

SPSO decision report

Case: 201701232, Aberdeenshire Council
Sector: local government
Subject: primary school
Decision: some upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Ms C complained to the council that the head teacher of her son's primary school had failed to follow correct procedures when they contacted social services regarding concerns about her son. She also did not consider that the head teacher had communicated with her appropriately when they informed her of her son's potential exclusion from school during what she considered to be an informal meeting with the class teacher.

The council met with Ms C to discuss her complaint and confirmed in their initial response that the head teacher had acted appropriately in contacting social services following a disclosure made to a member of staff. The council confirmed that, in order to protect and maintain confidentiality, they were unable to discuss the nature of the disclosure with her. With regards to the meeting informing Ms C of the possibility of exclusion should her son's behaviour not improve, they confirmed that the meeting was in keeping with previous interactions she had with the school and was therefore appropriate and in line with their procedures. Ms C was not satisfied and brought her complaint to us. In addition to the complaints about procedures and communication, Ms C also complained to us that the council's response to her complaint was unreasonable.

We concluded that, based on the records taken at the time regarding the disclosures made by Ms C's son, the head teacher had acted appropriately in contacting social services to discuss the concerns. We found that the head teacher acted in line with child protection policy and, given the nature of the disclosures made, was correct in not sharing the details with Ms C. In relation to the separate and unrelated matter of the potential exclusion of her son, it was clear that the school had complied with relevant policies regarding the management of pupil behaviour and that the communication with Ms C was appropriate in the circumstances. We concluded the council had acted appropriately and did not uphold these aspects of the complaint.

With respect to the complaints responses issued by the council, we found that their two stage two complaints responses were issued a several days outside of the required timescales and that they did not communicate the delays with Ms C. We upheld this aspect of the complaint and, while we did not make a recommendation, we requested that the council remind staff who deal with complaints of the importance to comply with timescales and communicate with complainants effectively.