

M [REDACTED]

RE: Gungahlin Montessori Academy

Email: [REDACTED]

Dear M [REDACTED]

Show Cause Notice – Proposed Compliance Action

1. I am a delegate of the ACT Regulatory Authority (the Authority), also known as Children’s Education and Care Assurance (CECA).
2. As you may be aware, the Authority is the regulator of education and care services in the ACT and has the responsibility of monitoring and enforcing compliance with the *Education and Care Services National Law* (the *Law*). One of the Authority’s roles is to investigate suspected offences under the *Law*.
3. The Authority is currently investigating multiple suspected offences at Gungahlin Montessori Academy - SE-40020141 (the Service) operated by Gungahlin Montessori Academy Pty Ltd - PR-40017814 (the Provider). Web addresses to the *Law* and the *Education and Care Services National Regulations* (the *Regulations*) are provided for your convenience at the end of this notice.
4. Authorised Officers have obtained evidence from several sources and the Authority has determined that you have a case to answer regarding a suspected offence under the *Law*. However, the Authority’s investigation is not complete until you have had an opportunity to respond to the allegation and evidence obtained by the Authority. This is the reason for sending this Show Cause Notice (Notice) to you. Detailed instructions of how to respond also appear at the end of this Notice.
5. If substantiated, the alleged conduct may constitute inappropriate discipline, which is an offence under section 166(3) of the *Law*.
6. “Discipline” is any strategy employed by an educator with the intention of changing a child’s behaviour. Discipline that is inappropriate within the meaning of section 166 of the *Law* includes any form of physical punishment or any behaviour management strategy likely to cause emotional or physical harm to a child. Examples include hitting, yelling, physically dragging a child, unreasonable restraint of a child, using threatening or humiliating language, isolating, or shaming children.

7. If, after considering all available evidence, the Authority finds an offence has occurred, it will need to consider whether compliance action is required. The Authority considers many factors when determining appropriate compliance action, the focus being on ensuring future compliance and improved outcomes for children, rather than punishment. Further details regarding potential compliance actions appear at the end of this Notice.

Grounds for issuing Show Cause Notice

8. Evidence obtained during the investigation to date supports offences under the *Law* within the following area: Inappropriate discipline of a child.

Facts

9. On 11 October 2023, the ACT Regulatory Authority (the Authority) received a notification alleging an educator had struck a child on the back. Refer Attachment A.
10. On 13 October 2023, further information was furnished by Provider upon request including the following relevant documents:
 - a) Witness version.
 - b) Version [REDACTED]
 - c) Dismissal for Misconduct Letter.
 - d) Behaviour Management Plan

Refer to Attachment B for relevant documents.

11. Due to the risk of harms and hazards likely to cause injury if children are inappropriately disciplined, the Authority determined to investigate the matter, which engaged suspected offences under sections 166(3) of the *Law*.

Allegation of Inappropriate Discipline

12. It is alleged that on 11 October 2023, you, [REDACTED] as a staff member at an education and care service, subjected a child, believed to be [REDACTED] (3:7) who was being educated and cared for by the Service, to corporal punishment, in that, was slapped on the back by you, in contravention of section 166(3) of the *Law*.

Legislation Relevant to Allegation

13. The following provisions of the *Law* are relevant to the Allegation:

Section 166(3) of the Law - Offence to use inappropriate discipline


A staff member, or volunteer at, supervisor of an education and care service must not subject any child being educated and cared for by a service to-

- (a) Any form of corporal punishment; or
- (b) Any discipline that is unreasonable under the circumstances.


Penalty: \$10 000, in the case of an individual

Evidence relevant to the Allegation

14. On 1 November 2023, the Provider furnished documents pursuant to 215 Notice including the following relevant documents:

- a) Child Attendance
- b) Working Directly with Children records
- c) Policy and procedures
- d) Personnel file 
- e) Investigation documents.

Refer Attachment C for relevant documents which are redacted in parts to protect individual identities.

15. Documents furnished by Provider to the Authority upon request, include signed contemporaneous confession from you, to slapping child,  on the back, resulting from a refusal to put on clothes and scratching your hand. This version of events is support by the evidence of witness educator, who also completed a signed file note regarding the incident. Refer to Attachment B for file notes.
16. During the investigation, the Authority obtained witness statements, relevant extracts from which appear below, with personal information redacted where appropriate. Due to the specific circumstances surrounding the alleged offences, witnesses are identifiable from the content of their evidence.
17. Please note that educator witness statements were obtained utilising powers under section 215 of the *Law*, imposing an obligation to attend before the Authority and provide relevant evidence under questioning by an Authorised Officer. It is an offence to fail to comply.
18. Relevant extracts from Witness A's statement include:





Contraventions Support Allegations

19. Evidence gathered appears to support that [REDACTED] was subjected to corporal punishment, in that he was smacked on the back by you for not putting his clothes on and scratching you, contravening section 166(3) of the *Law*.

