

# Mill Cottage Montessori School

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	John Coleman HMI

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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, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.<sup>1, 2</sup>

## Information about the school

Mill Cottage Montessori School is an independent day school which provides part-time and full-time education for up to 50 girls and boys aged from three to six years. There are currently 23 pupils on roll, all of whom are below the compulsory school age. The school has previously provided for older pupils who are of compulsory school age and has plans to do so once more in the next school year. There are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs. The school was first registered in October 2005 and was previously inspected in May 2009.

The school also provides childcare before and after school for children aged from nought to eight years. This formed part of the inspection in respect of the children aged three to six years who are a part of the school. Additionally, there is childcare provision for children aged from nought to three years throughout the school day and this was last inspected by Ofsted as part of the previous education inspection in May 2009. This inspection did not include the nought to three years provision; this is now subject to a separate inspection by Ofsted.

The school is situated in a Grade 2 listed building beside the River Calder in a rural location. The Early Years Foundation Stage is provided in one Nursery class. Parents and carers of 15 children aged three and four years are eligible to receive government Nursery funding. The school aims to 'allow each child to develop at his/her own pace in a well-equipped and supportive, stimulating environment, where each child can progress individually and is encouraged to build on his/her own strength'.

## Evaluation of the school

The school provides an outstanding quality of education for its children and fully meets its aims. Due to an outstanding curriculum and outstanding teaching, children make outstanding progress. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, their behaviour and the provision for children's welfare, health and safety are all outstanding. The provision and outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are outstanding. Arrangements for safeguarding meet all the requirements. The school has successfully addressed the two regulations which were

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<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents).

<sup>2</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents).

not met at the previous inspection regarding a suitable framework for assessing children's progress and now meets all the regulations for registration as an independent school.

## Quality of education

The curriculum and other activities are outstanding in meeting the range of needs and interests of children and cover all the required areas of learning. The individual needs of each 'unique' child are at the heart of all curriculum planning for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Teacher's plans show exciting activities which are based upon children's fascination and curiosity. These activities give children many opportunities to learn through solving problems. Staff are highly successful in teaching children to think for themselves. Parts of the curriculum are centred on topics which are interesting to children such as the seasons or cultural festivals. Curriculum plans include written evaluations of previous lessons and detailed step by step guidance showing how each child's learning will be moved on. All staff take part in planning activities and this means that everyone is extremely knowledgeable about the needs of children and the plans for developing their skills, knowledge and experiences. The Montessori approach is skilfully adopted so that the areas of learning required by the Early Years Foundation Stage are fully covered. There is a strong emphasis upon children being free to choose activities. The approach taken by staff is highly effective in developing exceptionally good concentration and perseverance in children. Outdoor curriculum activities are equally well planned. Many trips to places of educational interest are seamlessly woven in to curriculum topics and areas of interest for children. Excellent use is made of the local rural environment to bring real life learning experiences to children.

The effectiveness of teaching and assessment are outstanding in meeting the full range of children's needs. The headteacher is an inspirational teacher and she exemplifies the very high quality of individual care, guidance and support which is enjoyed by every child. Relationships are first class between staff and children and equally between children. Staff provide excellent role models for children. They provide great care, patience and consideration for every child. As a result, children blossom, gain confidence and grow in their self-esteem. Routines are child led and flexibly arranged so that children make informed choices throughout each day. For example, snack and drinks are available continually. Three-year-old children were observed by inspectors sitting politely on the snack chairs, peeling tangerines with wonderful dexterity, carefully piling the peel on their plate and taking care to tidy away ready for the next person. A striking feature of the Nursery classroom is the mature way in which every child is able to take part in practical tasks involving cutting, sticking and gluing while being undisturbed by others. Children learn to cooperate, share and to return all equipment to their orderly place on the shelves.

The childcare provision contributes strongly to excellent provision for children's personal, social and health education. Children are able to choose a healthy breakfast and settle quickly into the social routines of the day as they help to wash up and return cups and bowls to their storage place. Key workers are assigned to

every child with a second key worker identified in support for times of possible absence. In this, children are well supported throughout the childcare and school setting.

All teachers and staff offer close supervision but are committed to minimal intervention in order to promote each child's ability to explore and investigate for themselves. In this way, children develop independent learning skills rapidly. In lessons there is a very high level of consistency to outstanding practice. For example, the excellent social interactions between children and with staff successfully enable children to 'have a go'. Children are unafraid of trying new ideas. They learn in a world full of praise and encouragement. Teachers use excellent questioning skills to help children to learn in stages.

Teachers are adept at creating moments of awe and wonder during which children are uplifted and inspired to learn. For example, one group of children were taken on a mystery potato hunt by the teacher. The scene was set as the teacher whispered that: 'During the night someone had moved the potatoes in the garden. Who could this be?' The children's imagination was instantly captured and they offered suggestions such as a bear or Santa. Outdoors, the children, equipped with spades and buckets, carefully collected up the potatoes. The suspense increased as the teacher suggested looking in the chicken coup. Upon slowly opening the door it was revealed that Bernard the baby turkey had stolen a potato and was the mystery culprit. Every child's face was aglow with excitement. Later, in the classroom the children talked about the types of foods which chickens and turkeys eat.

The teaching of reading, including the letters and sounds which make up words, is extremely effective. Children freely and regularly choose from a wide variety of activities which rapidly develop their reading skills. Similarly, children's writing develops outstandingly well due to teacher's skilful guidance, excellent modelling of letters and words and because children take great interest and pride in improving their work. Staff take every opportunity to challenge children with numbers, shapes and problems. Children enjoy puzzling over two-dimensional shape games, fitting three-dimensional cylinders into different sized holes and using beads to develop their understanding of place value.

