

SCHOOL INSPECTION SERVICE

Independent professional inspection of schools affiliated to the Steiner Waldorf Fellowship

INSPECTION REPORT

INSPECTION CARRIED OUT ACCORDING TO SECTION 162A OF THE EDUCATION ACT 2002

Name of school:	Michael House School
DCSF number:	830/6010
Inspection team:	Reporting Inspector: Dr Martin Bradley Supporting Inspector: Mr Ted Cohn Lay Inspector: Mrs Helen Weatherhead
Dates of inspection:	27 th – 29 th April 2010

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SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school: Michael House School

Address of the school: The Field
Shipley
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Derbyshire
DE75 7JH

Telephone number: 01773 718050

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Email address: admin@michaelhouseschool.com

Proprietor: Michael House Association Limited

Name of the Chair of the College of Teachers: Mrs Bryden Stevenson-Jones

Name of the Chair of the Trustees: Mr Jeremy Roberts

Name of Administrator: Mrs Satu Sarkas-Bosman

DCSF number: 830/6010

Type of school: Independent school affiliated to the Steiner
Waldorf Fellowship

Age range of pupils and students: 3-16

Gender of pupils: Male and female

Total number on roll: (Full time) Boys: 57 Girls: 31
(Part time) Boys: 0 Girls: 0

Number of children under 5 Boys: 10 Girls: 12

Number of pupils with statements of special educational need:
Boys: 0 Girls: 0

Number of boarders: Boys: 0 Girls: 0

Annual fees: £3,300 to £4,578

Type of inspection: Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Inspection Team: Reporting Inspector: Dr Martin Bradley
Supporting Inspector: Mr Ted Cohn
Lay Inspector: Mrs Helen Weatherhead

Dates of inspection: 27th to 29th April 2010

PART A: INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the inspection:

This inspection was carried out by the School Inspection Service in accordance with Section 162(A) (1)(b) of the Education Act 2002, and it follows the inspection framework laid down by the Service and the Steiner Waldorf Fellowship, and agreed with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). It was conducted by independent professional inspectors who looked at all aspects of the school's provision as required by the current regulations. The professional inspectors were accompanied by a trained lay inspector who looked at agreed aspects of the school's management and ethos and reported on these to the Steiner Waldorf Fellowship. Her findings are summarised in Section C of this document, but this section is not a statutory part of the inspection process.

Information about the school:

Michael House School was founded in 1934 and moved to its present site in 1977. It follows the Steiner Waldorf curriculum. At the time of the inspection there were 110 pupils on roll, 22 of whom attend the Kindergarten classes on a part-time basis. Since the last inspection in 2007, the number of pupils has fallen, but is now stable. Twenty six pupils have been identified as having additional learning needs and/or difficulties, but none has a statement of special learning needs. There is also a Parent and Toddler Group which meets three times a week, although this was not inspected. Before the end of the academic year the school will open its nursery for children aged up to three. In the last two years the school has experienced several major changes, including the recruitment of new trustees, the appointment of a business manager and a financial review which it describes as a 'journey of transformation, renewal and reinvigoration'. It regards its primary task as being 'to provide the best possible education for its pupils so they may become not only knowledgeable, but also inwardly free, secure and creative adults.'

The school follows the Steiner Waldorf system for naming classes. The corresponding National Curriculum names for the classes in the school at the time of the inspection are:

Steiner class names	National Curriculum	
Kindergarten	Nursery, Year R, Year 1	
Class 1	Year 2	Lower school
Class 2	Year 3	Do
Class 3	Year 4	Do
Class 4	Year 5	Do
Class 5	Year 6	Do
Class 6	Year 7	Do
Class 7	Year 8	Do
Class 8	Year 9	Do
Class 9	Year 10	Upper School
Class 10	Year 11	Do

Summary of main findings:

The school is successful in fulfilling its aims, and the overall quality of education provided is good. The curriculum is broad and much of the teaching is of a high standard. The pupils value the feedback on their work given during lessons and their relations with adults is often outstanding. Support for pupils with additional learning needs and/or disabilities is excellent. Spiritual and moral development has outstanding features. Provision for welfare, health and safety is good. Work in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is good with outstanding features. The school has made good progress since its last inspection.

