

SCHOOL INSPECTION SERVICE

Independent professional inspection of schools affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust, schools accredited as members of the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship, and those schools belonging to the Cognita Group which are not members of the Independent Schools Council and its constituent associations

INSPECTION REPORT

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

Name of school:	Michael House School
DfE number:	830/6010
Inspection team:	Reporting Inspector: Mr Clive Barnett Supporting Inspectors: Mrs Anne McConway Mr Peter Limm Lay Inspectors: Mrs Helen Weatherhead Mrs Julie Neale
Dates of inspection:	13 to 15 May 2014

CONTENTS OF THE REPORT

Section A: Introduction and summary

Section B: Compliance with regulations for registration

Section C: The quality of organisation and management

Section D: Early Years Foundation Stage

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Michael House School
Address of school:	The Field, Heanor, Derbyshire DE75 7JH
Telephone number:	01773 718050
Fax number:	01773 711784
Email address:	admin@michaelhouseschool.com
Proprietor:	Michael House Association Limited
Names of the members of the School Management Team:	Mr Tom Watson, Mrs Diane Bolsher, Mr Ian Black and Mr Jeremy Ball
Name of the Chair of the Trustees:	Mr Nigel Gamble
Name of Administrator:	Mrs Satu Sarkas-Bosman
DfE number:	830/6010
Type of school:	Independent school associated with the Steiner Fellowship
Age range of pupils and students:	3 to 16
Gender of pupils:	Male and female
Total number on roll:	(Full-time) Boys: 59 Girls: 50 (Part-time) Boys: 8 Girls: 4
Number of children under 5:	Boys: 8 Girls: 4
Number of post-16 students:	Boys: 1 Girls: 0
Number of pupils with statements of special educational need:	Boys: 1 Girls: 0
Number of boarders:	Boys: 0 Girls: 0
Annual fees:	£3,382 to £5,073
Type of inspection:	Section 162A of the Education Act 2002
Inspection Team:	
Reporting Inspector:	Mr Clive Barnett
Supporting Inspectors:	Mrs Anne McConway Mr Peter Limm
Lay Inspectors:	Mrs Helen Weatherhead Mrs Julie Neale
Dates of inspection:	13 to 15 May 2014

SECTION 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 Schools Fellowship and agreed with the Department for Education (DfE). 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 Schools Fellowship. The lay inspector's 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, a Steiner Waldorf school, was founded in 1934 as a result of the vision of the philanthropist, Edith Lewis. It moved to its present site in 1977. It is situated close to Heanor in its own woodland adjoining the Shipley Country Park in Derbyshire. It is a comprehensive, non-sectarian and non-denominational school for boys and girls aged from three to sixteen years. At the time of the inspection there were 121 pupils on roll, twelve of whom attend the Kindergarten classes on a part-time basis. This is a slight increase in numbers since the previous inspection in 2010. One pupil has a statement of special learning needs; twenty pupils have been identified by the school as having additional learning needs and difficulties. In 2010, the school opened a nursery for children aged up to three years of age; this was inspected at the same time as the main school but is being reported upon separately. Since the last inspection, the school has experienced several major changes, including the recruitment of new trustees.

The school believes that childhood "is the most important time of our lives. The experiences, feelings and education of our early years will greatly colour and shape the adults we go on to become and the part we play in the world". The school's approach to educating the young seeks to be "inclusive and holistic, developing the 'head, hand and heart' and give balanced attention and opportunity for growth in all these areas". With that in mind, it regards its primary task as being "to provide an environment and education that will allow our pupils to become creative, responsible and confident adults who are more than equipped to face the many challenges of life ... to not only meet the future but to play a part in shaping it".

