

INSPECTION REPORT

In Touch Care Limited

06 May 2003



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 Jobcentre Plus programmes. 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 learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training 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.

Overall judgement

Where the overall judgement is that the provision is adequate, only those aspects of the provision which are less than satisfactory will be reinspected.

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:

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

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. A statement as to whether the provision is adequate or not is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

INSPECTION REPORT

In Touch Care Limited

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. In Touch Care Limited (ITC) is a privately owned company which was established in 1994 to provide work-based learning in care in South Yorkshire. ITC has recently moved into a new training centre in Sheffield, where the company trains foundation and advanced modern apprentices, and learners working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs), in health care, oral health and care for early years. ITC also provides a range of commercial training, including NVQs for learners over 25 and the supervised practice programme for non-British nurses.
2. The executive director manages the company and shares ownership of it with her husband, who is a non-executive director. The senior management team consists of the executive director, a senior manager for work-based learning, a senior manager for the supervised practice programme and four senior supervisors. The senior manager for work-based learning is responsible for the operational management of the government-funded training and the executive director is responsible for strategic developments, quality assurance systems and policies and procedures. The four senior supervisors report to the senior manager for work-based learning, who in turn reports to the executive director.
3. South Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funds ITC's modern apprenticeships and NVQs for young people.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Health, social care & public services

4. There are 124 learners on health and care training programmes, of whom 34 are foundation modern apprentices, 10 are advanced modern apprentices, and 80 are working towards NVQs at levels 2 or 3. There are 79 learners on health care training programmes, of whom 18 are foundation modern apprentices and five are advanced modern apprentices. Of the remaining 56 learners, 44 are working towards NVQs at levels 2 or 3 in care and 12 are working towards NVQs at level 2 in oral health. In early years care and education training programmes there are 32 learners, of whom 16 are foundation modern apprentices, five are advanced modern apprentices, and 11 are working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3.
5. Most of the learners are employed, with 97 per cent of health care learners and 45 per cent of early years learners in employment. The remaining learners are on work placements in local nursing homes, residential homes, domiciliary and daycare centres, dental practices, a children's centre, private nurseries, schools, crèches and pre-school centres. Most health care learners and all oral care learners receive training in the workplace. ITC provides early years learners with off-the-job training at its training centre. Most assessment is carried out by ITC's assessors, who visit the learners in their workplaces approximately every four weeks to plan and carry out assessments of work practice.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	5
Number of inspection days	20
Number of learner interviews	41
Number of staff interviews	44
Number of employer interviews	17
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	1

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

6. The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, ITC's leadership and management are good. Its approach to equality of opportunity and its quality assurance arrangements are also good. The quality of work-based learning in care is good.

GRADES

grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = unsatisfactory, grade 5 = very weak

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

Health, social care & public services	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

7. **The retention and achievement rates for learners at ITC are very good.** Learners are competent and professional in the workplace and are able to work independently. Learners' portfolios are good and the evidence is based on their work practice.

8. **Some of the learners make slow progress towards achievement of their qualifications.** Of the current learners, 17 per cent are still in learning, although their period of funding is complete. ITC has secured additional funding to provide extra visits from assessors to enable these learners to achieve. There has been a delay in starting and completing key skills training for some learners.

Quality of education and training

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	3	1	0	0	0	4
Total	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	4

9. Seventy-five per cent of the learning sessions that the inspectors observed were good. There were no unsatisfactory learning sessions.

10. **ITC's assessment practice is good.** There is a good range of work-based evidence in learners' portfolios. There is effective use of holistic assessment based on practice-based assessments designed by ITC. Assessors plan assessments well and learners understand what they need to do.

11. **The teaching and learning in childcare are good.** Teachers are enthusiastic, demonstrate good presentation skills and give learners positive reinforcement. Lesson plans are comprehensive and detailed. Those learners who are employed and are working towards an NVQ at level 3 receive good individual coaching from their assessors in the workplace.

12. **ITC's staff and their employers provide the learners with good training support.** Assessors spend considerable time in the workplace on each visit supporting and guiding the learners. This support enables learners to make good progress towards their qualifications and to take responsibility for their own learning.

