

SPSO decision report

Case: 201403841, North Lanarkshire Council
Sector: local government
Subject: primary school
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr and Mrs C complained about the steps taken by the council after they raised concerns about the bullying their daughter (Ms A) had suffered at school. They were also unhappy at the council's handling of their complaint and the fact that Mrs C had asked to attend school trips as a parent helper but had not been selected. Mr and Mrs C also raised concerns that the school did not communicate appropriately with health professionals involved with Ms A and that, in their view, school staff had acted inappropriately by discussing Ms A's impending school move with her.

We recognised the significance of Mr and Mrs C's concerns about bullying and how this can affect a child and also the wider family. While we took this into account, our role was limited to considering whether the appropriate policies and procedures had been followed. The limited records available (including a playground diary and the school's paperwork) did not support Mr and Mrs C's correspondence. Although we recognised that the absence of a record does not automatically mean something did not happen, we did not consider the evidence available pointed to a failure to follow the relevant policy. We did not uphold this complaint but made one recommendation because of the age of the school's policy and to ensure appropriate record-keeping in future.

We upheld Mr and Mrs C's complaint about the council's complaints handling. This was a particularly sensitive and distressing matter for them and the council initially failed to acknowledge their complaint and then missed their deadline for formally responding. We made one recommendation as a result, although we did not uphold Mr and Mrs C's remaining complaints. Although we recognised that Mrs C had been very keen to assist at school trips, we saw nothing to indicate that there has been a failure to act in line with the relevant policy. In addition, the paperwork available indicated that the school had involved a series of health professionals and did not point to a failure of communication in that regard, nor did we consider the evidence indicated that school staff had inappropriately discussed the matter with Ms A.

Recommendations

We recommended that the council:

- consider reviewing the school's policy to ensure it takes account of all relevant Scottish Government guidance, reported incidents and the need to ensure parental contact is recorded accurately; and
- apologise to Mr and Mrs C for failing to handle their complaint appropriately.