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	
Class 3	Year 4	
Class 4	Year 5	
Class 5	Year 6	
Class 6	Year 7	
Class 7	Year 8	
Class 8	Year 9	
Class 9	Year 10	Upper School
Class 10	Year 11	

Summary of main findings:

Michael House School provides a satisfactory education in some respects but fails to meet the requirements for registration in a number of others. Overall, it has made insufficient progress since its last inspection. The school requires improvement as a matter of urgency. Overall, the quality of education provided is satisfactory; the quality of teaching is good although the school lacks an effective system for assessing pupils' progress, which was also the case at the last inspection. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good. Pupils get on well with one another and with their teachers. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is generally good and pupils are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles. However, the provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is unsatisfactory. The quality of information provided for parents is good. The provision in the Kindergarten is inadequate. Overall, the school is poorly managed and organised.

What the school does well:

- teachers have a good grasp of subject matter and their lessons motivate pupils to achieve well;
- the provision of a wide range of opportunities for pupils' personal development means that they become confident and articulate young people;
- good relationships between all members of the school community are fostered; and
- the information provided for parents is informative, comprehensive and up-to-date.

What the school must do to comply with the regulations:

- provide a standard of education sufficient to meet the needs of pupils with a statement of special educational need as detailed in Part 1;
- put in place a framework to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use the information from assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can make progress as detailed in Part 1;
- put in place appropriate arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school as detailed in Part 3;
- ensure that such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State as detailed in Part 3;
- ensure that the school's appropriate written policy on first aid is implemented effectively as detailed in Part 3;
- put in place appropriate arrangements for fire safety and comply with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005) as detailed in Part 3;
- keep written records of sanctions imposed upon pupils for serious misbehaviour as detailed in Part 3;
- ensure that appropriate checks have been carried out in respect to each member of staff with regard to their medical fitness, right to work in the United Kingdom, qualifications and professional references, and previous employment history as detailed in Part 4;
- complete the appropriate checks before a person's appointment as detailed in Part 4;
- with regard to the Single Central Register, in relation to each member of staff appointed on or after 1 May 2007, ensure that the identity of each, their right to work in the United Kingdom and any additional checks on those who have lived outside the United Kingdom, and the date on which this check was made, is recorded in the register as detailed in Part 4;
- provide suitable changing accommodation and showers for pupils aged eleven years or over at the start of the school year who receive physical education as detailed in Part 5; and
- with regard to the school's complaints procedure, stipulate that a copy of any findings and recommendations of the panel are provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, and made available for inspection on the school premises as detailed in Part 7.

What the school must do to comply with the Equality Act 2010:

The school complies with the Equalities Act 2010.

Next Steps:

Although the school is not required to do so in order to comply with regulations, it should consider:

- developing greater consistency in assessment for learning and its recording;
- planning systematically to meet the needs of individual pupils including those requiring additional learning support;
- ensuring that Kindergarten staff record regular observations of the children's learning in order to plan activities appropriate to individual needs; and
- reviewing the leadership and management structures to ensure better record keeping and communication among members of staff.

SECTION B: COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

PART 1 - The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The school's curriculum is satisfactory in most respects, but inadequate in planning and in provision of support for pupils with additional learning needs. It is based on Steiner Waldorf educational principles as outlined in 'The Educational Tasks and Content of the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum'. It affords plenty of opportunities for pupils to make progress appropriate for their ages and aptitudes in all the key areas of learning. It is designed to foster each child's inherent creativity by responding to their individual needs at a particular time in their development rather than following a tightly-prescribed programme. Long and medium-term curriculum planning aims to achieve a balance of activities which foster pupils' thinking skills, emotional intelligence and social and physical development, by providing opportunities for them to work together, applying their knowledge through practical problem-solving. Individual lessons are planned to reflect this balance.

Throughout the school, many subjects are taught in two-hour Main Lesson blocks over a period of about three or four weeks. These take place at the beginning of the school day and introduce ideas and skills as best fits the stage of development of the pupils in the class. Typically, these thematic blocks include elements of: English, drama, mathematics, botany, biology, nutrition, ecology, physics, astronomy, chemistry, geology, geography, history, art, mythology, farming, anthropology, and philosophy. Each thematic block carefully builds on previous learning and is taught by the class teacher who stays with his or her class throughout Class 1 to Class 8. This arrangement promotes continuity and encourages pupils' confidence.