13. **The initial assessment of learners' skills is comprehensive.** However, the results of initial assessment are often recorded inadequately and it is unclear how ITC uses these to formulate learners' individual learning plan. Many learners identified as needing support with basic skills do not use the specialist help available and some are unaware of this facility. Most of them rely on their assessors, who give increased levels of support but do not have the appropriate expertise.

14. Resources to support learning are satisfactory. All staff are well qualified and experienced in the care profession. There is a wide range of learning materials and some textbooks.

15. The key skills training provided for learners is satisfactory. Staff are receiving training and support from a key skills tutor to enable them to fulfil their role more effectively. Learners use key skills builders and key skills files to help them identify their abilities and develop their knowledge.

Leadership and management

16. **ITC has extensive and constructive links with external organisations.** The company

uses these to develop its strategic planning and monitor external changes and developments. Every two months, ITC reviews new developments in staff meetings.

17. Internal communication is effective throughout the company. ITC has a formal meeting structure and each meeting has a clear remit. The meetings are effective forums for staff to disseminate information and to highlight good practice from within the company. The key skills tutor is helping assessors to understand the most effective ways to support and guide the learners in the use of the key skills learning materials. Staff from across the company have a good understanding of its strategic objectives and seek staff development opportunities to help the company meet them.

18. ITC has developed a good strategic approach to the introduction of distance learning. The distance learning packs cover a range of care and generic topics. ITC develops e-learning materials and has worked with four other providers from across the region to develop a series of on-line computer packages. These packages are effective in increasing learners' access to good learning materials, which help them to progress at a rate appropriate to their abilities and circumstances.

19. ITC's staff are committed to continuous personal development. All staff have a skills audit, which contributes effectively to their individual development plans. Staff development is also closely linked to the company's business plan, which includes the development of in-house expertise in basic skills training and support for distance learners.

20. ITC promotes equality of opportunity effectively. Learners and staff have a good understanding of equality of opportunity and broader diversity issues. ITC uses good equal opportunities information in staff and learner inductions and all staff receive continuous training in this area. ITC collects data on the gender, disability and ethnicity of its learners, but does not use this information to plan effective recruitment strategies.

21. ITC has a strong, effective commitment to continuous improvement. The recent revision of the quality assurance system is good and deals with the weaknesses identified by the recent review. Senior management are responsive to feedback from staff, which has led to changes in the company's management structure and improvements in its training provision.

22. ITC involves all of its staff effectively in the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report and development plan are satisfactory. All staff contribute to the discussions on the strengths and weaknesses of the company against the 'Common Inspection Framework'. However, the views of learners and employers are not used sufficiently. The inspectors identified many of the same strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report.

23. The internal verification system is good and the internal verification process is completed to a satisfactory standard.

24. There is insufficient co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. Ongoing

communication about the nature and progress of individual learners' on- and off-the-job training is not always satisfactory. Employers do not receive a copy of the training programme for study days and are not fully involved in learners' progress reviews.

25. ITC makes insufficient use of improvement targets. While ITC is committed to improving the retention and achievement rates of its learners, there are no specific targets set by which it can monitor progress. Starting points from which improvements will be made are not firmly established. There is insufficient analysis of the financial implications of strategic growth targets. There is also insufficient use of short-term achievement targets in learners' individual learning plans.

26. There is insufficient use of management information to monitor the progress of learners' achievements. Planning for short-term achievement in the individual learning plans is insufficient.

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- extensive and constructive links with external organisations
- effective internal communication
- good strategic approach to the development of distance learning
- effective continuous staff development
- effective promotion of equality of opportunity
- effective continuous improvement of provision
- good staff involvement in the self-assessment process

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of improvement targets
- insufficient use of management information

Health, social care & public services

Strengths

- very good retention and achievement rates
- good assessment practice
- good teaching and learning in childcare
- good training support for learners
- effective teamwork among staff

Weaknesses

- slow progress by some learners towards achievement of their qualifications
- insufficient co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT IN TOUCH CARE LIMITED:

