

Mill Cottage Montessori School

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	381/6012
Unique Reference Number	131158
URN for registered childcare	EY317102
Inspection number	331358
Inspection dates	7–8 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Jackie Cousins

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended. The inspection of childcare was conducted under Section 49(2) of the Childcare Act 2006.

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Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE
T 08456 404040
www.ofsted.gov.uk



Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The inspection of registered provision¹ was conducted under Section 49(2) of the Childcare Act 2006.

Information about the school

Mill Cottage Montessori School is an independent, boys and girls day school for children from three months to 11 years of age and is located in Brighouse, West Yorkshire. It was opened in October 2005 and was last inspected in September 2006. The school follows Montessori principles and aims to ensure that, 'Children will be encouraged to develop at an individual pace along a spontaneous learning path whereby they will develop a variety of new skills and become independent.' The school accepts children of various abilities. At the time of inspection, no children had a statement of special educational needs. There are some pupils with significant learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school is registered to take a maximum of 50 pupils and has 73 on roll due to some attending part-time.

Childcare is available for 46 weeks a year, for eight children between the ages of three months and two years and also for 31 aged between two years and the end of Early Years Foundation Stage. Government nursery funding is available for up to 24 children who are three and four years of age. Childcare is available for all of the children between the hours of 08.00 and 18.00. Nearly all of the 12 teaching staff have a childcare qualification equivalent to a level 3 and new staff members work towards this level of qualification. The childcare provision was last inspected in April 2006 by an Ofsted Childcare Inspector.

Evaluation of the school

Mill Cottage Montessori School provides a good quality of education and meets its aims effectively, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Parents are pleased with what the school offers and one parent said, 'The staff are great and have really welcomed both us and our daughter.'

¹ Schools which provide childcare for children from birth until the term in which they reach their third birthday must register this provision separately with Ofsted.

Pupils' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a significant strength of the school and is outstanding due to the dedicated level of care from staff. Welfare, health and safety are satisfactory. Pupils make good progress, mainly because teaching and learning are good.

The school has made significant improvements since it was last inspected and meets all but two of the regulations.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good because it focuses well on the development of pupils' skills in literacy, communication, mathematics, knowledge and understanding of the world, and in all other areas of learning. National guidance is used astutely to create a successful programme of study for pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Staff are guided by good plans, which ensure that pupils in Years 1 to 6 continue to build on their knowledge, skills and understanding in all subjects. Lesson planning is effective and sets clear objectives for sessions. Provision for pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good because individual learning plans are used well to support them. A music teacher attends the school each week to teach music to pupils from the age of three years upwards. Pupils also undertake French lessons. Provision for information and communication technology and physical education are satisfactory. The provision for pupils who are gifted and talented is well developed. This is because links are made extremely thoughtfully between areas of learning. Visitors are invited into the school to educate the children further. For example, the lollipop person developed pupils' understanding of road safety thoughtfully because he explained to pupils how to cross the road safely and why everyone needs to put on a seat belt in vehicles. Visits are made to places of educational interest to enrich the curriculum. A good balance is in place between activities led by teachers and those chosen by pupils, which is part of the Montessori way of working. Very good provision for pupils' personal development allows them to become independent and very mature young people.

Teaching and assessment are good, from the Early Years Foundation Stage to the end of the primary school. Successful teaching allows pupils to make good progress. Pupils receive a significant amount of individual attention because class sizes are small. The good subject knowledge of the staff helps pupils to develop their speaking and listening skills. They pick up new ideas quickly because teachers use demonstrations effectively. Staff have high expectations of all pupils and thoughtfully challenge their individual capabilities. Teaching is effective in encouraging pupils to be independent, think for themselves and solve problems. Good teaching methods are used. For example, during a good history lesson seen pupils were encouraged to think deeply because challenging questions were used by the teacher. This meant that pupils suggested a wide variety of ways people in the past could have communicated with signs. Resources are utilized effectively, for instance, in one case the teacher enabled the pupils to investigate patterns on a whiteboard so that the answers to mathematical problems were analysed in detail.

