

Child care shame files

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national political editor

CHILDCARE centres that fail to meet basic hygiene and safety standards will be named and shamed on a My School-style government website from next year.

A new rating system will allow parents to compare centres in their local area and interstate for the first time, rating the providers from excellent to unsatisfactory.

Childcare Minister Kate Ellis has confirmed she wants the transparency reforms to be rolled out on the existing mychild.gov.au website - from January 2012.

"They will be able to see how each centre is rated. Whether it is high quality or unsatisfactory and whether they have a focus on the issues important to them," she said.

The existing www.mychild.gov.au website offers only basic information on childcare centres, including fees and vacancies.

The Gillard Government's new push for transparency coincides with the release of the latest National Childcare Accreditation Council Report next week.

The report, obtained by *The Sunday Mail*, reveals one in four centres checked by officials had failed to secure dangerous products, including poisons, from children.

Nearly one in three childcare centres that received accreditation reviews also failed to implement effective food hygiene practices, such as staff washing their hands before serving meals.

It also finds that 28 per cent

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■ 15 per cent failed to document children's learning and use a planning program

■ 25 per cent failed to ensure that potentially dangerous products, plants and objects were inaccessible to children

■ 29 per cent failed to implement effective food hygiene practices

■ 28 per cent failed to ensure toileting and nappy-changing procedures were positive experiences

■ 20 per cent did not act to control the spread of infectious diseases

Source: National Childcare Accreditation Council Quality Trends Report July-December 2010

of centres checked by the NCAC failed to ensure toileting and nappy changes were positive experiences.

This involves not only hygiene, but ensuring staff helped toddlers to learn about toilet training without punishing or embarrassing children who have accidents.

"Parents are quite rightly horrified," Ms Ellis said.

"What's really alarming is the 20 per cent that are still not acting to prevent the spread of contagious diseases."

What do you think? Email yournews@thesundaymail.com.au or write to us at GPO Box 130, Brisbane, 4001.



Meticulous: Rebecca Cain spent hours researching her son Isaac's childcare centre.
Picture: Mark Cranitch

Mums taking great care

Carly Hennessy

FOOD hygiene is the No.1 priority for Bulimba mum Rebecca Cain.

Son Isaac has a serious nut allergy, so before enrolling him in Lady Gowrie at Spring Hill she spent several hours checking out the centre, reviewing its medical policy and watching how staff interacted with the children.

She's not a helicopter mum but you can't expect a three-year-old to tell you if staff and kids wash their hands before and after eating or make sure the centre is nut-free.

"As soon as he went there he loved it, that's how we knew we were at the right place," Mrs Cain said.

"He wakes up and he's excited about going. He was in a previous centre before that and never wanted to go."

Mrs Cain said she was surprised to learn almost a third of centres failed food hygiene standards and one quarter had potentially

dangerous products such as cleaning sprays in reach of children, according to the latest childcare accreditation report.

"We've never had any cause for worry. I guess if we did we'd just bring it up with the centre director," she said.

This is exactly what Rachel Smith, of Brisbane suburb Eagleby, was forced to do over unhygienic nappy changing practices at a centre her two girls attended.

"But they were good. Once we alerted them, it was addressed," Mrs Smith said.

"It can be difficult when they are going through that toilet-training phase. You need to get the routine right for each child."

Mrs Smith recommended visiting potential centres and spending several hours with your child observing staff interactions with the children, nappy change procedures and if the children regularly washed hands or put on sunscreen.

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