

# Michael Hall School

Kidbrooke Park, Priory Road, Forest Row, East Sussex RH18 5JA

## Inspection dates

26–28 March 2019

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
Early years provision	Good
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an inadequate school

- Leaders and trustees have an overgenerous view of the quality of education that the school provides. In particular, leaders' monitoring of teaching and learning is ineffective.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are weak in some phases of the school. This means that many pupils do not make the progress they could.
- Systems to assess pupils' progress are underdeveloped, impacting negatively on the progress pupils make.
- Too often, teachers plan learning that does not meet the needs of pupils of different abilities.
- Careers education and guidance are not well developed in some parts of the school.
- While there are some strengths in the breadth of the curriculum, its delivery does not ensure that pupils make adequate progress in a range of subjects across all phases of the school.
- Trustees know that improvements need to be made in the leadership of teaching. However, their recent actions have had little impact on improving this key aspect of the school so far.
- Although leaders know what aspects of the school need to be better, their development planning is ineffective and does not drive improvement quickly enough.
- Leaders and those in positions of governance have not ensured that all the independent school standards are met.

### The school has the following strengths

- Leaders and trustees know that aspects of the school need to improve rapidly and are keen to make this happen.
- Children get off to a positive start in the kindergarten classes in the early years where the quality of provision is good.
- Attendance is good. Most pupils behave very well and enjoy coming to school.
- The sixth form is effective. Students do well because the quality of teaching and learning is consistently good or better.
- Pupils' social and emotional development is served well by the school's curriculum.
- Safeguarding is effective. Pupils' welfare, health and safety have a high priority at the school.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school must take action to meet the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and associated requirements. The details are listed in the full report.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the leadership and management of the school, especially the leadership of teaching and learning, so that:
  - leaders at all levels have one vision for the school, and are held more rigorously to account for their individual roles in improving the quality of education it provides
  - leaders and trustees are provided with clear and accurate information about the school's strengths and weaknesses, especially with regard to teaching and learning
  - leaders have a clearer understanding of the quality of teaching and the way that this impacts on pupils' outcomes
  - improvement planning focuses on the key aspects that need to be developed and is implemented effectively and in a timely manner
  - leaders have access to, and make effective use of, an appropriate approach to monitoring pupils' progress and use this well to hold teachers to account
  - parents and carers have confidence that the school is providing the best quality of education that is possible for their children
  - all the independent school standards are met.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that teachers:
  - provide consistently strong teaching, enabling pupils to thrive in all areas of their education and make good or better progress as they move through all phases of the school
  - are consistent in their approach to delivering the school's curriculum
  - are given timely and effective advice about how to improve their practice, as well as access to appropriate professional development if it is required
  - are provided with clear and effective approaches to monitor and evaluate the progress that pupils make across all areas of their learning
  - plan learning that considers the different starting points of all pupils
  - have higher expectations of the progress pupils can make, especially in mathematics.
- Ensure that the curriculum is designed and adapted to enable pupils to make strong progress across all phases of the school.
- Provide pupils with effective careers information and guidance in accordance with the independent school standards.
- The school must meet the independent school standards, as set out in the annex of this report.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Inadequate

- Although there are strengths in some aspects of provision, the overall quality of education that the school provides is inadequate. Leaders and trustees understand this. They have begun to make the changes required to improve the school, but the momentum of change is not yet strong enough.
- Leaders and trustees have a broad understanding of where the main strengths and areas to develop in the school lie. However, improvement planning is not effective in helping leaders address specific weaknesses, or trustees to monitor progress in key areas.
- Leadership and management structures are evolving. Recent changes introduced new roles with more defined responsibilities regarding the leadership of teaching and learning. At the time of the inspection, it was not possible to identify the impact of this initiative on improving the quality of teaching in some phases of the school.
- The leadership of teaching and learning is ineffective. Current approaches to provide leaders and trustees with accurate information about the quality of teaching and the impact this has on pupils' outcomes are weak. Consequently, teachers are not held to account for their performance, strengths in teaching are not widely acknowledged or built on, and weaknesses are not addressed in a timely manner.
- Leaders' monitoring of the progress pupils make is fragmented and underdeveloped. Some monitoring is undertaken, but it is inconsistent and does not serve pupils, teachers or leaders well enough. Leaders are aware of this. New systems to assess pupils' progress across all areas of the curriculum are being developed but were not yet in place at the time of the inspection.
- While the curriculum has some strengths, notably in the early years and sixth form, the way the curriculum is implemented is not consistent. This is particularly the case in lower and upper school, where inconsistencies in the way the curriculum is delivered and in the quality of teaching mean that pupils in different classes receive a different quality of education.
- The curriculum provides particularly well for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There are also strengths in certain subjects that are delivered by specialists, including languages and gymnastics for instance. Dance, drama and music are also strengths, as is the delivery of eurythmy.
- The school's extra-curricular offer is strong. Pupils enjoy a wide range of trips and educational visits to enrich their main lessons. The lead inspector enjoyed an impressive choral performance given by the upper school during the inspection. Older pupils look forward to their annual tour of Italy towards the end of their time at the school. Younger pupils benefit from the use of the school's extensive grounds and gardens.
- Pupils are increasingly well prepared for life in modern Britain. The school's curriculum promotes tolerance and respect well. Pupils' understanding of equality and difference is strong. This is particularly the case with older pupils, who are eloquent and well equipped to understand the different issues that living in modern Britain brings.
- Some aspects of the school are led well. Many of the independent school standards were

