

# Michael Hall School

Independent School

Inspection Report

DCSF Registration Number	845/6037
Unique Reference Number	114625
URN social care	SC050351
Inspection number	333827
Inspection dates	29–30 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Wendy Forbes
Social care inspector	Angela Gunning

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005). The inspection of boarding was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

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## Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The inspection of boarding provision was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 having regard to the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.

This was a light touch educational inspection (LTI) which focused principally on the quality of education provided by the school; its provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; the arrangements for safeguarding pupils and the improvements the school has made since its last inspection.

## Information about the school

Michael Hall School in East Sussex is an independent co-educational day and boarding school which opened in 1925. At the time of the inspection there were 509 pupils on roll aged between 3 and 18; 17 pupils currently board with local families. Admission is non-selective. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs. Twenty-six pupils do not have English as their first language.

The school has three departments, the Early Years Foundation Stage Kindergarten classes for three- to six-year-olds, the Lower School for pupils in classes 1 to 8 (National Curriculum Years 2 to 9) and the Upper School with classes 9 to 12 (Years 10 to 13). Pupils have the opportunity to take GCSE and GCE 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.'

The school was last inspected by Ofsted in October 2006 and the boarding provision was last inspected by Commission for Social Care Inspection in January 2007.

## Evaluation of the school

Michael Hall School provides a good quality of education, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The provision meets all of the regulations for independent schools and the good curriculum and teaching result in pupils making good progress. Provision for pupils who board with local host families is good.

The school's distinctive Steiner philosophy places effective emphasis on pupils' personal development, which is fostered and supported by strengths in pastoral care. As a result, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.

Since the last inspection, the school has made reasonable improvement in the planning of its creative curriculum, procedures for assessing pupil progress as well as developing opportunities for staff to share their good practice.

## Quality of education

The quality of education is good. The curriculum is good, including that for the Early Years Foundation Stage. The first two hours of each day provide the 'main lesson' where one subject is repeatedly taught each day for an average period of about three weeks. The timetable for the rest of the day is organised to include a range of subject-based lessons which cover all the required areas of learning and the curriculum is sufficiently broad and balanced. A more structured approach to the teaching of reading and writing is not introduced until children are six to seven years old. Pupils are not taught to use information and communication technology (ICT) until they are around 13 years of age.

The creative curriculum particularly in art, music and movement is now a strength of the school. However, planning still does not yet fully ensure sufficient match of work to pupils' needs and abilities, especially those of higher attaining pupils in the Lower School. The curriculum provides exciting opportunities for pupils to develop their personal skills in speaking and listening, as seen in debating, gardening, outdoor baking, and environmental work. Pupils in the Upper School enjoy the opportunity to learn a wide range of foreign languages including French, German, Spanish, Italian and Chinese. The curriculum's clear aims are closely based on the Steiner international curriculum and on the theory of child development which underpins this. Therefore, in the Kindergarten there is an appropriate emphasis on the development of creative, social and emotional skills. The curriculum for older pupils, prepares them well for the future. It is enhanced by a wide range of guest speakers who often visit the school. Older pupils have the opportunity to learn about the world of work, not only through work experience opportunities, but also through visits from a range of professionals.

Pupils acquire a very wide knowledge and range of skills through a good balance of academic, physical, aesthetic and creative work. There is a broad range of subjects and especially good enrichment of the curriculum. Flexible planning ensures that effective links are made between subjects and that the creative nature of much of the work reinforces the pupils' learning in other subjects. One good example of this was seen in a good Lower School literacy lesson about the Queen of Sheba where pupils used their artistic, literacy and oracy skills to recount the colourful story in words and pictures. The Upper School curriculum is good in most respects with strengths in the aesthetic and creative areas. The school is flexible and responsive in the way it adapts the curriculum and is based on teachers planning collaboratively. There is appropriate repetition and a rhythm to the teaching of topics with clear steps of development and progression in learning.

The provision for pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is good and results in them making good progress, especially those who receive extra support. They have clear individual education plans, precise targets and effective support. Pupils who speak English as an additional language make good progress as a result of effective support.

