Administrator: Belle Chasse school deficiencies minor

by JOHN LPLANTE
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The administrator of the scandal-embroiled Belle Chasse State School says federal inspectors uncovered only relatively minor deficiencies this year and did not repeat past charges of neglect and abuse.

In recent years charges of rape and other crimes committed against mentally retarded clients of the school have been filed.

The latest inspection produced a long list of minor deficiencies but none regarding abuse or neglect, administrator Wayne Greenleaf said on Wednesday.

He said the report does not mean that abuse or neglect do not exist at the institution, but it does mean that all such cases are being dealt with.

“They’re saying we handled everything in accordance with their standards,” he said.

Earlier this year the school hired a psychological assistant after he was charged with sexual abuse and other offenses, including presenting fake credentials to get the job, Greenleaf said.

Greenleaf was asked to respond to U.S. Health and Human Resources Secretary Margaret Heckler’s charge that a Senate subcommittee that “appalling” conditions have been uncovered in several institutions for the mentally retarded.

Belle Chasse State School was listed as one of the institutions with major deficiencies.

At least one institution has been threatened with loss of federal funds for major problems, but Greenleaf said that, as far as he knows, his school has not been threatened.

A copy of the federal government’s 20-page inspection report was not immediately available, but Greenleaf read, over the telephone, what he said were the major deficiencies listed in the report.

Many of the problems already had been corrected, and the rest should be corrected within four months, he said.

Greenleaf said that perhaps the most serious citation involved a shortage of physical therapists to treat clients at the institution.

He said another citation was issued because dieticians and doctors did not “sit down and talk together” about nutritional needs for the clients. Such dialogue has since been started, Greenleaf said.

The school also had a shortage of dieticians, he said. One more dietician was hired last month, he said.

Another citation involved “food not getting to clients warm enough,” Greenleaf said. He said new equipment has been ordered to take care of that problem.

One building with severe leaks also was cited, he said. That building has been abandoned, and the attorney general’s office is planning legal action against the builder, Greenleaf said.

He said health and safety code violations included deficiencies such as not marking an emergency power switch and not mounting fire extinguishers on brackets.