

Busy Bees Nurseries Limited

Employer and independent learning provider

Inspection dates

1–2 and 7–9 February 2017

Overall effectiveness		Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding	Apprenticeships Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding	
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding	
Outcomes for learners	Outstanding	
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Good

Summary of key findings

This is an outstanding provider

- Directors and senior leaders have a clear strategic vision to provide outstanding childcare and learning for children; they have made this a reality.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have significantly improved the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes during a very significant growth in learner numbers.
- Highly skilled training officers provide excellent coaching, guidance and support to the apprentices; as a result, apprentices become very skilled at evaluating and improving their skills as childcare, catering and management professionals.
- Many training officers have risen through the ranks of apprenticeship; they act as role models to inspire apprentices to aim higher.
- Significant support and guidance from training officers, nursery managers and staff result in apprentices making excellent progress.
- Apprentices make a significant and very positive contribution to improving the quality of children's care and education in the nurseries in which they work; this is highly valued by parents.
- The rates of achievement of qualifications are very high and improving; most apprentices achieve their qualifications in the planned period.
- Apprentices develop their English, mathematical and information technology skills exceptionally well; most pass their qualifications, and at the first attempt.
- Apprentices work in pleasant, safe and welcoming nurseries where they teach children a range of social and personal skills that prepare them well for the next stage of their learning.
- Most apprentices are well trained in safeguarding and online safety; they protect children from harm.
- Apprentices benefit from excellent and impartial careers information, advice and guidance; apprentices chose their courses to develop their careers that suit their personal circumstances.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Busy Bees Nurseries Limited is a private company. It is a wholly owned subsidiary of Busy Bees Group Limited. Established in 1989, Busy Bees is the largest childcare provider in the UK. The company currently owns 267 childcare facilities throughout the country and employs over 7,500 staff. Almost all of the nurseries have been judged good or outstanding by Ofsted. These facilities are a combination of commercial, private day nurseries, workplace nurseries, shopping centre crèches and out-of-school schemes.
- Busy Bees Training Academy, based in Shenstone, near Lichfield in Staffordshire, provides training for apprentices employed in the nurseries. The training manager is supported by a team of managers, 38 training officers, a recruitment team and a team that delivers short courses. The responsibility for training lies with the human resources director. Since the previous inspection, Busy Bees has increased the number of apprentices significantly and expanded its apprenticeship provision into management and catering. Managers also recruit apprentices on behalf of some 100 external employers and provide training for them. At present, apprentices aged 16 to 18, 19 to 23 and over 24 make up 33%, 40% and 27% of the provision respectively. Of the total number of apprentices, 28% are at intermediate level, 55% at advanced level and 17% are in higher level management apprenticeships.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the training officers and managers implement the planned changes to help apprentices gain GCSEs in English and mathematics rapidly so that all apprentices achieve their apprenticeship framework in the planned period, allocating appropriate study time to the advanced apprentices.
- Ensure that all apprentices throughout the cohorts are able to clearly explain how fundamental British values and the risks of radicalisation and extremism apply to their work.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Directors and senior leaders have a clear strategic vision and high expectations for training in Busy Bees, which are reflected in the challenging targets they set for managers, staff and apprentices. All staff, including apprentices, share this ambitious vision and are highly motivated to provide the highest standards of care for children in their charge.
- Since the previous inspection, directors and senior leaders have overseen a substantial growth, almost four-fold, in apprenticeship numbers. Through careful planning they have improved the quality of provision and outcomes for apprentices from good to outstanding. They have consolidated and maintained the strengths identified at the previous inspection and have successfully rectified all the areas for improvement.
- All staff, ably led by leaders and managers, maintain a relentless focus on quality improvement. Quality improvement arrangements are highly effective in enabling continuous improvement of the provision. Observers accurately evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Managers use this information exceptionally well to provide feedback to training officers and enable them to reflect on and share best practice. As a result of this, training officers improve their confidence, skills and practice to provide apprentices with high-quality learning. This contributes to apprentices' very good progress, their rapid development of industry-standard skills and high levels of success in completing their qualifications.
- Leaders and managers know their provision very well and are appropriately self-critical. They seek the views of staff, apprentices, employers and parents as well as using performance data to provide an accurate account of the strengths and areas for improvement. Inspection judgements very closely matched those in the self-assessment report. Leaders and managers take swift and precise action to improve the quality of apprentices' experiences and enhance the provision on an ongoing basis. For example, managers have abandoned an electronic portfolio platform that did not serve their purpose in favour of another one that allows managers and apprentices to monitor their progress more accurately and instantly and take appropriate action. They have advanced plans to implement a virtual learning environment that will allow apprentices to learn at their own pace and convenience, enabling them to make even better progress in their learning.
- Leaders have developed a strong performance management culture across the company. They set challenging performance targets for managers, training officers and apprentices. They monitor targets closely at the frequent management and standardisation meetings that help accelerate improvements. Leaders also use performance information very well to establish areas of underperformance and take rapid action to support staff to improve quickly. For example, to deal with the low attendance of apprentices on GCSE programmes, managers revised their strategy to ensure that all staff were clear about their respective roles, so that apprentices could receive support when and where it was needed and complete their qualifications within the planned timescale.