Subjects which require constant practice and repetition, such as German and music, generally occur in the second half of the morning whilst the more practical subjects such as art, gym and physical education (PE), gardening, handwork and woodwork generally take place after lunch. The theme of the Main Lesson is often picked up and explored in these lessons. The school provides specialist teaching in German, woodwork, handwork, religion, eurythmy, music, art, gardening, Bothmer gymnastics and games. Classes 1 to 3 go on nature walks. In Classes 1 to 8, there are no formal lessons in information and communication technology (ICT) as its early introduction is not consistent with Steiner-Waldorf principles; in Classes 9 and 10, the ICT suite is made available for pupils to undertake private research. Throughout the school, supplementary lessons ('class lessons') are led by either the class teacher or a subject specialist; these include extra English, mathematics and science.

Pupils in Classes 9 and 10 follow a curriculum that prepares them to take GCSEs alongside the Steiner-Waldorf curriculum which continues to be taught through the Main Lesson. The examination courses offered include English language, English literature, mathematics, science, German and art. In addition, pupils continue to study history, art, geography and geology, handwork, woodwork, eurythmy, religion, PE, singing, gardening and farming. Citizenship is taught in the Main Lesson and through subjects such as English and religion. At the end of Class 10, pupils receive a record of achievement and are eligible for the Waldorf European Portfolio Certificate; this is specially formulated to accredit the individual pupil's achievement in work undertaken in Main Lessons.

Medium term planning in the form of Main Lesson and subject schemes of work is weak. Most but not all schemes of work follow a common format which includes the identification of the topic, learning objective and activity, differentiation and resources. Most are sketchy; they do not cover the whole year. Some subject schemes of work are missing altogether. Overall, they exhibit a tenuous grasp of what is entailed in planning to meet the needs of individual pupils. Where such planning exists it concentrates on outcomes; it rarely involves the identification of strategies and tasks for those requiring additional support or extension activities. The schemes of work provide an inadequate basis for lesson planning.

The school's approach to providing support for pupils with additional learning needs lacks coherence and is unsatisfactory. A record is kept of able, gifted and talented pupils, but responsibility for providing extension activities for these pupils lies with their class teachers. There is little evidence in lessons that the needs of these pupils are being met. A detailed register of pupils requiring additional learning support is kept and many of these pupils have individual learning plans. Screening to identify additional learning needs takes place at regular intervals during each pupil's progress through the school although the school acknowledges that its own in-house screening is ineffective. Some, but not all, of the pupils so identified are withdrawn from lessons for additional help on a one-to-one basis or in groups. The decision as to who is withdrawn resides with the class teacher rather than the learning support teacher. In response to the questionnaire, some parents expressed concern at the lack of help offered to pupils with additional learning needs such as dyslexia and dyspraxia, and inspectors found little evidence of strategies to support these pupils in lessons. The pupil with a statement of special educational need (SEN) is not receiving the requisite support. Ensuring training for the learning support teachers is now a priority, as is a review of overall SEN management.

An extra-curricular programme supplements and extends what takes place in the classroom. During the inspection pupils in Class 9 were out of school experiencing life on a local farm and pupils in Class 8 were rehearsing their class play. There are theatre and cultural visits, class and school trips abroad, and visits to industries and craft workshops. There has been a varied programme of outside speakers covering citizenship and careers topics for Classes 8 to 10. A day focusing on issues of e-safety was successful; older pupils worked with staff and younger pupils to highlight some of the dangers involved in using the internet. Pupils in Classes 6 to 9 enjoyed their involvement in the 'Shakespeare for Schools' project at the start of the current academic year leading to them performing 'Much Ado About Nothing' at Nottingham's Lakeside Theatre.

