

Crackerjack Training Ltd

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 51395

Name of lead inspector: Gerard McGrath HMI

Last day of inspection: 13 May 2011

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: Crackerjack Training Limited
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Information about the provider

1. Crackerjack Training Ltd (Crackerjack) is a small private training organisation, founded in 1996. Crackerjack contracts with the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) to provide apprenticeships and Train to Gain programmes and with Birmingham Local Authority to provide Young Apprenticeships for learners aged 14 to 16.
2. The company offers Young Apprenticeships, apprenticeships and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1, 2 and 3 in early years and play work. Crackerjack provides a number of commercial training courses and offers qualifications through the Qualifications Credit Framework. All learners work within a variety of childcare and/or play work settings. Publicly funded training makes up the majority of training offered by Crackerjack.
3. Crackerjack works with a number of schools in the Birmingham and Solihull area. In September 2007, to promote learning to pupils at risk of becoming excluded from school, Crackerjack began working with South Birmingham College as a lead on the 14 to 19 Young Apprenticeship programme in health and social care. Consideration of this programme provided evidence for leadership and management of the provider, but was not included in this inspection.
4. The majority of teaching and assessment is carried out in the work place; learners can also attend group off-the-job training sessions that are offered at five community venues across the West Midlands.
5. The managing director has overall responsibility for the management and quality of training and safeguarding. The numbers of staff and learners have grown since the last inspection. Crackerjack have introduced new staff posts with responsibility for the management of quality assurance and learner recruitment. Currently there are 103 advanced apprentices, 79 apprentices, 15 learners aged 14 to 16 on Young Apprenticeships and 267 learners on Train to Gain programmes.
6. The proportion of people with a minority ethnic heritage in the West Midlands is 11% compared to the 9.6% nationally. The ethnic backgrounds of Crackerjack learners broadly reflect those of the local population. Unemployment rates in the West Midlands are higher than nationally.
7. The provider was inspected previously in 2007 when all aspects of the provision were good, except achievements and standards which were judged to be outstanding.
8. The provider provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - Enta

9. The following organisation provides training on behalf of the provider:

- South Birmingham College

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
Provision for young learners: 14 to 16	15 part-time learners
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	267 learners 182 apprentices

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 1
Capacity to improve	Grade 2
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	1
Quality of provision	1
Leadership and management	1
Safeguarding	1
Equality and diversity	2
Subject Areas	Grade
Child development & well being	1

Overall effectiveness

10. Crackerjack has significantly improved the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners since the last inspection. Achievement rates are outstanding and are consistently well above national averages. In particular achievement rates are very high on Train to Gain and outstanding on advanced apprenticeship programmes. The majority of learners make good progress and complete their programmes within the planned time. Learners enjoy their training very much. Most learners go on to gain promotion at work or enter further or higher education.
11. Crackerjack promotes the health, well-being and safety of learners particularly well and learners feel very safe.
12. Training is good. Programmes are extremely well designed to meet the needs of learners, employers and the children that they care for. Lessons are planned very well to meet the needs of all learners and supported by good resources. However, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning is underdeveloped.
13. The care, guidance and support for learners are outstanding. Crackerjack staff assess accurately the detailed, individual support needs of their learners. Excellent individual programmes of support are provided, especially for learners

with learning difficulties and those experiencing significant barriers to employment, and this helps them to succeed.

14. Leadership and management are outstanding in promoting ambition for all learners. Crackerjack works excellently with schools, employers and higher education institutions to promote learning and career progression to under-represented groups of learners and those with few previous qualifications.
15. Crackerjack makes outstanding use of the feedback collected from learners, employers and parents to make improvements to the provision. Quality improvement arrangements are very effective. However, the current self-assessment report does not wholly reflect the company's very detailed knowledge of their own provision.

