



Square Peg & Not Fine In School behaviour survey

August 2021

This survey was conducted over 10 days, between 27 July 2021 and 5 August 2021. It was aimed primarily at the parents of children who face barriers to attendance, in order to evidence the correlation between behaviour policies, mental health and attendance difficulties. Many of these parents' children have SEND/SEMH*, have received sanctions for 'poor' behaviour and also have low attendance.

239 respondents completed the questionnaire. 46% of the children were at secondary school, 30% at primary school and 8% attended special schools. 74% had identified SEND and another 18% had suspected SEND/SEMH, or struggled in some respect at school.

Behaviour is communication. We must identify the underlying drivers

One of the key messages from the survey is that all behaviour is a form of communication – whether disruptive, masking or non-attendance – and a signal of underlying need.

However, there was a general feeling that this is not widely accepted, that policies are insufficiently flexible, and that not enough attention is given to identifying the underlying drivers behind these behaviours. For children with SEND/SEMH this can be a particular problem, & many feel that consistency is prioritised over individual needs.

Strict behaviour policies can cause trauma, and aren't effective

There are undeniable links between behaviour policies, exclusion, non-attendance, SEND and mental health.

In many cases, parents cited examples of where their child's mental health and attendance had been negatively affected by strict and inflexible policies. This often led to repeated sanctions (clearly not resolving the behaviour issues) and/or non-attendance.

Where schools made their policies more punitive following the pandemic, this tended to worsen their child's mental health.

Parents want trauma-informed practice, and better training for staff

It is very clear that parents have serious concerns about punitive approaches to behaviour, that these have a negative (and often very serious) impact on their child's mental health, and that, in their view, disciplinary policies don't work.

Almost without exception, parents asked for a more compassionate, trauma-informed approach, with improved training for staff, in terms of trauma, attachment and SEND.

There were several examples of schools who had taken this approach, with positive outcomes.

For more information, please contact hello@teamsquarepeg.org. Square Peg (www.teamsquarepeg.org) is a Community Interest Company working to effect change for children who face barriers to attendance. Not Fine In School (NFIS – www.notfineinschool.co.uk) is a social enterprise supporting the same families. NFIS has a closed Facebook Group for parents with a current membership of more than 17,500 and growing at a rate of approximately 800 per month.

*SEND = Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, SEMH = Social, Emotional and Mental Health

64%

said their child's attendance difficulties were linked to their school's behaviour management policy and practices. 23% said they were not, and 13% weren't sure

52%

said these difficulties were linked to anxiety, other mental health issues, SEND or trauma. Restraint, sensory overload and staff attitude was also mentioned

14%

felt the school's behaviour management policy was fair & appropriate. 45% agreed with some of it; 41% agreed with very little, or none, of it

16%

thought the policy was flexible enough to meet the needs of individual children. 45% felt it was sometimes flexible, but that consistency was prioritised, For 38% it was consistency at all costs

9%

agreed the school saw disruptive behaviour as a form of communication. 37% felt they tried to identify underlying drivers, but 36% said it was consequences first. For 18% it was a very disciplined approach

71%

of schools didn't change their behaviour policy as a result of the pandemic. Where it **did change**, it was likely to have become more punitive. Behaviour got worse in 29% of cases

67%

said their child's mental health worsened as a result of a more punitive change in behaviour management policies

96%

are concerned about the existing guidance for school-wide punitive approaches to address behaviour. 97% do not feel zero tolerance is the right approach

95%

who expressed an opinion claimed that a zero tolerance behaviour policy does not help improve behaviour

85%

said their child had been negatively affected by the use of zero tolerance behaviour policies. 15% said they had not, including 1% who felt their child preferred the structure of zero tolerance

86%

would like to see trauma-informed, compassionate policies and/or improved training for teachers to understand the drivers behind behaviour

46%

feel that mobile phones should be allowed, 30% do not and 24% are unsure. 43% said their child was allowed a mobile phone, but that there were penalties for inappropriate use