The Steiner Waldorf philosophy places a particular emphasis on preparing pupils for the opportunities and challenges of adult life. Teaching in the Upper School aims to develop pupils' critical faculties, personal judgment and social awareness to enable them to approach with confidence a complex and challenging world. Pupils have a good record of achieving GCSE grades A* to C. This, together with the broad range of subjects covered in the Main Lesson, means that those pupils who wish to do so have no difficulty in taking up a wider range of subjects to study at A Level, when they move on from Michael House. School staff give presentations to Classes 9 and 10 pupils on the options open to them when they leave the school and visits are arranged to the open days at local sixth-form colleges. Class 9 pupils benefit from a work experience week at the end of the summer term. Older pupils are encouraged to take a range of leadership roles within the school; these include welcoming visitors and leading guided tours of the school for prospective parents.

The quality of teaching and assessment

Teaching is good and assessment is satisfactory. During the inspection, the majority of lessons seen were good or better. Teachers know their subject matter well and they plan interesting and stimulating lessons which engage pupils and motivate them to learn. Lesson activities are well managed and teachers make their expectations and lesson objectives very clear so that pupils know what to do and how to do it. Teachers have established good classroom routines for pupils to adopt and this means that lessons generally start promptly and calmly. As a consequence, pupils make good progress in lessons and over time. Achievement by the end of Class 10 is good.

There is a good focus on literacy and numeracy skills, and pupils' writing develops well. Teachers use every opportunity to enable pupils to write imaginatively and critically on a diverse range of topics. Over time, pupils' ability to write at length and in a discursive way is impressive. Pupils work well both in groups and on their own and teachers provided good support to those who require extra guidance. The integrated nature of the curriculum also provides pupils with opportunities to apply their numeracy skills in a number of practical as well as analytical contexts. Resources are often used well to enhance pupils' learning, and good use is made of the school's attractive grounds and woodland for gym and for science activities.

Teachers have a good understanding of pupils' learning needs and use praise well to encourage them to do their best. Teachers have good questioning techniques which enable pupils to think more deeply and reflectively about their tasks. In an outstanding Class 10 lesson on geometry, by the skilful use of open questioning and by referring answers for peer review, the teacher encouraged the pupils to work together to identify a rule with regard to the interaction of lines and points. Some work on the nature of history in Class 9 demonstrated a high level of understanding of what the subject is about and how historians analyse and interpret evidence. For Lower School pupils, their teachers' ability to use stories to fire their imaginations often results in lively and creative writing or art work. For example, in an outstanding Main Lesson, Class 3 learnt the story of David and Goliath; later in the morning their eurythmy lesson explored the actions of a giant and, in the afternoon, in art they learned how to use colour in painting David fighting Goliath.

Work in books is well presented and indicates that pupils care about their work and the accuracy of their spelling and grammar. Sometimes the most able pupils are not provided with appropriately challenging work. Where the content of some lessons is not presented in a stimulating way, pupils become restless.

Assessment is satisfactory. Although teachers generally assess pupils' work on a regular basis and provide good oral feedback, there is no properly developed, common framework by which pupils' work can be evaluated against school aims or national criteria. This was also the case at the last inspection. Teachers across the school assess pupils' performance in many different ways and the quality and accuracy of some assessments are not sufficiently good to enable teachers to plan activities that match the learning needs of all pupils effectively. Reports and assessments do not mention clear learning targets for pupils. Assessments are used by teachers to guide future planning, but the quality of this process is not consistent across the school.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets all the requirements except two.

What does the school need to do in order to comply with the regulations?

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

- provide a standard of education sufficient to meet the needs of pupils with a statement of special educational need (*paragraph 2 (2)e*); and
- put in place a framework to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can make progress (*paragraphs 3g and 4*).

