

Ofsted registered early years setting inspection report

13 to 14 January 2026

Holmwood House Nursery

151 Coach Rd
Great Horkesley
Colchester
CO6 4DX

Inspection outcomes

Safeguarding	Met
Inclusion	Strong standard
Curriculum and teaching	Strong standard
Achievement	Strong standard
Behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines	Strong standard
Children's welfare and wellbeing	Strong standard
Leadership and governance	Strong standard

The extent to which the school meets the requirements of the early years foundation stage

The school's registered provision for childcare meets the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006.

Summary of inspection findings

1. Children are cared for very well and feel safe, known and valued as members of the community. Children form consistently positive relationships with adults and peers. Relationships are warm, respectful and skilfully sustained, enabling children to develop strong attachments and a deep sense of belonging. High expectations are embedded across the setting through well-established routines that children understand and follow confidently and with increasing independence. Children demonstrate high levels of emotional security, are settled and ready to learn.
2. Staff skilfully and systematically support children to articulate their feelings and manage their behaviour. Staff systematically reinforce expectations through highly effective teaching of routines and social behaviours. The culture is harmonious and respectful. Children demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and to each other, showing co-operation, resilience and kindness.
3. Children enjoy learning and are highly motivated. The curriculum is ambitious, inclusive and accurately implemented, drawing on expert guidance and the strong understanding of child development demonstrated consistently by staff. High-quality interactions extend children's thinking, language and understanding across all seven areas of learning. Children, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), disadvantaged children and those who may face additional barriers to their learning, secure both breadth and depth in their knowledge and skills across all areas of the curriculum.
4. Children achieve very well from their starting points. Staff use precise interventions and timely support to ensure that children's needs are identified early and addressed promptly. Children make

sustained progress, particularly in communication and language, and are very well prepared to transition successfully at each stage of their learning, including to school.

5. Leaders' consistently thoughtful and positive engagement with parents ensures children thrive and are very well supported at key points of transition. Where barriers to attendance or routines arise leaders take prompt, effective action to support families and establish positive patterns, ensuring children develop positive habits that prepare them very well for future learning.

Safeguarding

6. Safeguarding is met.
7. 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.

Inclusion

8. The grading for inclusion is at the strong standard.
9. Leaders and practitioners consistently make a demonstrable difference to the opportunities and experiences of all children, particularly those who are disadvantaged, those who have SEND, and those who face other barriers to their learning and wellbeing. Inclusion is central to the setting's culture and practice. This makes a significant difference to children's experiences and outcomes. Leaders have a detailed, accurate understanding of each child and their individual needs and use this knowledge to ensure no child is overlooked.
10. Leaders and staff take prompt, decisive action to address children's emerging and changing needs. Barriers to learning and wellbeing are identified swiftly through rigorous observation, assessment and discussions parents and external professionals. Children's learning and development are monitored carefully and systematically. Their progress is reviewed frequently, and leaders ensure that support remains responsive and effective. Staff make carefully considered adaptations to teaching, routines and the environment to ensure that children are fully involved in the life of the nursery. For example, staff adapt seating arrangements and provide footstools to support children's posture and stability at mealtimes, enabling them to eat independently and confidently alongside their peers.
11. Leaders work closely with families and external agencies to ensure children's support is co-ordinated and well matched to children's needs. They rigorously monitor the impact of interventions and refine strategies where necessary, ensuring improvements are sustained over time. Leaders' consistent and systematic approach supports children to feel included, valued and supported. From the earliest age, babies and children gain confidence, independence and the skills they need to succeed.

Curriculum and teaching

12. The grading for curriculum and teaching is at the strong standard.
13. Leaders have designed an ambitious, well-sequenced curriculum that reflects a secure understanding of how young children learn and develop. The curriculum builds carefully on what children know and can do, enabling them to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to succeed in their future learning and to support their physical development and wellbeing.
14. Teaching is consistently purposeful and informed by accurate assessment of each child's knowledge and understanding and their stage of development. Staff use assessment information to check children's understanding and identify next steps. Teaching is precisely tailored to children's individual starting points, needs and stages of development. This means all children, regardless of background or need, make secure and sustained progress across all areas of learning.
15. Leaders and staff identify children's needs swiftly and adapt teaching highly effectively. For example, all children, including those who need additional support, receive focused individual sessions each week to strengthen specific skills, such as fine-motor skills, communication and language or early mathematics. These interventions are carefully planned, reviewed regularly and adjusted as needed to ensure they have a meaningful impact on the progress of all children.
16. Staff provide rich experiences to support children's interests and engagement, such as climbing trees or decorating large cardboard boxes to create dinosaur models, while exploring colour mixing with paint. Children explore, investigate and achieve with confidence and independence, both indoors and outdoors.
17. Staff meticulously plan activities to develop children's physical skills, such as their core strength, balance and co-ordination. These activities are very well established as part of daily routines and play. Children build physical confidence, resilience and a deep sense of belonging through their spontaneous interactions and extended play.
18. The curriculum for babies is thoughtfully designed to support early development. Staff provide rich sensory experiences, responsive interactions and consistent routines that promote secure attachments, physical development and early communication. Babies are given the time and space they need to explore at their own pace. This also promotes their curiosity, confidence and wellbeing from the earliest age.
19. Assessment is used highly effectively to support children's progress. Staff complete the statutory two-year progress check accurately and use it well to monitor children's development and identify their next steps. Leaders and staff track children's progress carefully to ensure continuity of learning and progress at each stage.