The quality of the teaching and the assessment of pupils' progress are good throughout the school. The teaching observed ranged from satisfactory to good with some strengths in creativity in the Lower School, particularly. The great majority of lessons are good. Strong teaching is characterised by well organised and planned lessons with appropriately stimulating activities which engage pupils' interest. However, in the few satisfactory lessons there is insufficient challenge for the most able pupils; pupils' behaviour is not always well managed, which slows the pace of learning and progress of these pupils. Teaching in the Kindergarten is good and has a very positive impact on the pace of children's development. Most planning identifies learning objectives well and the teachers are good at evaluating the impact of their teaching, often altering their plans as a result of this reflection to ensure that most pupils' needs are met. Teachers know their pupils really well, helped by the fact they stay with the same group throughout their time in the Lower School. Small class sizes mean that pupils benefit from one-to-one attention. Excellent subject knowledge, personal knowledge and great attention and encouragement for individual pupils support effective teaching. Pupils are actively involved in learning and as a result their attitudes to learning are generally positive. However, the marking of pupils' work and feedback provided to them is inconsistent across the school and does not always give pupils sufficient or clear guidance on how they can improve. The school uses a small range of standardised tests and assessments to help plan most pupils' activities.

Pupils' progress is monitored throughout the school but information is not always used consistently to inform planning for the needs of some higher attaining pupils. The special needs staff check pupils at regular intervals to highlight any who may need extra support. As a result pupils who need help receive effective support. Pupils make good progress as they move through the school, especially in their creative, social, physical and emotional skills. Most start school with broadly typical attainment for their ages, although a few choose the school because they have struggled with learning or had emotional issues in other schools. Throughout, the school is successful in developing pupils' creative skills. There is high quality art and music evident in all years. The latest GCSE results indicate good performance overall, especially in art, literature and biology.

## Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The personal development, including the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, of children and pupils is outstanding and has developed further since the last inspection. This is a reflection of the emphasis placed on this area by the Steiner-Waldorf philosophy and the school's excellent practice in implementing it. From their first days in the Kindergarten, children develop good moral and social skills.

They are tolerant and accepting of one another, and make a good contribution to the school community. As pupils mature, the curriculum provides a wide range of opportunities for them to appreciate different communities and civilisations and local and wider public institutions and services. They enjoy contributing to social and cultural events, especially the festivals, musical events and drama productions that play a strong part in the Steiner-Waldorf curriculum. Art, music and stories are important elements of the curriculum, and a real strength of the school.

Cultural development is excellent. Opportunities are provided for pupils to participate in unique cultural events such as an Indian cultural evening, a French exchange, a visit to Auschwitz by older pupils and a residential Olympic Games event hosted by the school for Steiner Schools from across Europe. Organic gardening is a key feature of the school's provision for all pupils to experience. Pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to school, learning and play are good. Morality, including issues of right and wrong, is addressed in age-appropriate ways throughout the curriculum. Pupils clearly enjoy school and their spiritual development is outstanding. Unique moments to be still and reflect on life and times to be thankful are provided throughout the school day. Rhythm, singing and poetry, are key elements in promoting such moments in the school day. Pupils are confident, try hard and are proud of their many achievements. Their attendance is good. Their well-rounded personal development gives them an excellent foundation for their future adult lives, economic well-being and contribution to cultural tolerance and harmony.

### Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. Children are at the very heart of the school and their welfare is key to everything the school does. Staff are vigilant in their supervision of pupils, rigorously monitoring any accidents and incidents. Pupils benefit from remaining with the same class teacher throughout the Lower School. As a result staff know their pupils' needs well and are able to provide individual support for all pupils' welfare needs. As a result, pupils are able to self-regulate their behaviour and look out for the welfare of others. The school encourages pupils to make healthy choices in their eating and to adopt good exercise habits. A wide range of sporting activities within the school's huge site provide pupils with an excellent range of opportunities to develop their personal fitness. To ensure pupils' health, guidance in relation to sex and drug education is provided as appropriate and the school's policy is adhered to. Most risk assessments are in place to safeguard pupils, especially regarding out of school activities. However, a risk assessment to identify and minimise risks around the school grounds has not been recently reviewed. Child protection measures are appropriate. Designated staff and up-to-date training are in place, as is training for first aid. Staff recruitment procedures meet requirements, including the appropriate criminal record checks, and all such checks are recorded on a single central register. The school fulfils its statutory duties under the Disability and Discrimination Act 2002.

## Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Well-planned learning opportunities in the Kindergarten enable children to make good progress. Good teaching ensures a good balance between intervention and the freedom to explore and learn. Staff know their children well. Regular checks of each child's progress help to ensure that activities are appropriately planned to meet most needs. However a small group of more able children do not always achieve their full potential because their work is not matched to their ability. The good accommodation and resources, both indoors and outside, are used to great effect. They give the children many opportunities to play and work together and to develop their creative, social and emotional skills, thus preparing them well for their future learning. The quality of children's welfare, health and safety is good. Staff are meticulous in ensuring children's safety so that they feel happy, safe and secure. Children are given a high priority in the organisation of learning opportunities ensuring there is a clear balance between teacher-led and child-initiated activities, in line with the Steiner philosophy of daily rhythm and the creative curriculum. The stunning 60-acre site which children love, offers a creative environment that promotes high quality skills in speaking, listening, negotiating, sharing and co-operating, and these are evident amongst most children. Particularly noticeable is the way the older children help younger peers. Many are confident and polite and keen to share what they are doing with others. The Kindergarten is led and managed well and the staff make an extremely effective team.

## Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The boarding provision is good. All National Minimum Standards are met. Four recommendations have been made as a result of this inspection. The boarding provision takes place with boarding families, in and around the Forest Row area. The boarding pupils' living arrangements with boarding families are good and there are effective checking and support systems in place.

The boarding pupils enjoy a healthy balanced diet. Healthy eating is promoted and they are encouraged to try new foods. The food provided is of a high quality, using organic and local or home grown produce. Menus are varied and cater for the young people's dietary needs and choices. The boarding pupils' physical, emotional and healthcare needs are well considered and met. However, information about welfare needs is not always made known to all those people who need to know prior to the young person boarding with the school. There are good arrangements for medical care and treatment and first aid is well managed.

Privacy is respected and robust procedures are in place so that information about them is handled confidentially and appropriately stored. Pupils are made aware of the complaints procedure; they feel able to raise their concerns and are confident that they will be listened to. Good child protection and appropriate recruitment procedures are in place to ensure the young people are safeguarded. The boarding parents supervise the pupils appropriately.

Pupils feel school provides a safe and respectful environment and should bullying occur they confirm it is dealt with appropriately.

Staff are skilled at helping the young people with their emotional and behavioural development. Pupils are aware of behaviour expectations within the boarding provision and confirm they are treated fairly if they break the rules. There are effective fire safety arrangements and positive steps are taken to manage health and safety. However, a risk assessment to identify and minimise risks around the school grounds is not in place.

There is a very diverse mix of young people at the school and the promotion of equality and diversity is good. Pupils confirm that they are helped to understand and respect people from other backgrounds. They are given very good individual support. The small number of pupils enables both school staff and boarding parents to know the young people very well. Pupils have access to an independent person outside the school who they can contact about personal problems or complaints.

There are informal opportunities for the children to communicate their views and to make choices and decisions about the boarding provision at school. They are given good support to maintain contact with family and friends. However, not all contact arrangements are adequately recorded. The young people are admitted to and leave the boarding provision of the school in a sensitive and planned manner.

There is clear management of the boarding provision through the Boarding Administrator and the Boarding Reference Group. There are clear policies and guidelines and the Administrator has a good oversight of the boarding provision. The boarding parents are supported well by the Administrator and the Boarding Reference Group. Regular meetings and training opportunities are available to the boarding families. However, record keeping is not fully robust. The boarding pupils and their relatives are given good information about the services and facilities that the Michael Hall School provides.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

The school meets the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools for Residential Special Schools and associated regulations.

## What the school could do to improve further

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

- ensure that all children and pupils know and understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve
- develop the consistent use of assessment information so that daily plans can be appropriately adapted to ensure that all children and pupils, particularly the most able, reach their full potential.
- ensure that adequate information about welfare needs are made available to those people who need to know (NMS 7)
- maintain an up to date record of contact arrangements for each boarding student (NMS 19)
- carry out a risk assessment to identify and minimise risks around the grounds (NMS 47)
- record the meetings and training provided to the boarding parents. (NMS 34)

## Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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### The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

### Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	✓			
The behaviour of pupils		✓		

### Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		✓		
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### The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

How effectively are children in the Early Years Foundation Stage helped to learn and develop?		✓		
How well do children achieve in the Early Years Foundation Stage relative to their starting points and capabilities?		✓		
How good are the personal development and well-being of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?		✓		
What is the quality of welfare, health and safety of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?		✓		
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?		✓		
What is the overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage including, where relevant, the quality of childcare?		✓		

### The quality of boarding provision

Evaluation of boarding provision		✓		
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## School details

Name of school	Michael Hall School		
DCSF number	845/6037		
Unique reference number	114625		
Type of school	Steiner day and residential school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	20 January 1925		
Age range of pupils	3-18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 217	Girls: 263	Total: 480
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 16	Girls: 13	Total: 29
Number of boarders	Boys: 11	Girls: 6	Total: 17
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 2	Girls: 0	Total: 2
Annual fees (day pupils)	£4,600-£10,100		
Annual fees (boarders)	£2,150 (termly) + 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 (Education Administrator)	Mr E Van-Manen		
Proprietor	Michael Hall School Limited		
Reporting inspector	Wendy Forbes		
Dates of inspection	29–30 June 2009		