

SPSO decision report



Case: 202308876, Fife Council
Sector: Local Government
Subject: Secondary School
Decision: upheld, recommendations

Summary

C complained to the council that their teenage child (A)'s school had not taken reasonable action following the report of an assault on A and a report of bullying. A reported continued bullying behaviour early in the next term and measures were put in place, such as allowing A to leave classes early. Just over a week later A was involved in a pre-arranged fight with another pupil close to school grounds in school time.

The council's investigation did not uphold C's complaints about the action taken following the report of the assault and bullying. C was dissatisfied and raised their complaints with SPSO.

We found that the school did not follow their Anti-Bullying Policy following the assault on A. They did not advise C of their decision that the school could take no further action regarding the reports of bullying as there was no concrete evidence of this, and they were imprecise in how they described contact with other parents/carers to C. Therefore, we upheld C's complaints.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to A that the school did not follow their Anti-Bullying Policy following the reporting of the assault and that they unreasonably failed to manage the report of the assault. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at www.spsso.org.uk/information-leaflets.
- Apologise to C that in their complaint response they incorrectly stated that, as C knew, the lack of evidence had made it difficult to pursue the matter further. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at www.spsso.org.uk/information-leaflets.

What we said should change to put things right in future:

- The school should follow their anti-bullying policy and advise parents/carers of any decisions reached or actions taken following reports of bullying.
- The school should follow their Anti-Bullying Policy in relation to reports of bullying.

In relation to complaints handling, we recommended:

- The council's complaint investigations take full account of all the circumstances and their conclusions are supported by evidence. The council's investigations and complaint responses only deal with specific matters once. We offer SPSO accredited Complaints Handling training. Details and registration forms for our online self-guided Good Complaints Handling course (Stage 1) and our online trainer-led Complaints Investigation Skills course (Stage 2) are available at <https://www.spsso.org.uk/training-courses>.
- The council's responses to SPSO are properly considered and that it is clearly stated when, on reflection or further consideration, a different view or conclusion has been arrived at.

We have asked the organisation to provide us with evidence that they have implemented the recommendations we have made on this case by the deadline we set.