



advisory centre
for education

Promoting fairness in education



Annual Review
2010

ACE's vision: A fair education system for all

The Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) is a national charity that provides independent advice for parents and carers of statutory school age children in state-funded education. ACE aims to provide the information, support and high-quality advice that parents need to help their children at school, particularly where there are problems. We were founded in 1960 by the social entrepreneur, Michael Young, Lord Young of Dartington.

We are unique in having day-to-day contact with parents in England and Wales on a whole range of educational issues. This wide expertise is valued by parents, as children's problems rarely relate to just one issue. In 2010 we spoke to almost 13,000 parents on our telephone helplines, and over 117,000 sought advice from our website – that's over 130,000 parents and carers accessing ACE's help! Hearing parents describe their experiences gives ACE privileged access to how education law and practice impact on children and parents, and allows us to speak with authority on behalf of parents facing difficulties with the education system. This enables us to undertake policy work in order to improve circumstances for many more families.

We work to make ACE services as widely available as possible. Our helplines are free, giving equal access to families throughout the country, and we send out many of our materials free of charge to parents. We also encourage access through local advisers trained and supported through our Education Step-by-Step project, who are then empowered to go on to help the families and communities who need our help the most.



ACE's mission

ACE's mission as a registered charity is to promote fairness and opportunity in education.

We believe that effective education can transform lives, that parents have a vital part to play in supporting their children through school, and that to do this they need access to independent advice and support. We believe that a fair education system for all can be achieved through improved opportunities and experiences in school for all children and young people.

For the benefit of all children, young people and families across England and Wales, we work to:

- Empower parents and carers (through accessible advice and information)
- Encourage changes in education law and policy (by promoting the views and experiences of parents)
- Promote good practice in the education system (by providing training for professionals and community workers)
- Listen to and represent the views of users of our services.



ACE's values

Education is a fundamental human right, and ACE believes that everyone, regardless of gender, age, race, class or ability, has talents which should be nurtured, and everyone has: a right to a high quality education in a good local school; to be safe at school; to be valued, respected and to play a part in decision-making; and to understand the law, including rights and responsibilities.

To realise our vision, mission and values, ACE believes that it is essential to be:

Independent The advice, information and training we give are accurate, impartial and not subject to the political climate of the day.

Expert We draw on 50 years of work in the education field. Our team of advisers have an unrivalled understanding of education law, policy and practice, and of how they impact on children and families.

Responsive Our day-to-day contact with parents and carers is at the heart of all that we do. We develop our services according to the needs of families and changes to law, policy and practice.

Proactive We work to improve education law, policy and practice as they affect the rights and experiences of parents, carers and children.

Collaborative/co-operative We work in partnership with others to improve the education system for children. We believe that parents and carers, children, schools, governors, local authorities and government should all be equal partners in education.

Inclusive We give parents and carers the information and strategies they need to support their child at school. We have a particular commitment to reach out to the marginalised and those who find themselves excluded from the system.

Accessible We use straightforward language designed to simplify the complexities of the education system and to make it understandable to everyone.

We are here to listen to parents and carers, to offer our expert advice and to campaign for fairness and equality in education, because we believe every child deserves the best school experience possible.

ACE's 50th Anniversary

If, fifty years ago, you had happened to walk into one particular ex-bicycle shop in Cambridge, you would have come across ACE in its very infancy – one or two schools experts sitting at a desk, busy reading letters from worried parents and handwriting their replies. The people in that £1 a week room knew their work had begun to meet an important need amongst the British public, but if you had told them that by 2010, the Advisory Centre for Education would reach over 100,000 parents every year, they would probably have been amazed.

But amazing ACE's story is.

The charity was initially set up by Michael Young (later to become Lord Young of Dartington), both to advise parents on education issues, and also to fight for their right to be more actively involved behind the school gates. ACE campaigned hard for this throughout the 1960s. The 1970s saw progress, as the government began to explore the link between schools and community in greater depth. Then equal opportunity for girls was the subject of much advice in the 1980s, as well as racial equality, school closures and corporal punishment. In the 1990s ACE worked to share its vast bank of expertise in innovative ways, developing its Step-by-Step manuals for community advisors, providing tailored specialist training for other community support groups, and opening a second telephone advice line purely for exclusions.



