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Ms G Fawcett  
Managing Director  
Puffins Childcare  
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Dear Ms Fawcett

Ofsted survey inspection programme – good practice in apprenticeship training

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 14 October 2009, to look at good practice in apprenticeship training.

The visit provided valuable information that will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included discussions with key members of staff and learners and scrutiny of documentation.

Features of good practice observed

- Very good focus and attention on helping learners achieve key skills.

Puffins put a lot of time, effort and resource into supporting learners through their key skills, particularly application of number (AON). All key skills' tasks are vocationally relevant and key skills are well integrated into the programmes. All Puffins' staff have achieved key skills' qualifications themselves, so not only are they qualified to deliver key skills, but they also know what the learners need to do to achieve them. Where learners struggle with key skills, this is usually to do with AON. Additional teaching sessions are given along with individual support for as long as it takes the learners to pass the key skills test. This has led to significant improvement in achievement rates for the apprenticeship programmes over the last three years.

- Highly-trained and professional staff which contributes to high quality training and support for the learners.

All staff, from the support staff to the directors, have to undertake relevant professional qualifications. All training staff have achieved teaching qualifications and have or have applied for qualified teacher status. All training staff have specialist areas on which they lead such as health and safety, learner support, mentor support, equal opportunities, mathematics and English. The member of staff responsible for supporting the learners both in their academic work and for personal issues has gained a counselling qualification to support herself in the role. Another member of staff is designated as the training manager and deals with all training related issues. Learners know which member of staff covers each area and who to go to for help.

- Good use of mentors in each nursery room supports development of work-based skills.

Learners are supported by mentors within the rooms they work. The mentors are qualified and experienced staff who help the learner in acquiring work-based skills and knowledge through the completion of a work-based learning manual. Time is set aside for the mentor and learner to work together and to discuss the learner's weekly planning sheet and any issues related to the training.

- Good focus on monitoring learners' progress to help raise achievement.

Close attention is paid to monitoring learners' progress through the monthly meetings and the electronic national vocational qualification (e-NVQ). At the monthly management meetings staff review the planned end dates for all learners and their progress against that end date. They take action to ensure that learners achieve on time. Staff also try to anticipate issues that might affect the achievement of a learner such as long-term illness, or pregnancy and put the support systems in place to 'fast-monitor' learners who would otherwise have to delay their learning until after a period of time away from work. There is very good monitoring of learners' progress through the e-NVQ. The system provides management information at all levels, for example, an assessor can see the progress of all their learners and an internal verifier can see the progress of all the learners they internally verify. The training manager and managing director can see the progress of all learners, by assessor, by internal verifier and by workplace. Where they identify underperformance action is taken to improve it.

- Strong leadership and management sets high standards in teaching and learning.

Senior managers set high standards for their staff and learners. Managers insist that all staff have, or are working towards, level 3 qualifications and provide professional development opportunities to enable all staff to progress. All tutoring staff have completed Certificate in Education, Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector or the equivalent and all have at least level 2 key skills. The impact of staff gaining teaching and key-skills qualifications has been reflected in the quality of teaching and learning which has improved.

## Areas for Development

- Continue the very good developments in the use of technology to support learning.

As well as using the e-NVQ, Puffins' staff have identified a number of areas where technology can support learning. One good example is the use of MP3 players with video of teaching sessions that learners can watch if they have missed a session.

- Continue the development to meet the new requirements, following the introduction of functional skills

Functional skills in mathematics will need to be delivered differently from the current application of number key skills. Puffins staff are aware of this and have started to put plans in place to overcome some of the issues

- Enable learners to observe qualified staff undertaking home visits.

Learners on the apprenticeship programme do not currently have the opportunity to observe qualified staff carrying out home visits. This is a task the learners will have to carry out once they achieve their apprenticeship and learners report that it would be useful to cover the skills for this on the apprenticeship programme.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop apprenticeship training in your organisation.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your LSC and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Swift  
Her Majesty's Inspector