

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **Tops Day Nursery Training Ltd**

**26 May 2005**



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE

## 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 aged over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learnndirect** 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.

## Pre-inspection analysis

The resources allocated to a cycle 2 inspection are primarily determined by the findings from the previous inspection. Account is also taken of information about achievement and retention obtained from the funding body, and any significant changes in the size or scope of the provision.

Where a provider has received good grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is relatively light. If the provider offers a number of areas of learning, a restricted sample is inspected.

Where a provider has received satisfactory grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is less intensive and it is possible that not all areas of learning are included.

Where there are significant unsatisfactory grades from cycle 1, the intensity of the cycle 2 inspection is broadly the same as cycle 1, and all significant areas of learning are inspected.

Providers that have not previously been inspected will receive a full inspection.

## Overall effectiveness

The grades given for areas of learning and leadership and management will be used to arrive at a judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

An **outstanding** provider should typically have leadership and management and at least half of the areas of learning judged to be a grade 1. All area of learning grades will be graded 1 or 2.

A **good** provider should have leadership and management and at least half of the area of learning grades judged to be a grade 2 or better. A good training provider should not have any grade 4s, and few grade 3s in the areas of learning.

A **satisfactory** provider should have adequate or better grades in leadership and management and in at least two thirds of the area of learning grades. An adequate provider might have a range of grades across areas of learning, some of which might be graded 4.

Provision will normally be deemed to be **inadequate** where more than one third of the area of learning grades and/or leadership and management are judged to be inadequate.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning.

## Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes, as well as to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes equality of opportunity and quality assurance. The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - inadequate*

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## **Tops Day Nursery Training Ltd**

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# INSPECTION REPORT

## DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Tops Day Nursery Training Ltd (Tops) is a private training company based in Bournemouth, Dorset. It became active in January 2004, as the separate arm of a group of companies that started trading as Tops Day Nurseries in 1990. Tops Day Nurseries consists of a chain of day nurseries across Dorset, Hampshire and Somerset. The provision has grown rapidly in recent years. Since January 2004, the management team has been based in Bournemouth. Tops offers national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and technical certificates in early years care and education at levels 2, 3, and 4 and key skills qualifications at levels 1, 2, and 3. It also offers learning and development NVQs and assessor and internal verifier awards, playwork qualifications at levels 2, 3 and 4, administration at level 2 and cleaning and support at level 1.

2. Apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships in early years care and education are funded through Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Learning and Skills Council (LSC). There are currently 76 learners, all employed by Tops. The company has a policy of promoting from within and many of the nursery managers, managers and assessors are former apprentices.

3. Tops's provision spans the three largely rural counties of Dorset, Hampshire and Somerset. The counties mix relatively prosperous areas with pockets of social and economic deprivation. The economy depends heavily on agriculture and service industries, including tourism and public sector organisations. The proportion of school leavers who achieve five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above is generally higher than the national average, at 59 per cent for Dorset in 2004 compared with the national average of 53.7 per cent. The proportion of the population coming from minority ethnic groups is 1.3 per cent in Dorset, 2.2 per cent in Hampshire and 2.7 per cent in Somerset, according to the 2001 census.

## OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

**Grade 2**

4. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** Tops's leadership and management are good. Its arrangements for equality of opportunity and quality improvement are satisfactory. Provision in health, social care and public services is good.

5. **The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment process does not identify strengths and weaknesses in equality of opportunity and quality improvement. Tops does not use supervisors' and learners' views sufficiently to contribute to an accurate evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses.

6. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** Tops has been effective in carrying out actions to promote improvements. It has introduced good recent strategies in particular to improve learners' success in achieving key skills qualifications. Learners are making good progress towards completion of their full

apprenticeship frameworks.

