

## Investigation into complaint against primary school principal

The parents of a primary school pupil complained that the school's principal should not have become involved in what they considered to be a minor behavioural issue concerning their child.

They said that correspondence they received from the school regarding their complaint was 'dismissive and disrespectful' and claimed that the school's handling of the issue had a detrimental effect on the pupil's wellbeing.

In response to our enquiries, the school said it set up a committee to look at the complaint. However, it also said it did not think it was necessary to keep a record of what evidence it looked at, including notes of a discussion with the principal, as it thought there was 'no need'.

It also did not record why it decided not to uphold the complaint. Because of this we concluded that the committee's investigation was neither full nor fair.

We looked at the notes from a meeting which was held to discuss the parent's appeal against the school's findings. These said that 'the Complaints Committee had investigated this thoroughly and the appeals committee were unanimously in agreement with their decision'.

However, as there were no investigation records on which the appeals committee could base its finding, we questioned the rigour of its review. We expressed concerns with the school's Behaviour Policy as it did not provide clear guidance on how staff should manage pupil behaviour.

We also found that the school failed to inform the parents about the behavioural issue and the principal's involvement. While acknowledging that the principal has ultimate responsibility and discretion for managing how staff deal with behavioural concerns, we found that the principal's involvement in the incident was disproportionate. We also noted that the school's reference to the parent's 'history' of raising complaints was without foundation.

The investigation concluded that the school seemed to base their findings solely on the principal's account of the incidents and on the opinions of the Board of Governors.

Finally, and of particular concern, was the school's comment to our office that if the parents were unhappy, they had the right to move their child to another school. We reminded the school of the importance of maintaining a level of professionalism regardless of the circumstances, asking it to consider this when managing complaints and when responding to Ombudsman enquiries in the future. The Ombudsman recommended that the school apologise to the complainants, that it conduct a review of its internal guidance, and delivered training to relevant staff.