



News Release

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MINIMAL MINISTRY OVERSIGHT MEANS PARENTS NEED TO BE VIGILANT IN SELECTING THEIR CHILDREN'S PRIVATE SCHOOL, AUDITOR GENERAL FINDS

(TORONTO) Ontario has one of the least regulated private school sectors in Canada. The Ministry of Education provides little oversight to ensure that private school students receive satisfactory instruction, unless the registered private school offers credits toward the Ontario Secondary School Diploma, Auditor Bonnie Lysyk says in her *2013 Annual Report*.

In 2012/13, there were more than 1,000 registered private elementary and secondary schools in Ontario, with about 110,000 students enrolled. These schools are considered to be independent organizations and are not required to follow Ministry of Education policies for publicly funded schools, including hiring teachers certified by the Ontario College of Teachers, obtaining criminal background checks or following the Ontario curriculum unless they offer credits toward the Ontario secondary school diploma.

Following are some of the Auditor General's other significant concerns:

- There is a risk that some private schools may be operating unlicensed child-care centres. Ministry information indicates there may be more than 15,000 children younger than compulsory school age enrolled in private schools. Private schools registered before June 1993 are allowed to operate child-care facilities without a licence. In contrast to licensed daycare, there is no limit to the number of children that each private school staff person can oversee, there are no fire safety requirements, and these staff are not required to have any child-care qualifications.
- For the more than 600 elementary and non-credit-granting secondary schools, education officers conduct a brief visit to validate newly registered schools, but there is no process in place to ever visit these schools again. The Ministry does not evaluate the curriculum for quality or content, nor does it check for health and safety issues.
- To obtain the Ontario Secondary School Diploma, public and private school students must successfully pass the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT). In 2012, 82% of public school students passed the OSSLT on the first attempt, compared to 73% of private school students. However, results for private schools varied considerably from an overall school pass rate of 19% to 100%.
- The Ministry has provided private schools with extra Ontario Secondary School Diplomas, which have been pre-signed by the Minister, resulting in a risk of diploma fraud. For example, in 2011/2012, 30 private schools requested and received from the Ministry a total of 1,500 more diplomas than their grade 12 student populations.
- The Ministry identified that about 100 of the 400 private schools that offer credits toward the Ontario Secondary School Diploma had problems potentially related to credit integrity, such as failing to provide the required instructional hours for each course and insufficient support to justify granting students equivalent credits for courses taken at non-recognized out-of-country institutions.

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