

Wharfedale Montessori School

Bolton Abbey, Skipton, North Yorkshire, BD23 6AN

Inspection dates	03 – 05 June 2014	
Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This is a good school.

- Pupils of all ages achieve well. They make good progress from their individual starting points and are well prepared to succeed in their future education.
- Pupils develop a real thirst for understanding. They think about what they see, do and say and they make interesting connections between different areas of learning.
- Teaching is of good quality throughout the school and, over time, leads to pupils' good progress. Teachers know well each pupil's areas of strength and those needing more support, and they use this knowledge skilfully when planning pupils' learning.
- Pupils thoroughly enjoy their time at school. They say this is because, 'it is fair', they feel very safe and can organise their own learning.
- Pupils' behaviour and safety are outstanding. They are exceptionally composed and aware of others' rights and needs. This, together with their sustained concentration, makes for a highly supportive and well-focused classroom environment. Every care is taken to ensure pupils' safety.
- Leaders' total commitment and clear aims drive the school's continuing improvement. This underpins the school's many strengths in teaching and pupils' achievement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The roles of leaders and managers at different levels are underdeveloped.
- Evaluations of observations designed to improve the quality of teaching do not focus sufficiently on what pupils have learnt.
- Teaching does not yet lead to pupils making outstanding progress in academic subjects.
- Teachers' planning for information and communication technology (ICT) is underdeveloped.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed five lessons taught by six teachers. She also scrutinised samples of pupils' work and heard pupils from both classes reading.
- The inspector held discussions with the proprietors, the Principal, the leaders of the different departments, the school secretary and pupils. She also considered a range of documentation including that related to safeguarding, school development planning, policies, schemes of work, teachers' planning and records of pupils' progress.
- The inspector spoke informally with parents at the end of the school day and took into account the 16 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View). She considered pupils' point-in-time questionnaires and staff's responses to the inspection questionnaire. The inspector also took into account submissions from two secondary schools to which pupils transfer.

Inspection team

Sarah Drake, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Wharfedale Montessori School opened in 1990. The Principal has remained the same since that time. She and her husband, who is also head of the primary class, are joint proprietors. In March 2014, the proprietors were presented with the Montessori Schools Association national award, 'Montessorians of the Year'.
- The school is housed in two buildings, one for each class, set deep within a woodland location which is designated as an area of special scientific interest.
- The school's aim is to, 'enable children to achieve their full potential, to be happy, to grow in knowledge and confidence, to have a good self-image and eventually to be able to go into a fast-changing, problem-laden society confidently with well-developed skills, initiative and enthusiasm; able to find their place, enjoy it and do well.'
- The school is registered to cater for girls and boys aged between two-and-a-half and twelve years of age. Currently, there are 28 pupils on roll, aged between three and 10 years. Ten of the 12 children in the Early Years Foundation Stage attend part-time.
- No pupil has a statement of special educational needs. Most pupils are White British and all speak English fluently although a small number speak Arabic, Polish or Hungarian at home.
- The school was last inspected in April 2008.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - enhancing the roles of leaders at different levels so that their responsibilities and involvement in management are clearer and they can contribute more fully to the smooth running and development of the school
 - extending the scheme of work and planning for ICT to ensure that pupils' skills in this area are broadened further.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that there is a stronger focus on ensuring that pupils make outstanding progress in academic subjects by:
 - refining teachers' own evaluations of their work, and the evaluations of observations undertaken to improve the quality of teaching, so that they clearly record the impact that teaching has on pupils' achievement.

Inspection judgements

Achievement of pupils

Good

- Most children join the pre-school class with broadly typical skills for their age. By the end of Year 6, teacher assessments against National Curriculum criteria confirm that many are working at higher than national average levels in English and mathematics. Pupils of all abilities make good progress and achieve well. This testifies to the school's strong promotion of equality of opportunity.
- Typically, pupils gain places at the secondary schools of their choice, including selective schools. Evidence indicates that, whatever their ability, they achieve highly at these schools.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are inquisitive, adventurous, calm and thoughtful. They independently set out a learning mat, select resources and tidy everything away when they have finished, understanding that this will help whoever wishes to choose the activity later. One was fascinated to discover oak saplings in the garden and had a long discussion about growth with the teacher, prompted by the child's comment that the acorn 'looks like a potato'.
- Children concentrate hard, for example, when selecting the correct wooden letters to form the word 'jug' or 'elf'. Two used language well to help them consider how two differently coloured balloons could 'match' because, through touch, they realised that each balloon contained the same small items. Another confidently used practical resources to take nine away from 11 and record the answer.
- Older pupils continue to achieve well because their individual 'work schedules' are adapted daily according to teachers' observations of their previous efforts. Most classroom activities and tasks are of a practical nature, so pupils' work is not necessarily recorded in written form in their books. However, pupils clearly explain what they are working on and how they have progressed. One sagely commented that, 'the work gets easier and then you move to the next level where you use the same techniques but it's more difficult.'
- Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, for example, moving on from securing their knowledge of the different ways of making the 'ee' sound, to defining the different functions of words within a sentence. The most able pupils are fully challenged, for example, some can calculate the circumference of a circle while still in Year 4.
- In a French lesson, pupils spontaneously made a link between the words for 'mermaid' and 'jelly fish' with the 'sirens' and 'medusa' of Greek myths. Pupils use ICT competently for research, word processing and, for example, to use a 'script' to create an animated break-dancing sequence. There was little available evidence of their use of this medium in other areas, such as presenting data.
- Pupils of all ages demonstrate a love of books and they use them regularly to research the topics that they are working on. Those who are learning to read, use their knowledge of the links between letters and sounds well to help them decode unknown words, while more confident readers talk with relish about the novels they are reading.