The use of oral and written targets for pupils is not fully developed, so that not all pupils are aware of the strengths and areas for improvement in their work. This is partly because the Montessori methods do not structure learning in this way.

Assessment activities are used well. All areas of learning are assessed efficiently in the Early Years Foundation Stage and children's achievement is evaluated in relation to the nationally expected goals for five-year-olds. Throughout the school, staff use their knowledge of pupils effectively. This helps staff to be successful in assisting pupils in achieving a good degree of knowledge, skills and understanding. High quality meetings are held where the teaching staff and the headteacher discuss carefully the best ways to support pupils. Attainment in Years 1 to 6 is not recorded effectively against criteria to make it easier for staff to evaluate a pupil's progress in detail and identify underachievement even more thoroughly.

Work in the oldest pupils' books shows that they progress well. Their writing skills develop successfully. For example, older pupils wrote a good description of a flagpole, its parts and how it works. Pupils read books and explain the key events and characters astutely. Good progress in the four rules of number is evident in pupils' books and in the lessons seen. Pupils develop effective science skills, such as when they record the parts of a plant in detail.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The school's provision for pupils' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding throughout the school. The development of pupils' independence is central to the aims of the school and it is extremely successful in meeting this aim. Pupils of all abilities develop self-reliance and confidence effectively as they move through the school because of the expectations and encouraging comments made by staff. The school recognises the importance of pupils' spiritual development, for example, through developing their interest in the world around them, as seen through pupils' amazement in watching plants grow. Pupils develop a good understanding of the difference between right and wrong through a range of strategies used by the school. Their attitudes to learning are good and their attendance is regular. Behaviour is outstanding and pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. They handle equipment carefully and move safely around school.

The school makes a good contribution to developing pupils' awareness of their local community and their place in it. The school invites visitors from the local community to meet and speak to pupils. For example, a visit from the fire brigade allows them to learn about how this service operates, its importance and the operations of a fire engine. Consequently, pupils develop knowledge and understanding of British institutions and traditions well. Their awareness and recognition of their own and others' religious heritage and traditions are promoted successfully through the celebration of festivals, such as Christmas and Eid.

Older pupils have a good level of knowledge of Christianity and stories from the Bible and know, for example, what happened to Jesus at Easter. The school provides a harmonious environment where pupils from a diverse range of heritages learn about one another's traditions and values.

The pupils get on very well together and older pupils enjoy looking after younger ones at break times. Pupils of all ages very much enjoy drawing on the chalk boards in the playground. They help others by raising money for local people and national charities. Pupils learn thoughtfully and respectfully about global issues, such as recycling materials effectively and not wasting energy.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. Pupils feel safe and they are well cared for. The school has implemented most aspects of the latest guidance related to safeguarding pupils. It has a suitable anti-bullying policy which is implemented effectively through different preventative measures. There is a successful policy to promote good behaviour amongst pupils. Pupils feel that their property is safe and secure in the school. The school has a suitable child protection policy and all staff have received appropriate, basic child protection training; some have done intermediate child protection training; arrangements have been made to update an appropriate level of training for the headteacher in her role as child protection officer. The school carries out fire safety checks and regular fire drills are conducted and recorded. There is a health and safety risk assessment policy in place and the relevant checks are carried out and recorded satisfactorily. Occasionally they lack sufficiently full and thorough analysis. The school has suitable procedures to ensure that risks to pupils are minimised on school outings. There is a satisfactory first aid policy and nearly all staff have received training in handling incidents with children in the early years. Information about pupils' medical conditions and allergies are recorded diligently so that staff are clear about children's individual needs. Pupils feel that the school helps them to make sensible choices about healthy food and most say that they eat fruit and vegetables every day. Pupils take regular exercise in the playgrounds. The manual admission and attendance registers are maintained correctly. The school complies with the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 through its three-year plan.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Procedures for checking on the suitability of staff are robust, and meet all of the requirements, as does the single central record of such checks.

