

Left in the lurch [VN] ^[1]

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See text below.

EXCERPTS

A recent decision in northern province of Ha Tay to shut down substandard private kindergartens and daycare centers has left hundreds of parents scrambling to find childcare.

Frustration is mounting and families say they are in desperate need of qualified individuals to care for their kids while they work.

Provincial administration has now closed a total of 334 private centers after several facilities throughout the country were exposed as being overcrowded and understaffed.

On average, the private centers were found to have just 20 square meters of space for dozens of children and adult supervision was often inadequate.

"Ha Tay is facing a shortage of about 1,000 nursery teachers," said Quach Thi Mai Dung, vice director of the kindergarten education division at the Ha Tay Province's Department of Education and Training.

Many centers were also found to be employing under-trained and abusive staff.

The recent death of a toddler at a private center in Ho Chi Minh City sparked public outrage and led to tighter management policies in the private daycare sector.

The rapid shut-downs in the north however, have left over 1,000 preschoolers without a place to go while their parents are away at work.

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Local officials said the province will invest VND70 billion (US\$4.4 million) to establish and upgrade more schools and care centers in the future, and Ha Dong Town is constructing a facility that can accommodate up to 600 kids.

The new large-scale center is expected to be operational by the start of the next academic year.

Some experts have said this will not necessarily solve the problem of unstandardized daycares and preschools.

One of the main reasons parents turn to private facilities for childcare is because they can offer longer, more flexible hours at a cheaper cost.

Some parents even pay staff to pick up and drop off their children at home.

Local authorities say another problem is the difficulty in uncovering all private facilities as many operate illegally out of peoples' homes in remote residential areas.

Ha Tay is the first province to close down such a large number of private childcare facilities in such a short time.

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- reprinted from Thanh Nien

Region: Asia ^[2]

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