PART 2 - The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good. Pupils' spiritual understanding is nurtured well. The school provides many opportunities for pupils to develop a sense of identity, self-worth, personal insight, meaning and purpose. The philosophy of the school has encouraged teachers to explore with their pupils how best to develop their spirit and character by considering with them values and beliefs, including religious beliefs and festivals, and the way in which they affect peoples' lives. Teachers plan activities and experiences which enable pupils to reflect and learn from reflection. Pupils have the opportunity to understand human feelings and emotions and, within a caring environment, to grow and flourish. Teachers were seen to do this by valuing pupils' questions and giving them space to have their own thoughts, concerns and ideas.

The school helps pupils build a framework of moral values which in turn helps them to manage their own behaviour effectively. It succeeds well in this. Pupils are also encouraged strongly to think about society's values and to appreciate that there are issues over which people disagree. This is particularly seen in English, drama, history, religion and science. The school helps pupils to develop their own informed and balanced views about different opinions and philosophies.

The school's aims also include a strong focus on pupils' social development. There are many ways in which pupils at the school are encouraged to work effectively with each other and participate in both the school and wider community. Pupils said they very much valued living and working together in an environment that clearly cared about how pupils related to each other. However, there is currently no student council and they indicated they would like a stronger voice in discussions about school developments. Pupils have a number of opportunities to understand society's institutions, structures, and what it means to live in a democracy. They are particularly aware of the need for tolerance of those who have different faiths and beliefs.

Pupils have good opportunities to develop their understanding of their own culture and that of others in different parts of the world. In Main Lessons and subjects such as geography, German, history and religion, pupils learn about other cultures in time and place, their myths and ways of life.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets all the requirements.

PART 3 - The welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school's provision for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of pupils is unsatisfactory. The school's health and safety policy and procedures require review. There is inadequate staff cover for child protection across the school; child protection training is not up-to-date. The school has a first aid policy, but it is not fully implemented as the Kindergarten has no accident book. There is no fire officer; only an interim triad of staff pending a full appointment. No up-to-date training has been carried out despite this staffing issue being identified in the school development plan. Before the inspection, there had been no fire drills in the Kindergarten in the last two years. No clear evidence has been provided that the school consistently follows up incidents in the behaviour book as there is no single record of sanctions.

Other aspects of welfare are satisfactory. Pupils are actively encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles both within the curriculum and through a popular range of extra-curricular activities. As an integral part of the curriculum, pupils learn how to cook, with an emphasis on healthy ingredients and good nutrition. They are also taught how to garden, in addition to the exercise and physical skills they gain through gym and PE. Pupils are encouraged to walk or cycle to school, and whenever possible break-times are spent outdoors. Water is always available to pupils. The adventure playground provides further opportunities for exercise.

Pupils reported feeling secure and well cared for. Supervision at break and lunchtimes is good. Pupils reported few instances of bullying and generally 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 usually stay for up to eight years. Pupils are also encouraged to adopt safe practices; the school has a clear code of conduct for pupils, as detailed in the parents' handbook, and risk assessments are undertaken for all potentially hazardous activities. E-safety arrangements and awareness have been covered well during a day devoted to the issue this year.

It is important that the school ensures that its arrangements for compliance with the independent schools standards regulations have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school fails to meet five of the requirements.

What does the school need to do in order to comply with the regulations?

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

- put in place appropriate arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school (paragraph 7 (a));

- ensure that such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State (paragraph 7 (b));
- establish appropriate arrangements for fire safety and comply with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (paragraph 13);
- ensure that the school's written policy on first aid is implemented effectively (paragraph 14); and
- keep written records of sanctions imposed upon pupils for serious misbehaviour (paragraph 16).

PART 4 - Suitability of the staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school has a record of all the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), formerly Criminal Records Bureau (CRB), checks on staff, trustees and volunteers. The Single Central Register (SCR) is completed manually on separate sheets of paper for each staff member. It is necessary to add further categories of checks to make it compliant and there are gaps in the recording of the required information for each member of staff; for example, the register does not indicate when staff started at the school. Personnel files are inconsistently maintained and monitored. Important documents are not retained after identity checks have been completed. Copies of qualifications are not kept. Occasionally, the school uses agency supply staff and these checks are correctly carried out by the agency.

