

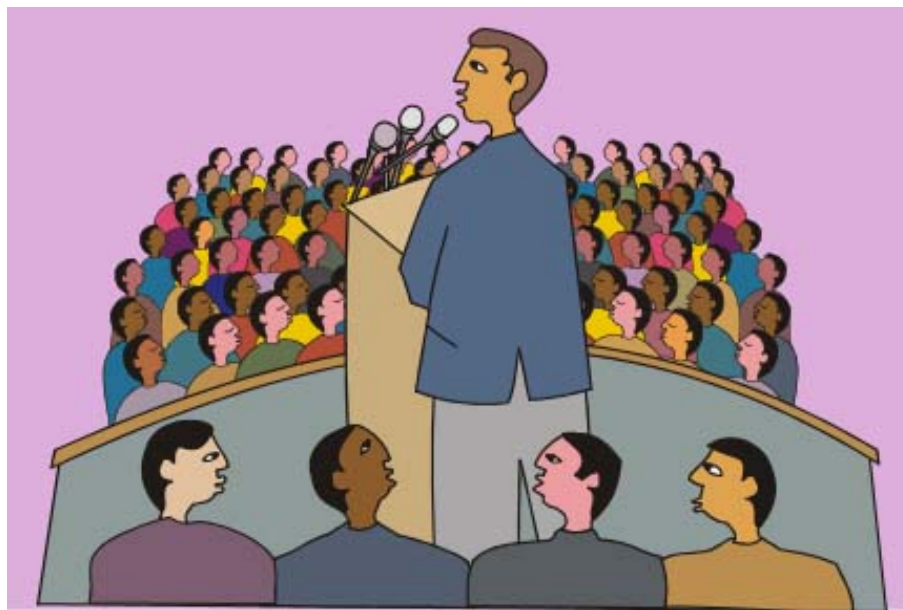
Somebody Ought To Do Something

"Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world, indeed it is the only thing that ever has"

Margaret Mead, Social Anthropologist

Chapter Two

Finding and Using Information



CASE is an education group that campaigns for only the best for all children and relies entirely on membership fees and donations.

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Chapter Two - Finding and Using Information

Effective campaigning needs to be based on good information. This guide shows where you can go for information whether it is local or national.

1. Local sources

Local organisations

There are a number of organisations which might prove useful sources of information

Pre-School organisations. Their addresses should be available from the Local Authority (LA) or its website.

Schools. Their addresses, phone numbers and headteachers' names should be available from the LA, your local library or the phone book.

Governing Bodies represent a number of interests. Local Authority's Governors' Services section should be willing to provide the name of your Chair of Governors who should be contactable, perhaps via the school. You can also ask a local councillor to get this information for you. There may be a Governor's Association or Forum that you can approach whose details may be provided by the National Governor's Association (NGA) – see below.

Parent Governors. All state schools have at least one parent governor and most have more. If you are a parent at a school, contact them for support and to represent your views and concerns to the Governing Body. There may also be a Parent Governor Representative (PGR) who advises your Local Authority. The local Governors' Services section should have this information.

Parents organisations. You may know of a local federation of Parent Teacher Association (PTA), or you may contact the National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations (NCPTA) for details.

Church schools. Local Catholic and Church of England Schools are responsible to their Diocesan Board of Education which should be in the phone book. You will need to know the name of your diocese (which usually covers an area the size of a county.)

Voluntary groups, community associations. There may be local groups specialising in special needs or pre-school education whose addresses are likely to be found at your library or via the LA website.

Post-16 colleges and universities' education departments. These will be listed in the Education Year Book available at your reference library, or via the internet.

Unions. Local branches of trade unions can often be contacted via their regional or national office, which you should find in the phone book, or through their websites.

Local Information Sources

Council minutes are public documents and should be available at the local reference library and on your local authority website.

Minutes of Governing Body meetings are also public documents and should be available for anyone to read.

Local Ofsted reports both on local schools and on your LA are available on the Ofsted website.

The **Section 52 statement** published each year by the LA lists the schools, data about them and their funding.

School Admissions Forums were required to be set up by the Education Act 2002. Their membership and procedures should be available from your Local Authority.

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Your **local MP** can ask parliamentary questions to find out information about his/her constituency.

Your **local Councillors** can ask questions of the officers to get information for you. The council committee clerks may be able to give you information.

Your local **Parent Governor Representative** should have access to council information.

2. National sources

National Organisations

There are a number of organisations who have a role in scrutinising schools and the local authority, or act as an appeal mechanism:

OFSTED www.ofsted.gov.uk inspects Early Years provision, schools and colleges and also reports on Local Authorities and government initiatives.

Ombudsman www.ombudsman.org.uk

The Ombudsman can investigate Government Departments and other public bodies, but you should first make your complaint to the organisation involved. If you do not receive a satisfactory answer from the organisation concerned or if you have not had a response, ask your MP to send your complaint to the Ombudsman.

Office of the School's Adjudicator www.schoolsadjudicator.gov.uk

Schools Adjudicators were appointed under Section 25 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

Adjudicators have two main functions:

- o to decide on objections to published [admission arrangements](#) from parents and others for admitting children to primary or secondary schools in England.
- o to decide on [statutory proposals](#) for school organisation, such as the opening or closing of a school, when the local school organisation committee does not agree unanimously on those proposals.

Adjudicators do not deal with the admission problems of individual children or appeals arising out of these. However if you think a school is not acting according to its published admissions criteria you can contact the Schools Adjudicator except in the case of Academies.

