

Monkey Puzzle Day Nursery Stanway

Unique reference number (URN): 2504015

Address: 1 Villa Road, Stanway, Colchester, Essex, CO3 0RH

Type: Childcare on non-domestic premises

Registered with Ofsted: 19/11/2018

Registers: EYR

Registered person: SMJ Childcare Ltd

Inspection report: 14 April 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	●
Expected standard	● ● ● ● ●
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

✓ Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, children are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect settings for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The setting has an open and positive culture of safeguarding.
- **Not met:** The setting has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Strong standard

Leadership and governance

Strong standard 

Leaders have made the required improvements since the last inspection. This displays their dedication to continuously reflect and strengthen the curriculum and teaching standards. Leaders have set clear goals to continually build on these improvements. For example, leaders have accessed further training and coaching opportunities to ensure that the curriculum is always inclusive and of consistently high quality.

Since the last inspection, leaders have taken substantial action to ensure that reciprocal communication with parents is consistent and highly effective. For example, parents are regularly invited to meet with their child's key person to discuss children's progress. Part of this process includes listening to parents' views and working together, sometimes with other external professionals, to plan children's next steps in learning and development. This collaborative approach particularly supports those children known (or previously known) to children's social care and those who face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing.

Parents express overwhelming amounts of praise for the caring and dedicated staff. They applaud the in-depth, daily communication about their child's day. Parents report a significant increase in their children's communication and language development since attending.

Staff provide overwhelming praise for their leadership team. They feel incredibly supported in their roles and feel their workload is manageable. Staff explain how training matches their development needs and preferences, alongside building their confidence to deliver high-quality care and education.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

All children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are thriving and achieving very well from their starting points. Children with SEND typically benefit from tailored interventions, such as one-to-one support when appropriate. This includes for the most disadvantaged children to improve their best outcomes and achievements in all areas of learning and development.

Children become independent learners and develop the essential knowledge and skills needed for their future learning and development. Children are very proud of their achievements and delight in showing visitors pretend ice cream they have made from sand.

Older children and those with SEND independently take themselves to specific areas to self-regulate when they feel overwhelmed. These are spaces where children can take time to

calm their mind and body, for example by listening to a quiet story. This helps children to manage their emotions and behaviours when they progress to school.

Behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines

Expected standard 

Leaders provide training to ensure that staff deliver inclusive approaches to behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines. Leaders have recently introduced 'five-minute observations', where they implement focused reflections alongside staff. This helps staff step back and observe environments at key points in the day, such as transitions to outdoor play. This is in its infancy but will help staff to reflect and improve on their practice, such as ensuring that staff help children's increasing independence by helping them learn how to dress appropriately for different types of weather.

Children are happy, and laughter fills the air as they play cooperatively with their peers and staff. Staff support children to foster close friendships, for example through turn-taking games. Any minor disputes over popular toys are dealt with effectively. Children learn about sharing and respecting the needs and feelings of others through excellent modelling by staff. Staff praise children when they show random acts of kindness, such as sharing toys. This helps maintain positive attitudes to learning.

Staff have high expectations for children's behaviour and establishing routines, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). For example, staff model to children with SEND how to push chairs under the table so they are not a trip hazard.

Staff provide tailored settling-in processes, which help children develop routines and positive habits. They also promote children's punctuality and attendance at nursery.

Children's welfare and wellbeing

Expected standard 

All children are becoming increasingly independent in attending to their personal needs. They develop life skills, such as cutting up food with a knife and fork. Patient staff use gentle hand-over-hand guidance to support this learning. Children self-serve their own meals and learn to make healthy food choices. Freshly prepared meals are balanced and meet children's nutritional needs.

Leaders have embedded daily procedures, such as intermittent spot checks of all rooms in the nursery. This promotes children's welfare and wellbeing, as leaders identify times of the day where extra support could be provided to maintain safe and purposeful learning environments.

Staff meticulously follow daily risk assessments to ensure that children with special dietary requirements, preferences, food allergies and intolerances have their care needs met. Children develop good hygiene routines in age-appropriate ways. This supports children's health and wellbeing beyond nursery. For example, parents report how children sing a merry handwashing tune taught at nursery to help them wash their hands properly at home.