What the school does well:

- the quality of teaching is good. Informal feedback in lessons is good and is appreciated by the pupils;
- the assessment of pupils' with learning difficulties and disabilities is excellent as is the provision for their identified needs;
- spiritual, moral and social development is good with some outstanding features, particularly in spiritual and moral aspects;
- adult-pupil relationships are always good and often outstanding;
- EYFS provision is good with outstanding features; and
- information for parents is clear and accessible.

What the school must do to comply with the regulations:

- devise a framework by which pupils' performance can be evaluated in relation to its aims (paragraph 1(4));
- provide pupils with a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in England (paragraph 2(d)); and
- tidy the science laboratory and review the storage of resources in it (paragraph 5(n)).

What the school must do to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002

The school complies with the DDA.

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good overall. The school follows the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum, although this is adjusted where year groups are combined such as for Classes 2 and 3 and Classes 4 and 5. The curriculum is supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work. Unlike some schools in the Steiner Waldorf Fellowship, the pupils attend full time from Class 1 and in older classes their school day exceeds the nationally recommended minimum, enabling them to develop their skills and concentration over extended periods. The transition from the Kindergarten into Class 1 is good and has been sensitively handled. At present the Class 1 free play resources are limited in range and so the possible activities lack variety.

The curriculum provides pupils with a broad variety of experiences, with particularly good work in creative, aesthetic and practical areas. These are developed in both subject lessons and in the Main Lessons, which take place at the beginning of each day and last for up to two hours. The Main Lessons follow an integrated approach and underpin both the breadth of the curriculum and the approach to learning. Considerable emphasis is placed upon speaking and listening in all lessons. The number of GCSE subjects offered is limited in range, as at the last inspection, although it has recently been supplemented by drama and music which are studied as after-school optional subjects. Currently two Open College level 2 awards are offered and others are being considered. These are in aspects of handwork which develop pupils' practical skills.

Personal, social and health education is well supported both directly through Main Lesson themes and the recently introduced cookery sessions, and indirectly through the promotion of positive relationships, social awareness and healthy living. As the pupils noted, the school's aims particularly in this regard are strongly supported by their parents. Since the last inspection careers guidance has been developed for Class 9 and 10, and this alternates with weekly study groups. This is satisfactory although it has not been possible in the current year to maintain the links with the careers service Connexions. A week's work experience is provided for Class 9 in their final term. Overall, the school prepares pupils well for adult life.

The curriculum enables pupils to make at least satisfactory and often good progress, supported by the small class sizes. The high quality work of learning support staff in developing Individual Education Plans (IEPs), including classroom strategies, effectively supports pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities.

The quality of teaching and assessment

Teaching is good, with some outstanding features, and has improved since the last inspection. Assessment is satisfactory, with some good features. Teachers have a good command of the material that they teach, lessons are well planned, with appropriate learning objectives and activities. Supported by the effective teaching, pupils' achievement is good across the school. They develop good literacy and numeracy skills and their vocabulary is impressive from an early age. They write with increasing fluency and sophistication as they proceed through the school, showing a capacity to write imaginatively, descriptively and analytically with increasing confidence. Project work and GCSE coursework indicate the capacity to

work well independently and include assignments of a good quality. Pupils are keen to learn and younger pupils in particular enjoy the learning and are enthusiastic about it. They demonstrate an impressive capacity to concentrate on tasks set from an early age.

Teachers know their pupils well, and have good and often excellent relationships with them. Class management is frequently a strong feature and many teachers are highly skilled at managing behaviour in a gentle and firm manner. This creates a calm, purposeful atmosphere that is conducive to learning, even where the material is abstract. In a Class 8 German discussion, the pupils thoughtfully questioned the use of the genitive case, using their knowledge of other grammatical cases and readily entered into a very effective dialogue with the teacher to confirm their understanding of the grammar.

