

SPSO decision report

Case: 201508465, Aberdeenshire Council
Sector: local government
Subject: primary school
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr and Mrs C's child made a disclosure to their class teacher about an incident they found upsetting within the family home. The class teacher spoke to the head teacher and the child was interviewed by the head teacher. The head teacher then contacted another member of the education department for advice and they suggested that social services be contacted. The head teacher said they were clear that they did not make a social services referral. However, the social work department contacted Mr C and arranged a meeting with him and Mrs C.

Mr C was unhappy about this and complained that the head teacher had not followed the correct Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) procedures. Mr C believed the head teacher should have spoken to him prior to contacting the social work department and they should have created a written assessment of the risk to the child. Mr C also complained the council's investigation into the matter had been rushed and unfair since they had refused to meet with him, despite meeting with the council staff involved.

We found there was no evidence that the head teacher had followed the appropriate GIRFEC procedures as set out in the council's guidance to staff. We found that the head teacher was unaware social services had recorded their contact with them as a referral. We considered it inappropriate that teachers did not know how the social work department recorded requests for advice. We found the council's investigation had not identified the failure to follow council guidance, nor had it explained to Mr and Mrs C why they had been contacted directly by the social work department. We considered the council's investigation into the complaint had not been conducted to an appropriate standard.

Recommendations

We recommended that the council:

- remind the staff at the school of the importance of recording information when following the council's GIRFEC guidance;
- review information sharing between the social work department and education staff, to ensure staff are aware when contact is recorded as a referral;
- review their investigation of the complaint to establish why issues around their failure to follow GIRFEC were not addressed in either response;
- review the investigation to establish why no explanation was provided for the recorded social work referral;
- provide evidence that the learning points identified in the response to us regarding meeting with complainants have been actioned; and
- apologise for the failings we identified.