found to be met during the inspection because of the strong quality of leadership and management of non-teaching aspects of the school. Provision of information, record-keeping, recruitment of staff and safeguarding, for instance, are all led and managed well.

- Leaders and trustees are reflective and increasingly open to change. They know that the school needs to improve more rapidly, but that changes need to be carefully considered and balanced in order to maintain the school's distinctive ethos.
- All parents who talked to inspectors and most of those who replied to Ofsted's online questionnaire were positive about the school. A small minority expressed concerns with the quality of leadership and management and the progress their children make at the school.

## **Governance**

- Leaders and managers, including those in positions of governance, have not ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- Trustees are not well served by current systems to lead and manage the school. The leadership structure, particularly accountability for the leadership of teaching and learning, is not fit for purpose. As a consequence, trustees are neither sufficiently well enough informed about the overall effectiveness of the school, nor in a position to hold leaders to account for improving it.
- Although trustees know that the quality of education provided by the school could be better, they do not have a clear enough understanding of what needs to be improved or why. This is because they lack accurate and objective information from leaders about the quality of teaching and learning, and the impact this has on pupils' progress across the school.
- Trustees have started to address underperformance, but there is still much to do if the school is to improve rapidly. Trustees' work with leaders from other Waldorf Steiner schools has the potential to help address some of the inherent weaknesses in provision at Michael Hall School. However, at the time of the inspection, inspectors were unable to judge what the impact of this work might be.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders and managers with responsibility for the welfare, health and safety of pupils undertake their roles well. They ensure that staff understand that it is everyone's responsibility to safeguard children. As a result, pupils are cared for well and concerns are dealt with in a timely manner.
- Systems to safeguard pupils are strong. More importantly, the school's caring culture ensures that staff are well placed to spot problems or concerns when they arise. Policies and procedures to keep pupils safe are fit for purpose. These include the safeguarding policy, which follows current guidance and is published on the school's website.
- All parents who talked to inspectors and most of those who completed Ofsted's online parent questionnaire were positive about the care staff afford their children. Pupils from three different representative groups told an inspector that they feel that the school is a safe place for them to be.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

## Inadequate

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inadequate. This is particularly the case in the lower school, where too much teaching fails to take account of pupils' different starting points.
- Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not high enough. This includes pupils of all abilities, not just most-able pupils. Too often, work is pitched at the wrong level because the work is either too hard or too easy. When this is the case, pupils often disengage from learning and their progress slows.
- Teaching lacks consistency across the lower school. Inspectors found that pupils in older classes were completing work that was easier than that in a younger class, for instance.
- The teaching of mathematics across the lower school is inconsistent. The lack of a dedicated leader of mathematics also means that teachers do not receive expert advice on how to improve their practice, or how to provide progression in learning for pupils as they develop their mathematical knowledge and skills.
- Evidence in pupils' mathematics books showed that they do not make the progress they are capable of because much of their work is repetitive and undemanding. Teachers do not give pupils enough opportunity to use their mathematical knowledge to reason or solve problems.
- Too much teaching is uninspiring or unchallenging. This includes teachers' expectations of the quality of pupils' written work. Some classroom visits showed pupils to be disengaged, bored with simple tasks such as counting pencils, for instance. Other activities lacked purpose and pupils were unable to explain what they were learning or why.
- Teachers do not receive timely or effective feedback from leaders about how to improve their work. Although inspectors found some good teaching over time in specific subjects or phases of the school, this was almost entirely due to the skill and dedication of individual staff. As a result, good practice is not shared more widely, and poor teacher performance is not addressed, impacting negatively on the progress pupils make.
- Some subject teaching is strong. This is particularly the case in the early years (kindergarten classes) and in the sixth form (classes 11 and 12), where better quality teaching over time has led to good outcomes. This is also the case in certain areas of the curriculum that are taught by subject specialists across the school, such as science in some classes, languages and music.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

## Good

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. The school's very distinctive ethos ensures that pupils' social and emotional development is strong.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are generally positive. This is particularly the case when teaching enthuses and engages them, such as in the gymnasium or in woodwork. This is certainly the case with older pupils, who are enthusiastic and show mature attitudes to

their studies.