Teaching methods are generally effective and engage pupils' interest, encouraging them to concentrate intently on learning tasks. Story-telling, for instance, often catches pupils' interest, recitation helps to consolidate and reinforce knowledge, and teachers' demonstrations of skills rather than formally directing learning contributes to pupils' good progress.

Teachers have a good understanding of their pupils' aptitudes, needs and prior attainments. This is greatly enhanced by the outstanding quality of the diagnostic analysis of pupils' learning difficulties and disabilities, and the detailed and helpful advice provided, based on this analysis, particularly in the senior school. This understanding is used effectively to support the progress of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. Identification and support for pupils who are gifted and talented is less well developed, although some examples of extension work were noted in some lessons observed and in some schemes of work.

Resources generally support learning well and include excellent drawings on classroom blackboards. The grounds of the school, including its woodland area, create a pleasant and in many ways aesthetically pleasing environment much of which is used effectively.

Teachers assess pupils' work regularly and in a number of lessons helpful verbal feedback encourages pupils by diagnosing strengths and weaknesses and making suggestions for improvement. It is more unusual to find marking in books. Pupils spoke positively about the support and guidance that they received from their teachers.

The school has no general policy for the assessment of pupils' work and teachers devise their own approaches to assessment. These vary considerably in detail and approach. Assessment is used to inform teachers' future planning and to support pupils' progress effectively. The school currently does not have a framework by which pupils' performance can be evaluated through reference to its own aims and/or national norms. Reports to parents vary considerably in style and approach, with some subjects focusing more on the curriculum covered during the reporting period and others focusing sharply on pupils' progress in the particular subject. Neither assessments nor reports identify learning targets to support pupils' progress.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets all of the requirements except one.

What does the school need to do in order to fully meet the requirements?

In order to comply with the Independent Schools' Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- develop a framework by which pupil performance can be evaluated by reference to its own aims, as provided to parents (*paragraph 1(4)*).

2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good overall, with several outstanding features but one significant weakness.

Spiritual development is excellent. The ethos of the school focuses sharply on spiritual development, and the development of pupils' self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence is central to the school's aims. Through the wide range of opportunities in the curriculum and the classroom approach and ethos that teachers encourage, the school successfully develops mature, reflective individuals, with a strong sense of self-esteem and self-confidence. Pupils value the aesthetic aspect of their lives highly, and gain much from the strong emphasis upon this in the curriculum.

The school's aims also include a strong focus on pupils' moral and social development. They become young adults who have appropriate and well understood moral values: this provision is outstanding. Through high expectations and by providing models of calm, civilised and caring behaviour in their relationships with the pupils, staff support their moral and social development. This includes a strong sense of what is right, wrong and just. Several areas of the curriculum contribute to this development, including history, geography, English, drama and religion. By the time they leave school, pupils' moral and social development helps to ensure that they feel well equipped to go into the adult world.

One aspect of the school's provision that is not well developed is ensuring that pupils have a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in England. There is no curricular provision to extend and develop this knowledge, including, for example, knowledge about political institutions or the development of the economic and industrial understanding.

The school makes good provision for pupils to acquire an appreciation of a variety of cultural traditions. A significant part of its philosophy is to encourage tolerance and harmony. Through Main Lessons, school trips and subjects such as art, history, geography, English, religion and German, pupils learn about different cultural traditions and communities in time and place, which enhances their understanding and appreciation of their own and others' cultures and traditions. They generally make good progress in this aspect of their education. However, they know less about the culturally diverse nature of British society and the rich variety of cultural traditions that this encompasses.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

No.

What does the school need to do in order to fully meet the requirements?

In order to fully comply with the Independent Schools' Standards Regulations 2003, the school should:

- provide pupils with a broad knowledge of public institutions and services in England (*paragraph 2(d)*).

