

Govt directive puts preschool, daycare centres in tough spot^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

KOZHIKODE: With the government of India recently clearing the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) policy, not many creches, daycare centres and government-run anganwadis in the district will be in a position to continue operations. Conditions including staff-kid ratio, space-child ratio and other regulations, which are part of ECCE were cleared by the Union cabinet on September 20.

As per the policy, a maximum of 30 children may be accommodated in a classroom measuring 35 sq m. Besides, outdoor space of 30 sq m and separate section for cooking nutritional meals should be provided at all private and government-run preschools.

As of now there are no regulations to monitor the standards of preschool centres in the district. This includes 50 private-run day care centres, over 2,900 anganwadis and more than 150 kindergartens operating out of limited spaces and sans qualified caregivers. Most centres, heavily depended upon by employed parents, do not follow any standard ratio between the number of children admitted and staffers on duty.

"As yet, we have received no information on the new government policy. If such a policy comes into existence, it would be impossible to continue running this centre," said Rajima Sreejith, a city-based woman who runs a daycare at home. I started this centre three years ago and it would not be financially viable for me to shift the centre to another building with more space, she added. At present, she accommodates 11 tots aged between 8 months and three years.

Most home-based daycare centres face a similar situation, as they accommodate kids at their own home. Many charge Rs 1,000 - 2,000 for the service.

The condition of many unrecognized kindergartens is also not different. As of now, many individuals have started kindergartens at their own houses and in rented buildings without necessary facilities, said an official with the district social justice office.

The situation will be worse with government-run anganwadis as many operate out of single rooms without proper protection from the rain and the sun. Other mandates of the policy-including first aid services, safe drinking water, child-friendly toilets, caregiver-student ratio of 1:20 for children between 3-6 years and 1:10 for those younger than three-are also not followed in a majority of anganwadis or daycare centres.

"Funds allotted to anganwadis is less and buildings for running these centres are allotted by local bodies. Most of the time, anganwadis operate from dilapidated rooms," said a Child Development Project officer (CDPO), who is in charge of monitoring anganwadis.

However, the CDPO, who did not wish to be identified, exuded confidence that the move to convert AWCs to Vibrant Early Child Development Centres would bring some much needed change.

Meanwhile, parents are happy about the new regulations. Rajesh Mathew, whose wife had to quit her job to look after their child in the absence of a hygienic daycare feels the government should have introduced this policy earlier. "This is important for the upbringing of a healthy generation, especially when most mothers today chose to work", he added.

-reprinted from the Times of India

Region: Asia^[2]

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