

INSPECTION REPORT

Tops Day Nursery

22 May 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

Tops Day Nurseries Training Centre Ltd is a private training company based in Poole in Dorset. The company provides training for early years workers. There are currently 16 modern apprentices, all of whom are employed by Tops Day Nurseries Ltd in the areas of Bournemouth, Poole and Wareham.

Overall judgement

The quality of the work-based training and learning is outstanding and the leadership and management of Tops Day Nurseries Training Centre Ltd are good. The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it.

Work-based learning for young people

The company has trained 25 modern apprentices, 23 of whom are employed by the company. The completion rate for modern apprenticeships is excellent. Over the last two years, all the apprentices have completed their apprenticeship. Apprentices are well supported by the company's staff. Training is well organised and there are opportunities for apprentices and staff to work towards additional qualifications. There are good opportunities for promotion within the company for all apprentices. In the past, many have progressed to become deputy managers or managers of the nurseries. Others have gained further national vocational qualifications (NVQs) which have enabled them to become assessors in the workplace or the training centre.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of Tops Day Nurseries Training Centre Ltd are good. Communications within the training company and with work placements are highly effective. There are effective quality assurance arrangements covering all aspects of work. The company receives regular feedback from the apprentices and take action on the points raised, as appropriate. Equal opportunities is an integral part of training. The company has been actively involved in a project to attract more men to nursery work. The company's self-assessment report was mainly accurate. Inspectors identified a number of additional strengths.

Health, care & public service	1
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	1

Leadership and management	2
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	2
Quality assurance	2

KEY STRENGTHS

- good career progression for apprentices' opportunities within the company and the nurseries
- high NVQ achievement rates
- high retention rates for apprentices
- good support for apprentices and staff from senior staff
- well-planned training sessions
- good staff development

KEY WEAKNESSES

- under-developed self-assessment process

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better understanding of quality assurance by staff

THE PROVIDER AND ITS CONTEXT

1. Tops Day Nurseries Training Centre Ltd was established in 1990 with one nursery. There are now five day nurseries catering for children aged 0-7 years, which provides work placements in Bournemouth, Poole and Wareham. The company offers training for advanced modern apprenticeships in early years care and education, level 4 NVQ in early years care and education, assessor and verifier qualifications, key skills, management qualifications and an NVQ in playwork at levels 2,3 and 4. There are three full-time and two part-time members of staff. They currently provide training for 16 modern apprentices. All apprentices are employed by Tops Day Nurseries Ltd. Many of the staff working for the company have progressed within the organisation to management positions in the nurseries.

2. Modern apprenticeship training is funded through a contract with the Dorset Local Learning and Skills Council (LLSC). In November 2000, the unemployment rate in Dorset was 1.6 per cent compared with the national average of 3.3 per cent. The unemployment rate in Bournemouth, Weymouth and Portland was 3.2 per cent. According to the 1991 census, people from minority ethnic groups represented less than 1 per cent of the county's population. In 1998, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 50 per cent. In 2000, this had risen to 54.6 per cent, compared with a national average of 49.2 per cent.

THE INSPECTION

3. A team of three inspectors spent a total of nine days at the company during May 2001. They interviewed seven apprentices, conducted five interviews with company staff, visited all five nurseries, and interviewed seven workplace supervisors/assessors. Inspectors observed training and assessment sessions. They examined a range of documents including apprentices' portfolios of evidence, apprentices' records, the company's plans, policies and procedures, promotional literature and awarding body reports. Inspectors also studied the company's self-assessment report, which had been updated in January 2001.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

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

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Health, care & public service

Grade 1

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	16	1

4. Apprentices are recruited through the nurseries. Their training needs are identified and a training programme is developed and provided by the company. There are currently 16 advanced modern apprentices, working towards childcare and education NVQs at levels 2 and 3. The apprentices work towards key skills qualifications throughout their training. They are also encouraged to study for additional awards in areas such as first aid, health and safety and child protection. Training and assessment are carried out in the workplace by senior members of staff who are qualified as assessors and internal verifiers. Training is managed and co-ordinated by the three full-time and two part-time members of staff at the company's training centre.

