

Anonymous submission of 14 January 2023

PE1979/J: Establish an independent inquiry and independent national whistleblowing officer to investigate concerns about the alleged mishandling of child safeguarding enquiries by public bodies

I believe this is an important petition and that children's human rights are routinely ignored in Scotland.

My family made a complaint to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman about significant negligence and incompetence in a Glasgow school that led to a year-long campaign of severe bullying of primary school siblings, including attempts on their lives and police involvement throughout. The school claimed it would "blow over" as it escalated out of control. Despite multiple reports of bullying throughout the year from multiple children (including the victims) and from parents (including some from unrelated families who had become concerned), the school and the council took zero action to protect the children. They did, however, take actions to further isolate the bullied children and increase the risks to them. Only one record of bullying for each child was ever recorded on SEEMiS, which showed that the bullying had been confirmed within the school. Under "action taken" was written "Education Services engaged". The Education Officer who became involved never once met the bullied children yet announced they were "fine" and that their bullying was "nothing really", despite clear evidence to the contrary as described by class teachers, health professionals, by the crimes investigated by police and by the police's insistence that the bullied children must be accompanied by two adults at all times when out in public. The family had to install a device in their home to protect against incendiaries posted through the letter box. The Education Officer simply recommended the victims be removed from classes to receive "relaxation training", treating them as the problem. This total lack of support and of being listened to resulted in the children being bullied out of their school and community, having suffered significant loss of schooling and serious impacts on their health.

The SPSO had a wealth of evidence of showing the school had violated multiple policies, including statutory policy (as confirmed to the SPSO by Govan Law Centre), yet it did not uphold the complaint after a 2 year “investigation”. When we also asked the SPSO if it had considered its obligations under UNCRC and whether the best interests of the children had ever been considered (by the school, Glasgow City Council or themselves), they brushed it off with “it is not for me to respond to [this]”. The children at the heart of the complaint barely seemed to exist in the SPSO’s correspondence.

An example of the ludicrousness of the SPSO’s arguments was that, even though a year’s worth of reports of bullying had never been officially recorded by the school, the SPSO said they believed the Head had made notes on paper, although he was unable to produce them, saying they had been lost. The headteacher had also failed to inform the school to which the children moved that they had Additional Support Needs due to severe bullying. The headteacher of the new school told us that anyone would think, from the records she received, that nothing at all unusual had happened to the children and she had to call the previous headteacher to confirm the records were lacking.

We believe that - because we had demonstrated multiple violations of anti-bullying policy to the SPSO - following our complaint, GCC replaced their schools anti-bullying policy with an old weak one that gives staff no guidance for responding to bullying, other than “deal with” it – whatever that means, i.e. our complaint weakened child protections in Glasgow schools.

We finally approached the GTC, showing the headteacher and school management had violated their Duty of Care and knowingly left the children exposed to ongoing bullying and danger, with no plans to address it for an entire school year. They had increased the risk to the children in various ways, including telling the victims to arrive late to school every day in the false hope of avoiding the bullying family. They had also lied to the SPSO. The GTC refused to investigate, saying it is the job of Glasgow City Council to investigate (themselves). The GTC cited GCC’s statement that “lessons would be learned” as a proof that there was no cause for concern, even though they never elucidated what those lessons were. Similarly, the SPSO refused to ask GCC what those lessons were, despite our requests. GTC said our complaint against both the headteacher and Education Officer “*do not meet a level of seriousness to require investigation*”, describing the problem as “a

system failure rather than the failings of an individual.” We doubt they would have investigated even had the children died.

If there is a massive system failure in a school that harms children in the way we experienced, who is there to address it if not the GTC or the SPSO? Is nobody responsible for safeguarding our children or rectifying negligence and incompetence?