In the 2000s, the huge social value of ACE's work was finally officially recognised with regular government funding, and this enabled the advice services to expand, reaching more parents than ever.

We thought such a history was something worth celebrating.

So on 21st June 2010, a special event was held at the House of Lords to mark ACE's Golden Anniversary. ACE staff, Trustees and Patrons were joined by parents, educationalists, lawyers, Local Authority, community and Ofsted representatives, peers, journalists, charity workers, and members of the judiciary. The newly-renamed Department for Education was also represented, as were a number of funding agencies and private sector companies.



Lively and impassioned speeches were heard from the Chair of Trustees Katy Simmons, exclusions expert Professor Carl Parsons, Trustee and child law specialist Jane Fortin, and ACE Chief Executive Simon Hepburn. A toast and celebratory cake-cutting followed, and the afternoon passed all too quickly as guests mingled, shared their stories of ACE and made new friendships that will help make the charity even stronger and ready for the years ahead.

2010 has marked a huge milestone for ACE. It has been a chance for us to reflect on everything we have achieved – on the millions of confused, anxious parents we have supported with free and dependable advice, on the profoundly positive impact that this has had in turn on the school experiences of children, and on the remarkable contribution our experts have made to the shaping of education policy. We have also taken the opportunity to look forward to what the next half-century may hold in store for our remarkable organisation. Fittingly, with this year's change of government has also come the reminder that an ever-changing education landscape means an ever-present need for the independent, practical support and expert advice that ACE offers without discrimination and free of charge.

ACE is here to listen to parents and carers, to offer our expertise and to campaign for fairness and equality in education, because we believe today, as we did fifty years ago, that every child deserves the best school experience possible.



“A fantastic service that all parents should be aware of”

“[The adviser] was encouraging and sympathetic”

“Without the advice I wouldn't know what to do”

Empowering parents and carers

Parents are often confused and daunted by the enormity of tackling issues such as admissions, exclusions, bullying and special educational needs, and that's where ACE comes in. With a sharp focus on equality, our aim is to enable all parents and carers to understand even the most complex issues surrounding their children's state funded education, and to give them the clear and accessible advice they need to get the very best out of it.

ACE Advice lines are open between 10am and 5pm each day. ACE Advisers come from a range of backgrounds including teaching, law, social work and general advice provision. They provide free, expert advice and independent guidance for parents and carers in England and Wales on a range of issues. The key subjects that parents contact us about include admissions and exclusions, appeals, attendance, bullying and issues surrounding special educational needs.



In 2010:

- **we answered 12,799 calls in total (compared to 10,000 in 2009)**
- **we sent out 2,806 Exclusion Packs, free of charge (compared to 3,125 in 2009)**
- **we sent out 3,926 other booklets, such as the 'My Child in School' series (compared to 2,258 in 2009)**
- **we received 117,097 visits to our website where parents can download our booklets and other information free of charge (compared to 114,346 in 2009).**

“Very informative, friendly and easy to understand advice”

“Everything was explained patiently and clearly, and then I was given clear facts I never knew before phoning”



“ACE’s advice was succinct, I was clear about my next course of action, within my rights and legal procedures”

Always looking to broaden the reach of its advice, ACE is contracted to provide advisers to work as Parent Supporters on the Netmums website each week, providing online advice and information to parents via chat-rooms, message boards and advice clinics. In addition, our experts took part in other online clinics for *The Guardian*, Ask Jeeves, Parentline Plus and The Choice Advisers’ Network. As online chat continues to develop into a mainstream method of communication, we will seek to engage with new communities in this way.



In January, ACE appeared at a Department for Children, Schools and Families Showcase as a member of Family Information Direct, a network of partially government-funded charities set up by the Department. This was a chance for all the organisations to mingle, to understand each other’s causes and to explore possible ways to achieve their objectives by working together. ACE delivered a workshop session with the charity Young Minds, including a lively roleplay of an example call to the advice lines, and Chief Executive Simon Hepburn gave a talk about the broader importance of ACE to families, and our society as a whole.