## KEY CHALLENGES FOR TOPS DAY NURSERY TRAINING LTD:

- continue to improve the provision of literacy and numeracy skills support
- improve collation and analysis of data and information in a systematic way
- continue with implementation of the staff development programme
- develop further strategies to promote equality of opportunity
- improve evaluation of learning during tutorials
- extend range of feedback mechanisms
- improve self-assessment process

## GRADES

*grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = inadequate*

Leadership and management		2
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		3
Quality improvement		3

Health, social care & public services			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<b>Early years</b>		2	
Apprenticeships for young people	76	2	

## ABOUT THE INSPECTION

7. The apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships in early years care and education offered by Tops were reported on and graded.

Number of inspectors	2
Number of inspection days	8
Number of learners interviewed	24
Number of staff interviewed	11
Number of employers interviewed	3
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	8

## KEY FINDINGS

### Achievements and standards

8. **Achievement rates for key skills qualifications are good.** Tops has improved the preparation for key skills tests and all learners who took recent tests passed.
9. **Retention rates for apprentices are good,** with 100 per cent of 2000-01 starters and 80 per cent of 2001-02 starters retained. Of the 83 learners who have started apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships since August 2003, 87 per cent are still in learning.
10. Learners achieve a wide range of vocational skills and knowledge of childcare. The standard of work in portfolios is satisfactory, and in some cases good.
11. **The achievement rate for apprentices starting in 2001-02 was low.** The achievement rate for 2002-03 starters is 20 per cent with three learners still in learning. Some learners have made slow progress in completing the framework. The achievement rate for advanced apprentices was in decline but new initiatives have recently been put in place and current learners are making better progress. The achievement rate for advanced apprentices has improved to 64 per cent for the 2002-03 intake.

### The quality of provision

12. **Target-setting in progress reviews is clear.** Learners are closely involved in discussing and setting targets at quarterly reviews. The targets effectively identify what is to be achieved by whom and within what timescale.
13. **Learners have a good understanding of NVQ standards.** They are able to identify opportunities for assessment and know what standards they are working towards. Portfolios are structured well and help learners understand the different elements of the NVQ and progression awards. They are of a good quality and contain copies of progress reviews and records of meetings.
14. **Workplaces are good and equipped well.** Staff are extremely welcoming and friendly. An easily accessible and useful training room is provided at each nursery and learners regularly use computers and the internet through broadband connections. Workplaces are risk-assessed and checked regularly.
15. **Learners benefit from good progression routes.** Tops has a policy of promoting learners, who have completed training, to nursery assistants and there are excellent career opportunities to progress within the company. Learners' prior experience and learning are taken into account and care is taken to ensure learners are on appropriate programmes to meet their level of ability and aspirations for the future.
16. **Learners receive good support to develop their vocational skills.** They are given good opportunities for additional training including first aid, food hygiene, health and safety, and child protection. Assessors are available at the nurseries and assessments are carried out at least monthly and often more frequently. Assessors involve learners well in regular progress reviews that are carried out quarterly. Staff at the nursery are supportive of the learners and readily help and advise them with their NVQ. Learners are kept informed of

their progress, which is monitored well.

**17. The identification of learners' literacy and numeracy skills and support needs, and the provision to meet these needs are inconsistent.** Some members of staff are well trained and skilled at teaching literacy and numeracy but others are at an early stage of their training. Diagnostic tests are in the process of being introduced and this is at different stages in each nursery. Learners who have identified literacy and numeracy skills and support needs are readily given more frequent individual support and appropriate activities are suggested to improve their skills.

### **Leadership and management**

**18. Communication at Tops is good.** Staff are kept well informed and feel well involved in the work of the company. Regular team meetings and frequent contact by phone and e-mail support effective operational management. A regular newsletter is sent by e-mail and a private intranet network gives easy access to policies, procedures and training documents.

**19. Tops has well-targeted staff development** that focuses on meeting the needs of the organisation and provides progression opportunities for learners and staff. The company has recently placed significant emphasis on literacy and numeracy qualifications. Many staff were apprentices at Tops and have progressed to assessor or tutoring roles within the organisation. Not all staff members' development needs are met before they take on additional responsibilities.