Audit Commission www.audit-commission.gov.uk

The Audit Commission is an independent public body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently, and effectively in the areas of local government, housing, health, criminal justice and fire and rescue services

You can use the Commission to query the accounts of your local authority or complain about the way in which they have spent money.

National Audit Office <http://www.nao.org.uk/>

The National Audit Office scrutinises public spending on behalf of Parliament. They are totally independent of Government. They audit the accounts of all central government departments and agencies, as well as a wide range of other public bodies, and report to Parliament on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which they have used public money.

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National Information Sources

There are many national sources of information. The internet provides an excellent way of finding a great deal of official information.

Central Government Websites

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) Newscentre

www.dfes.gov.uk/pns/newslst.cgi provides links to many sources of information, although the home page is not very user friendly. (Note - the DfES website has details of the Funding Agreements for all Academies. These hold key information about their governance and management arrangements. Many DFES publications are free from the publications centre 0845 6022260.

The Parent Information Centre www.parentcentre.gov.uk brings together in one place Government information for parents. It includes a quick search to find details of individual schools by name or postcode.

Teachernet for teachers <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk> is not just for teachers.

Governornet for governors <http://www.governornet.co.uk> provides shortcuts to new publications, consultations and events.

Parliament www.parliament.uk enables you to read parliamentary debates and select committee reports. Education and Skills Select Committee reports often contain useful information.

The Welsh Assembly www.learning.wales.gov.uk is particularly useful in respect of the structures and regulations that operate in Wales.

The Information Commissioner's Office <http://www.ico.gov.uk> The ICO provides guidance to organisations and individuals on the Freedom of Information Act and rules on the eligibility of complaints in relation to it.

Local Authorities

Local Government Association (LGA) www.lga.gov.uk

The membership association for local authorities.

The Children's Services Network (CSN) www.csn.org.uk

Supports Local Authorities with briefings and conferences. The briefings might be particularly useful

Governing Bodies' associations

National Governors' Association www.nga.org.uk

There is now a single organisation formed from the merger of the former National Governors Council and the National Association of School Governors.

Parent Governor Representatives www.pgrnet.org.uk

DfES-funded network for parent governor representatives.

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Unions involved in education

These two sites provide information that is in particular have useful information: to their members and others in the field. Both strongly oppose the privatisation of state education.

National Union of Teachers (NUT)- www.teachers.org.uk

UNISON www.unison.org.uk

Other organisations

Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) www.ace-ed.org.uk

ACE produces many explanatory leaflets provides information on parents' rights and education law which are available on their website

The **National Literacy Trust** <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/> has an excellent "who's who" in education and subject index.

Research and Information on State Education (RISE) www.risetrust.org.uk

This small independent charity was originally set up by CASE but is independent. The website information centre has links to online sources of information arranged under useful headings.

Media

BBC Website Education Pages <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education>

An excellent source of information, with an archive to previous stories and links.

The TES and Guardian websites have an archive of their articles on education and are a good source of information.

Guardian Education www.guardian.education.co.uk

Times Educational Supplement www.tes.co.uk

Useful publications

The following are useful and are available in a good reference library.

Newspapers and Magazines

Weekly - Times Educational Supplement (Friday).

Education pages in daily newspapers *Times* (Tuesday), *Telegraph* (Wednesday and Saturday), *Guardian* (Tuesday) and *Independent* (Thursday).

The Law of Education published by Butterworths

Education Year Book published by Pearsons

Vacher's Parliamentary Companion published by Vacher Dod Publishing Ltd.

Education in England and Wales: A guide to the system NfER1997

The Campaigning Handbook, Directory of Social Change 1994

Whitakers Almanac has a good section on education

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3. Using Information

Information must be provided in a way which is easy to understand for potential supporters and those you are aiming to influence.

Try to find someone in your campaign that is used to writing reports or leaflets. Use summaries, bullet points, headings and bold type so that your argument is presented in a way which is easy to read. If you want to refer to detailed research, it is often best to summarise the findings in your main report or article and put the details in an appendix.

If you can, create your own website which can display all your newsletters, press releases etc and will also act as an archive for your campaign, but make sure someone also keeps paper copies of everything.

You can use the information you have gathered:-

- o to communicate with your own supporters through regular newsletters, leaflets, notice boards, emails or through your own website
- o as the basis of a “fact pack” for the press (see Dealing with the Media)
- o in briefings for local Councillors or your MP
- o in submissions to consultations or to parliamentary committees

The information you use must be correct, so it is vital to check and double check that any information, statistics or comments that you use are quoted accurately and the source is acknowledged. If you are caught using inaccurate figures, opponents will use this against your campaign and your credibility may be undermined.

Investigate any information you come across where figures might have been used selectively to try to prove a point that you do not agree with.

For example, if a survey is quoted, establish whether it was based on a representative sample. If not, the survey might be of only those who cared enough to respond. Most of the well-known opinion-poll companies follow accepted standards on sampling, but newspapers and magazines will sometimes quote unscientific reader surveys or straw polls.

Using the Freedom of Information Act

Use the Freedom of Information Act to gain the information you need. To check your right to information or in case of difficulty contact the Office of the Information Commissioner www.ico.gov.uk for advice and help.

Requests must be put in writing but this includes email. Check the appropriate person or department with the organisation in advance, so your request does not get lost.

All public authorities including schools, are subject to the Act (Apart from Academies; only details of their Funding Agreements can be obtained through the DfES)

There are many questions you might ask to help assemble your case e.g. factual information for your LA and compare this with other LAs.