

Concerns About the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill

The *Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill* contains several concerning provisions that risk infringing on the rights of home-educating families while failing to address its stated goals of safeguarding children. Below, I have outlined specific sections of the bill that require urgent reconsideration:

1. **Section 24:** This section includes multiple provisions that would be harmful and, in some cases, dangerous:
 - Requiring LAs to refuse deregistration during child protection cases or assessments, even when the concerns are unrelated to parenting or the home environment, risks unfairly targeting families.
 - Allowing LAs to deny deregistration from special schools based on their judgment of the child’s best interests opens the door to misuse, particularly if schools provide incorrect information.
 - Subsection 8(b) could cause harm in cases where separated parents are involved due to abuse.
 - Subsection 12 automatically denies deregistration requests within six months of a previous denial, disregarding the changing needs of children and family circumstances.
 - Section 24 as a whole is redundant, as current legislation already allows LAs and Social Services to act swiftly in genuine safeguarding emergencies.
2. **Section 25 – Registration Requirements:**
 - The proposed register duplicates information already held by LAs and does not address the issue of children missing from education.
 - The details required (e.g., hours of education, lesson plans) are excessive, unrealistic, and incompatible with the flexibility inherent in home education.
 - The inclusion of undefined “other information” (Part 2, k) risks overreach and should be clearly specified in primary legislation.
3. **Section 436E:**
 - The requirement for information from unspecified groups risks isolating home-educated children from extracurricular activities, as many groups may refuse to accept them due to administrative burdens.
4. **Section 436F:**
 - Provisions that allow LAs to include opinions, biases, or inaccuracies in the register could harm families relocating from poorly behaved LA areas.
5. **Section 436I:**
 - The mandate for home visits could be harmful to neurodivergent children, such as autistic children, for whom home is a safe space. Furthermore, the lack of clarity on the training of visiting officials raises questions about the suitability of these visits.
6. **Schedule 31A and Section 436H:**
 - The extensive amount of information required from parents is unattainable for many families, potentially leading to fines and even imprisonment. This disproportionate response penalizes families seeking to educate their children in ways that suit their needs.
7. **Section 436P:**

- The increased penalties for School Attendance Orders (SAOs) could deter families from seeking justice in court when their education is suitable, leaving them vulnerable to misuse by LAs.

The existing legislative framework already provides LAs with sufficient tools to address genuine safeguarding concerns, including emergency rulings when necessary. The additional layers of bureaucracy and intrusive measures proposed in this bill not only fail to enhance child protection but also create significant barriers for families who are providing excellent, individualized education for their children.

Given these issues, I urge you to advocate for the removal or substantial revision of these sections to protect the rights of families and ensure that legislation does not harm the very children it claims to safeguard.