- Leaders have made a significant investment in staff training that updates staff knowledge and skills on a regular basis, so that they are more effective in their roles. To support their apprentices, all training officers have, or are working towards, a teaching qualification and a level 2 qualification in English and mathematics. Leaders and managers provide highly effective training for apprentices on topics such as improving children's speaking and listening and numeracy. In response to the gaps in children's development and learning, for example, managers introduced sessions such as 'Babble to chatter' and 'Nurturing problem-solving to mathematics'. Parents report significant improvement in their children's confidence in speaking, dealing with numbers and problem-solving skills.
- Leaders and managers are acutely aware of the shortage of skilled childcare workers and are highly responsive to meeting their own training needs as an employer and those of other employers in the sector. They recruit well-motivated apprentices for external employers and provide them with high-quality training and support. To develop a career pathway for apprentices and to retain and promote staff, leaders and managers have expanded successfully the offer of apprenticeships to include management, catering and customer service. Owing to the variety of job roles and employment opportunities available to them, staff stay with Busy Bees and progress to different roles; this means that relatively fewer staff leave the sector.
- Leaders and managers are well aware of the disadvantages in society and the groups that experience barriers to taking part in learning and benefiting from it. To this effect, they have successfully attracted apprentices who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). In the past year, they have used their strong partnerships with external organisations such as Jobcentre Plus to double the proportion of people who are NEET who start apprenticeships. In two pilot areas in Birmingham and Kent, the vast majority of new apprentices are from a NEET background. As a result, these young people have a chance to have a career and make a good contribution to the economy. Many parents from low-income backgrounds benefit from access to childcare through free funding for children aged two and three. This gives their children an opportunity to benefit from high-quality learning experiences.
- Busy Bees fosters an inclusive culture that prepares apprentices well for living in a diverse society. In the last year, managers have successfully increased the proportion of apprentices from minority ethnic backgrounds, but they recognise that they need to have a national strategy to improve the number of apprentices from diverse backgrounds and older adults who wish to work in the childcare sector. Managers monitor the performance gaps of different groups well and take effective action to narrow any achievement gaps between different groups of apprentices.

The governance of the provider

- Busy Bees has a board of directors who are highly knowledgeable and experienced. They are well aware of the role of high-quality childcare and learning in contributing to children's development and life chances. To this end, they have invested significantly and successfully in staff training and quality improvement to match their ambition to become an outstanding provider of childcare.