Since the previous inspection, the school has developed very good tracking systems to carefully measure and record each child's progress. Daily observations of children's learning are annotated by staff and collected into children's learning journeys. Many photographs are taken to visually show the children's learning. These files show that all groups of children make exceptional progress in both educational skills and knowledge and in the development of personal skills.

Overall, children make outstanding progress in their learning. Reports for pupils of compulsory school age, previously educated at the school, show outstanding progress. Observations by inspectors confirm the school's assessment records which show that all children in the Nursery class make outstanding gains in their learning. Most children start in the Nursery class with skills which are at least in line with age

related expectations nationally; some have skills above this expectation. By the time children complete the Nursery most are achieving the early learning goals expected of children one year older. Indeed, some children are reading, writing and using mathematics at levels not expected until much later. Children are articulate and express themselves confidently with a maturity well beyond their years. This represents significant and exceptional progress.

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

The quality of provision for children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Staff are calm, caring and extremely attentive to children's needs. As a result, children feel safe and thoroughly enjoy coming to school. Attendance and punctuality are excellent. Behaviour is outstanding in lessons, around the school and in the outdoor environment. Children are polite, well-mannered and cooperative. For example, the Christmas lunch and party took place during the inspection and inspectors were immensely impressed with the children's ability to select food sensibly, to talk quietly and to ask for things respectfully.

This is a very inclusive school and staff go the extra mile to accommodate parents' wishes in the interest of their children. Communication between the school and parents and carers is first rate and this ensures that school and home work side by side to provide the very best for children. Inspectors spoke to a good many parents and carers; without exception, they hold the school in high regard. Every parent and carer said that they are delighted with the school. The six responses from parents and carers on the Ofsted Parent View site show overwhelming support; they expressed a unanimous view that parents and carers would recommend the school to others.

The many school trips help develop children's cultural awareness and understanding. For example, several museum visits teach children about such British institutions as well as specialist knowledge. Visits by the fire service capture children's interest and help them to learn about the emergency services. Parents and carers are used well as visiting specialists. For example, a parent who is a dentist taught children about dental hygiene and improved their confidence and reduced anxieties about trips to the dentist. Although children learn about other faiths and beliefs, they have too few opportunities to learn at first-hand through links with schools or communities of contrasting cultures in Britain.

## **Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

The overall welfare, health and safety of children are outstanding. The school ensures that all the required policies and procedures meet the requirements, and are rigorously implemented and monitored. Staff training for first aid and safeguarding is up-to-date and at the required levels. Attention to the school site, including regular risk assessments, is meticulous. The building is very well maintained. Fire drills and arrangements for the regular servicing of equipment are fully in place. Staff

supervision is highly vigilant, and the start and end of school are carefully managed. Checks on staff and visitors are rigorous. Children learn about healthy eating and enjoy regular physical activities outdoors. Attention to health and safety is excellent. The school kitchen has been awarded the highest rating by the local authority in recent annual inspections. Above all, the consistent way in which all staff show very high levels of care for children's well-being demonstrates the exceptional quality of the school's provision.

## **Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors**

All the required safeguarding checks on staff are made, such as those by the Criminal Records Bureau, and are recorded appropriately in a single central register.

## **Premises and accommodation at the school**

The premises and equipment make an excellent contribution to children's learning. The school provides spacious accommodation, including a large Nursery classroom, library, dining room, outdoor classroom, garden, outdoor adventure area and outdoor hard surfaced play area including large climbing apparatus and a large covered space.

## **Provision of information**

The school complies with all the requirements for providing parents, carers and others with information about the school. The website provides useful background to the Montessori approach to education as well as some practical information about the school. Parents and carers receive an informative prospectus which contains details of the school's work and procedures in line with the government's requirements. Reports are sent home showing children's progress and attainment. Newsletters keep parents and carers up-to-date about school events. Staff are accessible on a daily basis for support and advice.

## **Manner in which complaints are to be handled**

The school's complaints policy and procedures fully meet the requirements.

## **Compliance with regulatory requirements**

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets all The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations').

## **What the school could do to improve further**

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

- Develop first-hand opportunities for children to learn about contrasting British cultures by establishing links with a school in a diverse community.

## Inspection judgements

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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## School details

<b>School status</b>	Independent		
<b>Type of school</b>	Montessori		
<b>Date school opened</b>	October 2005		
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–6 years		
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed		
<b>Number on roll (full-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 4	Girls: 3	Total: 7
<b>Number on roll (part-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 8	Girls: 8	Total: 16
<b>Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs</b>	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
<b>Number of pupils who are looked after</b>	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£1,750–£8,750		
<b>Address of school</b>	Wakefield Road Brighouse West Yorkshire HD6 4HA		
<b>Telephone number</b>	01484 400500		
<b>Email address</b>	ailsamneville@yahoo.co.uk		
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ailsa Neville		
<b>Proprietor</b>	Ailsa Neville		

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



14 December 2012

Dear Children

### **Inspection of Mill Cottage Montessori School, HD6 4HA**

Thank you for welcoming the inspectors into your school when we visited you recently. We thoroughly enjoyed our time with you and would like to share with you what we found out about your school. We judged that the Mill Cottage Montessori School is an outstanding school. These are the main reasons why we judged the school to be outstanding.

- Your headteacher and all the staff look after you very carefully and make sure you enjoy school and feel safe.
- The quality of teaching and the curriculum is outstanding so that you make outstanding progress in your learning.
- You behave exceptionally well when you work and play indoors and outdoors.
- You develop outstanding personal skills which will help you in the future such as by being well mannered, polite and cooperative with others.

All schools need to develop and improve and we have asked that there are more opportunities provided for you to learn about other cultures and communities in different parts of Britain.

Thank you once again for all your help. I wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely

John Coleman  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**