- the knowledge that they will get a qualification
- the ability to work at their own pace
- the opportunity to discuss their concerns with others in the workplace
- the opportunity to use distance learning materials
- the good support from the employers and assessors
- the knowledge that someone will listen to their problems
- the fact that staff visit them and give individual attention
- the minibuss transport to the training centre and local training events

WHAT LEARNERS THINK IN TOUCH CARE LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:

- the motivation of some learners
- the range of activities available on study days

KEY CHALLENGES FOR IN TOUCH CARE LIMITED:

- establish performance indicators and set improvement targets throughout the organisation
- co-ordinate the on- and off-the-job training more effectively
- continue to develop the management information system
- reduce the proportion of learners who fail to achieve by their target completion date

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- extensive and constructive links with external organisations
- effective internal communication
- good strategic approach to the development of distance learning
- effective continuous staff development
- effective promotion of equality of opportunity
- effective continuous improvement of provision
- good staff involvement in the self-assessment process

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of improvement targets
- insufficient use of management information

27. The senior management team has extensive and constructive links with regional and national care organisations. ITC use these links to develop its strategic planning and monitor external changes and developments. Every two months, ITC has staff meetings to review new developments, particularly the changes to legislation affecting the care sector, and passes this information to the learners' employers. ITC's executive director is particularly proactive within the regional training networks to co-ordinate and/or contribute to funding applications for improvement initiatives. These have included initiatives to increase the achievement of learners who have made slow progress, engage employers more in the training process and extend the off-the-job induction period in order to establish the learners' training programme before they begin their employment placement. Examples of sharing good practice across the region include the development of a learners' perception questionnaire and an individual learning plan document.

28. In partnership with the local LSC, ITC has successfully developed a new approach towards care qualifications. The new qualification is designed to provide learners aged between 16 and 18 with the opportunity to experience a range of aspects of the care profession and help them make an appropriate career choice. Throughout the duration of this full-time training programme, the time learners spend on the job at their employers' premises progresses from part-time to full-time work. When they reach the age of 18 the learners spend a further 13 weeks completing the personal care element of their modern apprenticeship framework.

29. In September 2002, ITC began providing the vocational general certificate of

secondary education (GCSE) in health and social care at a local secondary school. ITC's aim is to use its expertise to introduce care into the school curriculum and to provide a clear progression route into the care profession. ITC also hosts careers events for representatives from the local schools and careers service.

30. Internal communication is effective throughout the company. ITC has a formal meeting structure, which includes meetings for management, all staff, area of learning/specialist teams, the quality assurance team, the teaching quality team, and individuals. Each meeting has a clear remit and staff keep appropriate minutes. The meetings are effective forums for staff to disseminate information collected from external events, such as awarding body training days. They are also used to highlight good practice from within the company, which includes the differing experience of the LSC-funded provision and ITC's commercial training work. Examples of good practice are also brought in from outside the company and staff participate in full and open discussions, which help to resolve problems and move the company forward. Staff from across the company have a good understanding of its strategic objectives and seek out development opportunities to help the company meet them. Staff use a communications book to ensure that business information needs are shared effectively. This is less effective for the staff who only visit the office once each week. Employers receive information about each learner at the beginning of the training programme and some assessors keep employers informed of their learners' progress throughout the period of training. However, ongoing communication about the nature and progress of individual learners' on- and off-the-job training is not always satisfactory.

31. ITC has developed a good strategic approach to the introduction of distance learning. Its aim is to increase the number of learners and to offer them alternative approaches to gaining their background knowledge. ITC has recently introduced distance learning packs, which cover a range of care and generic topics, including health and safety, infection control, administration of medicines and the NVQ qualifications. ITC develops e-learning materials and has worked with four other providers from across the region to develop a series of on-line computer packages. ITC has contributed to the development of an on-line initial assessment package for care learners and an on-line unit on equality of opportunity. Forty of ITC's learners have recently taken part in the pilot phase of the project, which was to carry out the on-line initial assessment and complete three of the available units.