**20.** Financial arrangements are satisfactory. Since January 2004, Tops Day Nurseries operated as five companies, one of which is the training provision. Separate accounts are kept for the training provision and they are produced and reconciled quarterly.

**21.** The resources for training are managed satisfactorily. Learners and staff benefit from and appreciate flexible working arrangements that allow them achieve a good work-life balance. Learners' working and training time is programmed to include time to plan assessment and use computers and the internet.

**22.** The management of additional literacy, numeracy and language skills support is satisfactory. Learners with identified literacy and numeracy skills support needs are assisted well through extra individual support. However, some assessors are not fully qualified to provide literacy and numeracy skills support. Tops has plans in place to meet these staff training needs.

**23.** Staff appraisal arrangements are satisfactory. Annual staff appraisal includes clear identification of training needs, but is not used to set performance targets.

**24.** The strategic direction of the organisation is communicated satisfactorily and regularly. The three-year development plan generated by the self-assessment process is regularly monitored and updated by the managing director.

**25.** Safety is promoted and monitored well in the workplace. Health and safety is also monitored during learners' progress reviews, when policies are reinforced and matters such as personal protective clothing are discussed.



26. **Tops encourages strong promotion of social inclusion.** Nurseries promote a welcoming and supportive environment where there is clear commitment to equality and diversity. Learners are very positive about how well integrated they are in their work teams and feel well supported. Men feel welcome in the nursery environment and approximately 10 per cent of the learners recruited at Tops are men. The managing director gives clear strategic direction on social inclusion but Tops has no formal strategic plan to widen participation of under-represented groups or promote equality of opportunity.

27. Learners and staff have a satisfactory understanding of equality of opportunity. Tops has a range of appropriate policies and procedures. These policies are common across the nurseries and learners receive copies of them at induction. Learners' understanding of equality of opportunity is usually checked and recorded at progress reviews.

28. Tops has carried out an accessibility audit which has resulted in an action plan to improve access for those with restricted mobility. Data on gender, ethnicity and disability is collected regularly. Most learners have an equal opportunity to succeed but although significant action has been taken to improve the effectiveness of individual support for learners with identified additional learning needs, there are still learners who do not receive appropriate or timely support.

29. A clear and useful quality assurance manual outlines the key quality assurance processes and policies. Policies are updated regularly and most staff and learners are aware of the quality improvement systems used. Tops is committed to quality improvement and usually takes prompt action when the need for improvement is identified.

30. **Quality improvement processes are insufficiently developed.** Although Tops has introduced a range of useful quality improvement mechanisms, its use of them is not yet fully developed. Learners' feedback is not systematically used to produce improvements. No written analysis of learners' feedback takes place, and the response to learner feedback is sometimes slow. The effect of changes introduced to improve provision is not systematically monitored. However, staff are committed to improving the quality of provision. Informal mechanisms, rather than formal systems, are used to deal with concerns and improve the quality of provision.

31. Internal verification is satisfactory. Assessors meet regularly for standardisation discussions and actions are taken promptly to deal with any concerns identified. Feedback to assessors on assessment within portfolios varies in quality and sometimes is not sufficiently detailed. An appropriate sampling frame is used to systematically plan and carry out the verification process.

32. The self-assessment process is not sufficiently developed. Not all staff and learners are fully consulted within the self-assessment process. The most recent self-assessment report does not identify strengths and weakness to support the grades given for equality of opportunity and quality improvement arrangements.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Strengths**

- good communication
- well-targeted staff development
- strong promotion of social inclusion

### **Weaknesses**

- insufficient development of quality improvement processes

## **Health, social care & public services**

### ***Early years***

***Grade 2***

#### *Strengths*

- good achievement rates for key skills qualifications
- good retention rates for apprentices
- clear target-setting in progress reviews
- good understanding of NVQ standards by learners
- good workplaces
- good progression routes for learners
- good support for learners' development of vocational skills

#### *Weaknesses*

- low achievement rates for apprentices starting in 2001-02
- inconsistent provision for literacy and numeracy skills support needs

