

CAMP AUSTRALIA — LICENCE BREACHES

904. Mrs A.K. HAYDEN to the Minister for Child Protection:

I refer to the concerning situation of childcare provider Camp Australia having a string of licence breaches, including inadequate staff supervision, a child having poison sprayed in their eyes, and another child leaving the school and wandering the streets unsupervised. What is the minister doing to provide mums and dads certainty about their children's safety under the supervision of childcare providers?

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

People might be aware that what happens with long-day care, early years education, normal childcare centres, out-of-school hours care and holiday care is that although many of these services are funded by the federal government, they are regulated by the state government. Within the Department of Communities we have a regulatory unit and I am very impressed with the work that it does. For instance, most long-day care centres are visited at least once a year. The unit does surveillance work on all those providers, including—I should have mentioned this before—family day care services. The unit makes unannounced visits and sometimes carries out surveillance of providers. The case that has led to a significant find that was reported in the paper about Camp Australia, which provides a number of after-school hours care services around Western Australia, was not one in any of the circumstances that the member referred to. It was licensed for a certain number of children, I think at West Leederville Primary School, but it ended up enrolling a number more than that. From memory, I think it was licensed for 30 children and it ended up having over 40 children at different times. That is not good, and it not only did that, but also was wilful in its subterfuge about that issue. Two sets of books were kept and when inspections were done, it tried to hide that information from the regulatory unit. That is the reason it got such a hefty fine—the largest imposed in Western Australia. It was a significant penalty for Camp Australia. If it is some comfort to families out there that use Camp Australia, it should be noted that the ratios that were required for the higher number of children who were present in the centre were still maintained. In this particular breach, children's safety was not of concern. It was really that they had more children than they were licensed for and the level of deception that Camp Australia management was found guilty of.

At this stage, fines have been issued to Camp Australia. When I have been asked to comment on this publicly, I have made it clear that I have asked the department to work with Camp Australia to see what measures can be put in place to ensure the quality of its services across the state and that we can have some confidence in those services. There will also be a review of the regulations nationally. We are part of a national system. Although it is state law, we try to keep a national consistency across those regulations as much as possible so that when providers operate across state boundaries, they understand the rules. It is not good that Camp Australia has had a number of breaches, and particularly the significant last breach of which it was found guilty. But I think people can draw comfort from the fact that we have a strong regulatory system that is particularly active here in Western Australia. The findings against Camp Australia should give parents some comfort that our regulatory unit is proactive and goes out there and inspects a number of services throughout the state