Work-based learning for young people								
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)								
	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Number that started	3		4		5		16	
Still in training	0	0	0	0	3	60	13	81
AMA framework completed	2	67	2	50	2	40	1	6
NVQ level 2 completed	2	67	4	100	3	60	5	31
NVQ level 3 completed	0	0	0	0	1	20	1	6

STRENGTHS

- good achievement rates
- good retention rates
- comprehensive support for apprentices
- thorough monitoring of apprentices' progress
- good career progression within the company

WEAKNESSES

- none identified

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more detailed initial assessment

5. As identified in the company's self-assessment report, retention rates and achievement rates are high. Of the 26 modern apprentices who started their training at the company's training centre, 16 have achieved their NVQ at level 2 and seven have achieved their NVQ at level 3. Those who have achieved level 2 are making good progress at NVQ level 3 and in key skills. In 1997, the retention rate was 66 per cent. By 2000, this had risen to 100 per cent. Of the 26 apprentices who started training in the last four years, only three have left the training programme early. One was dismissed during the probationary period and two others left to take up employment, after gaining their NVQ at level 2 and a number of additional qualifications.

6. Support for apprentices is good. There is an initial assessment of apprentices' basic skills, though particular support needs are not always clearly identified. Training centre staff provide a comprehensive induction into the modern apprenticeship training programme and the employer provides a detailed introduction to the workplace. The induction programme covers all aspects of the training including equal opportunities, and health and safety. Occasionally, staff do not give enough recognition to things the apprentices already know when they join the programme. There is regular assessment and mentoring of apprentices. All apprentices have weekly tutorials or assessments with nursery or training centre staff. They also benefit from the support of other employees, many of whom have recently completed their own NVQs. Apprentices are clear about their own progress and have realistic expectations about completing the training programme. They speak highly of the support they receive. Some apprentices complete their training programme well ahead of the target date. Inspectors observed some good, well-planned assessment sessions. The assessors gave clear and accurate feedback to the apprentices and questioned them effectively to check their understanding. Off-the-job training is well planned, suitably demanding and effective. Teachers use relevant and stimulating materials in their training sessions. They also make good use of apprentices' own experiences.

7. Apprentices' progress is monitored thoroughly, both in the nurseries and at the training centre. For those apprentices who get behind with their training, paid study leave is available. One apprentice, who had recently fallen behind with work for her NVQ portfolio, had been allocated time every Friday afternoon to enable her to complete the necessary work. If apprentices are falling behind with their assessments, the company send in training staff to conduct additional assessments.

8. Employment opportunities for apprentices are good. All of the successful apprentices have stayed on in the company's nurseries as members of staff. Career options are excellent. Some apprentices have become deputy managers or managers, responsible for areas of the nursery. Some have gained additional NVQs, qualifying them to become assessors in the workplace or at the company's training centre. Others are in the

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process of registering for NVQ level 4 and for other courses that might lead to a recognised teaching qualification.

9. Each nursery has a staff study room where weekly tutorials and portfolio-building take place. Appropriate resources are available in all the nurseries. For example, there are photocopiers which enable the apprentices to reproduce materials relevant to their work. Apprentices' portfolios are good.

10. There were no identified weaknesses. The weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report had all been rectified by the time of the inspection.

Good Practice

Tops Day Nurseries Training Centre Ltd have submitted a proposal to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to part fund a project aimed at recruiting more men. Ideas include sponsoring a football or rugby team, targeting teenage fathers, using male employees at careers conventions and developing new publicity materials.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

11. Tops Day Nurseries Training Centre Ltd is managed by the owner and a centre co-ordinator. There are five other members of staff, two part-time and three full-time. The owner of the company acts as the main internal verifier for the training programmes while two of the other members of staff provide tutorial support to apprentices in the workplace and provide a peripatetic assessment service. One full-time member of staff has responsibility for the development of key skills. Staff meet weekly to discuss issues. The outcome of these meetings is recorded. The owner meets formally with employers on a monthly basis. There are progress reviews for apprentices in the workplace every 13 weeks. The company gained the Investors in People award in 1998 and has recently been successfully reassessed against the standard. The company has produced a self-assessment report, which was last updated in January 2001. There is a quality assurance policy, which was last updated in February 2001. There is also an equal opportunities policy.