The school lacks a clear policy regarding the information to be recorded on the SCR. Currently, this does not provide for appropriate approval; nor does it identify review dates.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school fails to meet three of the requirements.

What does the school need to do in order to comply with the regulations?

- ensure that appropriate checks have been carried out in respect to each member of staff with regard to their medical fitness, right to work in the United Kingdom, qualifications and professional references, and previous employment history (paragraph 19 (2) (b));
- complete the appropriate checks before a person's appointment (paragraph 19 (3));
- with regard to the Single Central Register, in relation to each member of staff appointed on or after 1 May 2007, ensure that the identity of each, their right to work in the United Kingdom and any additional checks on those who have lived outside the United Kingdom, and the date on which this check was made, is recorded in the register (paragraph 22 (1-3)).

PART 5 - Suitability of the premises and accommodation

The Lower and Upper Schools are housed in a large building which dates from the nineteenth century and which formerly comprised offices and workshops. There is also a range of outbuildings which house the woodwork, handwork, art and gardening workshops, and the Kindergarten, Rowans Nursery and Parent and Toddler Group. The school also has use of its own woodland, which includes a play area for the younger pupils, and which is separated from the main school buildings by a private road. The main school site has a generous play area which can also be used for Bothmer gym and games. The school is aware that when crossing the road to access the woodland, pupils must be supervised by staff at all times.

Suitable toilet and washing facilities are provided for the sole use of pupils, with separate arrangements for boys and girls, and for younger and older pupils. The school does not have any showers for pupils taking PE, and the classrooms and toilets provide the only changing accommodation. However, staff supervise all changing arrangements and PE and games are timetabled at the end of the school day to enable pupils to go home to shower. Good provision is made for pupils who are sick or injured. There are adequate supplies of drinking water in most classrooms and common areas.

Overall, the premises and the outside play areas are maintained to a satisfactory standard thereby ensuring, in this respect, the health and safety of pupils. Internal and external lighting and the acoustics are adequate. At the time of the last inspection, the science laboratory was found to be untidy and the storage of resources was poor. This is now much improved; all equipment is cleared away after use, resources are stored safely and chemicals are kept secure. When not in use the laboratory is locked.

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 comply with the regulations?

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

- provide suitable changing accommodation and showers for pupils aged eleven years or over at the start of the school year who receive physical education (paragraph 23 A (1)(c)).

PART 6 - The quality of information for parents

The quality of information for parents is good. All statutory policies are in place and are available via the website or the parents' handbook. Key policies are also accessible for inspection in the school's reception area. The website is up-to-date, informative and easy to navigate: it provides a wealth of information including an events calendar, school news, information about governance, staff profiles, school support teams and a section on e-safety for children. A weekly newsletter is emailed or given to parents with details of forthcoming school events and community notices.

Parents receive information about their child's progress through individual teacher-parent consultations. Termly parents' evenings provide an opportunity to learn about child development and the Steiner Waldorf curriculum. A written report is sent annually to the parents of Lower School pupils, with Upper School pupils' reports sent twice yearly. The best reports include a full account of what has been taught and a section on each child's progress in all subjects. Others are less informative.

The majority of parents who returned the sixty-three questionnaires are supportive of the school. Some parents highlighted a wish for more concrete information on how their child is progressing in their learning. A significant minority highlighted concerns about the general running of the school. Understanding the complaints policy is also a concern for some.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets all the requirements.

PART 7 - The effectiveness of the school's complaints procedure

The school has a complaints policy and procedure which are available to parents and prospective parents. They set out clear timescales for the management of the complaint and also the process that the school should follow.

The school does not always follow its own procedures for responding to a complaint. Three formal complaints were made in the last year. Copies of the findings, processes and recommendations following these complaints were not available to inspectors when requested. Written records indicating where complaints are in the process are not up-to-date in the folder. Members of the school's management team were not aware of the progress of one particular complaint.

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 comply with the regulations?