In March, funding was secured for a pilot Education Advocacy project in Croydon. Whilst parents and carers find our telephone advice, information booklets and website useful, we know that face-to-face support would really help many families, particularly those most at risk of experiencing difficulties with the education system. We have appointed an Education Advocate to work in partnership with local services in order to support parents, children and schools to reduce exclusions. We know that many exclusions that take place could be avoided, if parents are equipped to work with the school. Sometimes schools themselves do not provide suitable alternatives and in this way, young people can fall out of the education system together, which can lead to anti-social behaviour and poor life-chances. The project is proving highly popular in the area and a number of young people have already benefitted.

We regularly gather feedback from parents using our advice lines, via questionnaires. This evaluation shows that:

- **94% of respondents found ACE’s advice ‘very clear’**
- **88% found the ACE Advice Lines ‘very helpful’**
- **85% of callers were very satisfied with the service they received from ACE**

“ACE is ace!”

“Excellent advice underpinned with reference to recent changes in legislation. I cannot think how any of this could be improved”



Promoting good practice

Publications

During 2010, ACE continued to publish a range of booklets and briefings. Our publications are purchased by a wide range of organisations and individuals, with special rates for our members and bulk orders. The popular *My Child in School* series are free to download from our website and parents can request free printed copies of the booklets.

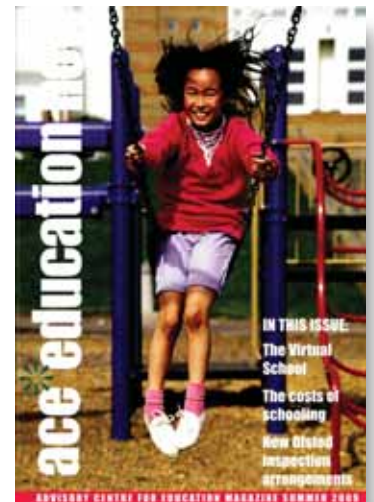
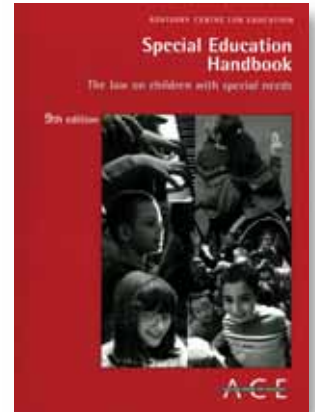
In 2010, a number of booklets and guides were updated as a result of new legislation and changes to government guidance. These included *Disability Discrimination*, *Applying for a School*, *Getting Extra Help* and *Tackling Bullying*.

Responding to demand we picked up from users over our advice lines, we wrote the entirely new booklets *Informal Exclusions* (which will go to press shortly) and *Fixed Period Exclusion: Wales*.

Our *Special Education Handbook* continues to be regarded as one of the best reference guides available on the issues surrounding SEN, with its unique mix of Special Educational Needs law and sound practical advice.

This year, we continued to publish our Members' magazine, *ace education now*. Feedback from users is positive, showing that they value the combination of news, views and the practical information it contains. More information about ACE's range of publications can be accessed from the Publications section of ACE's website:

www.ace-ed.org.uk



Policy

Our expert knowledge, combined with the thousands of conversations we have with parents every year, puts us in a unique position to act as a unified 'voice for parents' when we lobby for positive change in the fields of education law and policy. Since our humble beginnings in 1960, we have seen, influenced and advised on many changes in the education system from corporal punishment to equal opportunities for girls, and we continue to lobby and campaign for positive change today.

In 2010, we worked closely with the Special Education Consortium, putting forward our views in relation to the Academies Bill, the Disability Green Paper and the Pupil Premium. This work included meetings, online discussions, contributions to briefings and responses. We also prepared and submitted a response to a DCSF consultation on the Green Paper *Support for All* (which set out measures to support families as they bring up children), and one on the regulations underpinning the new school complaints service.

Our Head of Policy and Chief Executive met with Brian Lamb in February to discuss the implications of the final Lamb Inquiry report, which covered issues surrounding Special Educational Needs. In particular, the Lamb Inquiry looked at ways in which parental confidence in the SEN assessment process could be increased. A member of ACE staff was part of the reference group of professionals and parents that advised Brian Lamb during the inquiry. The final report had a clear message: parents need to be listened to more and the system needs to be more ambitious for children. It found that many parents of disabled children and children with special educational needs found the education system a battle, where they struggled to get the needs of their children identified and met. Calls to our advice line mirror the findings in the Lamb Inquiry and we regularly speak to and support parents who are facing these issues.