3. The welfare, health and safety of pupils

The provision and safeguarding of the welfare, health and safety of pupils is good overall and the points of non-compliance noted at the time of the last inspection in 2007 have been fully dealt with. This represents a clear improvement in the last three years. The school has reviewed and updated its policies on safeguarding and staff have been trained for this. Records of sanctions and the admissions and attendance registers are kept in accordance with the regulations. The First Aid policy is in place, along with appropriate procedures.

Pupils reported feeling secure and well cared for. Supervision at break and lunchtimes is good. Pupils reported few instances of bullying and they show care and respect for others with particular needs and disabilities. Lower school pupils in particular commented on the close bonds they develop with their class teachers, with whom they stay for up to eight years.

The school encourages pupils to adopt a healthy lifestyle. The contents of lunch boxes are generally healthy and fizzy drinks are not allowed. Water is always available to pupils and subjects like gym and gardening provide opportunities for formal and informal exercise in the school grounds. The adventure playground, whose surface has been upgraded since the last inspection, provides further opportunities for exercise.

During the last two years there has been close liaison between the Trustees and the College of Teachers, and particularly good use has been made of outside contacts to provide support and training. The school fulfils the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

4. Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has good arrangements for checking the suitability of the adults who work in it as well as its volunteers and other associated people. The non-compliance with the regulations noted at the last inspection has been dealt with and compliance is now good. A single central register has been created. This is in paper copy rather than electronic. It includes good records of Criminal Records Bureau checks as well as noting that personal details, qualifications and other required information have been verified. Although few staff have been appointed in the past two years, the school has good systems in place ready for any new appointments, including appropriate health and safety and child protection training.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. Suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school has reviewed its accommodation and is currently making significant changes to the use of certain parts. It meets most of the requirements for registration. Recent reviews have led to an upgrading of electrical and other services, and toilet provision for pupils and staff has also been modernised. The Kindergarten premises have been extended to accommodate the new nursery and have particularly good indoor and outdoor provision which is used effectively. Outdoor areas are well used, including the outdoor classroom, although this feature is not sufficiently well maintained and is unkempt. Overall, outdoor areas are satisfactory, although some less used sections are untidy and potentially hazardous. The school has recognised this and is in the process of appointing a maintenance assistant to address the issue. As a part of the school development work, the hall is now let to some outside groups after school and this is carefully monitored by the school. The updating of some rooms has led to others being used to store their equipment temporarily, again leading to clutter. The science laboratory is untidy: benches are not sufficiently clear and the storage of resources is poor. In the last two years the school has made good efforts to improve the quality of its premises and accommodation. It has made good progress and intends to continue to monitor developments.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets all the requirements except one.

What does the school need to do in order to fully meet the requirements?

In order to fully comply with the Independent School Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- ensure that the science laboratory and the associated areas are tidy and equipment appropriately stored. (*Paragraph 5(n)*).

6. The quality of information for parents

The quality of information for parents is good. All statutory policies are in place and available either via the website or in the parents' handbook. They are also openly accessible for inspection at any time in the school's reception area. The website is particularly good and its section can be accessed easily. It has extra useful information for parents, for example, guidance on helping children to stay safe on the internet. An informative weekly newsletter gives news of forthcoming events. It also summarises recent talks and other events.

College surgeries are scheduled one afternoon a week and evening appointments can also be made. Parents may raise concerns, request information or ask questions.

Parents hear about their children's progress through individual teacher/parent consultations. In addition, Parents' Evenings provide an opportunity to learn about child development and the curriculum. A written report is sent annually to the parents of Lower School pupils, with Upper School reports being sent twice a year. The overwhelming majority of parents who returned questionnaires are very supportive of the school. A very small number are concerned about the general running of the school while understanding the complaints policy is a concern also for a few.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

7. The effectiveness of the school's complaints procedure

The school's complaints policy and procedure are thorough and comply fully with the regulatory requirements. There were seven formal complaints last year. All were resolved prior to the appeal panel stage.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART C: ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

This section is not a requirement of the Education Act 2002. The business organisation and management of the school were inspected by the Lay Inspector, who has written this section of the report.

