

What our visitors say about 'The Mill Academy'



Safeguarding Audit, external consultant - September 2023

“This is a safe school. Pupils feel safe and are fully aware of the structures and routines around school to keep them safe. There is a sense of secure relationships within the school.

The school is a bright and happy place, the environments are stimulating, positive and safe. Behaviour around school is calm and purposeful. An ethos of care and compassion runs through the school. Pupils are aware of the structures, routines, and expectations around school.

Staff meet and greet pupils and parents every morning in the playground. Pupils line up until they are given the instruction to go into their classrooms which is seamless.”

Safeguarding Audit, external consultant - September 2023

“The management of safeguarding is robust. All staff are trained on a regular basis with weekly updates on Wednesdays.

There is a senior lead for mental health in the school and all staff are thrive trained. This is also a trauma informed school.

Performance management is regular with a raft of activities such as learning walks, monitoring visits.

Deep dives into behaviour and safety. There is also the use of staff and pupil voice.

The Chair of Governors is very proactive in school. As the Governor for Safeguarding, she visits the school at least once per month and takes part in active worship, coffee mornings and interviews.”

Collect Worship Audit from the Diocesan Education Team - October 2023

“Spirituality is led by RC and KG who attended training, as did the Chair of Governors. It is on the SIP and so all staff and governors are aware of its development. Training was disseminated to staff, with a particular focus on developing a specific act of collective worship once a week, to raise opportunities for children and adults in school to reflect. All staff (including office staff) are now invited to attend, a liturgy has been developed, the introduction of a school prayer, and an emphasis on creating a calm, spiritual atmosphere through music, lighting and visual stimuli. Senior leaders feel that this is already impacting in school, particularly on behaviour and stimulating staff discussion.”

Collect Worship Audit from the Diocesan Education Team - October 2023

Collective Worship

The whole school collective worship felt very special as children entered, lighting was dimmed, calm behaviour was impeccable and children brought a candle from each class to symbolise the school gathering together. The question was asked ‘Do you try to include people who are different from you? How?’. Children offered insightful answers, and this was linked to actions in school, their pets at home. This was then further extended by the Headteacher. There was an invitational school prayer. Everyone was given the opportunity to reflect with ‘hands ready for reflection’.

Learning Walk

The quality of displays in school is high, which support learning, celebrate children’s work, and make the environment inviting and stimulating. There are areas throughout the school for children to sit quietly with a book, and reflection areas in classrooms. There are opportunities for children and adults to respond to big questions posed in collective worship or in class. The sensory room in Key Stage 1 is used regularly. Plans are underway to create a reflection garden outside.

Collect Worship Audit from the Diocesan Education Team - October 2023

Pupil voice

Pupils really like the changes in collective worship, and said it felt special being together. Being collective worship champion is a very important role. They like the opportunity to be able to think and feel it helps them in their lives: ‘it helps you to make the right decision’, ‘it helps you to solve problems before they happen so you’ll know what to do’.

The children appreciate the calm corners in school and feel confident to share ideas and talk to staff about problems.

All ‘wow moments’ related to school work or exciting news.

Music Deep Dive- November 2023

Baseline data highlights communication and language as a high need for children who enter the Early Years. This being the case, the music curriculum in the Early Years has been developed with language as a core thread running through, and priority is given to children being immersed in learning songs and rhymes. Children across school also generally have limited experiences of identifying and handling musical instruments, of different styles of music, and of musical terminology, and knowledge of these is also threaded through the curriculum plans, starting in EYFS.

The Charanga Model Music curriculum scheme has been chosen by school as it follows the most up-to-date research and publication around high-quality music education and provides a support for staff, who are not music specialists, to teach music lessons. It also ensures all the objectives of the national curriculum for music are met. This curriculum highlights key vocabulary throughout the sequence of learning, which is explicitly taught and revisited frequently. Children develop an understanding of different musical styles as they move through school, and opportunities to experience playing a range of untuned and tuned instruments are planned into the curriculum, including recorders in Y2 and brass in Y5. This is in addition to what the Charanga curriculum provides.

