

Inspection report
Michael Hall School
Independent school
DfES ref no: 845/6037

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Date of inspection: 10 October 2006

Introduction

Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002 as part of pilot inspection arrangements in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

An inspection under Section 122 of pupils aged three and four in receipt of nursery funding was carried out concurrently and is reported on separately.

Information about the school

Michael Hall School in East Sussex is a long-established independent co-educational day and boarding school with 561 pupils aged between three and 19, of whom 15 board with local families. Admission is non-selective. No pupil has a statement of special educational need. Thirty-nine pupils do not have English as their first language.

The school has a playgroup for two to five year olds; Kindergarten classes for three to six year olds; the Lower School for pupils in classes 1 to 8 (Years 2 to 9 in National Curriculum terminology) and the Upper School with classes 9 to 12 (Years 10 to 13). The College Year (Year 14) follows, enabling students to complete General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and advanced level courses (A/S and A2).

The school's curriculum and teaching are inspired by the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner as expressed through the Steiner Waldorf curriculum:

"The school curriculum corresponds to the inner development of the child as he or she journeys from the imaginative world of early childhood to the adult world of clear intellectual thought."

Overall evaluation of the school

The school provides a good quality education which meets all of the educational requirements and results in pupils making good progress. The distinctive Steiner philosophy places effective emphasis on pupils' personal development which is fostered and supported by strong pastoral care. The school is increasing its capacity to evaluate its own progress and is well placed to continue current work on curriculum planning and development.

The curriculum is of a good quality throughout the school. In the playgroups and the kindergarten the curriculum for the younger children is securely planned using the

Early Learning Goals giving all children the opportunity to develop their individual talents. The kindergarten provides a good quality, interesting learning environment which enables children to make good progress.

The core of the curriculum for classes 1 to 8 is the *main lesson* with the Steiner-Waldorf themes determining the focus. The main lesson usually takes two hours each morning and a given theme lasts for about three or four weeks. While focussing on one subject, the themes provide a centre around which learning in other subject areas is effectively planned, helping pupils to make links between subjects. Lessons in English, mathematics, religious education (RE), music, German, French, physical education (PE) and the creative and expressive arts form the remainder of the curriculum. Music is consistently promoted from the early years through the learning of rhymes, verses and songs and contributes to good progress in the subject and to learning in other areas. Healthy eating and living are integral to the curriculum helping pupils to develop self-awareness and personal responsibility. Planning has improved since the last inspection. Teachers are more aware of the need to ensure consistency across parallel classes and to consider the time allocated to different subjects, so that pupils' learning experience is broadly comparable. In the best examples, work is very productive with good collaboration and clear benefits to professional development. Planning in individual subject areas is developing with the introduction of an annual plan which clarifies what will be studied over a specific period.

The curriculum in classes 6 to 8 continues the main lesson, building effectively on previous learning and usefully extending specialist subject teaching. In English and mathematics, for example, planning is well established and usefully includes collaboration between main lesson teachers and subject specialists. The Upper School curriculum maintains breadth with all pupils studying a broad range of subjects. Examination syllabuses are effectively used to plan for GCSE, Advanced Level and the Open College Network (OCN) courses. Students are encouraged to continue participation in other activities. Students following the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) course are integrated into wider curricular activities. Day and residential visits and extra-curricular activities further enhance the curriculum contributing to the quality of pupils' learning experience.

Teaching is consistently good and enables pupils to make good progress. The integrated approach of the main lesson gives pupils the time to explore the wider implications of a theme, as well as helping them to make useful links between subjects. Teachers have a close understanding of the Steiner curriculum and the confidence to interpret it effectively. Lesson planning is conscientious but varies in quality with some teachers noting what pupils will do, rather than what they will learn. In lessons pupils are encouraged to apply what they know, and as a result, become more effective learners and enjoy their work. Teachers' subject knowledge in most of the lessons seen was good or very good with particular strengths in maths, drama, art and modern languages. Some specialist subject teaching has extended into the Lower School contributing to pupils' progress, for example in English. This is effective and valued as a professional development opportunity for teachers. Individual initiatives, such as the 'team teaching' seen in art in class 7,

