



Is My Child Really 'Fine' in School?

Increasingly parents of children who struggle at school with SEND, health problems, or bullying are reporting that their children are described as being 'fine at school'. If this happens it may be helpful for parents and other professionals to ask for clarification and consideration of the following points.

Before describing a child or young person as being fine in school could you please make sure:

- You have a good working definition of the word 'fine' and that you have gathered enough evidence as to why you make that claim or assumption
- You are qualified to make that statement, or that s/he has been properly observed and assessed by someone who is
- You know him or her well enough, or have listened to and considered descriptions of their difficulties by someone who does
- You have considered the impact of any diagnosed or suspected SEND, including the possibility that s/he may be masking their difficulties at school
- You have considered the impact of this assumption on the child or young person's well-being

Please be aware of the implications of describing children as 'fine' when in fact they may not be, as this can result in a child or young person being:

- Less likely to be able to attend school regularly
- Less likely to be diagnosed or receive treatment and therefore more likely to deteriorate, or be harmed by inappropriate expectations and plans
- More vulnerable to bullying
- More vulnerable to deteriorating mental and physical health
- At risk of further long term difficulties

Please remember:

- Any difficulties are unlikely to go away without reasonable adjustments or specific interventions
- Disputing the difficulties denies the child and family access to relevant support, including SEN funding, top up funding, EHCP and ultimately a suitable education
- The Send Code of Practice emphasises the need to listen to, and work with children and their parents. Relationships and trust between parents and professionals are potentially damaged by disputing difficulties

It is hard to understand who benefits from describing a struggling child as being 'fine', or the assumption that a vulnerable child is coping at school. Too many children are struggling to get the support they need due to pressures within the current education system, exacerbated by funding cuts, as well as lack of time, training, or experience amongst professionals. This practice of denying need and refusing to accept that a growing number of children are *Not Fine in School* needs to stop. For a child to be 'fine' in school their needs must be acknowledged and supported in line with government guidance and policies. There also needs to be increased accountability in relation to how schools put guidance and policies into practice. Parents and schools need to work together to make sure schools are adequately funded to do this. Only then will the many children and young people who are *Not Fine in School* receive the education they need to be healthy (mentally and physically) and to achieve their potential.

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