

INSPECTION REPORT

Kindercare Childcare Centres Limited

18 June 2001



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and in New Deal options. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 5 - very weak.*

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

SEVEN-POINT SCALE	FIVE-POINT SCALE
grade 1	grade 1
grade 2	
grade 3	grade 2
grade 4	grade 3
grade 5	grade 4
grade 6	grade 5
grade 7	

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based training within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based training for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- the University for Industry's *learnirect* provision
- adult and community learning
- training given by the Employment Service under the New Deals.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework* by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

Inadequate provision

A provider's provision will normally be deemed to be less than adequate where

- one third or more of published grades for occupational/curriculum areas and New Deal options are judged less than satisfactory, or
- leadership and management are judged to be less than satisfactory

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. The overall judgement as to whether the provision is adequate or inadequate is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

SUMMARY

The provider

Kindercare Childcare Centres Limited is a private company based in Lancashire. Its main activity is providing early years care and education. It currently trains 41 of its employees as modern apprentices.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of apprentices. More specifically, the quality of work-based training and the leadership and management of the company are unsatisfactory.

Work-based learning for young people

There are good work placements for apprentices within the company's nurseries. A high proportion of apprentices complete their training. Many remain with the company and progress to take on more responsibility, including management roles. Insufficient resources are provided for training and assessment. Accommodation, equipment and learning resources for off-the-job training sessions are inadequate. A shortage of assessors means that apprentices' progress is often delayed while they wait to be assessed. Some aspects of assessment are not carried out thoroughly enough. Individual progress reviews for apprentices are not regular or sufficiently thorough. Little progress has been made in developing the training in, or assessing of, key skills.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of Kindercare Childcare Centres Limited are unsatisfactory. The company has clear plans to recruit and train the number of apprentices required by its overall business objectives. Regular reports on operational training issues are presented to the management team. There is no quality assurance policy or procedures relating to training. Arrangements for the internal verification of assessments are unsatisfactory. Management responsibilities for aspects of training have not been effectively allocated. The company does not adequately promote equal opportunities. Apprentices have little awareness of equal opportunities issues. The self-assessment report fails to deal with many important aspects of training and to identify many substantial weaknesses.

GRADES

Health, social care & public services	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

Leadership and management	4
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	4
Quality assurance	5

KEY STRENGTHS

- clear plans for the recruitment of modern apprentices
- good retention rates and progression within the company
- good work placements

KEY WEAKNESSES

- poor awareness of equal opportunities issues by apprentices
- lack of a quality assurance policy or procedures for training
- insufficiently thorough NVQ processes
- insufficient resources for training

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more detailed policy on equal opportunities
- a clear complaints procedure for apprentices, of which they are aware
- a more timely response to problems which arise
- apprentices' availability to attend training sessions

THE PROVIDER AND ITS CONTEXT

1. Kindercare Childcare Centres Limited (Kindercare) was established in 1989. It provides nursery education and care in locations across Lancashire. These include four nurseries in and around Preston, and one in Blackpool. It also provides some workplace nursery services and primary education through an independent school. The company became an approved training centre for national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in 1999. It has 250 staff, of whom 41 are advanced modern apprentices. A training co-ordinator oversees the training and assessment of the apprentices, who are based as employees in the company's nurseries. The company was accredited as an Investor in People in 1996 and was re-accredited in 1999.

2. Modern apprenticeship training is funded through a contract with the Lancashire Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The unemployment rate in Lancashire in May 2001 was 2.9 per cent, which was close to the national rate of 3.1 per cent. Preston has substantial minority ethnic communities, comprising 10.2 per cent of the population. This compares with only 4.4 per cent for Lancashire as a whole and 0.8 per cent in Blackpool. In 2000, the proportion of school leavers in Lancashire achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 49.6 per cent, close to the national average of 49.2 per cent.