- Pupils are taught how to stay safe in and out of school. This now includes dedicated lessons pitched at age-appropriate levels which teach pupils about e-safety and how to stay safe when using social media, for instance.
- Although older pupils and those in the sixth form are given careers information and guidance, this aspect of the school's provision is not as strong as it could be. Not all secondary-aged pupils receive careers information and guidance in as timely a manner as they should.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils conduct themselves well in classrooms and as they move around the school, although inspectors did witness off-task behaviours when teachers' expectations of pupils' engagement in learning were not high enough.
- Pupils are polite and welcoming to visitors. They were happy to share their work with inspectors. Most think that behaviour is good in the school, although some pupils in the lower school reported that silly behaviour is not dealt with strongly enough sometimes.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. Their attendance is good. Leaders are proactive when they have concerns about attendance. As a result, rates of absence are low.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Inadequate

- Outcomes are inadequate because not enough pupils make the progress they are capable of. This is particularly the case in the lower school, where the inconsistent quality of teaching impacts negatively on pupils' achievements in writing and mathematics.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics is a particular concern in the lower school. Teachers' expectations are not high enough. They do not plan learning that takes into account pupils' aptitudes. As a result, pupils' outcomes in mathematics are not as strong as they could be.
- Pupils' progress in writing is inconsistent as they move through the school. Pupils make limited progress with their writing lower down the school, even when taking into account that the school introduces writing later than some other aspects of learning. Progress is stronger as pupils move up the school, but many are significantly underachieving as they near the end of lower school.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make inconsistent progress across the school. Where teachers plan learning that meets their needs well, their outcomes are stronger. Classroom visits showed some tasks well supported and pitched at the right level, whereas others were not, leading to pupils becoming disengaged and bored.
- Pupils' attainment by the end of class 10 is strong in most, but not all, subjects. Most pupils are successful in a range of GCSE examinations, including in science and languages, because teaching meets their needs well. However, the proportion of pupils achieving a strong pass in mathematics was significantly lower than in other subjects, including in English language in 2018.
- Children make good progress from their different starting points in the early years. This is

also the case in the sixth form, where students make more rapid progress than lower down the school because the quality of teaching is consistently good.

- The school is beginning to develop more vocational strands to the curriculum. Leaders have identified that certified and accredited qualifications outside of GCSE and A-level courses will be useful for a growing number of pupils. As a result, the BTEC National Diploma in art and design has been introduced this year, with the intention of developing this aspect of the curriculum further.

### Early years provision

**Good**

- The quality of provision in the early years is good and better than other aspects of the school. Children make strong progress from their starting points because teachers and support staff know children well and cater for their individual needs successfully.
- Staff are knowledgeable in the early years. They are well led and provide a consistency of approach across all of the five kindergarten classes.
- Routines are very well established in the early years. Children's independence and self-sufficiency are developed effectively over time. Adults are successful at providing a nurturing environment where children behave well. Because of this, children display a strong sense of purpose in their learning, sharing and interacting with their peers exceptionally well.
- Children make good progress with their personal, social and emotional development. This is also the case with their language development, where opportunities for imaginative and creative play are fulfilling a vital role in developing children's communication skills. Early literacy skills are also developed effectively through storytelling, role play, singing and chanting rhymes.
- Children with SEND are catered for well. Staff are good at identifying potential problems early. Systems to assess children's progress are firmly established and effective. Other professionals are used to good effect to support children with specific needs. Because of this, inspectors were presented with compelling evidence of children from this vulnerable group making small but very significant steps of progress.
- The early years environment is clean, tidy, attractive and well organised. Classes are resourced well. This includes the outside learning environment, which is used imaginatively to support children's learning.
- Adults are positive role models for children. They intervene promptly and effectively to resolve any disputes and demonstrate key learning points in activities such as handcraft. Eurythmy is also taught well, playing a significant part in developing children's self-confidence, as well as their artistic and communication skills.
- Parents are very positive about all aspects of the early years. All parents who talked to inspectors were happy with the care and attention that staff afford their children. Inspectors also found the welfare, health and safety of children to have a high priority with all staff in the kindergarten classes.

