

Mill Cottage Montessori School

Wakefield Road, Brighouse, West Yorkshire HD6 4HA

Inspection dates

21–23 March 2017

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The proprietors and leaders have sustained and built on the outstanding outcomes recognised at the time of the last inspection. Children in the early years and those in the elementary school are making outstanding progress across a broad curriculum.
- The quality of teaching is outstanding. Teachers and other adults know when to intervene and when to allow pupils to discover things for themselves. They are skilled in prompting pupils to think and solve problems on their own.
- The curriculum contributes to pupils' personal, social and academic development outstandingly well. A wide variety of rich learning activities and resources inspire pupils to be curious, both when working inside or outside in the school grounds.
- Support for the few pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is outstanding. Leaders provide excellent support and work untiringly on behalf of parents to ensure that pupils receive additional funding to help meet their needs.
- Children in the early years and pupils in the elementary class behave extremely well. They quickly develop a sense of responsibility and learn to manage their own behaviour without the need for rules. They display consistently positive attitudes, feel safe, and are kind and respectful towards one another.
- Pupils' personal development is outstanding. They quickly acquire practical life skills and learn to work independently. Older pupils develop levels of knowledge and understanding well in advance of their chronological age.
- Pupils display a love of reading and read fluently with expression. However, their ability to write, especially to write for different purposes, is less well developed.
- Partnerships with parents are a key element in the school's success. Most parents are strongly committed to supporting their child's development and home educate their children for part of the week. Some parents would like more information to be available on the school's website.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Broaden the range of pupils' writing as they progress through the school, so that they develop a better understanding of writing for different purposes and audiences.
- Provide more information for parents via the school's website in order to further strengthen partnership working.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher and proprietor have sustained the outstanding standard of education recognised in the previous inspection and have successfully extended the age range of the school, while maintaining excellence. The change in age range has been registered with the Department for Education.
- Leaders provide all members of staff, parents and pupils with a clear vision and consistently model the highest of expectations. The school's aims, centred on the individual development of each pupil, are being successfully achieved. Staff morale is high and adults work effectively in teams to achieve their objectives. All parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, or spoke with inspectors in person strongly recommended the school.
- All members of staff benefit from the training and supervision they receive. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is consistently strong and contributes powerfully to pupils' progress and development. Training also ensures that members of staff are constantly vigilant and attentive to health and safety requirements. Provision for the few pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities or medical conditions is particularly strong. Leaders go the extra mile to ensure that these pupils have the support they need in order to make outstanding progress.
- The school's outstanding curriculum ensures that pupils' personal, social, creative and academic development is catered for outstandingly well. The indoor and outdoor learning environments are richly resourced and skilfully used to promote pupils' curiosity and sense of discovery. Detailed observations of each pupil are used to inform individual learning plans that build progressively on their interests and inclinations. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is richly woven into all planning. For example, an emphasis on 'peace education' helps pupils to develop positive relationships, to be respectful and to be kind to one another. Parents of different faiths and cultural backgrounds deliver workshops for pupils that help them to broaden their understanding of multicultural Britain.
- Parents are strongly committed to supporting their children's education. The school provides excellent training for parents on the teaching methods they use, and parents and teachers regularly review together the evidence of progress in pupils' learning journals. Parents and teachers share planning to ensure that pupils' learning at home and school progresses seamlessly. This partnership ensures that pupils of compulsory school age receive full-time education.
- Leaders have ensured that all members of staff are well informed about the risks of radicalisation or extremism. The impact of this training has already been shown to good effect in the prompt actions taken in response to a safeguarding concern.

Governance

- The proprietors have a detailed and thorough knowledge of the school's strengths and systematically seek to improve the school. Their self-evaluation is thorough and accurate.

- Policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and refined. The proprietors ensure that all members of staff, including those newly inducted into the school, know policies well and follow procedures relating to safeguarding, health and safety, and complaints assiduously.
- Financial planning is efficient. The proprietors are exploring options regarding the further expansion of primary-age provision in response to the interest shown by parents. The school continues to be popular and is oversubscribed.
- The proprietors have ensured that all the independent school standards are met and that the school complies with all the early years statutory requirements.
- Although the school complies with requirements to provide information, it only provides a limited range of information, including the safeguarding policy, on the school's website. Some parents told inspectors that they would welcome more details about the curriculum and teaching approaches to be available online.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's safeguarding policy is up to date and in line with current government requirements. Members of staff are highly vigilant. They take all necessary steps to check the suitability of employees and adults who visit the school. All members of staff receive appropriate training and know what steps to take if they have a concern about a child's safety. Leaders work effectively in partnership with parents and external agencies and take prompt action when required to do so. Leaders doggedly pursue solutions to any concerns they have, and maintain thorough chronologies of steps taken in order to secure a resolution. Regular checks are made on the safety of the site, including frequent checks on alarms and fire safety equipment.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- The quality of teaching is outstanding because it successfully promotes pupils' rapid development and love of learning.
- Teachers across both the early years and the elementary provision encourage pupils to initiate their own learning. As a result, pupils make their own decisions and become fascinated in topics that interest them. Teachers subtly introduce new possibilities when appropriate and are highly skilled in asking questions that open new directions or extend learning by making connections with other topics.
- The pace of learning is not forced. Pupils are allowed to learn at the pace that suits them. Teachers show considerable patience and restraint not to intervene when a pupil is challenged by the work they have chosen. Only when absolutely necessary do teachers provide prompts that help to move learning forwards. As a result, pupils develop considerable tenacity and resilience.
- Pupils regularly choose tasks that are challenging and ambitious in their aims. Teachers continually respond positively and supportively and do not put limitations on what pupils choose to attempt. Pupils are allowed to fail and are helped to learn from their experiences and guided to reshape their ideas.

- A wide range of resources help pupils to make excellent progress in literacy and numeracy. Pupils rapidly develop secure reading and calculation skills. Frequent activities, such as cooking and growing plants, are used to develop and apply reading, writing and mathematical skills for practical purposes.
- A strong feature of the school's approach to teaching and learning is the quality of the partnership with parents. Teachers and parents regularly discuss learning activities that can be continued at home. Homework is provided when requested, in line with the school's policy. The school provides an annual written report of each pupil's progress and attainment and two parents' evenings each year. The strength of partnership working makes a significant contribution to pupils' progress and development.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils learn to become independent, confident and self-assured learners. Their level of independence quickly grows as they progress through the school. From the start, children in the early years learn practical skills and quickly take on responsibilities. For example, they set out the furniture at the start of the day and wash up their crockery and cutlery after lunch. When they finish an activity, they tidy everything away so that resources are ready for the next child. Younger children learn to dress themselves in suitable clothing when they decide to go outside. They enjoy taking risks, such as balancing on uneven logs in the woodland area.
- Older pupils manage their own behaviour and learning maturely. They arrive at school motivated and ready to pursue particular lines of enquiry. Although levels of staff supervision are high, many require minimal intervention from available adults to keep on track. Pupils welcome advice and guidance as necessary and seek this support when they feel it is required.
- Children in the early years and pupils in the elementary class are active participants who can be energetic learners when outside, but also capable of sustained periods of calm, contemplative study indoors. Teachers encourage pupils to reflect on their learning in 'circle time' and to share their feelings. This approach and the nature of the curriculum effectively promote pupils' mental and physical health.
- Pupils learn sensible procedures from an early age that equip them with safe and practical life skills. For example, they help with laundry and learn how to load the washing machine. Cooking activities, supervised by the school chef, take place every week. General tidying up after activities is not optional. Pupils quickly learn that it is their responsibility to start and finish each activity properly.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.