Main findings

- Achievement rates on advanced apprenticeship programmes are outstanding. Achievement on Train to Gain programmes at levels 2 and 3, the majority of Crackerjack's provision, is very high and considerably above national averages. Achievement rates have risen steadily since the last inspection and are high across all programmes. The majority of learners complete within the planned duration of their programme.
- Learners develop excellent standards of written, practical and technical skills in childcare. They develop confidence and increased self-esteem, particularly those learners with no previous qualifications or learning difficulties. Learners make good progress with very high standards of work, although a small number could complete their courses faster than they currently do.
- Teaching, training and assessment are good. Learners benefit from well taught lessons and tutorials. Learners and employers appreciate the opportunity these sessions provide for learners to share experiences of different settings and develop the underpinning knowledge to compliment their on-the-job training. However, the needs of a few learners in the small number of off-the-job training sessions which combine learners from different courses and levels are not always met well.
- The resources used for learning are very good. Materials used in lessons and for assessment are well designed and up to date. Physical resources are of good quality and used very well to support learning. However, the use of ICT to promote and support learning is underdeveloped.
- The needs and interests of learners are met outstandingly well. Many learners progress to qualifications at the next level and a number go on to university. A large number of learners have developed their careers as a result of their learning. High aspirations are consistently promoted and learners have a very good understanding of career opportunities and the qualifications needed.
- Partnerships are used outstandingly well to develop the provision to meet learners' needs. Learner choices of optional learning units match the needs and opportunities in their work setting extremely well and very closely reflect the needs of the children in their care. The range of work placements developed

through local employers provides extremely caring environments for vulnerable learners.

- The care, guidance and support learners receive are outstanding. Outstanding support is given to learners from particularly challenging social and educational backgrounds. All learners are very strongly encouraged to succeed and their progress is greatly celebrated. Staff design and deliver extremely individualised care and support packages, especially for vulnerable learners. Additional learning support is good.
- Outstanding leadership promotes ambition throughout the organisation. All staff clearly understand and share the strong values of senior managers. Aspirations for individual learners and the company are exceptional. The growth of the provision since the last inspection has been managed exceptionally well to ensure high standards.
- Safeguarding of learners is outstanding. The well-being and safety of learners and the children in their care are given the highest priority. Formal arrangements meet the current legislative requirements. Communication with the employers, parents and carers of vulnerable learners is outstanding. Crackerjack also provides excellent advice and support to employers in developing safeguarding procedures.
- Crackerjack has been particularly successful in promoting access to learning and employment to learners from under-represented groups. Crackerjack's promotion of learning and work opportunities for learners with learning disabilities is particularly strong. Training sessions are delivered from venues in wards of socio-economic deprivation to encourage attendance. Learners' understanding of equality and diversity related issues is satisfactory but varies considerably.
- Crackerjack make outstanding use of the wide range of feedback that they collect about the provision. The outcomes of learner, staff and employer forums are used well to plan improvements. For example, security improvements were introduced at one venue following feedback from learners.

What does Crackerjack Training Ltd need to do to improve further?

- Use data consistently to monitor learners' progress to ensure that more complete within the planned time.
- Improve the planning of off-the-job training sessions to meet the needs of all learners.
- Develop strategies which promote the increased use of ICT to support learning in off-the-job training sessions and delivery in the workplace.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the approachable and helpful assessors, trainers and tutors who are readily available by phone and text
- being treated fairly
- that work is tailored to their individual needs
- that they are helped to progress, even after they have completed their qualifications
- that it is a better learning experience than they had at school or college
- the support to develop self-confidence
- being helped to find employment
- the encouragement to learn.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the level of technical language used in handouts and assignments
- the management of off-the-job training sessions which include learners at too many different stages of their education
- being able to progress with their qualifications more quickly.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- excellent communications
- the reliability and consistency of assessors
- opportunities to provide feedback
- the excellent flexibility of the training to reflect the work place demands
- that learners are much better at caring for children after completing their training.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the employers who gave their views did not make any recommendations for improvement.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

16. Crackerjack Training has a good capacity to make further improvements and maintain high standards. The achievements of learners have improved since the last inspection as have the quality of the provision and leadership and management. Achievements for learners are still outstanding. The promotion of equality and diversity and the quality of teaching and learning remain good.
17. As the number of learners has increased a new management structure and increased staffing is helping to bring about more rapid improvements.
18. Quality improvement arrangements are very effective. A robust system for observing teaching and learning has been developed and the outcomes are used well to support staff development. Staff are well-qualified and experts in child care. However, the use of ICT to support learning is underdeveloped.
19. Outstanding use is made of the feedback collected from learners, employers and staff to make significant improvements to the provision. Senior managers and staff have an extremely good and detailed understanding of the provision. The self-assessment report is rather descriptive; it does identify many of the strengths and all of the areas for improvement and, recognises their significance for learners.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 1

