

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 civil society.
 - a. Replace truancy laws with a compassion-focussed 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