### Sixth form provision

**Good**

- The quality of provision in the sixth form is good. Although lacking a faculty lead at the time of the inspection, the provision is stronger in the sixth form than in other areas of the school. Leadership over time has ensured that outcomes at the end of the sixth form are good for most students.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is strong in the sixth form. They use this to plan effective learning opportunities for students. Teachers' assessment of students' progress is also a positive aspect of provision in the sixth form. This enables staff to offer additional support when required or raise expectations of progress when students are doing well.
- Teachers also put their knowledge to good use to change the direction of learning during lessons. Classroom visits gave inspectors good evidence of this, with teachers adding additional challenge and successfully exploiting students' own sense of curiosity in a number of classes.
- Students behave exceptionally well in the sixth form. Relationships are respectful between staff and students, and between students. Attitudes to learning are positive, leading to a purposeful feel to classrooms.
- Students achieve well in their studies by the end of class 12. Many gain good passes in a range of subjects at A level. This includes in mathematics and English, and in the sciences. The school does not offer vocational courses in the sixth form at this time.
- Academic outcomes aside, students' personal development is also strong during their time in the sixth form. The quality of discussion and debate about different aspects of their learning is particularly impressive. Students become increasingly confident and articulate as a result. Students' understanding of key aspects of living in modern Britain, including those around equalities or current issues affecting partnerships with other countries, is also well developed.
- Provision of careers information and guidance is an aspect that leaders have already identified as needing to be better across the school. Although advice is adequate, and has a degree of impartiality, this area needs to be improved to more closely match the clear strengths identified in other aspects of the sixth-form provision.

## School details

Unique reference number	114625
DfE registration number	845/6037
Inspection number	10094399

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent boarding school
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	437
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	54
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Council of Trustees of the Michael Hall School
Chair	Andrew Scott
Headteacher	Davina Skinner (Director of Operations)
Annual fees (day pupils)	Up to £12,670
Telephone number	01342 822275
Website	<a href="http://www.michaelhall.co.uk/">www.michaelhall.co.uk/</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:davina.skinner@michaelhall.co.uk">davina.skinner@michaelhall.co.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	10 October 2006

## Information about this school

- The school's last standard inspection took place in October 2018. It was carried out by the School Inspection Service, an approved inspectorate. At the inspection, the quality of education provided by the school was judged to be good. The provision and procedures to ensure pupils' safeguarding, welfare, health and safety were found to be effective. All

the independent school standards were also found to be met.

- Michael Hall School is a co-educational, independent school with boarding provision for pupils aged from three to 19. It adheres to the international Steiner Waldorf curriculum developed by the Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner.
- Michael Hall School is a charitable trust company called Michael Hall School Ltd. The board of the company is known as 'the council'. Council members are governors, trustees and company directors.
- The school has an approved exemption from some aspects of the learning and development requirements of the early years foundation stage.
- The school does not use alternative providers.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors carried out classroom visits across the school during the inspection. Most classroom visits were accompanied by school leaders. During classroom visits, inspectors observed teaching and learning, assessed the quality of pupils' work, and talked to them about the progress that they were making.
- Pupils' behaviour was observed in classrooms and as they moved around the school. This included at the start and finish of the school day, and at breaktime and lunchtime.
- The lead inspector attended a rehearsal and performance by the upper school choir. An inspector heard pupils read. Inspectors also visited lessons and activities in the gymnasium, gardens and rehearsal studios.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, the chair of trustees, who also represented the proprietor, and three different representative groups of pupils. The lead inspector met with a group of teachers.
- Inspectors talked to parents at the start of Day 2 of the inspection. Inspectors considered the 107 replies to Ofsted's parent survey and accompanying free-text messages. Inspectors also considered the responses to the online pupil and staff surveys.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documents, records and policies, including those regarding safeguarding and other aspects of the independent school standards. Minutes of trustees' meetings, the school's own self-evaluation, improvement and development planning, and information about pupils' outcomes, behaviour and attendance were also considered.

## Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Clive Dunn	Her Majesty's Inspector
Lee Selby	Her Majesty's Inspector

## **Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements**

### **The school must meet the following independent school standards**

#### **Part 1. Quality of education provided**

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if:
  - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively; and
  - 2(1)(b) the written policy, plans and schemes of work:
    - 2(1)(b)(i) take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an EHC plan.
- 2(2) For the purposes of paragraph (2)(1)(a), the matters are:
  - 2(2)(a) full-time supervised education for pupils of compulsory school age (construed in accordance with section 8 of the Education Act 1996), which gives pupils experience in linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative education;
  - 2(2)(b) that pupils acquire speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy skills;
  - 2(2)(e) for pupils receiving secondary education, access to accurate, up-to-date careers guidance that:
    - 2(2)(e)(i) is presented in an impartial manner;
    - 2(2)(e)(ii) enables them to make informed choices about a broad range of career options; and
    - 2(2)(e)(iii) helps to encourage them to fulfil their potential;
  - 2(2)(h) that all pupils have the opportunity to learn and make progress.
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school:
  - 3(a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
  - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
  - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;
  - 3(e) demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught;
  - 3(g) demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress.
- 4 The standard in this paragraph is met where the proprietor ensures that a framework

for pupil performance to be evaluated, by reference to the school's own aims as provided to parents or national norms, or to both, is in place.

## **Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools**

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school:
  - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
  - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

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