20. The proportion of learners who achieve their learning outcomes and qualifications is excellent. Achievement rates have improved even further since the last inspection when they were judged to be outstanding; rates are consistently above the high national averages. For the high numbers of learners on Train to Gain learners success rates in 2009/10 were very high at 93% which is 8% above national averages. Success rates are outstanding for advanced apprentices, at 94% they are 19% above the national average.
21. The majority of learners complete their programmes within the planned time. The trend of completion within the planned time has increased further in the first six months of the current year. Learners enjoy their training very much and demonstrate very good skills while working in a variety of child care settings. Learners develop very high standards of written, practical and technical skills in childcare. Written work is excellently presented with extremely good use made of interesting illustrations and high quality presentations that demonstrate learners' detailed research on relevant topics. Learners with little experience of working with computers develop very useful ICT skills that enable them to produce attractive word-processed documents. They develop increased confidence and self-esteem. Learners make good progress although a small number could complete their courses faster than they currently do. Attendance

at off-the-job training sessions is high. There are no significant differences in achievement between different groups of learners.

The quality of provision

Grade 1

22. Teaching, training and assessment are good. Learners benefit from well taught group lessons and tutorials. Teachers and trainers are enthusiastic and knowledgeable. Questions are used particularly effectively to develop learners' knowledge and communication skills. Learners and employers greatly appreciate the opportunity these sessions provide for learners to share experiences of different settings. The underpinning knowledge they get quickly develops their understanding of how to work more effectively in the work setting. Lessons are planned thoroughly and learners enjoy them very much. However, the needs of a few learners in the small number of off-the-job training sessions which combine learners from different courses and levels are not always met well.
23. On-the-job assessments are regular, flexible, timely and reliable. The standards expected are very high. Feedback is good. Written assessments are thorough and timely. Assessors liaise regularly with managers in the workplace to keep them well informed of learners' progress. Internal verification processes and procedures are clear, transparent and rigorously implemented. Learners' work is marked particularly thoroughly. Feedback on assessed work is constructive; how learners can improve their work is identified very clearly, with a particular emphasis on helping them improve their literacy skills.
24. The resources used for learning are very good. Materials used in lessons and for assessment are designed well, easy to read and up to date. Physical resources are of good quality. An extremely wide range of toys and games are used to very effectively illustrate stages in child development. Particularly good use is made of outside space at venues to realistically recreate play areas and help learners demonstrate their high awareness of risk. The use of technology to promote and support learning is underdeveloped. Assessors and tutors are extremely well experienced in childcare, well qualified and enthusiastic. Current and recent vocational expertise is very strong.
25. The needs and interests of learners are met outstandingly well. Many learners progress to qualifications at the next level and a number go on to university. Many learners have developed their careers as a result of their successful achievement of qualifications. A number of childcare setting owners started on intermediate level courses and Crackerjack supported them in establishing childcare businesses. Very high aspirations are consistently promoted and learners have an excellent understanding of career opportunities and the qualifications needed to achieve these. The provider has close links with employers and uses these to match learners particularly well to settings, especially those with low self-esteem or learning difficulties.