Music Deep Dive- November 2023

The music lead has identified key knowledge from the Charanga scheme and used this to create a progression document to show how the inter-related dimensions of music progress. She has also spent time adapting the curriculum by reducing the number of songs children are expected to learn each half term. This allows focus to be given to mastering performances of each song and avoids staff feeling like they need to rush through the curriculum. The impact has been that the cognitive load on the children has been reduced significantly, allowing all children to access the learning and experience success.

The music that children listen to comes from around the globe, celebrating the diversity of the world in which we live. This meets the context and needs of the children in school, who rarely leave the local area. Genres of music are experienced across all key stages and taught explicitly from KS2. Wider curriculum links are made through the music curriculum to global events and issues, including Black History month, as well as PSHE links to grief, individuality, belonging, self-image and esteem, and friendship. This links to one of the school's curriculum drivers - 'be world-wise'. School is also a Thrive school, and music interlinks with this well, to support children's mental health and allow them freedom of expression and creativity. Children are guided to reflect on what music means to them.

Music Deep Dive- November 2023

The curriculum has been chosen, adapted and enhanced, so that it can be accessed by all pupils. For children who are working below the standard for their year group in music, provision is considered and put in place to support them to ‘keep up’ not ‘catch up’. For children with specific SEND needs, learning is broken down into smaller chunks and presented at an appropriate level, through modelling and repetition. Adjustments are put in place where necessary, according to individual need. Music lessons follow a consistent structure where children listen and respond to a song, discussing the structure and how it makes them feel. Children have music books from Y1 to record their personal responses to music. Children are then introduced to a song, which they learn how to perform, either through singing or through practical performance on an instrument, such as the glockenspiel.

To develop the cultural capital of children, school involve Barnsley music service in the curriculum, who deliver recorder and brass lessons to Years 2 and 5 respectively. Children take part in weekly singing assemblies and have opportunities to perform to the rest of school in class assemblies and at shared learning events to parents, including Barnsley Music Festival and Christmas services, within the community. These are well attended. Experiences in music that children do have from outside of school, are celebrated in school. The music lead has also encouraged music to continue beyond school, and all children can access the Quickbeats app, which allows them to compose their own music. Children were enthusiastic about this during the pupil voice session. School also have a SPARTS week (Sports and the Arts Week), which is in addition to the music curriculum, and during these, children are exposed to other music experiences, including DJ lessons.

Music Deep Dive- November 2023

The music curriculum has been well received by the children in school and this was confirmed by a pupil voice activity that took place during the audit, which included a range of children from different pupil groups. The music lead has highlighted that hard-to-reach children, who can sometimes become disengaged in other areas of the curriculum, are flourishing through music. Pupils could positively articulate their experiences of music. They enjoy music lessons, particularly learning about different genres of music. They could name pop, soul, rock, rap and jazz and give some features of rock and soul. Children could share what music means to them, including how it makes them feel, including that music is entertaining, and makes them feel relaxed, calm, and takes their stress away if they are feeling angry. Pupils are actively encouraged to engage with music as part of a healthy balanced approach to learning and their personal development. Children reported that they enjoy finding the beat, singing outside at break times, performing to the wider community, instrumental lessons, making their own instruments, as well as trips and visitors which enable them to see live music being performed, such as at the pantomime, and through Barnsley Music Service assemblies. Children gave lots of positive ideas as to how they would like music to be further developed across school including: more time to spend on the YuMu app, more time playing instruments, more live music performances, a wider variety of instruments to play, more music teachers so they can have more music lessons, a school band or composing club, more opportunities to experience different musicians from around the world, more opportunities to work with children in other key stages and homework challenges linked to music.