At times when children experience periods of high energy levels, staff know how to help individual children manage their feelings, such as playing outdoors. Children, including those with children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, benefit from fresh air

and physical play, which can help even the most disadvantaged children to improve their wellbeing.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Babies and children develop their physical strength and mathematics in fun ways. Babies enjoy learning to climb and pull themselves up on soft-play equipment while attempting to count in sequence with staff who are modelling this. Staff consistently respond attentively to babies' early signs of communication. For example, when babies hold out a book to them, staff offer to read to them. Babies show excellent attention and listening skills while being read to. They are building on their articulation of first words as they attempt to repeat words that staff model to them. The promotion of these early literacy skills is crucial for when they progress to school.

Recent improvements to the nursery curriculum are highly successful and play a pivotal role in staff's delivery of typically high-quality teaching throughout the nursery. However, occasionally, when staff are implementing activities, they do not always gather a broad perspective of all children's involvement. This can lead to some children not persevering in activities of their choosing, which can reduce intended learning outcomes.

Staff use robust assessments of children's progress to inform planning. This ensures that the individual needs of all children are met, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. For example, staff use Makaton sign language and visual prompts such as 'now and next' boards to help all children communicate and understand changes to routines.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Robust settling-in procedures and a securely embedded key-person system mean parents and carers can share their unique information about their child before they start. These early discussions foster a collaborative approach, including listening to views from any external professionals already working with the child. Any early interventions, such as speech and language support, are actioned straight away. This ensures that all children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make typical progress from their starting points.

Partnerships with parents are prioritised and a strength of the nursery. Leaders and staff work sensitively and build trusting relationships with parents. This ensures that all families and children are consistently receiving well-rounded support. This increases attendance and the overall happiness of all children, including those known (or previously known) to children's social care and those who face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing. Staff use parental input and regular assessments of children's progress effectively to offer opportunities to support children's next steps in learning. Staff skilfully consider children's interests and learning priorities in planning activities. Staff notice when children are not getting the most out of typically effective teaching strategies, such as one-to-one support. However, occasionally, staff do not always adapt their interactions swiftly enough to help children make even more progress.

What it's like to be a child at this setting

Children are very happy and enjoy their time at this nurturing and inclusive nursery. A well-established key-person system and bespoke settling-in procedures ensure that babies and children swiftly develop positive and trusting attachments with staff. Before children start, parents and carers are invited to discuss their children's existing daily routines, such as sleeping and eating patterns. Staff implement these routines from home, which are familiar to children. This greatly benefits children, as they settle smoothly, and can boost attendance. They feel extremely safe in their new environment and when moving into different rooms within the nursery.

Children's individual learning needs are typically met very well. Leaders and staff have recently created a well-designed curriculum that is clear, high quality and flexible to meet children's individual needs. Children particularly make rapid progress in their communication and language development. For example, staff provide visual pictures and use Makaton to help those children who find communication difficult. This ensures that all children make lots of progress from their starting points, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Older children regularly visit care homes, where they can practise their communication skills freely. Children develop a love of books and reading, enhanced with trips to the local community library.

Indoor and outdoor environments are stimulating and inviting and offer endless opportunities for discovery and fun-filled learning. Children delight in the freedom to create their unique artwork by painting on the outdoor fence with paint they have made themselves from beetroot. Children move closer to staff for reassurance and a cuddle when visitors ask them how they made the paint. With gentle encouragement from staff, children feel safe and empowered to explain, building on their social communication skills.

Children play cooperatively and show acts of kindness frequently without prompting. Staff provide genuine praise when children kindly push their peers on the swing. This reinforces positive behaviours expected of them.

Next steps

- Leaders should consistently support staff to identify children's changing needs, skilfully adapting their teaching and interactions to continuously enhance and extend all children's further learning and development.

- Leaders should support staff to identify children's engagement levels and help children to meet their learning intentions to further their overall development.
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About this inspection

The inspector spoke with leaders, staff, practitioners, the special educational needs coordinator, parents and children during inspection.

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.

Inspector:

Louisa Taylor

About this setting

Unique reference number (URN): 2504015

Address:

1 Villa Road
Stanway
Colchester
Essex
CO3 0RH

Type: Childcare on non-domestic premises

Registration date: 19/11/2018

Registered person: SMJ Childcare Ltd

Register(s): EYR

Operating hours: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday : 07:30 - 18:30

Local authority: Essex

Facts and figures used on inspection

This data was available to the inspector at the time of the inspection.

 This data is from 14 April 2026

Children numbers

Age range of children at the time of inspection

0 to 4

Total number of places

159

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other settings can learn from it.

Strong standard

The setting reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The setting is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The setting needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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