

Parents' Voices

The experience of the Enquire Helpline

Your answer gave me all the information I needed from the one source at the one time, which I don't feel I could have got anywhere else, and I feel confident at taking this forward.
Parent.

Why was Enquire created?

- Launched in 1999 as part of the Improving Our Schools programme
- To provide general advice to parents/carers, practitioners and children and young people across the whole spectrum of special educational needs
- To offer a helpline that provides impartial, bespoke advice

1999 - 2010

- Developed expertise in dealing with enquiries
- The parents' guide to additional support for learning (78,000 copies distributed)
- Run national training and outreach programme for different groups
- Created two websites



The policy context

- Partnership with parents has featured in policy rhetoric since the Warnock report in 1978 (Riddell, 2009)
- The 2004 Additional Support for Learning (ASL) Act aimed, amongst other things, to increase parents' rights in relation to the education of their children
- New sources of information order in the 2009 ASL Act

What does the Enquire helpline do?

Provides confidential advice and information about additional support for learning including:

- Parent and pupil rights
- School and education authority responsibilities
- Referrals to local networks

Helpline numbers

- Since November 1999 over 13,000 enquiries about a child/children's education
- Parents/carers average 75% of the people using the helpline
- Highest proportion of others using the helpline are information/support workers, educational professionals and other family members

Following implementation of the ASL legislation

- Calls concerns children across the spectrum of additional support needs but the emotions expressed have not changed
- Questions about resolving disagreements with a greater feature on statutory routes of redress
- Evidence of a shift from passive acknowledgement of parental rights to more active engagement with parents (but not everywhere)
- Clarification sought about Co-ordinated Support Plans

Consistent problem triggers

- Being left out, or sensing being left out, of a decision that concerns their child
- Hearing something from their child without follow-up from the school
- Not knowing who to ask
- Finding out about things from other parents
- Clash of the experts – differing parental and professional views
- Not feeling listened to

Why do people call?

- They would like to talk to someone who is independent and knowledgeable
- They have a concern
- They want to express anger
- They want to clarify rights and responsibilities or need specific factual information
- They want advice and information on what to do next



Partnership - parents and schools

Features of successful learning partnerships:

- Mutual respect
- Understanding of each other's responsibilities and obligations
- Getting it right from the start
- Involving the child or young person.

Outcomes for parents who contact Enquire

Based on helpline evaluation responses and external evaluation, we have identified 4 key outcomes:

- Gaining confidence about their rights and the reasonableness of seeking help for their child
- Feeling informed about who is supposed to do what
- Defusing emotions and misunderstandings
- Clarifying the next steps

Conclusions

Enquire:

- Promotes understanding of parents and pupils rights under ASL
- Promotes awareness of what the law and guidance says in accessible terms, including about every school/authority's duties
- Promotes positive parent/professional relationships and encourages resolving disagreements at school level
- Supports the best possible implementation of the ASL Act
- Supports the best possible outcomes for children and young people's educational journey