

## **School apologises after Principal physically turned the head of an ASD pupil to make eye contact**

Parents of a pupil with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) were furious when the Principal turned their child's head in order to make eye contact. This was without due regard to the impact of this action on their child's condition. In addition, derogatory comments were made about their child in earshot of other pupils and parents, which questioned their parenting abilities.

After bringing the complaint to the school, the parents received a response from the Board of Governors (BoG) advising that they recognised the need for training in ASD. However, the parents did not receive an apology. They felt that their complaint had not been taken seriously. The handling and length of time taken to address their complaint was also unsatisfactory.

On the grounds of welfare, they considered taking their child out of the school, but that would have caused much upheaval. Instead, the parents wished to seek an apology and that clear measures be taken to prevent such instances from happening again.

Investigators from this Office contacted the school to try and resolve the parent's complaint. After engaging with the BoG they acknowledged the following:

1. In respect of the comments allegedly made by the Principal, the BoG agreed that such comments would not be appropriate to use and confirmed that use of language would be addressed through future staff training.
2. The Principal confirmed that in previous training (SEELB some years before) they had been advised to maintain eye contact and, if necessary, to gently turning a child's face to enable eye contact. The BoG recognised this approach was not in keeping with current Autism training.

The BoG agreed to the following proposals:

- An apology from the BoG that the Principal turned the child's face when attempting to make eye contact;
- An apology from the BoG for comments made by the Principal;
- All staff in the School to receive Autism Awareness training;
- To meet the parents and agree a plan including a review of the support provided to their child.