## **WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT TOPS DAY NURSERY TRAINING LTD:**

- the friendly staff and relaxed atmosphere
- the way assessors are accessible and give useful answers
- individual training and small tutorial groups
- doing the progression awards and learning new things
- the good support
- 'being spoken to an adult and the way we are listened to'
- 'being able to be assessed as I work with the children'
- 'working at my own pace'
- getting clear feedback on progress
- 'the way we get to have our say'

## **WHAT LEARNERS THINK TOPS DAY NURSERY TRAINING LTD COULD IMPROVE:**

- the amount of time allowed to be booked out to complete portfolios and plan assessments
- the number of books on diversity and culture
- support for maths
- the ways of explaining things sometimes
- the speed of progress with key skills qualifications
- the amount of opportunities to leave the nursery rooms to get on with the training programme
- the amount of space to write on knowledge evidence sheets

## DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

### LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

#### Strengths

- good communication
- well-targeted staff development
- strong promotion of social inclusion

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient development of quality improvement processes

33. Communication at Tops is good. Staff are kept well informed and feel well involved in the work of the company. The managing director holds useful training team meetings every month at the main office. The dates of these meetings are fixed annually. The managing director visits each nursery approximately every month. Regular team meetings which include learners and training staff are also held at each nursery. Staff members' frequent contact by phone and e-mail supports effective operational management. A regular newsletter is sent by e-mail and a private intranet gives easy access to policies, procedures and training documents.

34. Tops has well-targeted staff development that focuses on meeting the needs of the organisation. This includes recent significant emphasis on literacy and numeracy qualifications. To support learners more effectively, some training staff are taking learning and development, and literacy and numeracy qualifications up to level 4. In addition, staff are encouraged to attend short courses relevant to their job roles. Tops has developed well-established progression opportunities for staff. Many staff were apprentices at Tops and have progressed to assessor or tutoring roles within the organisation. However, not all staff members have their development needs met before they take on additional responsibilities.

35. Financial arrangements are satisfactory. Since January 2004, Tops Day Nurseries has operated as five companies, one of which is the training provision. Separate accounts are kept for the training provision and they are produced and reconciled quarterly.

36. The resources for training are managed satisfactorily. Appropriate decisions are made to manage the business. For example, Tops subcontracted the task of providing the data returns required by the local LSC but, following staff expansion, the company is now in the process of taking full responsibility for data inputting and analysis.

37. Staff appraisal arrangements are satisfactory. An annual cycle of staff appraisal is followed by an annual pay review. Staff appraisal includes the identification of training needs, but it is not used to set performance targets.

38. The strategic direction of the organisation is communicated satisfactorily and regularly by the managing director, who has overall responsibility for the apprenticeship scheme and the management of the nurseries. There is no management board and, as the organisation has rapidly expanded, some responsibilities have been appropriately delegated to other

members of staff. For example, a financial controller was appointed in January 2004 and a training manager is planned for appointment in August 2005. The three-year development plan generated by the self-assessment process is regularly monitored and updated by the managing director.

39. Tops recognises the importance of literacy and numeracy skills support and has an appropriate policy for this. Most learners who have literacy and numeracy skills development needs are supported well when the needs are identified, although some assessors are not fully qualified to provide this support. Literacy and numeracy skills support varies from nursery to nursery. Staff are attending appropriate training and there are plans to rectify the inconsistencies.

### **Equality of opportunity**

### **Contributory grade 3**

40. Tops encourages strong promotion of social inclusion. This is illustrated by the warm, welcoming and supportive environment at the nurseries, where there is clear commitment to equality and diversity. This has an influence on the behaviour and attitudes of the learners. Learners are very positive about how well integrated they are in their work teams and how well supported they feel. A more specific example of the commitment to social inclusion is that of making men feel welcome in the nursery environment. Tops initiated a project to attract more men into nursery work at the time of the previous inspection. At that time there were no male learners on the programme. Since then, approximately 10 per cent of the learners recruited at Tops have been men. Tops tries to ensure that a male member of staff attends careers events, and images of men working with children are included in promotional materials. The managing director gives clear strategic directions on social inclusion, but the equality and diversity action plan does not clearly state how the actions listed will be met. However, the company is investigating the possibility of offering training to travellers in the local area.

