

Report found 35 percent of licensed childcare centres not inspected within a year ^[1]

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Source: Journal Pioneer

Format: Article

Publication Date: 14 Mar 2019

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

CHARLOTTETOWN, P.E.I. — P.E.I.'s auditor general has found that monitoring and inspection of the province's licensed child care centres has been inadequate.

In her 2019 report to the legislative assembly, auditor general Jane MacAdam found that overcenter cent of licensed childcare centres tested had not been inspected within a year. The report noted the standard of annual inspections is considered good practice in other provinces and by the province's early learning and child care board.

"We concluded that the ministry of Education, Early Learning and Culture did not adequately monitor and enforce the licensing of early learning and childcare centres," MacAdam said in a media briefing.

The report found the province's early learning and childcare board did not have a policy on how often inspections should be performed.

The report also found that staff screening documents, such as criminal record checks, were not obtained in 30 per cent of licence approvals examined. These centres were nonetheless granted a licence to operate by the province.

In addition, fire inspection documentation was not adequately obtained in 30 per cent of approved centres examined by the auditor general.

"Some licences and renewals were issued before the board received sufficient information to be satisfied that the centre met the legislative requirements," MacAdam stated in the report.

Under the Early Learning and Child Care Act, the minister of Early Learning appoints members to the board that oversees inspections of child care centres.

"If key aspects of the regulations are not included in the inspection, standards meant to protect the well-being of children under a centre's care may not be enforced."

In her report, the auditor general noted that the inspection template established by the board did not match up with regulations. Requirements around inspection of sanitation, separate cribs for infants, safe storage of medication and adherence of meals and snacks for children to Canada's Food Guide were not included in the inspection form.

"If key aspects of the regulations are not included in the inspection, standards meant to protect the well-being of children under a centre's care may not be enforced," the report stated.

Finally, the report noted that in the fiscal year 2017-2018, 39 out of 49 centres with funding contracts greater than \$100,000 did not receive authorization from the province's Treasury Board.

Among the report's recommendations were that the board implement policies on frequency of inspections, that the inspection forms be updated and that the board clearly identify which violations would result in a failed inspection.

The Guardian requested an interview with Early Learning Minister Jordan Brown, who did not respond by deadline.

Department has begun to act

Carolyn Simpson, the province's director for early childhood development, said the department has begun to act on the recommendations of the auditor general's report.

"We've either acted on each of the recommendations to its completion or we have a plan in place for them all," Simpson said.

Simpson said inspectors do visual checks of, for example, sanitation of furniture, equipment and food preparation areas. But she said the information was not recorded on the inspection forms.

"If there were concerns from our perspective, because we work with two other departments for inspections, we would send that immediately to our health inspector," Simpson said.

The board is currently updating the forms to meet requirements of the act, she said.

Sonya Hooper, executive director the Early Childhood Development Association of P.E.I., said she believes childcare centres are being properly inspected. But corrective action can be time-consuming.

"Depending on what corrective action is needed to be taken, a year goes by very quick," Hooper said.

"I think centres do report to us that they're inspected and that they have areas that they need to improve and implement corrections to."

However, Hooper said administrators of childcare centres are often under pressure to meet the demands of inspections.

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