Achievement

20. The grading for achievement is at the strong standard.
21. Children achieve very well from their starting points and demonstrate secure breadth and depth of learning. Babies and younger children develop strong foundations through carefully sequenced

experiences that support exploration, repetition and curiosity. Through sensory play with lentils, rice and pasta, younger children confidently fill and empty containers and begin to use early mathematical language such as full, half and heavy. These experiences also support physical development and early problem-solving, enabling children to persist, concentrate and take pride in their achievements.

22. Toddlers and older nursery children apply their learning confidently through play. For instance, during construction and imaginative role play, older children work collaboratively to 'fix a post', drawing on prior learning from watching a video about electricians. They recall safety messages, independently choose to wear goggles and hard hats and make meaningful comparisons between different types of protective equipment. This demonstrates children's secure understanding of safety, community roles and managing risk, as well as their growing confidence in communication and language with adults and with each other.
23. Through familiar songs and action rhymes, babies and young children remember sequences, respond accurately and maintain attention for extended periods. They confidently adjust their voices to sing fast or slow, high or low, demonstrating secure listening skills, memory and early awareness of rhythm and sound patterns that underpin later literacy.
24. By planning precise support, staff ensure that all children achieve well. Disadvantaged children, those who have SEND, and those facing other barriers to their learning, receive carefully matched support within daily activities. For example, during matching card games, some older children are supported with shorter turns or prompts, while others are encouraged to explain their thinking or to support peers. This means all children remain engaged, develop independence and make sustained progress. Children apply their knowledge confidently, use their skills independently and demonstrate enjoyment and pride in their learning. They are very well prepared to move successfully to the next stage of their education, including the transition to school, and show a positive, determined attitude as they make the most of learning opportunities with confidence and resilience.

Behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines

25. The grading for behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines is at the strong standard.
26. Leaders and staff have established a highly positive, calm and nurturing environment with clear expectations for behaviour that are applied consistently across the setting. Children feel secure, understand boundaries and demonstrate highly positive attitudes to learning and to one another.
27. Relationships between staff and children are warm, respectful and trusting. Staff know children well and support them sensitively to work together, take turns and resolve any minor disagreements that may occur. For example, children use mirrors and emotion cards to identify and name feelings such as happy, sad and angry. This approach helps children to develop both emotional literacy and empathy. Staff support children's emotional regulation skilfully, particularly with babies and toddlers. Staff respond sensitively to children's individual routines, comfort needs and transitions, helping children to recognise, express and manage their emotions clearly.
28. Staff consistently promote a culture of kindness, care and respect. Children play co-operatively, share resources willingly and demonstrate respect for each other without the need for frequent

adult intervention. Young children are increasingly able to manage minor conflicts calmly, seek help appropriately and show consideration for others.

29. Children show a strong sense of belonging and self-worth, confidently expressing preferences, feelings and ideas. Children are encouraged to take responsibility for their environment such as by placing rubbish in recycling bins and talking about caring for the world around them. Nurturing interactions, predictable routines and attentive care help children to develop trust, resilience and self-confidence.
30. Leaders promote the importance of attendance and punctuality and work closely with families to establish consistent routines that support children's wellbeing and learning. Where children have SEND or face additional challenges, adjustments are made sensitively to ensure expectations remain high while staff support is well matched to children's individual needs.

Children's welfare and wellbeing

31. The grading for children's welfare and wellbeing is at the strong standard.
32. Leaders and practitioners consistently prioritise children's welfare and wellbeing, ensuring that care practices are highly responsive to children's individual needs, and enable children to thrive. Children benefit from attentive, nurturing care that supports their physical health, emotional security and overall development. Highly effective key person relationships underpin babies' and young children's emotional wellbeing very well.
33. Staff know children very well, including their routines, health needs, preferences and family circumstances. Staff collaborate closely with parents, sharing detailed information about sleep, feeding, behaviour and emotional wellbeing. Staff are particularly sensitive to changes in children's circumstances and adapt care routines thoughtfully to provide reassurance and emotional support. This helps children feel secure, settled and confident within the setting.
34. Sleep routines are carefully planned and individualised, while prioritising children's safety and wellbeing. Staff demonstrate a secure understanding of safe-sleep guidance. These routines are applied consistently and reflect vigilant, high-quality care.
35. Children's physical wellbeing is promoted effectively through calm, well-organised daily routines. Mealtimes are relaxed, social and closely supervised. Children are supported to make choices, try new foods and develop independence and staff remain attentive and vigilant. For example, during lunchtime, babies confidently use cutlery. Staff sit close by, encourage the use of spoons and forks and model calm, positive interactions. These routines support children's physical development, self-care skills and confidence.
36. The environment is well organised and is regularly monitored by leaders and staff to promote children's welfare and wellbeing consistently throughout the day. Staff help children to feel safe and confident as they explore new experiences at their own pace. Children are supported to learn about personal safety, including understanding simple risks and developing early awareness of how to keep themselves safe through everyday routines and play. For example, younger children are taught to understand boundaries, follow simple rules and seek help from trusted adults, while older nursery children receive age-appropriate messages about online safety. Staff care practices are consistently