EYFS School Review by the Local Authority - November 2023

The curriculum has clear aims for the end of EYFS that support learning into year one and beyond. There is scope to include aspirations for the end of nursery so that learning intentions for the youngest children are clearly mapped out. Vocabulary is planned for the different areas of learning. A phonic scheme is implemented to rigorously and rapidly teach phoneme/grapheme correspondence from the end of nursery. Adults are strategically deployed to ensure all children receive the support they need to progress. This occurs in the small group differentiated teaching sessions and when children access continuous provision. Most adults are deployed to appropriately support whole group teaching however, some would benefit from more direction from the teacher. The identification of fifty things to do before leaving EYFS provides a wide range of challenging experiences in the curriculum. This supports developing understanding of the wider world and adds to children's wider experiences e.g. grow your own food, fly a kite, look up. The planned environment actively supports this understanding for example light boxes and magnifying glasses support understanding of light and dark, opportunities to dig for worms are encouraged and resourced appropriately. The environment is well-planned and resources are displayed for children to access independently. It is clear to children what they are expected to do so that learning takes place. Resources are added as children learn to use them effectively which supports systematic sequencing of learning for all areas of learning. Routines are rigorously established in the first few weeks and support independence and positive learning behaviours. Routines are planned to maximize time spent learning. E.g. within the first five minutes, children take off outdoor clothing, change reading books, give dinner choices, and sit together to practice writing their names or letter formation with adult support.

EYFS School Review by the Local Authority - November 2023

Children understood routines to support learning. Little time was wasted transitioning from one experience to another because routines were well-embedded and expectations of children to engage quickly, whether in self-chosen or adult-directed learning, were high. The learning environment was organised and resourced appropriately to support independent learning. They understood how to mix paint and how to tidy up including what to do if there was a spillage. New language was introduced during planned teacher led sessions and through adults intervening in child-initiated play. For example, when introducing and recapping a story children talked about stars, moon and gravity. The adult explained the meaning of gravity in an accessible way for the nursery children. Children practiced poems and recited some from memory. An interactive phonic session was directly taught by the adults. Each adult had high expectations of listening and attention. Children were engaged throughout and well-supported when writing graphemes and attempting to blend. Misconceptions were dealt with during the session including corrections to sitting position, pencil grip and letter formation. Adults undertook further interventions to support children needing more opportunity to practice individually throughout the morning. Opportunities to support phonic development and practice reading/writing phoneme/graphemes were available and used well in the environment. Well taught maths sessions took place for both nursery and reception which allowed for lots of repetition and practice and there were opportunities for children to explain and talk about their understanding of number during these sessions. Adults introduced mathematical language during other planned, adult-directed whole group experiences e.g. directional language was used during Squiggle While You Wiggle and the teacher talked about shapes and length during Drawing Club. Some children engaged in self-chosen mathematical experiences, e.g. a child talked about 'one-more' using Numicon; children jumped and recited numbers to 20 on an outdoor number line. Children's mathematical understanding would benefit from further adult intervention and modelling of mathematical language during continuous provision.

EYFS School Review by the Local Authority - November 2023

Children were taught to draw. The adult described marks as she drew and children were asked to draw following the modelled example. Many children elected to draw throughout the morning and several girls were keen to use the post-office but struggled to find resources to write on this occasion. There were many opportunities for children to develop their physical skills for both gross and fine motor e.g. digging outdoors; large/small construction; using tools (scissors/hammers); dough play; painting; playing with loose parts; riding bikes. Many of these opportunities also supported the development of creative skills and creative thinking. For example, children made models from cardboard boxes having been taught how to join and how to cut masking tape; children built elaborate models from wooden blocks. Imaginative ideas in role play and small world were scaffolded by adults e.g. an adult modelled playing with puppets for two children who continued with this play once the adult moved on and children outdoors were supported to role-play crossing the road. Children's personal, social and emotional development is very well supported. Space was available and used by the children for calming, quiet play. Children were supported to develop their play together, to share, to be tolerant of others and to be resilient.

