

ABC Learning finds it's not child's play in Canada ^[1]

Author: Walsh, Liam

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Excerpt

Susan Elson thought the childcare meeting with Australians in Canada had odd moments.

"They did not have business cards. They did not have brochures. They did not have anything," recalls Elson, who has been involved in accrediting child care in Canada.

The June meeting in a small Edmonton conference room was just one precursor to the start of Canadian operations in recent weeks for Australian-backed childcare group 123 Busy Beavers Learning Centres.

It was a quiet beginning to a firestorm about Busy Beavers' links to Brisbane-based ABC Learning Centres.

Now ABC – whose rapid expansion to over 2200 centres in Australia, NZ, the US and the UK has raised questions – has denied moving on Canada.

Stockmarket-listed ABC also maintains Busy Beavers and other 123 companies are separate, independent entities. That means ABC has no control over operational decisions, and the businesses themselves do not appear on ABC's accounts.

That hasn't convinced some Canadian politicians or media, who published views that ABC was behind the push.

The Canadian reception has been hostile, with headlines blaring multinational "big box" child care is set to arrive. Organisations such as the Canadian Union of Public Employees are sounding concerns about quality at profit-run child care.

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