THE INSPECTION

3. A team of three inspectors spent a total of 12 days at Kindercare during June 2001. They interviewed 21 apprentices and conducted 14 interviews with Kindercare's staff, including nursery managers, work-based assessors and trainers. Inspectors observed and graded three training sessions. They examined a range of documents including apprentices' portfolios of evidence, apprentices' personal records, the company's plans, policies and procedures, promotional literature and awarding bodies' reports. Inspectors studied Kindercare's self-assessment report, which was produced in January 2001.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Health, social care & public services	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	3
Total	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	3

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Health, social care & public services

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	41	4

4. The company employs 41 advanced modern apprentices in six nurseries. Twenty-three of the apprentices are working towards NVQs in early years care at level 3 and 18 at level 2. Most apprentices are recruited in July each year through the local careers service and Kindercare's recruitment events. All applicants are tested for their written ability in English. The results are used as part of the selection procedure. Those recruited in July receive an initial two-day induction to the training programme. This is followed by an extended eight-week induction to the company. Off-the-job training is given in most of the nurseries by a self-employed trainer contracted for this purpose. Apprentices are scheduled to attend for two and a half hours each week. There is a training library in the Blackpool nursery which is open to all apprentices. The full-time training co-ordinator is responsible for day-to-day oversight of the training programme and is also the internal verifier. There are 14 work-based assessors who carry out assessment of the NVQ units. The apprenticeship training programme has been running since 1999.

The table below shows the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of inspection.

Work-based learning for young people										
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)										
	1996-97		1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started							39		29	100
Still in training							14	36	27	93
AMA framework completed							16	41	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed							19	49	1	3
NVQ level 3 completed							16	41	0	0

STRENGTHS

- good work placements
- good retention rates and progression within the company

WEAKNESSES

- insufficient resources for training and assessment
- insufficiently thorough NVQ assessment processes
- inadequate development or assessment of key skills
- poor reviews of apprentices' progress

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better awareness of off-the-job training by some workplace supervisors
- enhanced induction for late starters
- better attendance at training sessions

5. All apprentices are employed within the company's nurseries. They are highly valued by the company and regarded as full members of staff. All the nurseries provide good training opportunities in the workplace which enable apprentices to develop new skills. Many workplace supervisors understand NVQs. They provide good support to apprentices. Some have completed the qualifications themselves. Other supervisors have a more limited understanding of the details of the relevant NVQ units, or the opportunities for development required by apprentices.

6. Retention rates are good. Of those who started training in 1999, 75 per cent have either completed the modern apprenticeship framework or are still in training. There are good opportunities for progression within the company. Many of the assessors and managers interviewed during the inspection have been encouraged to seek promotion and have progressed within the company to their current roles. One of the assessors started with the company as a cleaner and has since progressed through NVQs at levels 2 and 3 before completing her assessors' qualifications. The proportion of apprentices who achieve their modern apprenticeship framework is satisfactory. Of the 25 who began in 1999 and are no longer in training, 64 per cent achieved the full framework.

7. The resources allocated to apprenticeship training are inadequate. Some off-the-job training is given in rooms designed for children. Apprentices sit on chairs designed for children and work at tables that are too small to hold all their work. There is a carefully planned programme of lessons which is supported by notes provided by the tutor. However, apprentices are not clear about content of the programme. The tutor does not have access to suitable teaching resources. The tutor provides informal support to any apprentices who have been identified as needing extra help with English language. This support has helped some apprentices to make better progress with their NVQs. The training library located in Blackpool is not well used by apprentices in other nurseries. They do not have access to reference materials in their own nurseries. The need to provide staff cover regularly takes priority over apprentices' attendance at training sessions. This prevents many apprentices from attending the training they need. There

are too few links between off-the-job training and experience in the workplace. Of the 14 assessors, four do not have assessors' qualifications but are working towards them, and a further seven only have one unit relating to direct observation. Three of the nurseries do not have a qualified assessor to assess written evidence.

