

Markham daycare closure leaves parents shocked, looking for refunds^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

After a Markham daycare closed without warning on Sunday, leaving 23 children without a place to go, Ontario's education ministry revealed the daycare had been investigated in the past.

The Ministry of Education confirmed the Children's Aid Society (CAS) "investigated allegations regarding the welfare of the children" at The Little People's Academy, which billed itself as a Montessori school.

Ministry spokesman Gary Wheeler did not elaborate on the allegations, but said in an email to CBC News that the ministry "always co-operates with the Children's Aid Society when asked about an investigation, however we cannot comment on a CAS investigation."

Wheeler added ministry staff attended the daycare on Monday and found it closed and is now "working to contact the licensee about the closure and we will continue to follow up on the concerns raised."

It's unclear when the investigation took place. CAS could not be reached for comment.

The daycare's sudden closure left a group of parents, including Kamila Camp, scrambling for options and looking for refunds.

Camp said her daughter, three-year-old Luna, had been at The Little People's Academy for the last six months.

"I paid almost \$7,000 in tuition for the year, so I'm losing half of that," she told CBC News. She's hoping to get that money back after the surprise closing.

'Absolutely no warning'

Camp said daycare owner Tova Lavine gave parents "no indication ... absolutely no warning," and alleges she was taking deposits from parents and registering new students as recently as last week.

"To take that money, knowing that's money we're using to help our children with a huge transition in their lives, is unbelievable," she said.

Neha Chopra, whose daughter attended the daycare, said she received an email Sunday afternoon alerting her to the closure.

"I was shocked," she told CBC News. "You don't expect such a huge place to close overnight."

Chopra says she would like Lavine to explain why she shut down the daycare.

"Please come here, talk to us, give us the reason why you're doing that," Chopra said. "We need reasons and we need our money back."

Jordan Deangkinay, an early childhood educator told who was hired two weeks ago after responding to an ad on Kijiji, is also looking for answers.

Deangkinay, who worked only two days last week, said the ad didn't specify it was for a position with a Montessori school.

"If it did, I wouldn't have applied for it. I don't have the credentials or license for it," he said.

Deangkinay said he, too, can't get in touch with the owners.

"I feel more sad for the parents and children," he said. "I can go look for another job."

Owner says parents will get their 'stuff'

CBC News spoke with Lavine outside her home on Monday and asked if parents would be refunded.

"Everybody's gonna get their stuff," she replied.

That's not good enough for parents like Camp.

"I don't really need my daughter's snowpants, I need her tuition," she said.

Katherine Poyntz, the executive director of the Canadian Council of Montessori Administrators, empathizes with Camp and the other parents who have been left in the lurch.

"It's a sad statement of people being unethical and perhaps immoral to run a business like that," Poyntz said, adding incidents like this gives Montessori schools a bad name.

"My heart goes out to the families who have trusted and are in a situation where they don't have care for their children."

"Montessori is not a franchise so when there's a problem in one school, I can imagine the public feeling that all schools with the name Montessori are not able to be trusted," Poyntz said.

Parents affected by the closure are being urged to contact York Region Children Services or visit the education ministry's website to search for licensed child care in their area.

-reprinted from CBC News

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