

Wharfedale Montessori School

Independent School

DCSF Registration Number	8156032
Unique Reference Number	121763
Inspection number	329298
Inspection dates	30 April 2008
Reporting inspector	John Coleman HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

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, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

This was a light touch inspection (LTI) which focussed principally on the quality of education provided by the school; its provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; the arrangements for safeguarding pupils and the improvements the school has made since its last inspection.

Information about the school

The school was opened by the present proprietor (also the principal) in 1990. It is situated in local surroundings which are an area of special scientific interest and outstanding natural beauty. The school provides for pupils aged two and a half to twelve years. The youngest children (up to six years) are located in the 'children's house' on the ground floor of a large residential cottage which is set within extensive landscaped grounds. The older pupils (primary classes) utilise a recently built large chalet style classroom located adjacent to the house.

Nearby in a converted primary school building the proprietor also manages 'Wharfedale Babes' providing care for children aged nought to three years. This provision was inspected by Ofsted in 2007 and the recommendations resulting from this visit have been fully implemented.

The school is committed to the educational approaches devised by Dr Maria Montessori. In keeping with this philosophy the school aims to 'provide a vast range of learning experiences with apparatus and exercises that the children manipulate and explore in a hands on way, that satisfy their inner need to learn by doing'. All the teachers are trained in Montessori teaching methods and the principal is an approved lecturer/examiner of Montessori methods. The headteacher of the children's house is the principal's daughter and she has extensive Montessori experience outside of the UK. The principal's husband also teaches in the school. All family members deliver public lectures about Montessori education. The school is used as a provider of Montessori training. The school was last inspected in 2004.

Evaluation of the school

Wharfedale Montessori is a good school. The principal has a strong clear vision for the school and together with the dedicated staff she has developed a carefully structured environment in which pupils enjoy their education. The good provision for teaching and the curriculum means that pupils make good progress and achieve well. The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Provision for pupils' welfare, health and

safety is outstanding. A significant and outstanding feature of the school is the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. Action has been taken to rectify the small number of issues raised at the last inspection by improving policies and making more information available to parents. The school now meets all the regulations for Independent Schools.

Quality of education

Overall the quality of education provided by the school is good. The effectiveness of the curriculum and other activities in meeting the range and interests of pupils is good. The school structures its curriculum on Montessori approaches so that the youngest children begin their learning through practical life experiences such as sweeping, polishing and pouring. They move on to learn through a sensory focus exploring the differences in hot and cold, heavy and light, and big and small. As a result children quickly settle into the daily routines and make sense of their learning. Gradually the curriculum in the children's house includes mathematics and language and there is a close correlation with the Foundation Stage areas of learning. In the primary classes the curriculum also includes history, geography, zoology, arts and crafts and an introduction to physics, chemistry, algebra and geometry in preparation for secondary education. French and swimming tuition are available as additional areas and these are taken up by the vast majority of pupils. Computers are used in each class to extend pupils' learning by using interesting programmes which generate pupils' interest and concentration. The availability of the internet to develop pupils' research skills is limited due to the weak connection signal in this rural area. Throughout the school good use is made of specific Montessori resources which encourage pupils to learn by practical activities. Visits are made to places of educational interest and these enrich the curriculum. For example, pupils have had trips to a local quarry, a bird of prey centre and Leeds Playhouse. The school also welcomes visitors to talk to the pupils about curriculum related experiences such as when two Montessori teachers who originated from Ghana and Nepal related their cultural experiences. Parents are asked to volunteer if they have specific expertise or interests and pupils have learnt from a spinner and a professional jewellery maker. There are no extra curricular activities offered though when the school is preparing for a performance or concert pupils are given extra time after normal sessions. The school curriculum includes a satisfactory range of sporting opportunities making good use of the excellent outdoor environment.

The effectiveness of teaching and assessment in meeting the full range of pupils' needs is good. Staff know the pupils very well as individuals and this contributes greatly to ensuring they make good progress because of effective support and guidance. Relationships between staff and pupils and between the pupils themselves are excellent. Pupils show very good attitudes to learning because teachers provide interesting lessons. Teaching is consistently good throughout the school. Children get off to a good start in the children's house and receive good teaching with especially strong features in developing children's social and communication skills. Effective use is made of the wonderful outdoor environment. Many of the planned activities aim to help children to learn by doing and this keeps them interested and sustains their

concentration. As a result, children make good progress in their personal development and in their learning overall. The development of basic skills is a strength. For example, in a lesson seen during the inspection, children were learning to read with Montessori style phonic cards and using 'look and say' methods with the teacher. The children clearly enjoyed learning to read and were very enthusiastic about reading to the inspector. An outstanding feature in the pre-primary class is the quality of planning and record keeping which clearly shows the effective links made between the Montessori curriculum and the Foundation Stage areas of learning. The Foundation Stage Profile is used well as a means of assessment and informs teachers about the good progress pupils are making. In the primary classes teachers' planning is a broad but satisfactory outline of the Montessori areas for learning. Pupils are encouraged to pursue their own self chosen work and they develop into independent learners who diligently find out and explore things for themselves under the watchful guidance of the teachers. There is effective ongoing daily assessment of this work through discussion with the pupils and this is used by teachers to inform a daily work schedule for each. There is a well understood policy for the written marking of pupils' work but the use of this is variable and does not regularly provide useful feedback so that pupils know how to improve.