EYFS School Review by the Local Authority - November 2023

All children confidently access learning opportunities across all areas of learning independently. This includes those children with lower starting points. They listen attentively and respond to adults and each other positively. They are resilient and proud of their achievements. For example, a child proudly showed us the box modelling she had carefully crafted. Some children confidently use the higher-level vocabulary that is modelled by the teaching staff and use phonic sounds they know, to decode the text in the phonic scheme books. Children have learned to play well together and older children involve younger friends in role play. Parents report feeling well supported and understand the reading routines encouraged at home.

Maths Audit from the Diocesan Education Team

The maths leader is extremely experienced and has very well-developed subject knowledge. In response to the new early years framework the maths leader has devised and led whole staff training to ensure everyone understands the framework and maths expectations in reception. The school uses the newly developed White Rose materials to support maths content. The approach appears to be highly responsive and builds on expectations around planning meeting need. One example of this is the school's use of analysis groups to provide additional, responsive and timely input that can serve as 'pre-teach', response to fast marking, or digging deeper for more able pupils. The school prioritises a flexible approach to lesson structures so that all pupils apply their fluency to problem solving and reasoning to ensure fluency leads to deeper conceptual understanding. In addition, the school insists on varied fluency which further supports deeper conceptual understanding. The maths leader recognises that the school's ethos, which promotes intelligent adaption of approaches to suit classes, relies on teachers who have secure subject knowledge beyond their own year group, are responsive to need and use precise, formative assessment. Leaders are clear that this leads to responsive and intelligent marking which ensures instant feedback, elimination of misconceptions and appropriate pace post COVID. To support this, the maths leader has provided additional training and coaching for all staff, including staff who are new to school. The leadership of maths is exceptional. The maths leader brings expertise, deep knowledge and ambition for maths across school. Conversations indicate that the quality of maths across school is likely to be very high.

Maths Audit from the Diocesan Education Team

Pupils in early years have many well considered opportunities to explore maths, numbers and subitising. These opportunities have been well modelled and as a result pupils were able to demonstrate their learning with confidence and enthusiasm. This includes confident use of maths vocabulary, for example, greater than and less than. In key stage one pupils benefit from well modelled examples because staff have secure subject knowledge. Maths language is precise and explanations are carefully considered. Vocabulary is prioritised and so pupils are immersed in appropriate language. In addition, pupils have access to concrete representations to support their maths investigations, for example when exploring vertices in 3d shapes. Pupils make rapid progress because of this strong and consistent approach. Observations show a highly consistent approach, rooted in precision, fast feedback, timely addressing of misconceptions, thoughtful groupings and engagement with a variety of maths representations to deepen conceptual understanding. In addition, there is evidence to suggest that pupils are developing confident formal and informal, efficient written methods with the confidence to apply these strategies independently. Some pupils in year six were conducting a maths investigation exploring algebra. It's hard to overestimate how superb this work was, exemplified by exceptional teacher pedagogical subject knowledge, expert modelling and confident pupils applying fluent maths knowledge to solve complex algebraic problems. Others were also exploring algebra in a more structured and guided way, indicating carefully considered groupings so that all pupils receive exactly the support they need. The confidence pupils exhibit and the independence with which they apply their knowledge is superb. Sometimes, fluent and automatic recall is less well developed, partly as a result of covid, and this can be a stumbling block for some. However, teaching is so well developed and pupils' needs, gaps and misconceptions are so well addressed, pupils make very rapid progress.