41. Tops has a range of appropriate policies and procedures on equality and diversity, including a dignity at work policy. These policies are common across the nurseries and learners are given the policies at various stages of their workplace training and induction. They are not specifically written for the learners and the extent to which these policies are discussed and explained during induction varies. Although some learners do not remember covering equality of opportunity at induction, most have a satisfactory or good understanding of the topic. Many aspects of equality and diversity are covered during the training programme, mainly with reference to working with children. An employment rights and responsibilities training unit broadens learners' understanding of equality of opportunity in relation to themselves. Learners' understanding of equality is usually checked and recorded at progress reviews. Learners are treated fairly and their understanding of the complaints and appeals procedure is monitored during progress reviews.

42. All staff attend useful equality of opportunity training events at least annually, and updates on equality of opportunity are included in staff meetings. Staff have a satisfactory understanding of equality of opportunity and diversity. Staff meetings also include feedback from some staff who have attended training events on topics such as dyslexia awareness and mental health. Each nursery has an equal opportunities representative.

43. Tops has carried out an accessibility audit which has resulted in an action plan to deal with points of non-compliance with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Data on gender, ethnicity and disability is collected regularly. Equality and diversity

impact measures have not been agreed with the local LSC, and Tops has no specific externally set targets to meet, with regard to under-represented or under-achieving groups. The extent to which Tops ensures that all learners are given an equal opportunity to succeed varies. For example, although Tops has taken significant action to improve the effectiveness of individual support for learners with identified additional learning needs, there are still learners who do not receive appropriate or timely support.

## **Quality improvement**

## **Contributory grade 3**

44. A clear and useful quality assurance manual outlines the processes and policies planned to improve the provision. Policies are updated regularly and most staff and learners are aware of the quality improvement systems used. A comprehensive development plan is regularly updated and used as a key management tool. It itemises key objectives and identifies what action should be taken by whom and by when.

45. A wide range of meetings are used well to discuss and decide on actions to improve the quality of the training provision. These meetings include monthly meetings for assessors and internal verifiers and individual meetings between the managing director and key assessors. The good and frequent communication aids the ability of the company to introduce improvements.

46. Internal verification is satisfactory. Assessors meet regularly for standardisation discussions and reports from external verifiers are at least satisfactory, with some being good. Actions are taken promptly to rectify any concerns identified. Assessment is regularly observed as part of the internal verification process. Feedback to assessors on assessment portfolios varies in quality and sometimes is not sufficiently detailed. An appropriate sampling frame is used systematically to plan and carry out the verification process.

47. Quality improvement processes are insufficiently developed. Tops is committed to quality improvement and has a strong informal quality improvement system, usually taking prompt action when the need for improvement is identified. This commitment is demonstrated in the actions that are promoting improvements in achieving rates for frameworks, and, in particular, key skills qualifications. However, Tops has not developed fully some aspects of the quality improvement process to ensure it is systematically used to produce improvements. Tops has introduced a range of useful quality improvement systems including questionnaires to collect regular feedback from learners on the effectiveness of the quarterly review process and tutorial training. However, it carries out no written analysis of concerns raised or actions taken. Some improvements are made, but not all significant matters raised by learners are dealt with promptly. Tops has introduced observations of teaching but the emphasis is on the teaching rather than on what learners learn or achieve. Changes introduced to improve provision are not always formally recorded. For example, outcomes of audits of learners' records are not systematically documented and it is not clear what improvements have been made. Meetings are recorded but the minutes of meetings do not clearly identify agreed action points, and it is not clear how quickly or effectively matters are being dealt with or monitored.