- Directors have an excellent understanding of apprenticeship provision. They often visit and shadow apprentices and managers to gauge the impact of their training at first hand. They provide careful scrutiny and strong challenge to managers, as well as good support for all staff to achieve high standards.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Busy Bees has a strong and well-established culture of safeguarding. Managers carefully check the background and suitability of all staff to work with children. They update the comprehensive safeguarding policy regularly and provide relevant and valuable training to staff on all recent themes such as the promotion of British values and the 'Prevent' duty. The designated safeguarding officer is appropriately qualified and deals with matters swiftly to protect apprentices. Local managers in Busy Bees nurseries have good links with their Local Safeguarding Children Board. The designated officer has good links with 'Prevent' duty coordinators that enable valuable support and guidance on potential cases of radicalisation and extremism. Managers keep a safeguarding log of all incidents, dealing with actions swiftly and appropriately.
- All staff have very good awareness of safeguarding. All nurseries have strong firewalls on their information technology systems to prevent access to inappropriate materials, and strict rules about the use of mobile devices at work.
- Learners have a thorough induction that covers safeguarding and 'Prevent' duties well. Training officers reinforce effectively apprentices' understanding of safeguarding, health and safety, and equality and diversity by using a variety of useful scenarios to check and record their understanding in progress reviews. As a result, apprentices have a good understanding of how to keep themselves, and the children, safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Training officers provide excellent coaching, support and well-planned assessment. As a result, the vast majority of apprentices achieve their learning goals and qualifications. Most current apprentices are making excellent progress.
- Training officers, nursery managers and staff are very well qualified and experienced. Many use their degrees in early years education to broaden apprentices' knowledge and understanding of theory and practice. They act as role models to the apprentices; this inspires apprentices to achieve to the best of their ability. They have high expectations of their apprentices and encourage them to progress through qualification levels and into management roles.
- The assessment of apprentices' starting points is highly effective in assisting with the planning of their learning. Recruitment officers identify apprentices' additional learning needs promptly, and training officers support them well. As a result, apprentices achieve well and quickly gain the English, mathematical, information and communication technology (ICT) and vocational skills they need to be successful members of the nursery staff teams in which they work.

- Training officers are pivotal in enabling apprentices to succeed in their learning through the use of highly effective professional discussions, coaching and mentoring. During the frequent progress reviews, training officers use open questions skilfully to encourage apprentices to apply their knowledge to practical situations relating to children in their nurseries. They set challenging targets for apprentices to keep them motivated and help them to achieve their qualifications and develop skills that are fully endorsed by their employers.
- Training officers, with excellent support from learning mentors and nursery managers, continually assess apprentices' progress and performance. Assessment practice is, in almost all cases, particularly rigorous and comprehensive. Apprentices collect a wide range of evidence to demonstrate their competency; as a result, apprentices are highly confident practitioners.
- Training officers give their apprentices extensive and useful feedback on their work. This is supported by learning mentors, peers and nursery managers who make an excellent contribution to the apprentices' learning. Apprentices are clear about what they do well and the areas in which they need to collect further evidence of their knowledge, understanding and skills to raise their standards. This means that employers are fully confident in the ability and the high standards of their apprentices' work and know what progress their apprentices are making.
- All staff involved in the training programmes make an excellent contribution to ensuring that the children they care for, their families, all apprentices and staff are treated fairly and their individual needs are identified and met. Apprentices promote anti-discriminatory practice well. They are well aware of the dietary needs of children, and children's heritage and ethnicity and plan a range of activities that make all children aware of diversity in our society. Apprentices cite many examples of how they meet the needs of children and celebrate their heritage and ethnicity.
- The majority of apprentices are clear about the dangers of radicalisation and extremist views. They are acutely aware of the potential for bullying and discrimination, in both the children and families they work with, as well as themselves as apprentices. However, a small minority of apprentices are less able to explain the implications to their work of the 'Prevent' duty and fundamental British values.
- Training officers provide a range of very effective support for apprentices who need to develop their English, mathematical and ICT skills and complete functional skills and GCSE qualifications as part of their framework. Apprentices recognise the importance of these skills in improving their prospects of getting rewarding jobs and promotion and how they contribute to their future career aims.
- Apprentices, as they progress through their framework, present themselves as competent, confident and skilled practitioners. Training officers offer a highly individual approach to training their apprentices to minimise the potential stress of learning while working.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

