

Childcare centres fail basic standards ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Childcare centres [in Australia] are routinely breaching health and safety rules, with one in 20 caught failing to protect and properly supervise young children.

Unsafe buildings or equipment exist in one in five centres, and a similar number fail basic hygiene and food safety standards, the federal government's childcare watchdog reveals in its latest audit.

Eleven per cent of the nation's childcare centres failed inspections by the National Childcare Accreditation Council this year.

The breaches put pressure on federal, state and territory governments to approve higher staffing ratios, as well as a quality rating system for centres, at the next Council of Australian Governments meeting in December.

But the nation's biggest operator, ABC Learning -- which has stood down a Brisbane worker charged with biting a baby in her care -- is resisting the push to impose higher quality standards.

ABC Learning claims it would need to charge \$20 a day more in fees to comply with COAG proposals to force centres to hire extra staff.

The NCAC said 26 per cent of the 1539 long daycare centres it inspected between January and June had breached the rules by failing to keep potentially dangerous products, plants and objects out of reach of children.

More than 5 per cent of centres ignored basic safety precautions, such as keeping electrical cords out of reach and shielding power points.

In at least 5 per cent of centres, staff did not store, handle or serve food properly.

And childcare workers in one in 20 centres did not wash their hands after changing nappies or wiping noses, or before serving food.

...

But ABC Learning, which is in receivership and controls 15per cent of the market, says in its submission to a Senate inquiry that minimum quality standards cannot be "black-letter laws".

"The love and nurture displayed at ABC Centres is not founded on command and control regulation," it says.

...

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