When the Education Select Committee launched a new inquiry into behaviour and discipline in schools in July 2010, ACE was keen to submit written evidence. In 2009–10, we answered 2,323 calls (20% of our total) about exclusions, and wanted to reflect the experiences of those parents in our submission. We addressed issues such as challenging behaviour, fixed-term and permanent exclusions and how special educational needs could be recognised in school policies on behaviour and discipline. ACE commented on the proposals to give teachers more power to search and discipline pupils as well as the removal of the requirement for written notice of detentions outside school hours.

This year we continued to raise the profile of ACE and of parents' and carers' views through various newspapers, including *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Times* and regional papers. We appeared on a range of TV channels, including Channel 4, a lengthy feature on GMTV, and top slot on ITV's *London Tonight* on National Offer Day in March. We also gave various interviews and took part in discussions throughout the year on national and regional radio channels.

Through our media, policy and campaigning work to raise the profile of the organisation, we hope to become known as a solution-focused thought-leader, representing the voice of parents and carers on education issues.



Training and consultancy

ACE delivers specialist training and consultancy services to professionals and stakeholders working with schools, children and families up and down the country – from Local Authority officers, teachers and governors, to community advisers and legal representatives.

Many of our training courses are accredited by the Law Society, Bar Council and Institute of Legal Executives. Topics covered include Admissions and Exclusions Appeals, and SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) Discrimination. New courses this year also include SEND Preparation and Children Missing Education, as well as Charing Skills, Looked After Children and Attachment Disorder. We constantly revise our training programmes to incorporate changes to policy, guidance and case law. This year we delivered training on the new Equality Act, which came into force in October.

In total, 20 training seminars were delivered in 2010, and 19 tailored in-house sessions. This totalled 539 delegates, ranging from Local Authority Independent Appeal Panel Officers to foster care agencies, social workers and Parent Partnership Officers as well as various volunteer groups, including those supporting refugee and asylum-seeking families. One of our tailored training sessions was for Headteachers only which was particularly encouraging, as we look to develop more training for schools. As the current Government devolves more responsibility to schools, we foresee ways in which we can assist teachers by sharing our expertise in best practice. We also delivered five sessions to the Office of the Local Government Ombudsman on SEN and disability, Exclusions, Anti-Bullying, Looked After Children and Children Missing Education.

ACE's unique Step-by-Step training programme trains advisers across the country from community groups as well as statutory organisations. We endeavour to raise funds in order to offer the training, free of charge, to small local organisations, particularly in disadvantaged areas

*“This is the best training by far
that I have attended for several years”*

Training participant

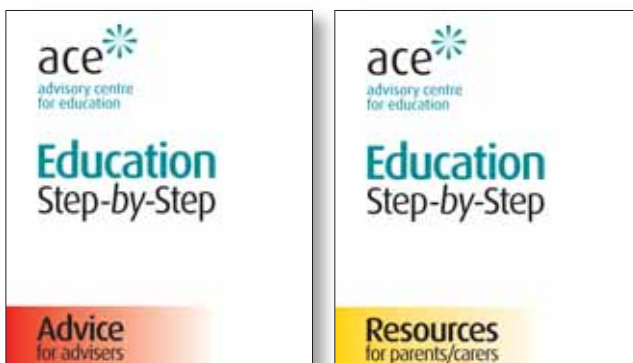


where the need is greatest. Training is usually delivered on a one-to-one basis and attendees receive our specially developed (and this year, newly-designed) manuals which provide them with the information they need to give face-to-face advice and advocacy to parents in their local community.

In January, a Training Co-ordinator joined our team, primarily responsible for developing the Education Step-by-Step programme. Work in this area has resulted in our gaining a grant from the Walcot Foundation to deliver Step-by-Step training for free to voluntary sector organisations in Lambeth. We have also recently started distributing our Step-by-Step Manual Updates electronically, as we seek to provide an efficient service to our registered users. In 2010, we trained 57 advisers from 18 organisations through the Education Step-by-Step programme.