The quality of the organisation and management of the school

Michael House is an independent, self-administering Steiner Waldorf school. Its proprietor, Michael House Association Limited is a registered charity. Membership of the Association is open to all who are committed to the principles of the school subject to acceptance by the Board of Trustees. Currently there are eight board members. They have responsibility for running the company including its finance, development and assets. As Trustees of the charity they also have overall legal responsibility.

The pedagogical policy-making body of the school is the College of Teachers which has seven members at present. They are supported by the Trustees who maintain a responsibility for staff welfare. Joint meetings of Trustees and the College take place once a month. The College is led by a group of three teachers who, on a weekly basis, rotate the tasks of taking minutes of the college meeting, chairing the college meeting and chairing the pedagogical staff meeting. This results in effective and efficient communication throughout the school. The day-to-day running of the school is delegated to the newly appointed Business and Operations Manager ably supported by administrative staff.

A school improvement group meets once a week. Five areas for development have been identified: learning and teaching; governance; supporting and nurturing students and staff; communication; and spiritual development. The outcome of these meetings will inform the School Development Plan.

In recent years, the school has undergone considerable change in terms of management practice and governance. The energetic and enthusiastic Trustees bring a wide range of professional skills. Co-operative working between the Trustees, the administrative team and the College of Teachers has raised morale and fostered trust in working relationships. It has served to maintain the best of previous practice while instigating reform and renewal. It remains faithful to the spiritual basis of the education and ethos of the school.

Could the organisation and management of the school be improved?

The College of Teachers and the Trustees might consider:

- setting a target date for the production and implementation of the School Development Plan;
- ensuring educational quality assurance: through the further development of mentoring; implementing staff appraisal; formalising a consistent approach to lesson planning, record keeping and report writing; providing for continuing professional development; and
- ensuring new strategies and procedures are systematically applied and become embedded in school life.

PART D: EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

The overall effectiveness of the provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage

The Kindergarten classes, which work with children aged between three and rising seven years, meet the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage effectively and the provision has a good capacity to maintain continuous improvement. Having received exemptions and disapplications from several aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the setting has reviewed its approach to Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy and appreciates that it meets the current requirements. In addition the process of applying for exemptions has provided valuable contacts with the Local Authority and local schools enabling links to be made. Invitations have been received to lead some local training sessions, and a clearer awareness of the quality of the Kindergarten's work has been developed. This has had a positive impact on the Kindergarten's partnership with other local services and the local authority.

The leadership and management of the Kindergarten classes are good. Ambition is developed and improvement supported. Resources are well deployed within the Kindergarten, appropriately maintaining Steiner's view that at any one time 'less is more'. Equality and diversity are well supported and safeguarding is good. Risk assessments are carefully prepared. The setting's engagement with parents and carers is excellent.

The children achieve well in the context of the school's approach to education and, significantly, they enjoy their learning. Outstanding use is made of the outdoor environment, although the adults could extend the ways in which they model learning indoors into outdoor activities. The children feel safe. Through the daily snacks, many of which they help to prepare, and through good indoor and outdoor play activities which they devise with the adults' help, healthy lifestyles are promoted. The children are encouraged to contribute to the Kindergarten by working cooperatively and by helping to tidy up, such as when putting their picture to dry rather than expecting an adult to do this.

Overall, the two Kindergarten classes develop social skills and attitudes towards learning particularly effectively. Speaking skills are well developed, as are the skills of listening to and having respect for others. The quality of the provision in the EYFS is good with several outstanding features.

Does the school meet the statutory requirements?

Yes.

This report has been prepared by the School Inspection Service, which provides independent professional inspection of all schools affiliated to the Steiner Fellowship. Further copies of the report are available from the School Inspection Service website: www.schoolinspectionservice.co.uk.