

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201303004, A Council  
**Sector:** local government  
**Subject:** primary school  
**Outcome:** some upheld, recommendations

### Summary

Mrs C's children had been placed on the child protection register, and she complained that the head teacher at her son's school had made unsubstantiated allegations to the council's social work department about her parenting ability. Mrs C also complained that the head teacher had unreasonably failed to ask for the social work department's record to be corrected, despite later claiming that her remarks about the situation had been recorded inaccurately. The head teacher had also refused to meet with Mrs C to discuss her complaint.

The council said that as the head teacher disputed the accuracy of the records and as she had not had the opportunity to view them before Mrs C complained, the council did not consider them accurate. They said, however, that the remarks were not the substantive reason for placing Mrs C's children on the register. The council's investigation found that the head teacher's decision not to meet with Mrs C was based on advice from senior colleagues in the education department. The council also said that due to the personal nature of Mrs C's correspondence, the education department had been preparing to deal with the matter as a formal complaint, but this was overtaken by events, when Mrs C formalised her complaints. They said they recognised that it was inappropriate for formal records of conversations not to be agreed by all parties, and so they had taken steps to improve inter-department communication. They were, however, unable to share with Mrs C any details of actions taken in respect of the head teacher.

Our investigation found that it was not possible to determine the accuracy of the record, as it was disputed by the head teacher. The evidence did, however, show that the head teacher's remarks were not the reason that the children were placed on the register. We found that the education department had failed to request that the record be amended, despite being aware that the head teacher disputed the remarks attributed to her, and that child protection proceedings were underway. We also found that, although the council should have told Mrs C why the head teacher would not meet with her, the decision not to do so was one that the head teacher was entitled to make, and was not something that we could look at.

### Recommendations

We recommended that the council:

- consider adding an addendum to the social work department file to confirm the head teacher disputes the statements attributed to her; and
- apologise for the failure to correct the social work department record at the earliest available opportunity.