32. ITC's staff are committed to continuous personal development, which the company recognise as a strength in its most recent self-assessment report. All staff have a skills audit, which contributes effectively to their individual development plans. Staff development is closely linked to ITC's business plan, which includes the development of in-house expertise in basic skills training and support for distance learners. Most staff are studying additional qualifications, such as internal verifiers' awards, assessors' awards, basic skills qualifications or a degree in management. ITC trained several of its key staff and promoted them into management or supervisory positions.

33. ITC manages its resources efficiently. It has recently moved into good temporary accommodation in preparation for a relocation to purpose-built premises in the next two

years. Staff numbers are appropriate to the number of learners. All staff are well qualified and have considerable experience in the care profession. Resources to support learning are satisfactory and the company is developing new materials, such as e learning and distance-learning materials. ITC encourages employers to accept learning direct points of delivery (pods) so that both they and the learners can access IT-based learning materials. A small number of laptop computers are also available for learners who have no access to computers in their workplace.

34. ITC's approach to supporting the development of learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills is satisfactory. ITC tests all learners' literacy and numeracy skills. Assessors provide increased support to learners with identified literacy and numeracy support needs, but many staff do not have the appropriate expertise. Due to the lack of trained staff in this area, ITC has arrangements with an external organisation to provide specialist support for these learners. However, many learners identified as needing support with basic skills do not use the specialist help available and some are unaware of this facility. The responsibility for co-ordinating basic skills support has recently been allocated to a member of staff who is receiving appropriate training to improve the effectiveness of ITC's literacy and numeracy support.

35. ITC makes insufficient use of improvement targets. The new initiatives with other regional training providers to improve retention and achievement rates on work-based learning programmes do not have firmly established starting points. Many of the targets in the new initiatives are based on regional targets and do not reflect ITC's current performance. While the company is committed to improving the retention and achievement rates of its learners, there are no specific targets set by which it can monitor progress. ITC does not use improvement targets in staff appraisals and there is insufficient use of short-term achievement targets in learners' individual learning plans. The financial implications of strategic growth targets are not analysed sufficiently. ITC recognises the insufficient use of targets as an area for improvement in its self-assessment report and is developing strategies to improve its use of data.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

36. ITC promotes equality of opportunity effectively. The company has an equal opportunities policy with clearly defined aims. Learners and staff have a good understanding of equality of opportunity and broader diversity issues. ITC uses good equal opportunities information in staff and learner inductions and all staff receive continuous training in this area. The company uses feedback from these training events to improve its training provision and to develop resource materials. Equality of opportunity is covered at learners' progress reviews to ensure that they understand diversity issues in relation to their own treatment as employees, and their professional responsibility as carers. Staff and learner handbooks include ITC's procedures regarding complaints and harassment, which are well established and understood by all. ITC deals with any complaints effectively.

37. Employers are required to have their own equal opportunities policy or to comply with ITC's policy. ITC assists employers in meeting this standard. There has been some

marketing of the training programmes to potential learners from under-represented groups, such as men and minority ethnic groups. ITC collects data on the gender, disability and ethnicity of its learners, but does not use this information to plan effective recruitment strategies. While 5 per cent of the local population are from minority ethnic groups, they comprise only 1 per cent of health care learners.

38. ITC is developing a range of e-learning and distance-learning materials to provide access to care learning for a wide range of potential learners. The company recognised this as a strength in its most recent self-assessment report. This new approach to learning is also used by existing learners who prefer self-directed study or cannot access off-the-job training sessions due to their work or personal commitments. ITC has developed an e-learning module on equal opportunities. Learners with restricted mobility have good access to ITC's premises. ITC also provides a minibuss service to improve learners' access to the training centre and to training events in the region.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 2

39. ITC has a strong, effective commitment to continuous improvement. The company recognised this as a strength in its most recent self-assessment report. The quality assurance system is good and has been revised recently after a full review. In 1995, ITC achieved the ISO 9001 standard, which is an international quality assurance standard, and in 2002 a recommendation was made to implement a new quality assurance system, which meets the ISO 9001:2000 standard. In January 2003, ITC introduced this new system, which is comprehensive and deals with the weaknesses identified by the review. The company has effective procedures for the internal auditing of the quality assurance systems. Six internal auditors are responsible for different areas of the quality assurance system and there is a schedule for internal audits, which is complete and up to date.

