

Inspection of Downhall Under Fives

Ferndale Open Space, Ferndale Road, Rayleigh, Essex SS6 9NN

Inspection date: 1 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

This is an exceptional early years provision, where children thrive within a nurturing, stimulating and inclusive environment. The pre-school offers an outstanding start to children's learning journey and staff demonstrate exemplary practice in all areas of children's learning.

Children's behaviour and attitudes are superb. They are happy, confident and deeply engaged in high-quality learning. Staff encourage high levels of independence. Children competently select resources, use the bathroom unaided and participate in routines with ease. They arrive eagerly and separate from carers calmly. Children settle quickly, indicating they feel safe and secure with the kind and caring staff. Strong key-person relationships underpin children's sense of security and confidence.

Behaviour is consistently positive due to excellent role modelling from staff. Children demonstrate respect, cooperation and empathy. Routines such as circle time, registration and group activities are embedded and understood by all. Staff actively ensure the curriculum promotes children's well-being. They teach children about hygiene, nutrition and safety, including how to stay safe in the sun and the importance of drinking lots of water. Staff skilfully use role play and storytelling to support children's emotional exploration. Children express empathy through stories, such as offering comfort or encouragement to their friends. Children make excellent progress in their emotional and social development.

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

- Communication and language is a central pillar of the curriculum. Children confidently use advanced vocabulary, such as 'frozen' and 'recipe'. They recall prior learning such as how water freezes and why it melts and apply this knowledge meaningfully during play. Children contribute to group discussions, such as news time. They use language incredibly well to recall and describe events.
- Storytelling demonstrates the hallmark of high-quality early years teaching. Sessions are exceptionally well planned and delivered. Staff encourage children to recall the characters, helping them to think critically, reflect deeply and articulate their thoughts with confidence.
- Curiosity and perseverance are strong characteristics of the provision. Children initiate tasks such as designing and balancing on beams. Staff support risk taking positively, promoting children's confidence and resilience. Children engage with adults in the home corner and are encouraged to think of their own recipes. They excitedly call staff to look at the tiny tomato that has grown on the vine.
- Staff make sure children are offered a range of diverse experiences. Children

learn about growing vegetables and observe the effects of the sun on ice. They participate in community events, such as VE Day celebrations and visits from an ambulance crew. The extensive curriculum provides children with a window into a wider world of learning while highly skilled teaching encourages the awe and wonder that brings the experiences to life.

- Provision for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well structured, inclusive and collaborative. Use of tools such as 'now' and 'next' boards and close work with external agencies exemplify best practice in this inclusive provision. Children are highly respected as unique individuals. The provider ensures that the use of additional funding is effective in targeting interventions and extending children's learning.
- Children learn through activities that are woven through the areas of learning. For instance, children enthusiastically sing a tooth brushing song, helping to promote their motor development, rhythm and health education. Staff embed mathematical concepts in everyday routines. Children confidently count, measure and use comparative language with increasing confidence.
- The role of staff is pivotal in the success of the curriculum. Staff are skilled in observing children's play, extending their thinking and using language to support and sustain learning. Interactions are purposeful as staff take time to truly listen and respond, deepening children's understanding and confidence.
- Leadership and management are highly effective with a clear strategic vision, reflective practice and a commitment to continuous improvement. Staff feel valued and supported by leaders. They develop autonomy in their teaching and care practices through continuing professional development.
- Leaders place high value on preparing children for the next stage of their education. Transitions to school are carefully planned with a range of supportive strategies, including school visits.
- Parents speak highly of the strong bonds their children have formed with their key persons and how these relationships have fostered secure attachments. Parents credit this as a major contributor to their children's confidence, emotional security and overall progress.

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	EY403443
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10398134
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	64
Name of registered person	Downhall Under Fives C.I.C
Registered person unique reference number	RP905386
Telephone number	07752 960411
Date of previous inspection	4 October 2019

Information about this early years setting

Downhall Under Fives registered in 2009. The pre-school operates Monday to Friday, from 9.15am to 4pm, during school term time only. There are 11 members of childcare staff. Of these, two hold an early years qualification at level 6 and six at level 3. The pre-school provides government funded early education for all eligible children.

Information about this inspection

Inspector
Clare Ford

Inspection activities

- One of the managers joined the inspector on a learning walk and talked to the inspector about their curriculum and what they want their children to learn.
- The inspector spoke with leaders about the leadership and management of the pre-school.
- Parents shared their views with the inspector during the inspection and their views were taken into account.
- The inspector observed the quality of teaching and interactions, both inside and in the garden.
- The inspector viewed a sample of documentation to demonstrate the suitability of staff.
- Children spoke to the inspector.

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