

CHALLENGES FACING EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT CENTRES EMERGING

Thursday, 13 March 2014

Media Statement

Pretoria, 13 March 2014 – The Department of Social Development's national audit of early childhood development (ECD) centres, which began in August 2013, is nearing completion and key issues on the provisioning of childhood development services are beginning to emerge.

The Department undertook the audit to obtain information on the nature and extent of ECD provisioning, services, resources and infrastructure in order to inform and support on-going policy and planning initiatives. The audit was also motivated by the National Planning Commission's Diagnostic Overview of 2012, which pointed out that:

"The quality of early childhood education and care for poor black communities is inadequate and generally very poor... Despite the policy commitment to early childhood development, implementation in the poorest communities lags behind and it is reflected in the development indicators on children."

A comparative analysis of six (6) provinces where the audit is 50% or more complete shows that ECD centres are battling with issues of inadequate infrastructure, inadequate equipment and supplies, a lack of practitioners and poorly trained practitioners, as well as inadequate health and safety measures, among other issues.

The comparative analysis is of the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, North West, Northern Cape and Western Cape provinces. The audit targets a total of 19 971 ECD centres nationwide, registered and unregistered.

Infrastructure

Nearly a third (30.8%) of ECD centres have been built for the purpose of providing ECD services. For those centres operating from improvised locations, more than 17% are operated from a house or part of a house including a garage, and 10% operate from a shack.

It has been found that 42% of ECD centres require urgent maintenance. Most of these centres are in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu Natal provinces.

ECD practitioners

The analysis found that virtually none of the ECD practitioners have a tertiary qualification. Over 43% of practitioners have below Grade 12 education, while about 40% have completed matric.

The highest number of those with a matric certificate is in KwaZulu Natal (49%). In the Western Cape, 33% of practitioners have a matric certificate. However, the Western Cape has the highest number of practitioners with post-matric diplomas (5%).

Salaries for practitioners make up 49% of total expenditure in ECD centres for all provinces.

Services offered

With regards to the curriculum offered, 91% ECD centres offer an unrecognised curriculum, while only about 8% offer a recognised curriculum. Moreover, 40% of ECD centres do not have sufficient learner support material.

When it comes to providing meals for learners, the analysis found that most ECD centres offered meals, with breakfast and lunch being the most commonly served.

Forty percent of ECD centres don't have sufficient learner support material. These are mostly found in the North West, Limpopo, KwaZulu Natal and Eastern Cape provinces.

On issues of governance, the comparative analysis found that 90% ECD centres have management committees even though only 50% of the ECD centres were formally registered (20% of audited ECD centres are not registered, while conditional sites in the process of registration make up 30% of audited ECD centres).

With respect to disability related matters, it has been found that assessing children for disabilities is relatively uncommon in ECD centres.

The Minister for Social Development, Ms Bathabile Dlamini, has welcomed the preliminary findings saying they will make a valuable contribution to government's strategy to improve the provisioning of early childhood development services in the country.

"ECD programmes must provide appropriate developmental opportunities and care for our children, ensuring that their emotional, cognitive and physical development needs are met throughout their early lives. The information provided by this audit will help government meet this objective," said Minister Dlamini.

The Children's Act stipulates a number of norms and standards that an ECD centre must meet. These include a safe environment for children; proper care for sick children or children that become ill; adequate space and ventilation; safe

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drinking water; hygienic and adequate toilet facilities; safe storage of anything that may be harmful to children; access to refuse disposal services or other adequate means of disposal of refuse generated at the facility; a hygienic area for the preparation of food for children; measures for the separation of children of different age groups; the drawing up of action plans for emergencies; and the drawing up of policies and procedures regarding health care at the facility.

The audit is expected to be complete by end March.

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