STRENGTHS

- effective internal communications
- effective management of key skills
- effective promotion of equal opportunities through all aspects of training
- effective quality assurance arrangements

WEAKNESSES

- self-assessment process

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- equal opportunities practices
- clearer understanding of quality assurance by staff

12. There is effective communication within the company between staff, and between staff and apprentices. Nursery managers talk regularly with trainers/assessors. Training staff visit apprentices regularly to monitor their progress and identify training needs. Staff meet weekly to discuss apprentices' progress and the training issues arising from these visits. Meetings are minuted, and actions are identified and monitored. Staff are in regular contact by mobile telephone and respond quickly to the needs of apprentices and employers. Staff have clearly defined roles and responsibilities and are able to provide cover for each other without affecting apprentices' progress. They can also provide supervisory cover in nurseries if apprentices are receiving tutorial support.

13. The company has placed a high priority on developing key skills as an integral part of the training. The key skills co-ordinator is accredited for all key skills at level 3 and has played a major role in promoting the benefits of key skills, both to staff and to

apprentices. Key skills are introduced at induction and an assignment which apprentices are given to complete in the first 12 weeks of their training, provides good evidence for key skills. The key skills co-ordinator provides regular support to apprentices in the workplace, helping apprentices to cross reference NVQ and key skills activities. Apprentices have a good knowledge of key skills and NVQ requirements.

14. The managing director plays an active role as an internal verifier as well as working in the nurseries. Staff provide good role models for other apprentices. The company has a well-established staff appraisal and review system. Senior staff provide strong support for other staff, including opportunities for training and development. Good morale within the organisation is reflected in the high achievement rates of apprentices and the very low turnover of staff. The managing director encourages apprentices to continue with their studies after completing their modern apprenticeships.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

15. The equal opportunities policies and procedures developed by the company are comprehensive and are reviewed regularly. They are clearly written and easy to understand. The policies and procedures are shared with the nurseries and all apprentices receive written copies of the policies at induction. Equal opportunities is integral to the training programme. The staff use tutorials and planning time effectively to increase apprentices' awareness of equal opportunities issues.

16. The company maintains detailed records of staff ethnicity and gender. There is an imbalance in favour of women and a lack of minority ethnic staff typical of this occupational area. Despite this, staff work hard to ensure an awareness of the issues and provide opportunities to celebrate diversity in the nurseries. The company is also involved in a project, run in partnership with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), to attract more men to nursery work.

17. Some aspects of the company's practice on equal opportunities need improving. There is no systematic professional development in equal opportunities for senior staff. Checks are not always carried out to ensure that new staff have fully understood the company's policies and procedures for equal opportunities. The equal opportunities statement in the original brochure promoting the nurseries has been omitted in a new provisional brochure.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 2**

18. The company has effective quality assurance procedures which cover all aspects of its work. However, the quality assurance policy was only formalised in February 2001 and it does not fully reflect the wide range of quality assurance activities carried out by the company.

19. Internal verification arrangements are very good. Four of the five staff at the centre are qualified internal verifiers. There is a detailed schedule for sampling apprentices' portfolios and for sampling across all assessors and all types of evidence. Company staff regularly observe work-based assessors as part of their quality assurance procedures.

20. Feedback from apprentices about their courses is systematically collected through questionnaires at the start, in the middle and at the end of the training programmes. Staff from the training centre and the nurseries also evaluate all short courses. The company takes action, as appropriate, on issues and suggestions raised by the apprentices and staff.

21. The self-assessment process is not yet fully developed. The centre has produced two self-assessment reports. The latest one was partially updated in January 2001. Not all staff were involved in the self-assessment and not all have a thorough understanding of the quality assurance issues. The self-assessment report did not identify strengths and weaknesses, or provide grades for leadership and management, quality assurance and equal opportunities. However, the centre does have a detailed up-to-date action plan that covers all aspects of quality assurance, which is used as a working document by the whole team. Revision of the quality assurance framework and development of the self-assessment process are areas identified in the centre's business plan.

Good Practice
<i>The company provides financial support for driving lessons by paying for them up front, then allowing staff to repay the company from their wages on a monthly basis, at an affordable rate. The company allows staff to start and finish their work at times to fit in with family arrangements. The training centre also provides childminding facilities for staff.</i>