effective, relationships are secure and responsive, and routines are well established to support children's health, safety and emotional development. This helps children to feel safe, cared for and well supported to achieve and thrive in the setting.

37. Children are introduced to healthy lifestyles from a young age. They are introduced to healthy foods through daily routines and activities, such as choosing fruit at snack time and helping to prepare food. Staff promote oral health, for example by discussing toothbrushing routines, sharing stories about visiting the dentist and reinforcing good hygiene practices at appropriate times of the day. However, while children are developing positive habits, staff do not consistently support children to understand why these healthy choices are important to deepen children's understanding and help them make informed choices about their health as they grow.

Leadership and governance

38. The grading for leadership and governance is at the strong standard.
39. Leaders, including those with responsibility for governance, demonstrate a clear and sustained commitment to providing high-quality education and care that improves outcomes for all children, including children who have SEND, and those who face other barriers to their learning and wellbeing. Leaders' decision-making is consistently rooted in the best interests of all children. Leaders are reflective, responsive and well organised, with a clear focus on continuous improvement and securing the best possible outcomes for all children. Leaders and staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and apply policies and procedures consistently and thoughtfully across the setting.
40. Leaders have a secure and accurate understanding of the setting's strengths and areas for development. They use robust self-evaluation, alongside evidence from monitoring, incident reviews and staff feedback, to take prompt and effective action where improvements are needed. Recent changes, including the reorganisation of toddler rooms and adjustments to group sizes, demonstrate leaders' capacity to respond decisively to the setting's changing needs. Leaders ensure that the provision operates consistently and cohesively as one setting across the two sites. Improvements make a positive impact on children's safety, engagement, physical development and emotional wellbeing.
41. Leaders manage staff wellbeing and workload thoughtfully. Staffing structures, deployment and expectations are carefully considered to ensure practitioners are supported to deliver high-quality teaching and care. Professional development opportunities are purposeful, well planned and closely aligned to improvement priorities and staff roles. Training has a clear and measurable impact on improving staff practice. For example, recent professional development focused on self-regulation has strengthened staff confidence in behaviour support, inclusion and emotional regulation. This has also improved the quality of supervision, particularly during transitions between outdoor and indoor environments. This means children are consistently well supported during these changes, contributing positively to a culture of safety, children's emotional security and their learning outcomes.
42. Partnership working is highly effective. Leaders invest significant time in building trusting, respectful relationships with families and are proactive in gathering detailed information about each child's home circumstances, routines and experiences. This enables leaders and staff to tailor care, routines

and support swiftly and sensitively to meet children's needs. Leaders work closely with external professionals to secure timely support where needed. These strong partnerships have a clear and positive impact on children's progress, emotional wellbeing and smooth transitions, including between rooms and into school.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- strengthen teaching to support children to develop a clearer understanding of the benefits of healthy food choices and how these contribute to their physical health and overall wellbeing.

Registered setting details

Registered setting name	Holmwood House Nursery
Unique reference number	2499293
Address	151 Coach Rd Great Horkesley Colchester CO6 4DX
Phone number	01206 273827
Email address	office@holmwood.house
Website	www.holmwood.house
Proprietor	Bellevue Education International Ltd
Nominated individual	Steve Wade
Age range of children at the time of the inspection	6 months to 4 years
Total number of places	108
Number of children on roll	143
Date of previous inspection of the registered setting	24 to 25 January 2024

Information about the setting

43. Holmwood House Nursery registered in 2022. The registered setting operates across two sites: Holmwood Nursery at Great Horkesley and Holmwood House School at Lexden. The setting is open all year round from 8am to 6pm.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

13 to 14 January 2026

44. One inspector visited the registered setting for two half days. The on-site inspection was quality assured by a monitor. This inspection took place at the same time as the inspection of Holmwood House School.
45. Inspection activities included:
- shared observation of learning in collaboration with setting leaders
 - discussions with the school leaders, managers and other members of staff
 - discussions with parents
 - discussions with children
 - observations of children's routines, including eating, sleeping and transition times
 - scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the setting.
46. The inspection team considered the views of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

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