provide a valuable means of increasing staff expertise with the class teacher and specialist working together. This also provides enhanced learning opportunities for pupils. Classes are of mixed ability and provision for the full range of pupils' attainment was clearly evident in some but not all lessons. The school recognises that this is an area for further development. The Foundation Stage Profile provides comprehensive assessment in the youngest children. Thereafter individual pupils' progress is regularly and effectively assessed. Progress in personal development is emphasised in assessments, alongside progress in main and other lessons. Learning support procedures are well established with comprehensive screening to aid identification of those who may need support. Biennial class screening by learning support staff helps to monitor pupils' progress. This provides teachers with valuable feedback about the learning strengths and weaknesses of the class. It also provides useful information for planning.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is at the heart of the school's purpose. It is of good quality and strongly reflects all aspects of its provision. Pupils' awareness of their own spirituality is fostered from the kindergarten with time for reflection, observation of the natural world and a strong focus on the creative. The well-established daily and seasonal routines of the Steiner curriculum help to foster pupils' self-confidence and achievement, as well as their sense of being part of a community. Pupils learn to differentiate right from wrong and to become increasingly aware of how their behaviour impacts on others. Behaviour is good with pupils learning to share and collaborate at play and when working. Pupils feel they are known by the staff and this aids their self-confidence in responding to opportunities to contribute to their progress through discussion, drama and presentations. Younger pupils said they enjoy school, feel safe, and believe they make good progress. "Teachers explain it to you 'til you get the whole picture". Taking responsibility for small tasks in the Lower School classes builds towards greater responsibility for the personal challenge projects of the Upper School. The national and international links and exchanges with other Steiner schools, and the inclusion of cultural dimensions in main lessons, contribute strongly to pupils' understanding of the wider world.

The welfare, health and safety of pupils are of high priority in the school. The quality is good. Comprehensive and effective policies and procedures support and direct practice in relation to keeping pupils safe and encouraging healthy habits. Pupils trust staff to deal with any concerns they might have. A number of older pupils commented on bullying in the pupils' questionnaires, though this has not been raised through the students' council or through the pastoral system. Encouraging pupils' good behaviour is supported by the models of collaboration offered by staff working together routinely and on joint projects. A clear set of procedures informs all aspects of the recruitment of staff.

Teaching accommodation across the site is generally of a good quality and well maintained. The very good specialist rooms contribute strongly to pupils' learning particularly through the library and in sport and drama. The school welcomes and expects the active participation of parents in creating a joint school community. The comprehensive parents' handbook has been reviewed but, like the school's website,

the contents are sometimes confusing to follow. The school has an extensive written complaints policy but a significant proportion of parents who responded to the questionnaire are not aware of procedures.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

What the school could do to improve further

Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- continuing work to improve planning, especially for the full range of pupils' prior attainment across the school;
- exploring ways of sharing the current good practice in teaching; and
- reviewing the Parents' Handbook and the school's web site to ensure information for parents is clear and accessible.

School details

Name of school:	Michael Hall School
DfES Number:	845/6037
Type of school:	Day and boarding
Status:	Independent
Date school opened:	20 January 1925
Age range of pupils:	3 -19
Gender of pupils:	mixed
Number on roll (Full time):	Boys:259 Girls:302 Total:504
Number of boarders:	Boys:6 Girls:9 Total:15
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys:2 Girls:0 Total:2
Annual fees (day pupils):	Day: from £3975 to £8085 per year.
Annual fees (boarders):	(Termly) £5925+tuition (Weekly) £4880+tuition
Address of school:	Kidbrooke Park Forest Row East Sussex RH18 5JA
Telephone number:	01342 822275
Fax number:	01342 826593
Email address:	info@michaelhall.co.uk
Headteacher:	Mr Ewout Van Manen
Proprietor:	Michael Hall School Limited
Reporting Inspector:	Mrs Eileen McAndrew
Dates of inspection:	10 October 2006

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