

## The Government plans to implement the Schools Bill.

In its current form, it will increase the number of families who meet the threshold for fines and prosecution. We have the opportunity while the Bill is under discussion in parliament to stop this.

We need the support of as many MPs as possible to do this. Will you write to your MP today asking them to pledge their support and raise the issue in Parliament?

Visit <https://members.parliament.uk/FindYourMP> to find out who your MP is and what their email address is. Feel free to write your own email or use any of the sections in the following template as a guide:

Dear MP xxxxxxxx

### **A. Introduction:**

*Explain who you are, summarise your family's experience of school attendance problems or concerns on behalf of other families if you do not have direct experience yourself.*

### **B. Mention the Petitions:**

I have joined the 110,000++ people across the UK who have signed this petition to stop the prosecution of families whose children cannot attend school:

<https://www.change.org/p/updated-attendance-guidance-encourages-prosecution-and-fine-s-of-families-facing-barriers-to-attendance-undiagnosed-children-with-send-are-particularly-at-risk-please-don-t-criminalise-our-families>

And <https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/create-a-new-absence-code-for-school-refusal>

### **C. Request support for our 3 Asks:**

I am writing to request your support for the 3 Asks proposed by 'Square Peg' and 'Not Fine in School'. Please see the attached document for further details. We're calling for:

- 1. END TRUANCY LAWS**
- 2. AN ATTENDANCE CODE OF PRACTICE**
- 3. INTRODUCE A MENTAL HEALTH ABSENCE / REGISTRATION CODE**

### **D. Call to action:**

I am incredibly concerned about the criminalisation of parents and families. As my elected representative, I am calling on you to do the following:

- Write to the Secretary of State for Education in opposition to the Schools Bill
- Raise the issues in Parliament through Oral or Written questions, to encourage debate about the '3 Asks'
- Show your public support by sharing the petition

I would be happy to meet to discuss and to answer any questions. School attendance difficulties and persistent absence is an extremely complex and often misunderstood problem.

Thank you for your interest and support.

Yours sincerely

Enc. Square Peg & Not Fine In School '3 Asks' doc



## Schools Bill Part 3

### Square Peg & Not Fine In School 3 Asks

1. **End truancy laws** - criminalising parents does not improve outcomes for the child or their family, nor does it increase attendance. It harms the most vulnerable, increases likelihood of withdrawal, disengagement, anger, resentment, distrust. It weaves intergenerational institutional cycles of harm and has no place in modern civil society.
  - a. Replace truancy laws with a compassion-focused response which focuses on ensuring welfare, social care, disability and SEN / educational support, mental health and appropriate healthcare needs have been assessed and provision is in place.
  - b. Where it is found a child is at risk of abuse or parental neglect, there are already mechanisms in place to address this via safeguarding and social services.
  - c. Ensure all efforts to work with the child and their family is a priority and protected standard.
  
2. Square Peg clause - **Attendance Code of Practice**, mapped, designed and co-produced with organisations such as ours, those with lived experience of barriers to attendance and brings together third sector organisations working across disability, SEN, intersectionality, children & families support as well as education professionals, health and care practitioners and welfare teams. The Attendance Code of Practice would set out the gold-standard replacement offer to criminalising families.
  
3. Introduce a **Mental Health absence code** - this will achieve several key outcomes:
  - a. Give schools agency to authorise absence for mental ill health (too many currently do not recognise mental health as legitimate or valid)
  - b. Ensure families are not caught in the 'unauthorised absence' black hole, which fast tracks them to punitive, harmful, destabilising threats of fines and prosecution
  - c. Separate & identify the numbers of children struggling with disabling or clinical levels of mental ill health from the physical illness absence data and thus capture the impact of mental ill health on children's ability to access education
  - d. Act as a pastoral 'flag' for schools to notice and check in with the family to put in place informal or formal support or refer to specialist services, as appropriate, by following the Attendance Code of Practice

**We can do better, together**