

Chéticamp's only daycare looks to prioritize children with ties to French language ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The only daycare in Chéticamp, N.S., will temporarily close as of Friday due to staff resignations, which come amid concerns over a move to prioritize children of families with a French-speaking background.

Three staff members recently resigned from Les Petits Poussins Daycare, which is housed in École NDA, a French-language school in the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP) school board.

Two of the employees left for personal reasons unrelated to the proposed changes, but the third resigned after saying she felt "uncomfortable" with the new policy, said Lindsey Chason, vice-president of the daycare's board of directors.

Under the changes, which were outlined in a notice sent to parents over the summer, priority for admittance to Les Petits Poussins will shift to children who meet CSAP entry requirements.

Stephanie Comeau, a spokesperson for CSAP, said those requirements include children of parents whose first language is French or children whose grandparents speak French.

Comeau said CSAP asked the daycare to bring in these changes over time as "an important partner in our school."

"However, it was never to impose anything that would cause grief ... to the daycare," she said.

Local parent says changes unfair

Chelsea Ingraham said her son Josiah, who is nearly two, had been on the daycare's wait-list since she was four months pregnant.

She was told priority for admittance would be shifting to children who fall under the CSAP entry requirements, which her family does not meet.

Although Ingraham said the daycare offered to honour Josiah's place on the wait-list, she was worried what the changes would mean for any future children of her own, and those of other Anglophone families.

"I think it's a discrimination against our children in this town, because there are people in this town who do not have Acadian background," Ingraham told CBC Radio's Information Morning Cape Breton on Wednesday.

"It's almost as if I had to find somebody who was Acadian before to have a child with, so they would have access to daycare. It just doesn't seem fair."

Ingraham has pulled Josiah off the wait-list even though he was close to getting in because she said sending her son to the daycare would teach him it's OK "to treat someone differently" based off their background.

The daycare's board told CBC News the policy came down as a directive from CSAP, but Comeau said the school board cannot dictate any changes to the daycare as it does not own the facility.

She said CSAP regularly works with partners in its schools to offer more French-language services to children and their families.

In July, she said the board approached the Chéticamp daycare to work toward changes, including a stronger focus on speaking French to the children. Some French is already spoken at the daycare.

The board also suggested that children meeting the CSAP criteria "would then have a priority at the daycare," since that's who would be attending École NDA.

Chason told CBC News the former board of Les Petits Poussins has resigned since those conversations began with CSAP.

However, Chason said Wednesday in an email the former board members did not resign because of the CSAP terms. The members had

served on the board for many years, even beyond the time that their children attended the daycare, she said.

Chason also sent a statement on behalf of the current board, which said it is working with CSAP to bring in the same admittance policies as other CSAP school daycares.

The board said there is no timeline for making this happen, but it hopes to bring in these policies "without creating barriers for our community."

Region: Nova Scotia ^[3]

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