

Inspections result in nearly half of province's daycare centres receiving only temporary licences ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Nearly half of Manitoba's daycare centres didn't pass muster with fire, health and child-care inspectors and were awarded only temporary provisional licences this spring.

But, unlike British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and now New Brunswick, the details of those inspections aren't public, and likely won't be for years.

According to a *Free Press* analysis of nearly 700 licensed centres and nursery schools, 47 per cent were given temporary, provisional licences following the annual round of inspections done in February and March. Those provisional licences typically expire next month. Centres will be awarded permanent ones if they fix what needs fixing, which most do.

Public health inspectors found problems with roughly 13 per cent of daycare centres and nursery schools, but the Manitoba government posts no details online so it's impossible to gauge how serious the health violations were.

Nearly nine per cent of daycare centres and nursery schools raised red flags with city fire inspectors. Again, the details of those inspection reports are not made public.

Margaret Ferniuk, director of Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care, said it's not unusual to have so many centres issued provisional licences because they had outstanding inspection issues that need to be addressed.

"If there are any major issue, we deal with it right away," she said.

The annual round of inspections were completed this spring on centres and nursery schools only. Home daycares will be inspected next.

Manitoba's regulations are considered to be among the best in Canada, though critics say the rules often apply on paper only. Manitoba is among the only provinces that doesn't post online details about each licensed centre's annual inspections.

Ontario, where a series of high-profile problems has sparked huge scrutiny of child care recently, has been posting detailed inspection reports online for the last four years that allow parents to see whether the daycare is in compliance with roughly 200 rules. Last month, New Brunswick began posting its inspection reports online.

But Manitoba only posts a line or two that offer little detail about a centre's deficiencies and which are mired in confusing regulatory jargon.

The Manitoba Child Care Association has formally called on the province to post clearer and more complete information about inspections and licence exemptions online.

"I think parents would find that helpful," said executive director Pat Wege. "Licences mean nothing to the average lay person when they're written in code."

The province says inspection records exist only on paper and are placed in every centre's paper file. Making them public would be "a large and expensive undertaking."

"It is a paper-based system. It is not computerized and significant changes in information gathering would have to be implemented," said the province in a statement. "We are exploring ways to put inspection reports online, including the costs for doing so."

A time frame for putting inspection reports online has not yet been determined. The province noted that parents can ask to daycare staff to provide the centre's latest fire, health and provincial inspection reports.

In addition to health, fire and regulatory inspections, the province also uses an environment rating scale that looks at the quality of programs, furnishing, outdoor space and a host of other things at daycare centres. Out of a possible score of seven, Manitoba's centres earned an average score of 4.7 last year. A score of five is considered good. The province released the scores following an access to

information request but would not reveal the names of individual centres, so it's impossible for parents to know how well their centre scored on the bi-annual environmental rating scale.

This year, the rating will be voluntary.

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