



SCHOOL ATTENDANCE DIFFICULTIES: PARENT SURVEY RESULTS

May 2018

'Not Fine in School' was established in 2017 by parents who are working in partnership to offer support and guidance to other parents and professionals. We also campaign and raise awareness of school attendance difficulties. Our group was created in reaction to the growing number of children who are struggling to attend mainstream school, and the difficulties parents experience in finding understanding and support for their children.

In May 2018 we devised a simple survey to gather data from parents in our Facebook group, and in other parent support groups on social media. Our aim was to create a snapshot of the current situation and illustrate the difficulties parents are experiencing.

The survey was shared on social media for one week and received 1,661 responses during that time.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS [1,661 responses]

Attendance: 25.6% of parents have children who are attending school with anxiety and mental health difficulties. A further 18.4% have children who are attending with SEND difficulties, and 19.3% have children not receiving any educational provision at all.

Onset: 74.6% of parents have children who started to experience difficulties before secondary school age (43% at primary school and 31.6% at nursery age). This reflects the WHO (2013) observation that half of all mental health conditions first occur by the age of 14.

SEND: 92% of parents think that school attendance difficulties are related to SEND that are inadequately supported or unrecognised in school. 64.1% of parents report that their child has a SEND diagnosis and a further 26.6% of parents suspect a diagnosis is needed.

Influences: Inadequate support for SEND (73.7%), along with Cognitive Difficulties (60.9%) and Pre-existing Anxiety Disorders (51.8%) are considered to be highly influential. Social Anxiety and Friendship Difficulties are also a concern according to 70.2% of parents. Other influences that are considered most significant are the School Environment (73.7%), School Culture (62.3%), Academic Pressure (62.4%), and Bullying (child or adult) (44.3%).

Support: Those services and professionals we automatically turn to when school attendance becomes an issue do not score highly for their levels of support. Considering the definition of their role, EWOs were only found to be supportive by 5.4% of parents. Local Authorities (13.7%) and Social Workers (10.2%) do not rate highly for support. Neither do school based staff - School Nurses were positively rated by (7.5%); School Counsellors/Therapists (12.7%); School SENCO's (33.1%) and School Teachers (33.3%). The most supportive source is peer related with social media support groups rated by 66.7% of parents, and online websites found supportive by 46.5% of parents.

EHCP: The most striking aspect of the feedback here is that although **24.6%** of parents have been successful in getting an EHCP in place, another **20.4%** have been told by schools or CAMHS not to bother applying, or that they will not get an EHCP. In addition, a further **20%** of parents do not know what an EHCP is, suggesting that professionals are not providing them with relevant information about the options for their children in getting the right support. Parent's comments also reveal that their applications are being obstructed, or they are being misinformed about the relevance and process of applying for EHCP's.

Educational Provision: School adaptations such a reduced timetable or changes to the environment have been tried by **67.9%** of parents and schools. **34.7%** of parents report that they have been provided with homework by their school. Alternative provision has been provided in some cases – via home tuition (**11.6%**); hospital school (**4.1%**); PRU (**4.7%**); SEN school or unit (**12.2%**) and funded online school (**4%**). **6.4%** of parents are funding online school themselves, while **22.3%** are home educating. **17.8%** of parents have children who are not currently receiving any educational provision, and **12.4%** have children currently too unwell to take part in any education.

'School Refusal': Considering that the term we hear used most frequently in practice and debate is 'school refusal', we were surprised to see that a diagnosis of 'school anxiety' was reported by more parents in the survey (**5.1%** compared to **14.6%** respectively). **74.8%** of parents stated that an attendance related diagnosis had not been given at all, which suggests that there is a lack of acknowledgement of many children's difficulties.

Blame: The results illustrate the tendency to blame school attendance difficulties on poor parenting (**55.5%**) and/or children's negative attitudes towards school (**60.8%**).

Penalties & Prosecution: While **26.3%** of parents reported that they have been threatened with a fine as a penalty for unauthorised attendance, a smaller figure of **2.5%** have actually been fined. We were surprised to find the number of parents who report being prosecuted for non-attendance is low at **1.3%**, however, that does equate to 20 families who were unfairly put through a distressing and costly experience. Almost a quarter of parents (**24.9%**) report that they have been referred to Social Services because their child has a difficulty with school attendance.

FII: Almost a fifth of parents (**18.4%**) report that they have been accused of Fabricating or Inducing Illness (FII) in relation to their child's difficulty with school attendance.

Forced Attendance: Almost half (**45.5%**) of parents in the survey state that they have forced their child to attend school, as they felt under pressure to do so; in addition, **21.2%** felt under this pressure but have refused to force attendance. When asked if they use of force was helpful in resolving their child's anxiety, **36%** said no, and **59.1%** said it has made things much worse. Only **0.4%** of parents thought force did help and **4.5%** thought it might have helped.

The full report is available on our website www.notfineinschool.org.uk