26. Partnerships are used outstandingly well to develop provision to meet learners' needs. Employers have an incisive understanding of the need for training and the content of programmes that learners are working towards. A range of courses have been developed to meet the needs of employers extremely closely. Learners' choice of optional learning units match the needs and opportunities of their work setting extremely well and very closely reflect the needs of the children in their care, particularly those in special schools. In addition to essential vocational courses, some staff and managers in partner organisations are working towards assessor and teaching qualifications in order to improve their support for learning. The range of work placements developed through local employers provide extremely caring environments for vulnerable learners. Work with local secondary schools, local authorities and colleges leads to very effective promotion of learning and career opportunities for younger learners and some groups of learners who might otherwise be excluded.
27. The care, guidance and support learners receive are outstanding. Recruitment is thorough and learners are very carefully placed in work settings and on appropriate courses that meet their needs, particularly those with learning difficulties. Learners are very clear who to contact if they have any needs and appreciate very much the prompt response and consideration they are shown when they raise queries. Professional help such as counselling is provided swiftly and effectively when needed. Outstanding support is given to learners from particularly challenging social and educational backgrounds. All learners are very strongly encouraged to succeed and their progress is greatly celebrated. Staff design and deliver extremely individualised care and support packages for vulnerable learners. Very effective additional learning support for learners is available and take up is good. Learners in receipt of such support achieve at least as well as other learners. Support for learners from tutors and assessors is very readily available and much appreciated by learners and employers. Advice and guidance for learners on their next steps in training, education and employment is very detailed and accurate. Learners continue to seek advice and guidance from the provider after the end of their courses.

Leadership and management

Grade 1

28. Outstanding leadership promotes ambition strongly throughout the organisation. Staff have expert knowledge of child-care settings. All staff clearly understand and share the strong values of senior managers. Aspirations for individual learners and the company are very high. The growth of the provision since the last inspection has been managed exceptionally well to ensure that the high standards of the provision have been maintained. Team working and collaboration between staff at all levels of the organisation is very good.
29. Robust systems for monitoring learner performance, managing staff performance and quality improvement, including observations of teaching and learning, have been introduced and ensure consistently high quality provision for learners. Achievement rates have risen steadily while learner numbers have increased in the four years since the last inspection.

30. Safeguarding of learners is outstanding. The well-being and safety of learners and the children in their care are given the highest priority. Formal arrangements meet the current legislative requirements. The staff awareness of safeguarding topics and behaviours is very high. The care of vulnerable learners is excellent. Staff use their detailed knowledge of each learner to apply excellent packages of care and supervision while maintaining confidentiality.
31. Communication with the employers, parents and carers of vulnerable learners is outstanding. Crackerjack also provides excellent advice and support to employers in developing safeguarding procedures. Concerns raised by learners are taken extremely seriously and acted on very promptly.
32. Equality and diversity are promoted well. Crackerjack has been particularly successful in promoting access to learning and employment to learners from under-represented groups. Crackerjack deliberately recruits learners from areas of socio-economic deprivation. The provider promotes learning, the acquisition of qualifications and career aspirations of learners with learning disabilities and difficulties particularly strongly. Off-the-job training sessions are taught in community venues in wards of socio-economic deprivation to encourage attendance and reduce the stress of travelling for vulnerable learners. There are no significant differences in the high rates of achievement by different groups of learners. Staff attend regular training updates on relevant topics and equality and diversity are covered appropriately during training sessions. Learners' understanding of related issues is satisfactory but varies considerably.
33. Crackerjack make outstanding use of the wide range of feedback that they collect about the provision. The outcomes of learner, staff and employer forums are used well to plan improvements. The responses of questionnaire surveys and the additional comments from parents are seriously considered, discussed at senior management meetings and used promptly to plan improvements. For example, after comments from learners, Crackerjack jointly funded the installation of CCTV cameras at one venue to improve security for learners as well as other users of the site.
34. Crackerjack produces an annual self-assessment report which describes the provision reasonably well. It accurately reflects many of the strengths and all of the areas for improvement and recognises their significance for learners. The associated quality improvement plan is used as the basis of improvement planning. However, the plan does not contain sufficiently measurable success milestones to enable managers to accurately identify the impact of improvement strategies.

Information about the inspection

35. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's managing director, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding bodies, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring visit, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
36. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Crackerjack Training Ltd

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners		
Full-time learners	0	0
Part-time learners	449	449
Overall effectiveness	1	1
Capacity to improve	2	
Outcomes for learners	1	1
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	1	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	1	
How well do learners progress?	1	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	1	
How safe do learners feel?	1	
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	n/a	
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	n/a	
Quality of provision	1	1
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2	
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	1	
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	1	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	1	
Leadership and management	1	1
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	1	
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	n/a	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	1	
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2	
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	1	
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	2	
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	1	

*where applicable to the type of provision

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