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

- with regard to the school's complaints procedure, stipulate that a copy of any findings and recommendations of the panel are provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, and made available for inspection on the school premises (paragraph 25(i)).

SECTION C: ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT, AND MAINTENANCE OF THE ETHOS OF THE SCHOOL

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 School is an independent, self-administering Steiner Waldorf School. Its proprietor, Michael House Association Limited, is a registered charity. In line with the articles of association, application for membership requires approval of the trustee body. There are three trustees and they are currently advertising for additional members. The trustees hold overall legal and financial responsibility for the school. Trustees have a monthly joint meeting with the school management team. They also endeavour to meet weekly and, as a minimum, aim to meet once a month.

The school has embarked on a new organisational structure based on the concept of associative leadership. In this model, the trustees maintain the long term interests of the school. The collegiate comprises any staff member committed to carrying and developing the pedagogy, based on anthroposophical insight. This body is consulted on all policy development. They also appoint from their number members of the school management team, a group which, through the school development plan, make decisions based on the medium term interests of the school. They mandate tasks to clusters of support teams based on four realms of activity: administration, teaching, public relations and environment. These teams take on the day-to-day running of the school. Support teams are made up of teachers and parent volunteers. This collaborative working strengthens community spirit and draws on the considerable skill base of the parent body. For the last two years, the school has used a project management tool, Base Camp, which carries information from all groups and is a communication pathway for everyone involved in the organisational model to access. Not all members choose to use this tool, or they use it sporadically which weakens its effectiveness.

Credit must be given to the school for choosing to undertake a new organisational structure which aims to maintain a healthy balance between the desire to move forward and yet hold the core values and vision of the school. However, the practice is proving extremely challenging and the structure is not yet effective. Management is weak because managers lack the time and support to monitor actions delegated to support teams. This has resulted in a failure to ensure that statutory training is undertaken and that all procedures and processes are followed with rigour and within appropriate timeframes. There is insufficient evidence of action follow-through in areas such as safeguarding and complaints. The development plan is sketchy and basic, and reporting and recording are poor. Accountability is not yet clearly defined. The turnover of staff and trustees in recent years has further weakened the organisational structure.

The school management has been slow to implement the recommendations from the last inspection four years ago. For example, an assessment framework has been drafted but not yet implemented. Assessment is used on an individual basis to inform future planning but this is patchy and the quality is inconsistent across the school. The writing of reports policy makes no mention of identifying next steps or targets for pupils, and there is little evidence of this in reports.

While a significant number of parents have questions over how well the school is run, on a positive note, many appreciate the education their children are receiving. The ethos of the school lives strongly in the festivals celebrated, in community events, and in collegiate study and activity.

Could the organisation and management of the school be improved?

The trustees might like to take into consideration the following suggestions as to where specific improvements could be made:

- intervening to challenge and support the school so weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met;
- reviewing the working of the school management team and either enlisting administrative help or freeing up members' timetables to allow more time for them to fulfil their duties; and
- ensuring that the constitution as it appears on the website is consistent with the articles of association.

PART D: EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

The overall quality and standards of the early years' provision

The overall quality and standards of the early years' provision are inadequate because many key regulations are not met. The staff have a clear awareness of the ways in which they wish to develop their provision but the capacity to maintain continuous improvement is limited by the inefficient systems for recording information. Since the last inspection, there has been a reduction in the keeping of essential records, and a failure to continue to meet the regulations of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Framework.

EYFS exemptions have been granted by the Department for Education from the whole literacy educational programme, and modifications have been granted for communication and language, physical development, mathematics, understanding the world, and expressive arts and design but not from assessment arrangements.

The provision for children's personal and emotional development is satisfactory. Parents speak of the happiness of their children in the Kindergarten. However, some of the regulations are currently not being met in welfare, health and safety and safeguarding.