Our Service Level Agreement with Islington Council is now in its fourth year. This successful partnership ensures that community and voluntary organisations and Parent Partnership Services in the London Borough of Islington are trained and up-to-date in giving education advice to parents and carers. We were also asked to deliver tailored training sessions directly to parent groups in 2010, which received very positive feedback.

Evaluation of our standards this year showed that all of our training continues to be very highly rated, with 95% of delegates describing it in their feedback as either 'Good' or 'Excellent'.



About ACE

ACE is a charity and company limited by guarantee. Council members have overall responsibility for the organisation, both as Trustees and as Directors of the Company.

ACE Council

The Council meets four times a year and holds an Annual General Meeting in the autumn. The Finance and Audit Sub-Committee oversees financial matters and the Standards & Personnel Committee oversees organisational development and human resources matters; both meet four times a year. A Governance Working Group was established to build and strengthen ACE's governance arrangements, enabling it to become a model of good practice. This also meets quarterly.

Council membership 2009

Katy Simmons (Chair)

Rob Honeybourne (Vice Chair)

Alan Gottlieb (Treasurer)

Geoff Berridge

Ron Glatter

Gabriela Daniels

Megan Griffith Gray

Jane Fortin

Membership

ACE's members are eligible to stand for election to the Council, and to vote for the appointment of Council members. Membership currently stands at over 400 (including affiliate members and subscribers), and membership and affiliation numbers were maintained during the year. Work has continued to develop the scheme to ensure that it meets the needs of members. This enables us to promote fairness and opportunity in education to a wider audience and to draw on the knowledge and experience of others in the field. This year, we launched our monthly Members' E-Bulletin, which collates and summarises key education news and policy items, promotes relevant sector events and updates members on ACE activities. The Bulletin has proved popular and we hope to build on this communications work.



“Education is the most powerful weapon
which you can use to change the world”

Nelson Mandela

Summarised Financial Statements for the period ended 31 March 2010

The following information was extracted from the audited annual accounts for the year 2009/10, on which the auditors' opinion was unqualified. The full report and accounts were approved by the Trustees on 17 September 2010 and were submitted to the Charity Commission and Registrar of Companies. Copies of the full accounts may be obtained from ACE's registered office (see last page for details) or from the Charity Commission website.

Total Income: £802,254	(£941,555 in 2008/09)
Total Expenditure: £753,411	(£842,722 in 2008/09)
Total Funds: £389,367	(£340,524 in 2007/08)

ACE's Supporters in 2009/10

As a charity, ACE relies on voluntary support in the form of grants and donations to continue its much-needed work. We would like to thank all our supporters for their generous contributions to ACE's work over the past year, in particular:

Department for Children, Schools & Families (now Department for Education), National Assembly for Wales, Cambridge Education @ Islington, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Walcot Foundation, Vision with Technology and our hundreds of Members and individual supporters, many of them parents and carers we have helped and advised.

Throughout our 50th Anniversary year, we have consolidated our fundraising strategy, looking to increase and diversify this generous support to secure our future. We know that our services will be needed more than ever and we hope to grow our unrestricted income by seeking support from individuals that share our vision of a fair education for all.



ACE advice lines

General Advice Line (freephone): 0808 800 5793

(Monday to Friday, 10am – 5pm)

Calls are free from UK landlines and UK mobile networks

Exclusion Advice Line (freephone): 0808 800 0327

(Monday to Friday, 10am – 5pm)

Calls are free from UK landlines and UK mobile networks.

Exclusion Info Line (24-hour answerphone): 020 7704 9822

Calls are charged at local rates.

Help support ACE

Though a national voluntary organisation, ACE is a small charity that relies on grants, membership and donations to fund its work. You can get involved or support ACE in various ways – by joining as a member, subscribing to our newsletter, or by making a one-off or regular donation. For more information on how you can support ACE and help to give children the best start in life, please go to our website: www.ace-ed.org.uk, or contact Joanna Westley on 020 7704 3375 or joanna.westley@ace-ed.org.uk

Contacting ACE

By post

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By phone (office and admin enquiries only): 020 7704 3370

By email: enquiries@ace-ed.org.uk

By fax: 020 7354 9069

On our website: www.ace-ed.org.uk