48. The self-assessment process was identified as a weakness in the previous inspection. There is no record of a post-inspection action plan to rectify this weakness. The self-assessment process is still insufficiently developed. The managing director produces a draft self-assessment report using feedback from a variety of sources, including the

questionnaires from learners. Training staff and nursery managers are consulted on the content of the draft report, but not all learners and supervisors are not included in this process. The final strengths and weaknesses and grades given in the self-assessment report are not clearly linked to the consultation process. In the most recent report it is not clear how the identified strengths and weaknesses justify the grades given.

## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Health, social care & public services

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Early years</i> Apprenticeships for young people	76	2 2

49. Learners are working towards apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships in early years care and education. All learners have their suitability assessed by interview and complete a period of probation at a nursery before starting their training programme. The length of the probation is approximately 12 weeks, but varies according to need. Learners complete a child development project during their probation period. Learners are placed in one of Tops's nurseries and are carefully advised about which training programme is the most suitable, given their previous qualifications. Learners are able to progress on the training programme at their own rate. Most training is received at the nurseries, but learners travel to Bournemouth for some off-site training.

### *Early years*

Grade 2

#### *Strengths*

- good achievement rates for key skills qualifications
- good retention rates for apprentices
- clear target-setting in progress reviews
- good understanding of NVQ standards by learners
- good workplaces
- good progression routes for learners
- good support for learners' development of vocational skills

#### *Weaknesses*

- low achievement rates for apprentices starting in 2001-02
- inconsistent provision for literacy and numeracy skills support needs

### **Achievement and standards**

50. Achievement rates for key skills qualifications are good. All learners who took a recent key skills test passed. Learners are taking the key skills tests earlier in their training programme and are better prepared. Effective individual support is available to help learners.

51. Retention rates for apprentices are good with 100 per cent of 2000-01 starters and 80 per cent of 2001-02 starters being retained. Sixty per cent of the 2002-03 starters have been retained, with three learners still on the training programme. Of the 83 learners who have started apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships since August 2003, 87 per cent are still in learning.



52. The achievement rate for advanced apprentices starting in 2002-03 is good, having improved to 64 per cent with one learner still in learning. The achievement rate for apprentices starting in 2001-02 is low at 20 per cent, and remains 20 per cent for the 2002-03 intake with three learners still in learning. Some apprentices progressed to the advanced apprenticeship having achieved the level 2 NVQ, but not the full apprenticeship framework. The achievement rate for advanced apprentices and apprentices was in decline, but Tops recognised this and put several initiatives in place to improve it. Current learners are making good progress, but it is too early to judge the effect on the achievement rate.

53. Learners gain a wide range of vocational skills and knowledge of childcare. For example, they learn about bottle feeding, how to communicate well with children and their parents and how to plan activities that help children develop knowledge and skills. Nursery managers are impressed with the learners' development of skills in the workplace and their increasing confidence and maturity. The standard of work in portfolios is satisfactory and, in some cases, good. Some portfolios contain good examples of materials that learners have designed to work creatively with the children, including models and pictures for story telling.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	20		19		11		19	100	10	100						
Retained*	0		3		7		11	58	9	90						
Successfully completed	1		3		7		10	53	8	80						
Still in learning	19		15		1		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																
Apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	29		15		10		5	100	3	100						
Retained*	0		7		6		4	80	3	100						
Successfully completed	0		3		2		1	20	2	67						
Still in learning	28		10		3		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

### The quality of provision

54. Target-setting in progress reviews is clear. Learners are closely involved in discussing and setting targets at quarterly reviews. The targets effectively identify what is to be achieved by whom and within what timescale. The achievement of these targets is checked and recorded at the next meeting or progress review. Learners are motivated well

by the targets and find their progress reviews useful in helping them to progress through the training programme.