40. ITC's senior management are responsive to feedback from staff. For example, at the suggestion of staff, they introduced a new layer of senior supervisors into the management structure, to allow for more effective delegation and responsiveness. Another staff suggestion resulted in the provision of laptop computers for learners who do not have access to the Internet, so that they can use the new e-learning materials. One member of staff has been given a day each week to improve consistency across the LSC-funded and commercial training teams.

41. The work-based learning manager observes the assessors in the workplace twice each year. Observations have been effective in highlighting inconsistencies in some areas of the assessors' work, such as setting short-term targets, and ITC is taking action to improve the provision. The executive manager carries out further observations and awards grades in line with inspection practice. The internal verification system is good and the internal verification process is completed to a satisfactory standard. Some evidence and assessment documents have not been signed or dated.

42. ITC involves all of its staff effectively in the self-assessment process. The company has produced self-assessment reports every year since 1998. The development plan is updated every two months and is a detailed and effective document for ensuring that

the proposed quality improvement initiatives are carried out as required. The self-assessment process starts with an initial one-day workshop for all staff, where they discuss the company's strengths and weaknesses against the 'Common Inspection Framework'. Staff review and contribute to the draft report at staff, team and management meetings, and all staff receive a copy of the finished report. Good use is made of the minutes of meetings and other documents in the development of the report. However, the views of learners and employers are not used sufficiently. Learners' feedback is collected routinely but without sufficient analysis to contribute to the improvement process. A new system of collecting learners' feedback by questionnaire was established in February 2003 and has only just been analysed. The self-assessment report acknowledges that there has been a poor response to employers' questionnaires and employers do not receive feedback on the results of their contributions. The inspectors identified many of the same strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. The self-assessment report and development plan are satisfactory.

43. There is insufficient use of management information to monitor the progress of learners' achievements. Information is collected on a central computer database, which includes the learners' start and end dates and their core and option unit choices, but this only collects information on unit achievement. All of the target dates for the achievement of units are set to the programme end date. Internal verifiers have a clear impression of the progress each learner is making, but assessors are insufficiently clear about short-term progress monitoring. There is insufficient planning for short-term achievement in the individual learning plans. Internal verifiers consider the progress of learners when they internally verify the learners' portfolios of evidence, but this is only at three-month intervals.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Health, social care & public services

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	124	2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- very good retention and achievement rates
- good assessment practice
- good teaching and learning in childcare
- good training support for learners
- effective teamwork among staff

Weaknesses

- slow progress by some learners towards achievement of their qualifications
- insufficient co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training

Achievement and standards

44. The retention and achievement rates for learners at ITC are very good. This was not identified as a key strength in the company's most recent self-assessment report. The percentage of learners who have stayed on their training programme and achieved over the past three years is high on all training programmes, despite a downturn in achievement in the last two years. ITC report that this downturn was due to its approach to key skills training, which it has now developed significantly and includes the new e-learning initiatives. Learners are competent and professional in the workplace and are able to work independently. Learners' portfolios of evidence are good and evidence is based on their work practice. Most learners are making satisfactory or good progress towards achievement of their qualification. Learners are motivated by a high-profile award ceremony each year, where a guest of honour from the care profession makes the presentations.

45. Some of the learners make slow progress towards achievement of their qualifications. Of the current learners, 17 per cent are still in learning, although their period of funding is complete. ITC has secured additional funding to provide extra visits to enable these learners to achieve. There has been a delay in starting and completing key skills training for some learners.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	16		13		17											
Retained*	1		9	69	12	71										
Successfully completed	1		8	62	13	76										
Still in learning	10		0	0	0	0										

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

LSC funded work-based learning																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	42		22		15											
Retained*	2		17	77	13	87										
Successfully completed	2		14	64	13	87										
Still in learning	34		0	0	0	0										

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

LSC funded work-based learning																
NVQ Training																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	139		139		130											
Retained*	33		118	85	101	78										
Successfully completed	33		105	76	105	81										
Still in learning	73		7	5	0	0										

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

Quality of education and training

46. ITC's assessment practice is good. Learners understand the NVQ standards and refer to them to ensure that they are providing appropriate evidence. There is a good range of work-based evidence in learners' portfolios, including detailed observation records, testimonials from workplace supervisors and learners' accounts of activities carried out in the workplace. These provide evidence to accredit both the performance

and background knowledge components of the modern apprenticeship programme. Questions and answers are used to supplement evidence where necessary. There is effective use of holistic assessment based on practice-based assessments designed by ITC. Each practice-based assessment covers a range of units. Assessors plan assessments well and learners understand what they need to do. Some assessment evidence has not been signed as required.

