

INSPECTION REPORT

Kindercare Childcare Centres Limited Reinspection

26 November 2002



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. 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 **learndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- learning and job preparation programmes funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

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.

SUMMARY

The provider

Kindercare Childcare Centres Limited is now part of the Busy Bees group, one of the largest providers of childcare in the country. The Kindercare name has been retained and it continues to operate nine day nurseries, three of which are workplace nurseries for national companies and government agencies. Kindercare Childcare Centres Limited also provides out of school care. The company became an approved assessment centre in 1999. It has 250 staff, of whom 44 are advanced modern apprentices. A training co-ordinator, employed by Busy Bees, oversees the training and assessment of the learners who are employees in the company's nurseries.

Modern apprenticeship training is funded through a contract with the Lancashire Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The unemployment rate in Lancashire is 2.7 per cent, which is close to the national average of 3 per cent. Preston has substantial minority ethnic communities, comprising 15 per cent of the population. This compares with less than 2 per cent in Blackpool and 6.2 per cent nationally. In 2001, the proportion of school leavers in Lancashire achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 50 per cent, close to the national average of 47.9 per cent.

Overall judgement

The Adult Learning Inspectorate's inspection in June 2001 found that training for learners on early years programmes was unsatisfactory, as were the organisation's leadership and management and arrangements for equality of opportunity. Quality assurance of the training was poor. At the end of the reinspection most aspects of the provision were found to be satisfactory apart from quality assurance which, although improved, remains unsatisfactory.

Grades awarded

| | Original | Reinspection |
|----------------------------------|----------|--------------|
| Leadership and management | 4 | 3 |
| Contributory grades: | | |
| Equality of opportunity | 4 | 3 |
| Quality assurance | 5 | 4 |

| | Original | Reinspection |
|--|----------|--------------|
| Health, social care & public services | 4 | 3 |
| Contributory grades: | | |
| Work-based learning for young people | 4 | 3 |

KINDERCARE CHILDCARE CENTRES LIMITED REINSPECTION

During the reinspection process, the inspection team identified the following key strengths, weaknesses and other improvements needed:

KEY STRENGTHS

- effective strategies to improve retention and achievement rates
- comprehensive policies and practices to ensure equality of opportunity
- good retention rates and progression within the company
- good opportunities to learn at work

KEY WEAKNESSES

- insufficient impact of quality assurance procedures
- poor assessment of key skills
- inadequate initial assessment

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- develop internal verification practices
- more training for nursery managers in equality and diversity
- better use of workplace evidence for assessment purposes

THE REINSPECTION

1. Reinspection was conducted in two stages. A total of 12 inspection days was used. The first visit was on 26, 27 and 28 November 2002. The second stage was completed on 4, 5 and 6 February. Kindercare Childcare Centres Limited (Kindercare) had prepared a revised self-assessment report for inspectors to examine.

Grades awarded to learning sessions at the original inspection

| | 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 |

Grades awarded to learning sessions at reinspection

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

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

During the reinspection process, the inspection team identified the following strengths, weaknesses and other improvements needed:

STRENGTHS

- effective strategies to improve retention and achievement rates
- good internal communications
- good staff development
- comprehensive policies and practices for equality of opportunity

WEAKNESSES

- poor management of one subcontractor
- insufficient impact of quality assurance procedures
- inadequate sharing of good practice

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- closer management of resources for training
- better facilities for learners to work on NVQs in some nurseries
- more training for nursery managers in equality and diversity
- develop internal verification practices

2. The management structure of Kindercare has changed since the original inspection. The training co-ordinator's post is now full time and exclusively devoted to training. Many new initiatives have been put in place to improve the training programme. One of the most effective has been the strategy to improve retention and achievement rates through staff training and improved management of the training, assessment and review process. Unit achievement of national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in the past six months has been good. Attendance at training is now closely monitored and learners who are thought to be at risk of dropping out or failing are given extra assessment time, visits or additional support.

3. Internal communications at Kindercare are now good. There are frequent and productive meetings at all levels. The training co-ordinator attends and reports to the nursery manager meetings to ensure training issues are communicated effectively. Useful records are kept. The roles of nursery managers, assessors and learners are now clear and managers set targets for unit completion which are monitored. Staff have had extra training in assessment and review practices, in addition to information technology (IT) skills and a wide range of staff training offered by the Busy Bees group. There has been an improvement in the way staff work with learners.

4. The management of a main subcontractor is poor. The management responsibility is unclear, there is no contract or service level agreement and target-setting is ineffective. The personnel concerned are not part of the company's appraisal process and no records of informal meetings are kept. The subcontractor carries out most of the off-the-job training and internal verification. Resources for training have improved since the original inspection, but they are not monitored sufficiently closely and learners are not encouraged to make the most of them.

5. Kindercare recruits once a year to the training programme during the summer. The system used in the past for assessing the literacy and numeracy needs was inadequate. No learners have been identified as needing additional support. Additional informal non-specialist support is given on an individual basis as needed and a new, more thorough system for initial assessment has been developed for the next recruitment phase.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

6. Since the original inspection, Kindercare's approach to equal opportunities has improved. Kindercare has revised its main policy which underlines the rights of all staff, including learners, and points out the relevant legislation. It clearly states the company's beliefs and values on equality of opportunity and includes policies and procedures for dealing with racial harassment, harassment and bullying. There are procedures relating to the policies for staff recruitment and for reviewing and updating the policies. All learners know about and understand the complaints procedure. Key processes are monitored for equality of opportunity and data kept. Marketing materials and photographs are carefully chosen to contain no stereotypical images. Equal opportunities data are analysed on recruitment and selection, leavers and achievers. Findings are analysed and targets are set on an annual basis to improve the involvement of men and those from a minority ethnic background. The company has developed an equal opportunities action plan which is monitored and updated but this does not cover access to assessment which has affected some learners and prevented them from making good progress. Some nurseries have poor rest facilities and learners have nowhere to do their written work in the nursery, to spend time with their assessor or for progress reviews. There is poor access to the training room for people with restricted mobility. Nursery managers are not being given sufficient training in equality and diversity issues that they apply to their staff.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 4**