Overall pupils make good progress in their learning because of the good teaching and curriculum provision which they receive. Most pupils are successful in their application to chosen secondary schools and a good proportion of these are to selective grammar schools. Pupils' work seen during the inspection and discussions with pupils about their work, confirms that they do well in acquiring the skills and knowledge needed for later life and study. Whilst there are effective systems in the children's house to assess their progress through the Foundation Stage Profile, there is no structured assessment system in the primary classes. Although standardised verbal reading tests are used as a resource together with national test materials in mathematics, English and science, these are not utilised to provide information about the attainment and progress of pupils. Consequently, the school does not track pupils learning by any quantifiable means rather it relies on professional quality judgements and uses these to inform pupils and parents. This makes it difficult for the school to evaluate its own performance and limits the information to pupils and parents about the level of pupils' attainment and their rate of progress from year to year.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Wharfedale Montessori successfully achieves its aim to provide a setting where pupils can live together in harmony. As a result, pupils enjoy their education and want to come to school. They attend well, behave outstandingly and show very positive attitudes to learning and achieving. The school promotes pupils' confidence and self esteem extremely well due to an emphasis on praise and recognition of each pupil's self worth. There is an absence of criticism and staff provide excellent role models treating everyone with respect and understanding. The outcome is that pupils develop tolerance, patience and an awareness of others' needs. Moral

development is outstanding and pupils have a clear understanding of right and wrong. They work and play together co-operatively sharing ideas and listening to each others views. Pupils show increasing initiative which is encouraged through a range of daily jobs and responsibilities. For example the older pupils begin each day by attending to a rota which includes tidying, sweeping, dusting and polishing. There is a real sense of community and pupils act independently as when they decide it's time for morning break. They carefully set out the bread and honey and afterwards clean away without having to be told or instructed. Their social development gains greatly from these daily routines and is outstanding. Spiritual development is outstanding and is at the hub of Montessori practice. The appreciation and wonderment of our world provides a core part of pupils learning. In particular, use of the outdoor environment to excite, interest and engage pupils is a strong feature of educational provision. Cultural development is outstanding and every opportunity is taken to raise pupils' awareness of other ways of life. Many different religions are covered in the curriculum and the school uses the diversity of pupil's faiths as a resource to celebrate and share. Multi cultural studies include world and global considerations and there are artefact boxes from different cultures and places. A core part of the curriculum includes 'people who help us' and visitors provide examples of British life, such as the local farmer complete with his tractor and lambs.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The overall provision for welfare, health and safety of pupils is outstanding. Safeguarding procedures are in place which fully meets the most recent regulations. The school has suitable policies and procedures which are well used by staff to ensure the well being of pupils. Risk assessments are regularly completed and staff are vigilant in their supervisory role showing a high level of care for pupils' needs. Staff receive relevant and up to date training in, for example, first aid and child protection. Pupils say that they feel safe and are confident that they can freely ask teachers for help and advice if they need to. A good programme is provided for pupils' personal, social and health education. The school promotes healthy lifestyles effectively and in agreement with parents so that pupils' lunches have no 'junk' food, sweets or fizzy drinks. The outdoor area is used well to provide a range of activities which develop active play and exercise for pupils. The grounds include a large grassed area with soccer nets, a hard surfaced playground with basketball and netball nets, maypole, wooded areas and soft surfaced climbing equipment. Pupils thoroughly enjoy the freedom and independence of all the outdoor provision.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

What the school could do to improve further

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

- Improve the means by which pupils' attainment is measured in the primary classes and rigorously evaluate the rate of pupils' progress.

School details

Name of school	Wharfedale Montessori School		
DCSF number	8156032		
Unique reference number	121763		
Type of school	Montessori		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1990		
Age range of pupils	2-12		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 12	Girls: 12	Total: 24
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 8	Girls: 7	Total: 15
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£5394		
Address of school	Bolton Abbey Skipton North Yorkshire BD23 6AN		
Telephone number	01756710452		
Email address	jane.lord@wharfedale.montessori-school.info		
Headteacher	Mrs J Lord		
Proprietor	Mrs J Lord		
Reporting inspector	John Coleman HMI		
Dates of inspection	30 April 2008		