Quality of teaching

Good

- Consistently good quality teaching for pupils of different ages and abilities ensures that pupils focus very well on their learning and make good progress during their time at the school.
- Lesson planning is firmly based on highly structured schemes of work which lead pupils' learning forward in small, incremental steps. Teachers review pupils' individual learning plans every six weeks and, based on their close observations, adapt the support provided. They carefully consider all aspects of the classroom environment to enable pupils to make independent choices about what they focus on and when, within the clear framework of their well-structured individual plans. Pupils enjoy this method of learning.
- All adults in both classes, including teaching assistants, are highly skilled at maintaining a

balance between asking probing questions and standing back as pupils work things out for themselves. This enables pupils to think deeply and learn well.

- Adults' careful analysis of what pupils of all ages are finding difficult as they extend their reading skills, leads to well-tailored support to meet their needs. Daily checking of older pupils' work at lunchtime provides individuals with instant feedback that helps them to recognise their successes, understand what they have could have done better and take action to rectify mistakes.
- Teachers thoughtfully evaluate the success of different sessions but these reflections focus more on activities and pupils' enjoyment than on what they have actually learnt. As a result, this does not provide teachers with a firm basis for ensuring that all pupils are encouraged to make outstanding progress.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge enables them, for example, to help pupils to establish a secure understanding of different mathematical processes so that they can then use them confidently in different contexts. Teachers make sure that pupils seek out for themselves the meaning of any new words that they encounter. The imaginative, practical approach means, for example, that, while making delicious soup or ice-cream for all to enjoy, pupils learn to create and follow instructions, to work as a team, to cost items, to seek and tally opinions and to consider possible improvements.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Outstanding

- The behaviour of pupils and their awareness of how to keep themselves safe are outstanding because, from a very early age, they learn to take responsibility for their actions and to consider others' needs.
- Relationships throughout the school are exceptionally positive. Any pupil who expresses a well-founded concern, for example about playtimes becoming too boisterous, may ask to lead a whole-class discussion during which pupils work out a suitable solution. This extends their understanding about the democratic process and the need to act safely, and underpins the supportive, happy atmosphere that pervades the school.
- Pupils are unfailingly polite towards each other and adults, showing genuine courtesy and respect. They are interested in and tolerant of difference, and are adamant that bullying does not happen in the school. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, a display labelled with the Polish words for colours led to a discussion about different languages and cultures. Older pupils could recall well one family's recent visit to the 'haj' as part of their Muslim practice. This reflects the school's excellent provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Pupils understand the need for a quiet environment in order to be able to concentrate on their work and they are not afraid to 'ring the bell' if they feel others are growing too noisy. They sustain their concentration for long periods and are not afraid to ask if they do not know something. This has a very positive impact on their learning.
- Pupils feel very safe in school. The youngest children happily take a peaceful afternoon nap, overseen by staff and after which the bedding is washed daily. They can recognise nettles and know that they are best avoided. Older pupils showed very good awareness of the need for hygiene when, independently, filling the bird feeder. This demonstrates that pupils learn very well from the school's constant attention to ensuring their health and safety.

Leadership and management

Good

- The proprietors, who are also the Principal and head of the primary section of the school, successfully put into practice their determination, 'to render our children strong, to encourage them to be all they can be.' They rigorously assess pupils' progress against Montessori criteria and also use national norms at key points to compare pupils' achievement to that of pupils nationally. They are also very well aware of, and can demonstrate, how well

past pupils achieve as they progress through their secondary education.

- The leaders have developed a dedicated staff team whose members have good access to training aimed at enabling them to carry out their responsibilities well. Through frequent informal observations, senior leaders are aware of the quality of teaching. Suitable arrangements are in place to manage staff performance. The school has recently introduced more formal, recorded observations which provide helpful pointers for improvement but these do not focus enough on the impact that the teaching has on pupils' achievement.
- The roles, responsibilities and involvement of leaders and managers at different levels in driving school improvement and ensuring that it runs smoothly are not sufficiently clearly defined. This means that the principal carries a heavy load and, should she be absent for any reason, some management activities can fall behind.
- The school has received helpful support and challenge from the local authority, for example, in relation to the establishment of the new Early Years Foundation Stage framework.
- The curriculum ensures that pupils make good progress in their learning in a wide range of subjects, including sport. It is greatly enhanced by use of the magnificent outdoor surroundings where, for example, pupils grow vegetables and the youngest children 'brew potions' in the mud kitchen or create a pulley system to transport items across the woodland floor.
- The scheme of work for ICT does ensure that pupils learn skills in a sequential manner and develop their understanding of the potential dangers of electronic communication. However, it does not set this out sufficiently clearly or in enough detail to ensure that pupils' skills in all areas of the subject are equally well promoted.
- All the independent school standards and the statutory requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage are met. Procedures to ensure the safeguarding of pupils are securely in place. All staff are checked to ensure their suitability to work with children, and they know what to do should they have any concerns.
- Parents who are the main group that hold the school to account, are highly supportive of the school and greatly appreciate how it helps their children to grow in confidence and independence. All those who volunteered an opinion would recommend it to other parents.

What inspection judgements mean

School	
Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Non-association independent school inspection handbook* which is published on the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140053.

School details

Unique reference number	121763
Inspection number	443467
DfE registration number	815/6032

This inspection was carried out 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.

Type of school	Montessori
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	28
Number of part time pupils	10
Proprietor	Mrs Jane Lord and Mr Graham Lord
Principal	Mrs Jane Lord
Date of previous school inspection	30 April 2008
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6,534
Telephone number	01756 710452
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	secretary@wharfedalemontessori.co.uk

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