

Inspection report
Mill Cottage Montessori School
Independent school
DfES ref no: 381/6012

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Date of inspection: 26 September 2006

Introduction

Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002 as part of pilot inspection arrangements in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Mill Cottage Montessori School is a new school which was first registered in October 2005. It is in a Grade 2 listed building with extensive outside grounds and play areas. At the time of the inspection there were 48 children on roll of whom 44 were aged between six months and five years. Four children were of compulsory school age. The school intends to open a separate elementary class for the oldest children soon. Most children attend part time, although a minority attend for the full opening hours of 0800 to 1800. The school is open 46 weeks a year. The children come from a wide area around Brighthouse and the surrounding areas.

Overall evaluation of the school

Mill Cottage Montessori School has developed well during the year it has been open. It provides a satisfactory quality of education which meets nearly all of the educational regulations and thus enables the children to make satisfactory progress. It has made a particularly good start to its work with children under five. The efforts of the proprietor and her colleagues are reflected in the outstanding behaviour of the children.

The school follows the Montessori curriculum and covers a good range of areas. These usefully develop children's learning from the infant and toddler rooms, which have children from about 6 months to rising three years, to the Children's House for children aged between three and six. In order to satisfy the requirements of the Foundation Stage, the school's planning links Montessori approaches to the guidance 'Birth to Three Matters' for the younger children and to the Areas of Learning for the three to six year olds. The school has made effective links between its planning and the Montessori assessments which form the backbone of its monitoring of children's progress. Staff keep detailed notes on each child. The experiences provided for the small number of 5 and 6 year-olds emphasise personal life skills and early language, literacy and mathematical skills. The wide age range in the Children's House complicates planning and makes it hard for staff to ensure that sufficient challenge is provided for the oldest children. The school is rightly planning to establish an Elementary class to better meet the needs of the older children.

Good use is made of the school grounds and the school's many pets to develop the children's awareness of the natural world. In particular, children with additional learning needs and/or difficulties are encouraged to play a full part in the school's

work and their needs are well met.

Some of the children who are of compulsory school age do not attend full time. The school should ensure that parents or carers provide written statements that they are educating their children at home or elsewhere when they are not attending Mill House.

The Montessori approach is effectively used to promote children's independence. They are able to choose apparatus, use it appropriately and then tidy it away. Teaching is satisfactory: it is well designed to promote independent learning. In the music lessons seen there was good pace and organisation to ensure that children actively developed their skills of recorder playing and musical movement. Where staff do support children, mainly individually or in small groups, they are encouraging and very caring. However teachers' planning in the Children's House does not identify clearly the activities and learning intended for the different age groups and as a result the pace of learning can be slow, especially for children who are not engaged on tasks for significant parts of the day. Whilst the oldest children make satisfactory progress, the provision for younger ones is more clearly focussed and their progress is better. All children make good progress in developing personal skills and this area is a strength of the school. The older children are given additional responsibilities, such as setting the lunchtime tables and helping to clear away after lunch. The school has done well to acquire a good variety of resources since it opened. Outdoor resources are being reviewed and extended.

Provision for the children's moral, social and cultural development is good. It has a positive impact on their overall personal development. Spiritual aspects are less frequently addressed although themes such as 'peace' promote children's awareness satisfactorily. The children enjoy their time at school and attendance is good overall. Behaviour and discipline are outstanding: the school emphasises self awareness and self discipline as well as enabling the children to see themselves as part of the school community. This work is extremely effective.

Overall, the provision for the children's welfare, health and safety of the children is good as are the procedures which the school has put in place to support these. The children are encouraged to be healthy. Good snacks are provided and the children are able to choose from these when they wish. The school provides breakfast and tea as well as well-cooked lunches which the children enjoy in a suitably family-centred atmosphere. The children are safe and staff are well deployed to support them. Staff are checked thoroughly before they are employed. At present the admissions register is not fully up to date and the attendance registers are not kept for each session. They do not distinguish between the different forms of absence.

The premises have been very well modified for their present use and the art room extension will provide good additional facilities. The toilet provision is adequate for the present numbers and age range of the school. However, any increase in the numbers of under two-year-olds and the addition of children to its projected upper age limit of 11 would require review of this provision. Plans to develop the school grounds to support nature study will also extend the range of learning opportunities available to the children. Parents are very supportive of the school and are provided with generally good information about its work. The complaints procedure meets the

legal requirements, although the school has not received any complaints.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, 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 where children of compulsory school age do not attend full-time that their parents or carers provide the school with a written indication that they are being educated elsewhere for the times not at Mill Cottage School (paragraph 1(2)(a)(i)).

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

- ensure that the admissions register is fully up to date and that attendance registers fully meet the regulations (paragraph 3(9)).

What the school could do to improve further

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

- extend the provision for the oldest children of Elementary class age so that they are presented with work which is more closely matched to their current achievement and that they are able to persist and develop their concentration more effectively, and
- review the balance of the Montessori curriculum, so that each area of learning is more fully taught.

School details

Name of school:	Mill Cottage Montessori School
DfES Number:	381/6012
Type of school:	Montessori
Status:	Independent
Date school opened:	31 October 2005
Age range of pupils:	0-11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll :	Boys: 5 Girls: 43 Total: 48
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 0 Girls: 1 Total: 1
Annual fees (day pupils):	£6,435
Telephone number:	01484 400500
Email address:	ailsaneville@yahoo.co.uk
Headteacher:	Miss Ailsa Neville
Proprietor:	Miss Ailsa Neville
Reporting Inspector:	Martin Bradley HMI
Dates of inspection:	26 September 2006

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