

Almost 300 childcare centres failing to meet minimum standards

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Source: Herald Sun

Format: Article

Publication Date: 23 Mar 2014

EXCERPTS:

Almost 300 Victorian childcare centres are failing to meet minimum standards under the strict new federal rating system.

Eighteen months into the three-year grading process, less than two in every five centres had been assessed nationwide.

And while Victoria has the best record of any state so far, not one local centre has earned an "excellent" rating.

Under a new system agreed to by state education ministers, all of the 14,000-plus childcare centres across the country are being given a "quality rating".

The latest report by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority shows 77 per cent of the Victorian centres graded so far are either meeting or exceeding the new standards. This compares with the national average of 59 per cent.

None of the 1411 centres assessed so far have received top billing.

Just one centre - Wonderkindy in Port Melbourne - has been placed in the worst category of "significant improvement required".

Meanwhile, more than 2400 other Victorian centres are waiting to be graded.

Earlier this month, Assistant Education Minister Sussan Ley said she was concerned about the "growing backlog" of ungraded centres.

An ACECQA spokeswoman said a "number of efficiency measures are being considered" to speed up the assessment process.

She said the "agreed time frame" for the completion of the nationwide assessments, which are conducted by state education departments, remained mid-2015.

An Education Department spokesman said assessment results so far showed "Victoria leads the nation in early years education".

Shane Lucas, chief executive of the Early Learning Association Australia, said the "working towards (the standard)" category could be misleading.

"It needs to be made clearer to services that 'working towards' is not a fail," he said.

"It may be a very strong result. There are just certain areas that you need to focus your attention on."

Centres are tested on seven areas, including educational program, child health and safety and physical environment.

Those that achieve an "exceeding (the standard)" rating overall can then apply directly to ACECQA to be assessed for the "excellent" rating.

Laverton Community Children's Centre, in Melbourne's western suburbs, is among Victoria's best performers, listed as "exceeding" the standard in all seven categories.

Centre manager Kate Kirner believes that community diversity is one of the biggest keys to their success, with children from a wide range of ethnicities attending the centre.

"We also employ staff from different cultures ... and so from a young age the children have an appreciation that people look and sound different," she said.

-reprinted from the Herald Sun

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