7. The arrangements for assuring the quality of Kindercare's training are unsatisfactory. New policies and procedures for assuring the quality of training have been developed in the past three months and are not yet fully implemented. These cover most aspects of the training process but some do not focus on the learners' experience. For example, the observation of teaching criteria does not include emphasis on whether learning is taking place. Many of these procedures remain untried and tested and staff are not yet aware of their content. The yearly schedule of monthly internal audits has only just begun. There has been insufficient monitoring of the work of a main subcontractor. Now Kindercare is part of the larger Busy Bees group, which also offers government-funded training, there is a chance for good practice to be shared between the companies to further improve the training process. There is no system in place for this at present. Internal verification has improved but is not recorded in sufficient detail and meetings do not include enough activities to standardise assessment and verification processes across all assessment staff.

| Good Practice |
|---|
| <p><i>The company monitors attendance at off-the-job training closely, and all learners who attend 85 per cent of their training sessions, are given an attendance certificate. Attendance rates have increased. The company has two evenings a year when learners' achievements are celebrated by a presentation of certificates by a senior director. This is attended by learners' families, friends and staff at the nurseries.</i></p> |

AREAS OF LEARNING

Health, social care & public services

Grade 3

| Programmes inspected | Number of learners | Contributory grade |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Work-based learning for young people | 44 | 3 |

During the reinspection process, the inspection team identified the following strengths, weaknesses and other improvements needed:

STRENGTHS

- good opportunities to learn at work
- good retention rates and progression within the company
- very effective induction

WEAKNESSES

- poor assessment of key skills
- inadequate initial assessment

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better use of workplace evidence for assessment purposes

8. The company has developed good on-the-job training to enable learners to develop new skills at work. All learners are employed in the company's nurseries. They are valued by the company and regarded as full members of staff. Since the previous inspection, learners are now able to gain experience of working with different age ranges by moving to work with a different age group every six weeks. This has also helped to provide more opportunities for NVQ assessment. Many supervisors understand NVQs and managers of nurseries are generally better informed of the training programme and able to plan training and assessment at work. Some assessors are given more time to assess, and peripatetic assessors are employed to ensure learners are assessed frequently. Learners are paid to attend training or given extra time off and attendance at training sessions has improved. Work placements are well monitored for health and safety and for nursery practice.

9. Retention rates remain good. Of those who began training in 1999-2000, 62 per cent have completed the full modern apprenticeship framework or remained in training.

Rates have improved each year since, at 64 per cent in 2000-01 and 76 per cent in 2001-02. All of the 17 learners who started in 2002 remain in training. There are good opportunities for progression within the company. Many of the assessors and managers interviewed during the inspection, were encouraged to seek promotion once they had completed their work-based learning programme. They have progressed within the company to their current roles. Of the 39 who began the programme in 1999-2000 and are no longer in training, 48 per cent completed the full framework. Twenty-one per cent remain in training.

10. The company's group induction has now been extended from two to three days and includes a more in-depth focus on equal opportunities and health and safety, including more practical tasks. The three-day group induction is followed by an eight-week workplace induction for each learner, who is allocated a mentor and given a comprehensive folder of policies and procedures. Practical skills training and individual support are offered, along with coaching and supervision, to ensure gaps in knowledge and practice are dealt with. The nursery manager spends time with new learners on three occasions during the eight-week period to ensure that they are well informed and settled into the nursery routines. Workplace inductions are extended to three months for those who need it. Learners complete a questionnaire in the following two months to check understanding. The induction is reviewed annually and feedback from learners is used to develop this further.

11. Since the original inspection, significant improvements have been made to the review process. There is a more effective process and progress review document and reviewers have been trained to use this. Progress reviews are more frequent and are monitored for frequency and quality of completed documents. Assessment practices have also improved. There is better action-planning of the elements of the NVQ units. Assessment is more effective and comprehensive and assessors receive better training and support.

12. The assessment of key skills is still poor. Some changes have been made since the original inspection and new key skills tasks, relevant to childcare, are integrated with the training programme. These tasks have been linked to key skills and vocational units but learners are not aware of this yet. Staff are still gaining confidence with key skills and training has been arranged for assessors and nursery managers. The majority of learners on programme are not aware how key skills are assessed, and do not know about external testing. The company has not been using practice tests. The company has a list of learners who are exempt from testing and those that require testing but this has not been shared with learners. Key skills training is still introduced too late, at the end of the level 2 NVQ. Some learners have completed the level 3 NVQ and have not completed one key skills unit. There is no cross-referencing of key skills on childcare observation sheets. There is insufficient assessment of key skills in the workplace.

13. Initial assessments are inadequate. The present learners have had their basic skills assessed but some tests are not accurately marked or interpreted. The test is too basic and does not assess more advanced key skills. Recently, the company has identified

new procedures and tests for initial assessment but these have not been tried or tested. None of the current learners have been assessed as needing additional support for literacy and numeracy. Two learners are receiving additional individual time with their tutor to help them organise their written work.

14. There are many useful work products, such as plans covering early learning goals, letters to parents, contact with parents, contributions to staff meetings and teamworking, but these are not used as evidence in portfolios.