8. The NVQ assessment processes are insufficiently thorough. The assessment methods used most frequently are observation of an apprentice's performance in the workplace and verbal questioning. There is not enough observation. Generally, only one observation is carried out for each element to be assessed. Records of observation are not sufficiently detailed or specific. There is not enough evidence to cover the range and background knowledge in some portfolios. The overall evidence relating to achievement of a specific unit is not considered systematically by assessors. Assessors follow a set order of units issued by the internal verifier. As a result, apprentices are often not working in an appropriate area when an assessment is due and are placed for a short period of time in an unfamiliar setting, such as the baby unit, in order to be assessed.

9. The company has been slow to begin key skills training and assessment. Work-based assessors have little awareness of key skills and are not involved in key skills assessments. Apprentices are not aware of the content of the key skills units which they are aiming to achieve. Apprentices who have just completed their apprenticeship have been assessed on a project at the end of their programme. The company has plans to develop apprentices' key skills during the apprenticeship, but these have not yet been implemented.

10. The induction process for apprentices who start during the main period of recruitment is satisfactory. It includes comprehensive information about the company and the training programme. However, those who start later in the year receive an individual induction within their nursery; this induction is not always thorough. These apprentices are less aware of all aspects of the programme. Reviews of progress are irregular. Many apprentices have waited up to five months for a review. Actions are not followed up and often re-appear on the records of several reviews. Target-setting is vague and does not help apprentices to make progress towards their qualification.

Good Practice

The company recognises the achievement of both NVQ units and full awards. Apprentices are issued with certificates when they complete a number of units, to motivate them to continue. An awards ceremony has been held for apprentices and assessors. Parents and managers were also invited. Assessors are presented with an NVQ badge when they gain their assessors' awards. Staff and apprentices value this recognition from the company.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4

11. Kindercare is a private company. It has two directors, who are the owners. It is managed by a team comprising the directors, 13 nursery managers, a director of education and a training co-ordinator. An NVQ tutor is employed part time to provide off-the-job training within the company. Two hundred and thirty-five other staff provide care services throughout the nurseries, of whom 17 act as NVQ assessors. The company has no quality assurance policy or procedures for training. It has an equal opportunities policy. The company produced its second annual self-assessment report in January 2001.

STRENGTHS

- clear plans for the recruitment of modern apprentices
- regular reports on training issues presented to the management team

WEAKNESSES

- ineffective allocation of managerial responsibilities for training
- little awareness of equal opportunities issues by apprentices
- poor promotion of equal opportunities
- poor use of quality assurance and equal opportunities action plans
- lack of quality assurance policy or procedures for training
- inadequate arrangements for internal verification

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- clearer complaints procedure for trainees
- more detailed equal opportunities policy
- better structure to apprentices' questionnaires
- better understanding of the modern apprenticeship framework and NVQ processes by nursery managers

12. The company's business plan is reviewed and updated annually. As part of this process, future staffing needs are identified. Clear plans are prepared for the recruitment of modern apprentices. Their training is, however, not effectively managed. The director of education is the senior manager responsible for training. She also has other extensive responsibilities within the company and is able to provide little leadership on training issues. A training co-ordinator has day-to-day responsibility for training across the company's six nurseries. However, individual nursery managers are responsible for ensuring that on-the-job training and assessment opportunities are adequate to meet the needs of apprentices, and that apprentices are released to attend off-the-job training. This aspect of their role is not given sufficiently high priority. Some managers are not sufficiently familiar with the NVQ units being taken by their staff. As a result, there is

some poor practice in nurseries. For example, assessors are not provided with adequate time to carry out assessments when apprentices are ready for them. Too frequently, apprentices are prevented from attending off-the-job training sessions because they are required to carry out tasks in the workplace.

13. There are some good communication systems for staff involved in training. The training co-ordinator effectively monitors operational issues related to training in all the work placements. At monthly management meetings attended by all nursery managers, she presents thorough written reports on a wide range of training matters. There are also regular meetings of assessors to consider day-to-day issues. There is, however, little communication between staff providing on- and off-the-job training. The company has been collecting data on retention and achievement since it became involved in government-sponsored training. It has recently analysed the data to identify trends and these have been carefully considered by managers.