55. Learners have a good understanding of the NVQ. They are able to identify opportunities for assessment and know what standards they are working towards. Most learners take an active part in completing their assessment plan and in planning suitable activities to demonstrate their competence. They are able to choose activities for their first assessments that they enjoy and feel competent in, and this builds up their confidence quickly. Most assessors encourage learners to take responsibility for portfolio-building and planning assessments. Learners feel central to the training process. Portfolios are structured well and help learners understand the different elements of the NVQ and progression awards. The portfolios are of a good quality and contain copies of progress reviews and records of meetings, as well as evidence that the learners meet the knowledge requirements through written answers to questions. Some learners are not aware they are working towards the completion of an apprenticeship framework.

56. Workplaces are good and equipped well. Staff are extremely welcoming and friendly. An easily accessible and useful training room is provided at each nursery and learners regularly use computers and the internet through a broadband connection. Learners and staff can also access private intranet and use computer telephony to contact each other. Each nursery has a plentiful supply of books and learners either have their own textbook or are able to borrow a copy. Learners have good access to digital cameras to record practice for assessment purposes. Workplaces are risk assessed and checked regularly.

57. Learners benefit from good progression routes. Learners who have completed training are promoted to nursery assistants by Tops, and the company offers excellent career opportunities to progress to the roles of supervisor, deputy manager and nursery manager. Many of the senior staff were previously apprentices and provide positive role models for the learners. Many learners who complete the apprenticeship progress to the advanced apprenticeship. There are examples of learners who leave Tops temporarily and return to take the advanced apprenticeship. Some learners have progressed to higher education and are completing foundation degrees at the local college. Learners' prior experience and learning is taken into account well to ensure they are on appropriate programmes to meet their level of ability and aspirations for the future. Many learners are interested in pursuing a career within Tops.

58. Learners are given good opportunities for additional training in subjects including first aid, food hygiene, health and safety, and child protection. Off-the-job training held at the head office is satisfactory. Some learners are able to complete wider key skills qualifications in subjects including problem solving and improving their own performance.

59. Support for learners is good. They have easy access to assessors who are mostly on site at the nursery. Assessments are carried out at least monthly and often more frequently. Assessors involve learners well in regular progress reviews that are carried out quarterly. Learners find the process supportive and like the way they can set their own targets. Reviews reinforce policies on how to complain or appeal. All staff at the nursery are supportive of the learners and readily help and advise with the NVQ. Learners' progress is monitored well. Each portfolio contains clear monitoring documents showing progress to date and each training room has clear charts identifying the stages that each learner has completed.

60. Tops's identification of learners' literacy and numeracy skills support needs and support it provides to meet these needs are inconsistent. Some members of staff are well trained and skilled at teaching literacy and numeracy, but others are at an early stage of their training. This varies from nursery to nursery, with some learners getting better-quality support than others. Not all learners receive the initial literacy and numeracy skills assessment or the diagnostic tests. Tops is in the process of introducing diagnostic tests and this is at different stages in each nursery. Some details of learners' additional learning needs are recorded for use during off-site training, but it is not clear how these details are used. Learners who have additional learning needs identified are readily given more frequent individual support and appropriate activities are suggested to improve their skills. For example, one learner was encouraged to use a specialist website to complete an exercise to improve their ability to read documents quickly and extract appropriate information. Tops makes no specific provision for language skills support at present but is in the process of investigating this area.

### **Leadership and management**

61. Learners benefit and appreciate flexible working arrangements that allow them to fulfil the other demands on their time. Learners' working and training time is programmed to include time to plan assessment and the use of computers and the internet.

62. Promotion and monitoring of safety in the workplace is strong. Assessors promote health and safety in the workplace through feedback following assessment of practice. Health and safety is also monitored in progress reviews, during which policies are reinforced, matters such as personal protective clothing are discussed, and learners are encouraged to comment on their understanding of health and safety. Visitors to most nurseries and the head office at Tops are given a clear information leaflet explaining relevant health and safety matters. The leaflet covers details of car parking, what to do in the event of a fire, accidents and the no smoking policy. Leaflets are available in large print.

63. Staff are well motivated and committed to their roles. Day-to-day management of the training programme is good. Effective and frequent communication between staff and with learners promotes good management. Key skills assessors and work-based assessors work closely to make the best use of assessment opportunities.