47. The teaching and learning in childcare are good. In the three sessions that the inspectors observed, teachers were enthusiastic, demonstrated good presentation skills and gave learners positive reinforcement. Lesson plans are comprehensive and detailed, and the handouts and activity sheets are good. All learners working towards an NVQ at level 2 attend off-the-job training at the training centre. Learners working towards an NVQ at level 3 who are employed are not usually able to attend sessions at the training centre, but they receive good individual coaching from their assessors in the workplace. Assessors use appropriate learning materials in the workplace and many learners use the Internet for research.

48. ITC's staff and the employers provide the learners with good training support. Assessors visit the learners at least once every four weeks, although they visit some of them every week or every two weeks if they need extra support. Assessors spend considerable time in the workplace on each visit supporting and guiding learners. The assessors have a friendly and relaxed relationship with the learners, but assessors make sure that the learners understand what is expected of them with detailed short-term action plans. Employers are also supportive of the learners in the workplace. They give them the opportunity to practise a wide range of skills and help them to extend their knowledge through individual support. This support enables the learners to make good progress towards their qualifications and to take responsibility for their own learning. Learners value the support they receive, but support is not always recorded fully on their individual learning plans or in review documents.

49. The initial assessment of learners' skills is comprehensive and includes basic skills and key skills tests and an interview. Learners are also required to assess themselves against a set of personal development objectives. Learners' progress against these objectives is monitored at regular intervals during the training programme. The results of the other components of the initial assessment are often recorded inadequately and it is unclear how ITC uses these to formulate learners' individual learning plans. Many learners identified as needing support with basic skills do not use the specialist help available and some are unaware of this facility. Most of them rely on their assessors, who give increased support but do not have the appropriate expertise. The responsibility for co-ordinating basic skills support has recently been allocated to a member of staff who is receiving appropriate training.

50. Resources to support learning are satisfactory. All staff are well qualified and experienced in the care profession. There is a wide range of learning materials and some textbooks to support the development of background knowledge, although some learners are unaware of these resources. ITC is developing new materials, which include e-learning and distance learning materials. Some work placements are equipped with

learnirect pods, which enable learners to access the Internet and develop their IT skills. A small number of laptop computers are also available for those learners who do not have access to computers in their workplace. The impact of these new initiatives is not yet evident.

51. The key skills training provided for learners is satisfactory. Some learners are receiving key skills training at the training centre, and others are receiving support from the assessors in the workplace. Staff are receiving training and support from a key skills tutor to enable them to fulfil their role more effectively, although some assessors are using this resource more than others. Learners use key skills builders and key skills files to help them identify their abilities and develop their knowledge.

Leadership and management

52. ITC's staff work effectively as a team and support each other. They share good practice and strive to make continuous improvements to the way they work for the benefit of their learners. Internal verifiers and assessors often carry out joint assessments to ensure that learners get immediate and accurate feedback on their work. The key skills tutor is helping assessors to understand the most effective ways to support and guide learners in the use of key skills learning materials. The key skills tutor and the assessor make joint visits to learners if a particular need is identified.

53. There is insufficient co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. Employers receive information about each learner at the beginning of the training programme and some assessors keep employers informed of their learners' progress throughout the period of training. However, ongoing communication about the nature and progress of individual learners' on- and off-the-job training is not always satisfactory. Employers do not receive a copy of the training programme for study days. The section in learners' progress review forms on planned on- and off-the-job training is often not completed adequately. Employers are not fully involved in the progress reviews, often submit their written comments separately and frequently do not receive a copy of the completed form.