How well the early years' provision meets the needs of the range of children who attend

Overall, the provision for meeting the range of children's needs is unsatisfactory. The learning and development requirements are not fully met and record-keeping is poor. More support and guidance are needed for all the children to ensure there is sufficient challenge in their learning. Guidance for staff on managing behaviour is lacking. Children with SEN receive some support from staff who engage with parents and professionals to provide a fully inclusive environment. Opportunities for the children to develop their language and communication skills and to acquire a wider range of practical skills are not always taken up. Insufficient consideration is given to shape, space and measures in mathematics.

The Steiner approach to indoor and outdoor play, which includes songs, stories and craft activities, is included in the weekly plans. In the Kindergarten, children are encouraged to help set out materials but they do not always use resources in free play with care and sensitivity.

The contribution of the early years' provision to children's well-being

Much of the provision for the children's well-being is satisfactory, but there are shortcomings in the provision for their welfare, health and safety.

The need for physical exercise is met as children have freedom to move indoors and regularly play outdoors; they have ample time for imaginative play. The children are developing independence in managing their own hygiene and personal needs; they are reminded to wash their hands as a matter of course. They are able to form appropriate friendships with one another and secure attachments with the adults. Parents and carers are welcomed into the Kindergarten to help their children to

settle. The children are happy and enjoy the activities indoors and out. Healthy eating is well promoted, with children learning how to prepare snacks and to bake. All the food provided is organically sourced.

The children acquire good practical skills in free-play time. The staff sometimes have low expectations of the children's learning which constrains the development of good social skills. The lack of provision of detailed observation and assessment records constrains children's transition into Class 1.

Children are familiar with the daily routine which reflects the Steiner approach of following the rhythms of the day, week and year. Physical skills and control are well developed through eurythmy sessions which are taken by a specialist teacher. Seasonal events are celebrated.

Shortcomings in provision for children's well-being include issues with staff training for child protection and fire safety. Fire drills have not been carried out on a regular basis. Safeguarding procedures are weak and the Kindergarten lacks appropriate systems for checking the suitability of people likely to come into contact with the children.

The effectiveness of leadership and management in the early years' provision

The leadership and management of the early years' provision are inadequate. The absence of oversight has meant that standards of management have slipped since the last inspection. A significant number of the regulatory requirements for the safeguarding of children's welfare and health and safety have not been met. Daily, weekly and termly planning for children aged three-and-a-half and upwards lacks detail and their educational programme is insufficiently monitored. The absence of detailed records, including observations of the children's learning, makes it difficult to assess the progress of individual children over time. The planning and recording process lacks systems for self-evaluation that could be used to identify the next steps for development. Partnerships with parents are good, but no written reports are sent home. The Kindergarten would benefit from a review of its documentation especially for planning, observation, assessment and reporting.

Currently no named practitioner is responsible for behaviour management. Daily attendance records are not always completed in full. The recording of the induction process for new staff is inconsistent. Staff lack sufficient knowledge of the EYFS Statutory Framework, and of school policies and of the procedures to implement them effectively. There is a lack of records of complaints received and of their outcomes.

Does the school meet the statutory requirements?

The school fails to meet a significant number of regulations.

What does the school need to do in order to comply with the regulations?

Learning and Development:

- guide the development of children's capabilities with a view to ensuring that they complete the EYFS ready to benefit fully from the opportunities ahead of them;
- plan and implement each area of learning and development through planned, purposeful play; and
- in mathematics, give greater consideration to shape, space and measures.

Welfare and Safeguarding:

- take all necessary steps to keep children safe and well;
- ensure that all staff follow policies and procedures, and implement these to safeguard children;
- ensure that the relevant personnel attend a child protection training course enabling them to understand and respond appropriately to signs of possible abuse and neglect;
- ensure that people looking after children are suitable to fulfil the requirements of their roles; and
- put in place effective systems to check the suitability of people likely to have regular contact with the children.

Health and Safety:

- keep written records of accidents, injuries and first aid treatment, and ensure the provider complies with the requirements of health and safety legislation;

Complaints:

- keep written records of any complaints and their outcome.

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