

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201304815, A Council  
**Sector:** local government  
**Subject:** primary school  
**Outcome:** some upheld, recommendations

### Summary

Mrs C complained to us about her dissatisfaction with the council's investigation into her complaints about bullying of her children at their former school. She said that the school had failed to make her aware of their anti-bullying policy; had not contacted her when one of her children was hit during a playground incident; failed to properly manage bullying against another of her children; and that the head teacher had not tried to speak with Mrs C's husband when he notified the school that the children would not be returning. Mrs C told us that the head teacher's own investigation had contained glaring inaccuracies, but the council had not upheld her complaints.

Our investigation found that Mrs C had been made aware that the school had an anti-bullying policy, as it was summarised in the handbook that she would have received when her children were enrolled. We did not uphold that complaint, although we made a recommendation. We also did not uphold the complaint about the council's investigation of Mrs C's complaint about the head teacher. They had found that the head teacher dealt appropriately with the matter, and we agreed that this was something for the council to decide.

We did, however, uphold her complaints about the investigation into lack of communication and failure to manage bullying. On communication, we found that the investigation was flawed, as the council's files showed that they initially found fault with the school's handling of the playground incident, but then changed their decision and did not uphold the complaint. We found no evidence of new or further information having been provided before the decision was changed, and we took the view that the investigation relied too heavily on interviews, and did not seek to verify the facts with evidence. On bullying, we found that the council's investigation placed too much reliance on the head teacher's assurances that the school had properly managed the bullying. Again, the investigation had not tried to verify this as they should have done by checking the school records etc.

### Recommendations

We recommended that the council:

- reinforce with the school the need to ensure that both the council's and the school's own policy on anti-bullying are being complied with;
- apologise to Mrs C for the council's failure to investigate her complaint about this issue properly and fully, and the failure of the school to notify her when the incident occurred;
- consider how best to ensure in the light of our findings that the process for investigation into reports of bullying is clearly set out, including parental involvement, and full records are kept of the investigation and its outcomes;
- apologise to Mrs C for the council's failure to investigate her complaint about the bullying of her child not being managed properly and fully by the school; and
- remind staff of the importance of considering records and evidencing decision-making at Stage 2 of the council's complaints procedure.