- Pupils display consistently positive attitudes to learning and there is a tangible sense of enjoyment. The wide variety of activities and range of options available mean that pupils are readily absorbed in activities that capture their interest. Consequently, standards of behaviour are excellent. Pupils sustain their concentration for long periods and delight in talking about their work. For example, pupils thoughtfully explained their reasoning behind the patterns they made when carefully gluing coloured sticks onto a cardboard box for the set of a puppet show.
- Teachers in the early years and the elementary class make notes on each pupil's attitude and behaviour as part of the regular observations they make. If any concerns are identified, they plan suitable experiences to improve or moderate behaviours. The school's behaviour policy prevents the use of sanctions or punishments. From time to time, leaders involve all members of staff in case studies of particular pupils, in order to identify and address behaviours that inhibit their progress.
- The school tracks attendance and punctuality carefully. Overall attendance for pupils of compulsory school age is in line with that of primary schools nationally.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Since the school was last inspected, it has admitted 14 pupils of compulsory school age who are taught together in the elementary class. They range from Reception-age children to Year 3 and all attend the school on a part-time basis. All 14 pupils are home educated for the remaining part of the week. The school does not make use of standardised tests but does record each pupil's progress in the Montessori curriculum and cross-references this information with national curriculum expectations.
- Pupils make outstanding progress across the areas of learning promoted under the school's curriculum. They develop as curious and keen learners who are eager to challenge themselves and build on their existing knowledge and understanding of the world.
- Pupils are encouraged to follow their interests and are provided with a stimulating range of resources and facilities to deepen their understanding. They articulate their understanding maturely and many develop a fascination with particular areas of knowledge. For example, a Year 1 pupil wrote lengthy lists of the world's most deadly animals in his workbook. He went on to record their scientific names, coping well with challenging spellings. A second pupil preferred to write creatively and on the day of the inspection settled to write a play based on a popular children's story.
- Although pupils demonstrate secure writing skills, some limit their writing to their specific interests only and do not apply their writing skills to other purposes and audiences.
- Pupils read avidly. They read with fluency and expression, and demonstrate an ability to infer wider meaning from the text. Most pupils read at a standard well above their chronological age. A well-stocked library gives access to a wide range of fiction and reference books that are suitable for pupils at different stages of development.

- Pupils make excellent use of available resources to develop their understanding of mathematics. They have a good grasp of numbers and calculation methods and challenge themselves to extend their understanding further. Inspectors observed pupils using beads and place value mats to develop their addition skills, working with numbers up to and above 1,000. One of the youngest pupils in the elementary class chose to work on the six-times table. She placed beads in rows onto a peg board, counted them and recorded each value correctly in her mathematics book. Only minimal support was needed from the teacher.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive a high level of care and support. Partnerships with parents are particularly strong in order to ensure the best possible help is arranged. Consequently, these pupils make rapid progress. The work in their books shows particularly impressive gains made over time in the quality of writing and understanding of number.
- Pupils display a good understanding of world geography through their interest in maps. They can identify on a world map where the United Kingdom is and can label the names of oceans and continents accurately.
- The level of attainment of pupils in the elementary class is consistently above age-related expectations and the most able pupils make particularly strong progress. Their growing independence and curiosity to learn is ensuring that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- The headteacher ensures that all of the independent school standards and welfare requirements relating to the early years are met. The highest level of outcomes has been sustained since the school was last inspected.
- Teachers assess each child's level of development against the early years profile when they are two years old. Teachers make detailed observations and work hand in hand with parents to establish an accurate picture. These assessments show that children enter the Nursery class with skills and experiences that are typical for their age. They make rapid progress and by the end of the Nursery Year the vast majority of children reach or surpass expected levels of development. Children who stay at the school and continue through the Reception Year continue to make rapid gains. Their personal, social and academic development is also rapid and, as a result, they are very well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- From the start, children are taught according to Montessori principles. Classrooms and outdoor areas are filled with resources appropriate in size and complexity to stimulate children's curiosity. For much of the time, children initiate their own learning. Teachers and other adults provide close supervision but do not intervene unless invited to do so, preferring to allow children to investigate for themselves. There is an atmosphere of calm, thoughtful learning and discovery. Provision for two-year-olds is excellent and their care and welfare are very well managed. The outstanding quality of teaching is worthy of dissemination to others.