Potential Compliance Actions

20. The Authority reiterates that no decision has been made at this time – this letter is a step in the investigation process. However, procedural fairness requires that the Authority take this opportunity to advise you of potential compliance actions, if any offences are substantiated and/or the Authority finds that you may be an unacceptable risk of harm to a child or children. Potential compliance actions are under Part 7 of the *Law*, and include:

Section 179A of the Law – Enforceable undertaking

- (1) This section applies-
 - a) if a person has contravened, or if the Regulatory Authority alleges a person has contravened, a provision of this Law; or

- b) in the circumstances set out in section 27(a), 72(a) or 184(3).
- (2) If subsection (1) (a) applies the Regulatory Authority may accept a written undertaking from the person under which the person undertakes to take certain actions, or refrain from taking certain actions, to comply with this Law.
- (3) If subsection (1)(b) applies in relation to a person other than the approved provider of an education and care service, the Regulatory Authority may accept a written undertaking from the person, under which the person undertakes to take certain actions, or refrain from taking certain actions in relation to an education and care service.

Section 182 of the Law – Grounds for giving prohibition notice

- (1) The Regulatory Authority may give a prohibition notice to a person who is in any way involved in the provision of an approved education and care service if it considers that there may be an unacceptable risk of harm to a child or children if the person were allowed –
 - (a) to remain on the education and care service premises; or
 - (b) to provide education and care to children.
- (2) For the purposes of subsection (1), a person may be involved in the provision of an approved education and care service as any of the following –
 - (a) an approved provider;
 - (b) a nominated supervisor;
 - (c) an educator;
 - (d) a family day care educator;
 - (e) an employee;
 - (f) a contractor;
 - (g) a volunteer;
 - (h) a person who was formerly a person referred to in paragraphs (a) to (g) in relation to the approved education and care service –
or in any other capacity

Section 183 – Show cause notice to be given before prohibition notice

- (1) Before giving a prohibition notice, the Regulatory Authority must give the person a notice (a ***show cause notice***) –
 - (a) stating that the Regulatory Authority proposes to give the person a prohibition notice; and
 - (b) stating the reasons for the proposed prohibition; and
 - (c) inviting the person to make a written submission to the Regulatory Authority, within a stated time of at least 14 days, about the proposed prohibition.

Effect of an Enforceable Undertaking

21. An Enforceable Undertaking is a formal “promise” to the Authority to do or not do certain things. Terms vary, but examples of requirements are:
 - a. only working with children under supervision; or
 - b. doing some additional training to improve your skills as an educator; or
 - c. keeping the Authority advised of your workplace; or
 - d. having an approved mentor.
22. It is a flexible way to ensure ongoing compliance with the *Law* and *Regulations* and may be appropriate depending on the level of risk to children.
23. If you offer an enforceable undertaking and the Authority accepts it, failure to comply with any of its terms after acceptance allows the Authority to apply to the relevant tribunal or court for an order under section 181(2) of the *Law* to enforce the undertaking.

Effect of a Prohibition Notice

24. If, after considering all available evidence and any submission you wish to make, the Authority decides to issue a prohibition notice, while the prohibition notice is in force you must not:
 - a. provide education and care to children for an education and care service; or
 - b. be engaged as an educator, family day care educator, employee, contractor or staff member of, or perform volunteer services for, an education and care service; or
 - c. carry out any other activity relating to education and care services.

Right of response

25. Please note that the Authority has made no decision at the time of sending the Notice and will make no decision without giving you a reasonable opportunity to respond.
26. If you do not respond to the Notice at all, or within the allowed timeframe, the Authority can only consider the evidence it already has when deciding if any offences have been substantiated on the balance of probabilities and, if so, what (if any) compliance action should be taken.
27. You have a right to respond to the allegations set out in this notice. You may respond in writing or by way of a recorded interview with two Authorised Officers.
28. You may, within 14 days of receiving this letter, make a written submission for the Authority’s consideration in deciding if compliance action should be taken. If you need additional time, please direct a request with reasons to the contact officer.

29. At Attachment D to this Notice is a '4 Step Guide to Responding to a Show Cause Notice' to assist in the development of your submission.
30. If you wish to respond in a recorded interview with Authorised Officers, please advise the contact officer within seven days. A convenient time will be arranged for you to attend at the Authority's premises in Stirling, ACT, to provide your response in person. You are permitted to bring a support person to that interview, as long as the person does not have any connection with the Provider or the Service.
31. If you respond in writing, please direct your written submission via email to Authorised Officer Brian Cropper at brian.cropper@act.gov.au or by post to:

Children's Education and Care Assurance (CECA)
Education Directorate
Attention: Brian Cropper
GPO Box 158, Canberra ACT 2601.

Caution

32. Please be aware that it is an offence under section 295 of the *Law* to provide the Authority with false or misleading information or documents.
33. I am informing you that the excerpts of witness accounts taken for the Authority's investigation are included in the interests of procedural fairness. The statements taken during the investigation and the excerpts provided for your consideration in the show cause process are protected disclosures under section 296 of the *Law*.
34. The *Law* provides, at section 297, for the protection of persons who make protected disclosures from serious detrimental action against them in reprisal.

Legislation

35. The *Law* applies to you as an educator and to any service you may be employed at.
36. The *Law* is applied in the ACT by the *Education and Care Services National Law (ACT) Act 2011* <http://www.legislation.act.gov.au/a/2011-42/default.asp>.
37. The *Law* and *Regulations* can be viewed at: <http://www.acecqa.gov.au/national-law, and>
<http://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/#/view/regulation/2011/653>
38. Should you have any questions about this Show Cause Notice please contact Authorised Officer Brian Cropper at brian.cropper@act.gov.au.

Yours sincerely,



Nicole Withers
A/g Assistant Director
Children's Education and Care Assurance
Education and Care Regulation and Support
15 February 2023