

Inspection of Tollesbury Preschool

The Manse, 2 Station Road, Tollesbury, Maldon CM9 8RA

Inspection date: 4 July 2025

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

What is it like to attend this early years setting?

The provision is outstanding

Staff provide a highly nurturing, well-organised and stimulating environment where children thrive. Daily routines are clearly embedded, and transitions, such as tidy-up time, are managed exceptionally well. The use of the 'Mission Impossible' theme tune encourages children to take responsibility for their environment while making the experience enjoyable. Children move between activities calmly and independently, with minimal adult instruction, indicating a strong understanding of expectations and routines. Warm, trusting relationships between children and staff are extremely effective. Children seek comfort, cuddles and emotional support from adults, forming strong attachments and a deep sense of safety. Staff respond sensitively and adapt activities to meet individual needs fully. For example, staff allow children to play with toy trains while listening to stories during circle time to support children to self-regulate and manage change. This ensures a highly inclusive and personalised approach to care that supports children's confidence in expressing feelings, which reflects the emotional security and responsiveness of the adults around them.

Children's independence is thoroughly promoted. Children confidently use tongs to self-serve snacks, clear their own plates and refill water bottles for play. Staff support children at their own pace, for instance, allowing them to finish food without rushing. This results in smooth, respectful transitions throughout the day. Therefore, children manage their own needs exceptionally well and are highly respectful of their environment. Language and mathematical development are wonderfully supported. Staff are remarkably skilled in modelling vocabulary, extending children's ideas through open-ended questions and promoting sustained shared thinking. Conversations are natural and meaningful, linking play to real-life experiences such as baking at home or seasonal birthdays. As a result, children are articulate and demonstrate confidence in speaking with familiar and unfamiliar adults. This reflects their secure attachments and the value placed on their communication and individuality.

What does the early years setting do well and what does it need to do better?

- Children demonstrate exceptional kindness, cooperation and respect for one another. Older children support younger ones by showing them how to use outdoor taps, while everyone helps tidy up and take care of resources without being prompted. Group behaviour is exemplary. There is a strong culture of turn-taking, active listening and participation, whether waiting patiently in line or joining in shared games. Children understand and follow signals, such as the 'alligator snap', reinforcing behavioural expectations in a positive, playful manner. Children know what is expected of them and cooperate fully, creating a remarkably calm and friendly atmosphere.

- Children's achievements are celebrated through a 'wow moments' board, where milestones, such as learning to ride a bike or using the toilet independently, are recognised. Contributions from both children and parents build a sense of pride, belonging and highly effective connections between the home and the setting.
- Staff foster children's strong sense of curiosity and creativity, especially outdoors. Children work collaboratively to mix potions, collect natural materials and care for living things such as insects and herbs. They demonstrate extraordinary levels of concentration, perseverance and joy in their discoveries. This broadens children's knowledge and understanding effectively but also encourages them to experiment and explore the world around them.
- Staff meticulously plan for children's progress and wholly recognise next steps. Key persons understand when children have gaps in their learning and plan fun and exciting activities to build on these areas. For example, children's fine motor skills are supported by activities such as magnetic games, mark making and tweezers to promote this area of development. As a result, children are notably more confident and actively seek these activities out to practise independently, taking ownership of their learning.
- Staff demonstrate an exemplary approach to safeguarding, with incredibly effective systems and procedures in place. Staff show strong awareness, consistent communication and a clear commitment to children's welfare and protection. There is an evident safeguarding culture embedded across the setting, reinforced by continuous training, visible information and robust daily practices. As a result, children's safety and well-being are at the forefront of all practice.
- Parents speak highly of staff, describing them as 'dedicated', 'caring' and 'approachable', which demonstrates warm, professional and effective relationships between staff and families. The setting is considered a tight-knit community where children and parents feel a strong sense of belonging. This is particularly evident in returning families, who feel emotionally connected to the provision and staff.
- Children's learning is wonderfully supported by thoughtful planning, community-based projects and a strong environmental ethos. Leaders are extremely passionate about sustainability and promote eco-conscious behaviour among staff and children alike. The use of real-life experiences, such as recycling initiatives and reducing single-use plastics, means children are tremendously considerate of their natural world.
- The setting demonstrates robust special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) practice. The use of detailed, accessible planning documents ensures that children with SEND receive tailored, consistent and well-informed support. Regular reviews, staff collaboration and strong partnerships with families and external professionals underpin a child-centred, inclusive ethos, ensuring that children are well prepared for their next stages of learning.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts children's interests first.

Setting details

Unique reference number	402290
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10398267
Type of provision	Childcare on non-domestic premises
Registers	Early Years Register, Compulsory Childcare Register, Voluntary Childcare Register
Day care type	Sessional day care
Age range of children at time of inspection	2 to 4
Total number of places	28
Number of children on roll	32
Name of registered person	Tollesbury Pre-school Community Interest Company
Registered person unique reference number	RP524034
Telephone number	07874240751
Date of previous inspection	11 October 2019

Information about this early years setting

Tollesbury Preschool registered in 1996. The pre-school employs 12 members of childcare staff. Of these, two staff members hold appropriate early years qualifications at level 6, five hold level 3 qualifications and two members of staff hold a qualification at level 2. The pre-school opens from Monday to Friday, during school term times. Sessions are from 9am to midday, midday to 3pm and 9am to 3pm. The pre-school provides government-funded early education to all eligible children.

Information about this inspection

Inspector

Laura Paternoster

Inspection activities

- Leaders joined the inspector on a learning walk and talked to the inspector about their curriculum and what they want the children to learn.
- The children told the inspector about their friends and what they like to do when they are at pre-school.
- The inspector talked to staff at appropriate times during the inspection and took account of their views.
- The inspector observed the quality of education being provided, indoors and outdoors, and assessed the impact that this is having on the children's learning.
- The inspector and the manager carried out a joint observation of a communication and language activity.
- Parents shared their views of the setting with the inspector.
- The inspector looked at relevant documentation and reviewed evidence of the suitability of staff working in the pre-school.

We carried out this inspection under sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006 on the quality and standards of provision that is registered on the Early Years Register. The registered person must ensure that this provision complies with the statutory framework for children's learning, development and care, known as the early years foundation stage.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

This publication is available at <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2025