- Apprentices are highly committed to high-quality early years care, and work confidently with their work colleagues to provide an exceptional service that is rated highly by parents.
- Apprentices are highly motivated to improve their skills and undertake learning, often skilfully combining a full-time job with learning. A small minority of apprentices who make slow progress are identified quickly and training officers give them excellent one-to-one support to keep them motivated and get them back on track. As a result, most apprentices achieve their qualifications, enjoy their learning and continue working with the nurseries in a variety of roles.
- Apprentices benefit from high-quality information, advice and guidance. This helps them to make informed choices in relation to career pathways and future roles with the provider, and alternative careers outside the early years employment sector. Apprentices are encouraged to work in a nursery before they commit to an apprenticeship programme. Many find this opportunity very helpful to learn about further development and training opportunities that help them achieve their intended career aims.
- Apprentices develop and use their English, ICT and, to a large extent, mathematical skills confidently in their daily work. Training officers ensure that apprentices are progressing well in the development of these skills, providing coaching as appropriate and signposting them to a range of appropriate learning resources.
- Apprentices plan their learning with training officers and managers very well, learning from their experiences to benchmark their learning and to improve further their knowledge and skills to provide excellent early years provision. Apprentices apply theory to practice diligently and quickly develop the behaviours and employability skills, such as teamwork, time-keeping and communications, necessary to meet the very high expectations of the employers.
- Apprentices are valued highly by their employers and are a very important part of their future growth plans. All apprentices either in direct early years care or management roles provide essential skills and knowledge and perform to the same high standards as their full-time colleagues. Parents are very complimentary about the quality of childcare, learning, food and experiences their children receive.
- Apprentices know how to keep themselves and the children in their care safe and know whom to contact within the organisation if they need support and guidance. They demonstrate an excellent knowledge of potential health and safety risks and know how to reduce these, to create a safe play and learning environment for children.
- Additionally, most apprentices know how to protect themselves from the risks associated with extremism, radicalisation, bullying and harassment. They are skilled in recognising potential threats of abuse and in the safe use of online resources, including social media sites.
- Apprentices benefit from a comprehensive range of enrichment opportunities and additional training. This extends their knowledge and practical skills and as a result apprentices perform a variety of job roles competently and work flexibly to improve the early years care they provide.

- Apprentices' attendance on training courses is high. The vast majority participate in classroom and online learning; however, the attendance of a small minority of apprentices at English and mathematics lessons has been low. Managers have taken steps to improve communications and alternative methods of support.

Outcomes for learners

Outstanding

- The rates of achievement for the apprenticeship framework are high and improving. These are currently above the national averages and have increased gradually over the past three years.
- Apprentices make good and often excellent progress and complete their qualifications in the planned period. All catering apprentices, and a very high percentage of apprentices on advanced and higher level management apprenticeships, complete their qualification in the planned period. The rates of achievement in the planned period are slightly lower for apprentices on the advanced level early years apprenticeship. This affects approximately 13% of the advanced apprentices and is due to non-achievement of GCSEs in English and mathematics, which are a requirement of the framework.
- All intermediate-level apprentices complete their qualifications in the planned period and rapidly progress to advanced-level apprenticeships. This is excellent progression. Apprentices aged 16 to 18, who are mostly school leavers, rapidly progress into becoming qualified childcare workers and gain permanent employment. All apprentices on hospitality programmes become assistant chefs.
- The rates of functional skills achievement have improved from 52% first-time pass rates in 2012 to 92% in the current year. Managers and staff have worked very hard to achieve such high outcomes. Apprentices appreciate the importance of these skills, including ICT, to their current employment and future careers. They make a concerted effort to achieve qualifications and to improve these skills further.
- Outcomes for the small number of traineeship learners have been high. These learners gained valuable work experience and skills and progressed to an apprenticeship. This provision type is not currently running.
- Some 25% of advanced early years apprentices progress in their roles and take an additional apprenticeship in customer service and/or a higher level management apprenticeship. As a result, many of them secure quick progression through the various roles in the nurseries. They improve their planning, coaching and management skills, which enhances the satisfaction levels of apprentices and results in them providing high-quality childcare for parents. A good percentage of apprentices from earlier cohorts have progressed into training officer roles.
- Apprentices on the hospitality and catering framework have developed highly polished skills in food preparation. This has enabled the managers to provide high-quality, wholesome and nutritious meals for the children. As a result, children learn to eat healthy food from a very young age.

Provider details

Unique reference number	50936
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16–18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	1,275
Managing director	Marg Randles
Telephone number	01543 711150
Website	www.busybeestraining.co.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	262	89	110	539	0	58		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	0							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	0							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors	None							

Information about this inspection

The short inspection of this provider was converted to a full inspection. The team was assisted by the training manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of apprentices and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

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