

SPSO decision report

Case: 201507723, A Council
Sector: local government
Subject: primary school
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Miss C said that her daughter (Miss A) was unable to go on an outdoor education trip organised through her school as she had her period that day and there were no arrangements for toilet stops during the outing. After raising a complaint about this with the council, Miss C agreed to look over draft documentation on the council's policy on offsite trips as part of a review group and provide feedback. This process subsequently broke down and Miss C complained again to the council and was given assurances that the changes that she felt should be made would be put in place. When Miss A's school next issued correspondence on an outdoor education trip, Miss C said it was clear that the agreed changes had not been made.

Miss C complained that the council acted unreasonably by failing to make the amendments to the documentation on the council's policy which she was led to believe would be put in place. The council acknowledged that this was the case and that the timescale for finalising and implementing the revised documents was unreasonable. This was supported by documentary evidence and we therefore upheld this aspect of Miss C's complaint.

Miss C also complained that the council's handling of her complaint was unreasonable. Miss C raised several issues, including that the timescale for dealing with her complaint was excessively lengthy. We found that there were unreasonable delays by the council in acknowledging and responding to Miss C's complaint. We also found that the council appeared to be operating two different complaints procedures, one of which (Complaints Procedure 1) contained an excessive number of stages and out-of-date information on rights of appeal, and did not comply with the local authority's model complaints handling procedure. We therefore also upheld this aspect of Miss C's complaint.

Recommendations

We recommended that the council:

- take steps to ensure that possible toilet stops are included in every outdoor activity plan;
- provide Miss C and her daughter with a written apology for the failings identified;
- ensure that Complaints Procedure 1 complies with the model customer facing complaints procedure on the Complaints Standards Authority Valuing Complaints website;
- feed back our decision on Miss C's complaint to the staff involved; and
- provide Miss C with a written apology for the additional failings referred to in our decision.