

# Pre-primary planning 'inadequate,' rushed to meet election promise, AG finds <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

Access online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

Nova Scotia Auditor General Kim Adair-MacPherson is suggesting the governing Liberals didn't do their homework before launching pre-primary in 2017.

Adair-MacPherson released her report into the program, which offers free education for children in Nova Scotia in the year before they start school, on Wednesday.

"Our overall conclusion is that there was not proper planning before the program was rolled out into the school system," Adair-MacPherson told CBC News.

The report suggests the provincial government rushed the start of the pre-primary program, didn't properly cost it out and failed to properly assess its impact on the daycare sector.

The auditor general's criticisms of "inadequate planning" included:

- Identifying program goals and measuring success.
- Identifying potential risks to the program, as well as ways to mitigate those risks.
- Analyzing the full costs of the new program.
- Consulting with stakeholders.
- Ensuring roles and responsibilities of employees are clear.

Adair-MacPherson said it's expected that such things would be completed before a new program is announced.

The governing Liberals announced the program in April 2017, days before an election was called. The program's four-year rollout would begin just five months later, at the start of the next school year.

That may have been a factor in the ability of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to "carry out these steps," said Adair-MacPherson.

Although it's not noted in her office's 15-page report, Adair-MacPherson said the government appeared to be in a hurry to create and expand the program to fulfil an election promise. The province declared the rollout of the program complete in October 2020.

"The initiative was driven based on an election platform commitment in 2017," she said.

Auditors noted there were no consultations with those who would be most affected by the program, until after it started.

"In September 2017, after the program was up and running in the first round of schools, the department consulted with families of young children to better understand their needs and licensed daycare providers to better understand the effects on their sector," the report said.

## Criminal-record checks

Some daycare operators are still scrambling to find staff after losing employees to the program as it was being expanded. Many early childhood educators were attracted by the higher pay and benefits offered by the government program.

Auditors also found background verifications, including criminal-record checks, vulnerable-sector checks and child-abuse registry checks were not always completed before pre-primary staff were hired and on the job.

"We found that background checks and employee qualifications were sometimes not provided at all or were provided after the individual started working in the classroom," noted the report.

Adair-MacPherson found that troubling.

"The most important thing is that we have to ensure that it's a safe learning environment for these young children, so those background

checks are very important," she said.

The auditor made nine recommendations, all of which were accepted by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Education. They include:

- Establishing specific and measurable goals for pre-primary.
- Regularly evaluating the program.
- Ensuring all background checks are completed before employment.
- Making sure credentials are verified.
- Clearly defining and communicating roles and responsibilities for pre-primary staff.

**Region:** Nova Scotia <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** pre-school <sup>[4]</sup>

social policies and programs <sup>[5]</sup>

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