Equality of opportunity**Contributory grade 4**

14. Kindercare has an equal opportunities policy, which is brief and relates to both its childcare business and training. It consists of a statement of intent not to discriminate. The policy is explained to apprentices at their induction. There are no formal procedures for monitoring the policy. Apprentices are recruited annually and places for training are oversubscribed. Records are kept on recruitment and selection. Data on recruitment of under-represented groups have been compared over the past two years and action plans produced to deal with issues. However, little progress has been made in making improvements.

15. Apprentices have a poor understanding of equal opportunities issues. They are unsure of their rights and responsibilities as apprentices and do not know what relevance equal opportunities has to their work in childcare. Although discrimination is monitored during progress reviews, apprentices do not have the depth of understanding to identify many of the issues they could face in the workplace. While equal opportunities forms part of the induction no check is made of apprentices' understanding of the policy or related issues. They are not aware of the company's complaints procedure, which relates to staff, although they can identify members of staff they could approach if they have a problem.

16. The promotion of equal opportunities is poor. Publicity information for apprentices does not include statements to attract under-represented groups into training. Information is brief and includes few images or statements declaring equality of opportunity as being part of the company's policy. There has been no specific staff training in equal opportunities and some staff do not have the level of understanding required to assess the NVQ standards or help the apprentices with these issues.

17. The company's equal opportunities policy is very brief and does not refer to all relevant groups susceptible to discrimination or to recent legislation. There are no procedures to monitor equal opportunities issues in training. Trainees are asked at reviews about discrimination at work. However, their responses show little understanding of what lies behind the question.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 5

18. The most recent self-assessment report was prepared by the director of education and the training co-ordinator. Nursery managers and staff were not involved in identifying the main strengths and weaknesses for training in their nursery or for constructing the action plans. The report did not deal with many important aspects of training, and failed to identify many substantial weaknesses. The self-assessment report was produced against the framework of the Training Standards Council (TSC), 'Raising the Standard'. Inspectors awarded grades for all aspects which were lower than those given in the self-assessment report.

19. Kindercare has a policy and procedures for quality assurance relating to its childcare activities. There is no formal policy, nor are there procedures for its training provision. Some steps are taken to improve the quality of training when problems arise but there are no standards or targets for improvement. Questionnaires are provided annually to apprentices and nursery managers to obtain feedback on their experience of the training process. In 2000, only 20 of the 60 apprentices returned their questionnaires. The questionnaire for apprentices is of limited value. It requires a narrative response to questions rather than a judgement against specific criteria of quality. The results are analysed and presented to the management team. They are taken into consideration in the self-assessment report and action plan. Apprentices are not told what action has been taken on issues they raised.

20. The company has been slow to respond to weaknesses it has identified in its training. Several important actions planned in January 2000 were not implemented but have been carried forward into the subsequent action plan. For example, action to deal with the high number of late assessments has still to be taken. Similarly, inadequate accommodation and resources for some off-the-job training still exist.

21. There is inadequate management of the performance of staff in their training and assessment roles. The NVQ tutor is responsible directly to a senior manager. No standards are set for the quality of off-the-job training; it is not monitored and the tutor is not part of the company's appraisal system. Assessors are not routinely observed or appraised for their performance in this role.

22. Internal verification arrangements are unsatisfactory. The training co-ordinator is the main internal verifier. The NVQ tutor also carries out some internal verification when required. There is insufficient support for the work-based assessors, many of whom are inexperienced and not qualified to assess diverse evidence. The sampling strategy is systematic but does not reflect the experience of assessors and the range of assessment strategies being used. Assessors' meetings are held, but they are not providing the necessary information and support for those assessors who lack confidence or experience. Assessment decisions based on insufficient evidence are not being identified or dealt with. Assessments carried out by unqualified assessors are not monitored to ensure that they are accurate.

Poor Practice

During a training session about the protection of children from abuse, the trainer used a number of case studies to illustrate examples of child abuse. Most of these were about people from minority ethnic groups or stepfathers and perpetuated inappropriate stereotypes.