School's premises and accommodation

The school's premises and accommodation are satisfactory overall. They assist pupils to learn effectively. The building and classrooms are of a good size and quality. The school has a suitable medical room so that pupils are able to rest in an appropriate place when they are unwell. A dedicated art and design room is available to develop pupils' creative and artistic skills.

All resources, including Montessori materials, are maintained well and are accessible. Three outside areas are equipped with an effective range of apparatus and there is a garden where children learn about growing plants.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The prospectus and welcome pack provide a good range of information about the school for parents. Written reports are provided for parents about their children's progress once each academic year. This is further supported on two occasions during the year when parents have the opportunity of meeting staff to discuss their child's progress. Parents can come in and discuss their child at the beginning or end of the school day. Communication between the school and parents is enhanced by a simple diary sheet for younger children, which provides an effective means of passing messages between staff and parents.

Procedures for handling complaints

The procedures for handling complaints fully meet regulations. The policy for complaints is written in clear and accessible language. One complaint was received and investigated by Ofsted. The school was not required to make any changes to practices or policies as a result.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Boys and girls make good progress from 3 months to the end of Early Years Foundation Stage because the quality of the provision is good. Children settle quickly into school life because the staff take time to find out about each individual child and establish a strong partnership with parents.

The youngest children develop well because resources are used effectively. For example, children under the age of one year learn to crawl successfully because interesting toys are placed slightly out of reach so that children are challenged to move to reach them. The children develop their basic language skills well because staff model reading regularly. Boys and girls learn to write carefully because resources are readily available in the inside and outside learning areas. Regular assessments of children are used to record the developmental progress of the children and this is linked successfully to achievements made with the Montessori materials. Children's personal development and behaviour are outstanding because staff ensure the good care and well-being of each individual.

Older children progress well. They learn to read using letter sounds successfully because of good, structured teaching and assessment activities. Children learn carefully to use language to express their own thinking because the staff are skilful in setting questions. For example, children learn about the dangers of playing with matches due to the good use of open-ended questioning and stories. Assessments regularly highlight what children know and when this is attained.

Records do not always set out specifically the next steps children should take to improve. Although children's welfare, health and safety are satisfactory overall, risk assessments are not always completed in sufficient detail. Nonetheless, the leadership and management of this stage of children's education are good. Consequently, they have a wealth of opportunities to learn. Practical activities are used effectively to develop children's knowledge and understanding of the world. The outside areas are effectively resourced and the school plans to extend the range of equipment to allow for its more comprehensive use. Children happily share equipment and work independently due to the high expectations staff have of them and the diligent way that they organise the resources.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ("the Regulations"), with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- ensure that the school has in place a framework by which pupil performance can be evaluated by reference to either the school's own aims, as provided to parents, and/or by national norms (paragraph 1(4)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- ensure that the designated person receives training for child protection every two years (paragraph 3(2)(b)).

The school's registered provision for childcare meets the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006.

What the school could do to improve further

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

- sharpen the detail of targets for pupils throughout the school so that they are more aware of their areas for improvement
- ensure that risk assessments are completed more thoroughly.

Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

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

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

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

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

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

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

School details

Name of school	Mill Cottage Montessori School		
DCSF number	381/6012		
Unique reference number	131158		
EY URN	EY317102		
Type of school	Montessori		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	October 2005		
Age range of pupils	3 - 11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 7	Girls: 5	Total: 12
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 15	Girls: 15	Total: 30
Number of pupils aged 0-3 in registered childcare provision	Boys: 19	Girls: 12	Total: 31
Annual fees (day pupils)	£975 - £7,020		
Annual fees (childcare)	£1,288 - £9,199		
Address of school	Wakefield Road Brighouse West Yorkshire HD6 4HA		
Telephone number	01484 400500		
Fax number	n/a		
Email address	ailsaneville@yahoo.co.uk		
Headteacher	Ms Ailsa Neville		
Proprietor	Ms Ailsa Neville		
Reporting inspector	Jackie Cousins		
Dates of inspection	7-8 May 2009		