

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201400518, A Council  
**Sector:** local government  
**Subject:** primary school  
**Outcome:** some upheld, recommendations

### Summary

Ms C complained that her child had been racially abused by another pupil at school. Ms C said the school had not contacted her on the day of the incident – unlike the other child's parents - and she found out about it from her child that evening. Ms C said she spoke with the head teacher the next day, who confirmed that the other child involved had been punished but would not confirm the specific punishment. Ms C also complained that her younger child had also suffered from bullying on a number of occasions.

Although we fully recognised the significance of Ms C's concerns, the law does not allow us to consider complaints about conduct, curriculum or discipline within schools. This meant our role was to consider whether the council had followed the relevant policies, one of which said that both sets of parents should have been told about the incident. Although Ms C said the school did not contact her, the council said the school had tried to do so without success. While the school's paperwork appeared to indicate that they had tried to phone Ms C, the policy was clear that she should have been informed. Had they been unable to contact Ms C on the phone (or leave a message asking her to contact them), we considered the school could reasonably have sent a brief note home with Ms C's child asking Ms C to contact them or, alternatively, they could have sent a letter. Either of these steps would have demonstrably satisfied the policy and so, taking everything into account, we upheld this complaint.

Ms C told us she had no supporting evidence for her second complaint. The council said the school confirmed there had been no reports (either from Ms C or her children) of any other incidents involving Ms C's children and the head teacher said Ms C had not reported bullying of her younger child, prior to her written complaint. There was no additional evidence of bullying or racial abuse for us to consider and, although we recognised the seriousness of the underlying allegations, we could not establish, on the basis of the evidence available, that the issue with Ms C's younger child was raised with the school. We did not, on balance, uphold Ms C's second complaint.

We made three recommendations with a view to ensuring good record-keeping in the future.

### Recommendations

We recommended that the council:

- consider amending their policy to require a record of attempts to contact parents by phone be made;
- remind staff if they cannot contact a parent over the phone they consider contact by other means; and
- remind staff of the importance of completing the relevant forms in terms of their policy.