

SPSO decision report

Case: 201402469, Aberdeen City Council
Sector: local government
Subject: communication staff attitude dignity and confidentiality
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr and Mrs C had a number of concerns about their daughter's school and raised this with the head teacher. The head teacher met with them to discuss this, but they remained concerned that the issues had not been resolved. They also felt the school took subsequent action against their daughter as repercussion for their complaint. Mr and Mrs C raised their concerns with the council, who undertook several investigations of the issues over the next year and a half.

The council acknowledged that there had been poor handling and communication in relation to Mr and Mrs C's complaints, which had caused a prolonged period of frustration for them. While they did not uphold all of Mr and Mrs C's complaints, they apologised for the way things had been handled and took action to improve their processes, including developing new complaints handling guidance for schools and creating a new role to oversee complex complaints. However, Mr and Mrs C were dissatisfied with the council's response and brought their complaint to us.

We investigated and upheld two of Mr and Mrs C's complaints. While we found no evidence that the head teacher failed to keep a commitment made to follow up an issue, we found a number of failings in the council's handling of Mr and Mrs C's subsequent complaints. In particular, we were critical that the council undertook several 'informal investigations' when the complaint was first made, rather than following their complaints procedure. We were also concerned that the council did not refer to relevant policies in their final complaint response. While we noted that the council had apologised and taken steps to improve their complaints handling, we made some additional recommendations to ensure that this action would address the failings we found.

Recommendations

We recommended that the council:

- demonstrate to us that education and schools staff have been made aware of the new guidance and processes for complaints;
- take steps to ensure that complaints handling staff routinely consider which policies may be relevant to the complaint;
- write to Mr and Mrs C and their daughter (as applicable) to clarify what action was taken in response to the upheld parts of their stage two complaints; and
- apologise to Mr and Mrs C and their daughter for the overall failings our investigation found.