- Teachers provide deeply engaging and memorable experiences for children, which fire their imagination and stimulate their creativity. During one session, inspectors observed children listening to a story under a canopy in the wooded area during heavy rain. In response to the story and the mood created, the children used clay, sticks, beads and other materials to create sculptures that would scare monsters out of their woods. They delighted in positioning their sculptures in places where monsters might lurk.
- Each child is allocated a key worker. Their key worker makes regular observations and listens carefully to each child as they play, to capture their interests and level of understanding. This information is gathered and used to plan individual activities to develop and extend each child's abilities further. Meticulous planning ensures that activities skilfully build on each child's predispositions, and thoughtfully introduce activities that address identified gaps in their development.
- Senior leaders monitor the performance of all adults who work in the early years closely and staff are supported through regular supervision and training. This ensures that all staff are knowledgeable about child development and successfully contribute to achieving the school's aims.
- Robust policies and procedures, coupled with the constant vigilance of staff, ensure that children are safe and secure. Every effort is made to ensure that children eat healthily and take physical exercise through, for example, use of outdoor play equipment or yoga sessions. Children behave exceptionally well.
- Partnerships with parents are particularly strong and many parents are highly committed to continuing their children's learning and development at home. Many parents attend workshops provided by the school.

School details

Unique reference number	131158
DfE registration number	381/6012
Inspection number	10025952

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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.

Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	113
Number of part-time pupils	108
Proprietors	Ailsa Neville and Martin Blowers
Headteacher	Ailsa Neville
Annual fees (day pupils)	£1,775–£12,852 per annum
Telephone number	01484 400 500
Website	www.millcottageschool.co.uk
Email address	Ailsa.neville@millcottageschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	12–13 December 2012

Information about this school

- Mill Cottage Montessori School is an independent day school which provides part-time and full-time education. The approach to teaching and learning is firmly centred on Montessori principles and methods. Currently, there are 99 boys and girls aged from two to five years taught within the early years provision, most of whom attend on a part-time basis.
- At the time of the last inspection, the school had no pupils of compulsory school age. Since then, the school has admitted 14 pupils who attend the elementary class on a part-time basis and with the agreement of the headteacher are home educated for the remaining time.
- A small number of pupils have special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.

- The school also provides childcare before and after school for pupils aged between nought and 11 years. This formed part of the inspection in respect of the pupils aged two to seven years who are a part of the school. Additionally, there is childcare for children aged nought to two years throughout the school day, and this provision was last inspected by Ofsted in January 2015. This inspection did not include the nought to two-year-old provision, which continues to be subject to a separate inspection by Ofsted.
- The school aims to 'allow each child to develop at his/her own pace in a well-equipped, supportive and stimulating environment, where each child can progress individually and is encouraged to build on his/her own strength'.
- The school was first registered in October 2005.
- The last standard inspection of the school took place in December 2012 and judged the school to be outstanding.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited classrooms and outdoor areas to observe children in the early years, and pupils in the elementary class, engage in learning. Inspectors also observed pupils being cared for before and after the school day. Inspectors also observed pupils at social times and during lunchtime.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher who is also a proprietor, the second proprietor, the deputy headteacher and other members of staff. Inspectors also spoke with a number of parents in person or on the telephone.
- Inspectors talked informally with pupils throughout the inspection and looked at their books and learning journals in order to establish their level of knowledge, skills and understanding.
- A range of documents were scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, assessment information, curriculum planning, policies, safeguarding information, and a range of health and safety information in order to assess the school's compliance with the independent school standards.
- The inspection team took account of the 29 responses to Parent View, and to the 18 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Chris Smith, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Peter McKenzie

Ofsted Inspector

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