

# Information, resources and support for your families

All too often primary schools are the first port of call for families in need of all kinds of support. **Nabil Dance** looks here at resources and information we might signpost families to

Our families face many different challenges in their day-to-day lives and schools might consider maintaining a list of useful information and resources that can easily be passed on. We are not obliged to do this of course, but in terms of supporting children's education and building strong relationships with our families it can be worth the time and effort. There are many information sources and legal advice providers that we might consider signposting to and which will be useful to families. Let's explore some examples.

## External advice and information

**Home-to-school transport provision:** As a starting point, a pupil is legally entitled to free transport if the school is more than two miles away and the child is under 8 years of age, or the school is more than three miles away and the child is 8 or over. There are other paths to entitlement but parents can find more information from gov.uk.

■ [www.gov.uk/help-home-school-transport](http://www.gov.uk/help-home-school-transport)

**Social security benefits:** Families should be aware of the wide range of social security benefits that they may be entitled to, from Child Benefit and Disability Living Allowance, to the Parents' Learning Allowance. Where an application for benefit is refused, applicants have the legal right to appeal to the independent Social Security and Child Support Tribunal. The Free Representation Unit (FRU) is a charity with pro-bono lawyers who help applicants and represent them at tribunal appeal hearings.

■ [www.gov.uk/browse/benefits/families](http://www.gov.uk/browse/benefits/families)  
■ [www.thefru.org.uk](http://www.thefru.org.uk)

**Employment issues:** The law protects employees from unfair dismissal, discrimination, breach of contract, dismissal due to whistle-blowing, and various other detriments and circumstances relating to the workplace. The aforementioned FRU also assists employees who are taking their case to the Employment Tribunal, including representing their clients at hearings.

**Homelessness:** Tenants have numerous rights, including that local authorities must try to prevent them from becoming homeless, and that families with children will still be housed if that is the best way to help them. Established in 1966, the charity Shelter has had a huge impact in preventing homelessness across the UK. Their solicitors provide free legal advice and attend court to help people who have lost their homes or are facing eviction.

■ [www.shelter.org.uk](http://www.shelter.org.uk)

**SEN and disability:** Children and parents have a range of rights regarding SEN and disability, such as those set out in my past articles for *Headteacher Update*. The charities Independent Provider for Special Education Advice (IPSEA) and the Disability Law Service advise families as to their legal rights in this area.

■ Article: Disability discrimination: <https://tinyurl.com/2mtr559w>  
■ Article: The SEND Tribunal explained: <https://tinyurl.com/5ftuszdf>  
■ [www.ipsea.org.uk](http://www.ipsea.org.uk)  
■ <https://dls.org.uk/>

**Legal aid:** Some solicitors can provide free legal advice to families through legal aid funding from the national government. Families should avoid making assumptions about their eligibility and confirm



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it online via the gov.uk website. A strict eligibility criteria is applied based on means testing and whether funding would be in the interests of justice.

■ [www.gov.uk/legal-aid](http://www.gov.uk/legal-aid)  
■ [www.gov.uk/check-legal-aid](http://www.gov.uk/check-legal-aid)  
■ [www.gov.uk/legal-aid/eligibility](http://www.gov.uk/legal-aid/eligibility)

**Immigration and refugee matters:** Immigration status is complex for immigrants and refugees. The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants is a specialist charity that provides legal advice.

■ [www.jcwi.org.uk](http://www.jcwi.org.uk)

**Debt:** The law has various rules concerning debt collection, including the conduct of bailiffs and time limits for debt recovery. The charity National Debtline, funded by the Money Advice Trust, has a helpline run by specialist advisors.

■ [www.nationaldebtline.org](http://www.nationaldebtline.org)

## Other legal areas

There are other reputable specialist organisations that provide advice across a very wide range of areas, such as:

■ Advocate (formerly known as the Bar Pro Bono Unit) is a specialist charity which offers help with "any area of law": <https://weareadvocate.org.uk/>  
■ Lawworks, a similar charity to Advocate: [www.lawworks.org.uk](http://www.lawworks.org.uk)  
■ Citizens Advice Bureau (locally available or online): [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)  
■ Law Centres: [www.lawcentres.org.uk/i-am-looking-for-advice](http://www.lawcentres.org.uk/i-am-looking-for-advice)  
■ Advice Now, a charity providing legal information: [www.advicenow.org.uk](http://www.advicenow.org.uk)  
■ Beyond the organisations listed above, Lawworks has a good list of other national service providers, which is certainly a useful source: <https://tinyurl.com/39jawnw>

I have listed some legal rights and forms of protection above but parents should be guided to seek advice from specialists. A school simply provides the information if it wishes to do so to support its

families. As to charities generally, it is worthwhile clarifying that a strict criteria is often applied. In some instances, referrals are needed from a particular organisation. In other cases, there may be geographical restrictions.

## External specialist resources

Beyond advice and information pertaining to the law, there are charities and other organisations that provide their own resources to families. It might be worth maintaining a database of such resources locally and nationally to support your families. To cite just a few examples:

- The Royal National Institute for the Blind operates Talking Books, a free audio book player for blind and partially sighted users.
- The Royal Society for Blind Children has practitioners that run monthly evening group sessions for parents and carers of vision impaired children and young people (0-25 years) at no cost.
- The charity Refuge provides safe houses to victims of domestic violence.
- The Royal National Institute for Deaf People provides free hearing tests on its website.
- The Trussell Trust has a list of food banks available for families struggling with the cost of living crisis.

## A list of school resources

In exploring the strengthening of parent-school relations, look at your own resources. Consider disclosing what resources you have to families in specific areas, and where appropriate, e.g. provision maps for SEND support, or for gifted and talented pupils. I recall many cases where parent clients were clueless about a school's provision until I sent them a map or list. Leaving certain parents in the dark can be problematic, especially where the parent-school relationship is already weak.

## The benefits

So, what are the benefits to passing lists of such information and resources on to families?

- Increasing parental confidence in the school.
- Minimising future complaints.

- Stronger partnerships between your school and other organisations.
- Enhancing your pastoral care provision via indirectly supporting children's emotional and wellbeing needs.
- Promoting healthy home environments.
- Enhancing local and regional reputation.
- A potential increase in parental support for a school, e.g. perhaps by encouraging membership of the PTA.
- Ultimately, a firm display of empathy which all families appreciate.

I have personally witnessed many families resolving complex problems, and the schools benefiting from it, simply because I referred them to a website. It cost me mere seconds in many instances.

In my experience, parents in difficult circumstances are not familiar with many of the organisations mentioned in this article, or they remain unaware of the full extent of their services.

In other cases, families may have approached one organisation with no success and given up. In any event, providing a list helps to support them.

## Final thoughts

You may wish to consider collaborating with other local schools to create a master list of information and resources, if you wish to minimise the overall time cost and maximise your output.

Finally, please remember that these sources should be strictly labelled as "information" or simply "resources" – as opposed to "advice" – in order to limit your school's liability and manage parental expectations.

Families should never be inadvertently misled into incorrectly believing that a school is responsible for providing the advice in question. **hu**

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