Science Audit from the Diocesan Education Team

There is a strong sense that science matters. The science leader is passionate about the subject and there is a clear commitment to engendering a love a science for pupils. This includes ensuring pupils are exposed to a range of scientists and are clearly taught that science learning is for everyone. The school has a secure progression map and additional knowledge maps which are developing. There is a strong focus on securing high quality resources to support learning and an incredible vision for the subject, expertly communicated by the science leader. Observations indicate pupils do have opportunities to think scientifically and conduct science experiments. Books indicate that pupils do encounter key scientific ideas and concepts. Where practice is stronger pupils are working with greater independence and show a great deal of resilience, for example when tackling a difficult concept like creating classification models. Vocabulary is central to science teaching. It is well explained and pupils remember a great deal. They are extremely curious, can explain their thinking confidently and clearly enjoy their learning. In early years there is a strong sense of exploration, intentional scientifically rooted conversations and opportunity for pupils to try things out. Books indicate that learning in science is well sequenced.

Curriculum Audit from the Diocesan Education Team

The curriculum lead has worked collaboratively with colleagues to intentionally plan curriculum provision which closely meets the needs of the community the school serves by focussing on three key drivers, ‘resilience, world wisdom and creativity’. Subjects are planned carefully so that knowledge and skills build sequentially. The curriculum leader can talk clearly about how topics have been structured to support learning. This includes key expectations about being ‘scientists, geographers and historians’ for example, by learning to use sources of evidence in history. The progression documents which underpin provision are well structured, detailed and clear in terms of ambition. The curriculum leader has already systematically checked the impact of curriculum planning, spoken with pupils, checked the quality of work and taken robust action where expectations were not being met in terms of the progression document. In addition the curriculum leader has drilled down to what pupils have actually learned and retained in long term memory. Detailed notes support this process and so the curriculum lead has a very secure understanding of the impact of practice and areas for development. Where subjects are less well developed the school has clear strategies to address this and has already taken action to improve subject knowledge, for example in ICT and music. Documents supporting the renewed curriculum offer have been in place since January but the impact appears to have been significant in a very short space of time.

Curriculum Audit from the Diocesan Education Team

In early years vocabulary is at the heart of provision. Pupils write with confidence and have many opportunities to engage with story and narrative. Subject specific vocabulary is also strong and pupils can use newly acquired language when talking about their work, for example when discussing their design technology work. Planning is detailed and supports adults in promoting vocabulary throughout the provision. In year one pupils were engaging in expressive dance. The opportunity to be creative, listen to music and develop their collaboration resulted in pupils confidently expressing themselves, supporting each other and developing strong relationships. A quick look at the sequence of learning in year two shows that pupils' skills and knowledge builds over time, for example, exploring mini-beasts as well as art skills and geographical knowledge. These strands thread together to provide a cohesive experience for pupils underpinned by opportunities to apply skills independently. The quality of art work is exceptional. Pupils reach very high standards because key techniques are carefully structured and taught. This is clear in books and in the environment. The impact of the school's key drivers is significant. For example, pupils in year five explored the driver of resilience, designing physical models to illustrate their understanding of resilience. Another example is the importance the school places on creativity. Opportunities to be creative are purposeful and rooted in knowledge and skill so that pupils consistently achieve outcomes beyond that which might be expected for their age.

Curriculum Audit from the Diocesan Education Team

In year three pupils explored AD and BC as concepts to help define historical eras. Teachers across school expertly check knowledge by providing opportunities to recall learning, explain understanding and teach concepts back to each other. In addition teachers rehearse language - talk is central to this - with opportunities for shared talk and call and response to help reinforce subject specific language. As a result pupils gain new vocabulary quickly. Opportunities to write for purpose across the curriculum are deeply embedded. The quality of writing, complexity of language and clarity of sentence structure is consistently strong. All learning is supported by curated texts which are accessible to all pupils. These are intentionally planned for each topic. Across school pupils learning behaviours are exceptionally strong because they are inspired and engaged. Teachers are fearless and determined. As a result pupils experience a wide range of creative approaches and rich experiences which build their learning over time. Learning is purposeful and pupils develop their knowledge and skills with creativity, enthusiasm and resilience.