

have any head-banging or hand-biting."

She said the school had to dismiss only one teacher in the past year. And even though the 1995 report has been widely circulated among parents, no student has been pulled out of the school, she said.

Noting that there are always three to four staffers in each of the school's 10 classrooms, she said, "It would be difficult — unless the entire agency were practicing some God-awful treatment — for a person to do the stuff in the report."

Ms. Gerenser noted that just last month, Eden II's adult school program received a "very good" rating in an evaluation by the city's Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Alcoholism Services.

The state Attorney General's Office reports no complaints on file against Eden II.

The New York State Commission on the Quality of Care for the Mentally Disabled said it has investigated 11 accusations of abuse and mistreatment against Eden II between 1991 and 1995. Four of the accusations were found to be without merit, four were substantiated, one was dropped and one case remains open. Records of a 1991 accusation of mistreatment could not be found by staff, officials said.

Ms. Gerenser insisted that the school staff is well-trained, and that any accusation of abuse is properly handled.

As for training, every staffer undergoes a three-day program at the beginning of every school year, she said, during which they are taught about autism and instructed in professional behavior. On-going training occurs throughout the year, she said.

Accusations of abuse, she said, are thoroughly checked out. "If there is an allegation of abuse, that person is suspended immediately. That's policy. We then conduct an investigation, and call anybody who needs to be notified — the child abuse hotline, the parents. If there is substantial evidence, the person is fired."

Several parents of children in the school blasted the damning 1995 state report as biased and untrue.

"This school is the best thing that ever happened to my daughter," said Paula Delfino of Prince's Bay. Two incidents of abuse listed in the report apply to her 7-year-old daughter, but she insisted they were twisted out of context.

The report, she said, alleged that a teacher had pushed her daughter's head back in order to force her to eat. But in actuality, her daughter has an eating problem and a teacher has to move the girl's jaw "to train her jaw to chew," and sometimes the girl resists, said her mother.

"They [the staff] were just doing their job," insisted Mrs. Delfino.

Several mothers of children at Eden II, upon learning that the Advance was preparing a story, called to support the school. They also asserted that the report was spurred by a small group of disgruntled parents and teachers, and that it did not reflect the true atmosphere at Eden II.

Tricia DiMaggio of New Dorp, who has two children at Eden II, said she trusted the school staff so much "that I would leave my children with them for the weekend."



The entrance to Eden II, a facility for autistic people in Elm Park.

Photo #12