Written evidence submitted by Naomi Moksha to The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill Committee (CWSB244).

Main points

- Lack of specialist school places
- Needs of SEND children ignored
- Home education needs to be recognised and protected for the positive impact it has on children's wellbeing
- Services and professionals allow children to 'fall through the cracks' due to lack of funding and resources
- To school or not to school is irrelevant in protecting vulnerable children
- The government are ignoring multiple crises and systemic failures that have been evident for at least 25 years
- Child poverty, the SEND crisis, CAMHS, and the social care crisis need to be tackled
- Families needing an EHCP for their SEND children are facing a complex process, and extraordinarily long waiting times
- A child's visibility does not keep them safe from abuse
- Underfunding of social care enables children to fall through the cracks
- Parent blaming and a misuse of power towards parents of neurodivergent children
- No access to mental health help and CAMHS crisis are leaving children vulnerable
- Parents of neurodivergent children will be negatively affected by the bill
- Home education improves most children's wellbeing
- The education system is not fit for purpose
- The government is not holding itself accountable
- The government takes a 'one size fits all' approach to education and wants to punish those who don't fit in
- The new bill infringes upon the rights of disabled children and their families
- The politicians and leaders attempt to create further division by creating an argument of school vs home education, and professionals vs parents.
- The government display cult-like behaviours that plan to strip away parental rights and undermine family systems
- Rather than creating breakfast clubs, why not tackle child poverty and the cost-of-living crisis to enable more children to enjoy breakfast with their families?
- I speak in reference to the following clauses within the proposed children's wellbeing bill; clause 21, clause 24, and clauses 25 to 29 and schedule 1.

    1. I write to you from the perspective of two young people who 'fell through the cracks' of the system. I am speaking for myself, age 30, and my daughter, age 12.

We both have pathological demand avoidance (PDA) which is a form of autism. We are survivors of systematic abuse, and child sexual exploitation. Over the last two and a half years, I have had the joy of home educating my daughter which has enabled me to provide her with a low demand lifestyle, and focus on her wellbeing to help her recover from severe trauma and burnout. We have had the chance to reconnect and heal together from our past experiences.

2. I believe that everyone deserves the right to choose how they educate their children, and that school should be an opt-in or out choice. There are multiple ways to learn, and receive an education, and there is not a one size fits all way to be educated. Home education gives children and parents more freedom to find a way to learn that works best for them. My child has giftedness, something that was not recognised in a mainstream school setting. Home education gives my daughter a chance to focus on her own special interests.

3. According to the NSPCC, on average, 1 child is killed per week in the UK. https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/statistics-briefings/child-deaths-abuse-neglect

Most of these children are known and seen by proffessionals. This begs the question – why has the UK government decided to use the case of Sara Sharif to defend its plan to remove the rights of a parents choice to home educate? What about the rights of the other fifty children who were murdered who were all known to the services? The government has been hiding away from multiple crisies and systemic failures that harm children for many years, and I can trace this back to my own childhood over twenty years ago when, as a SEND child, I slipped through the cracks of the system.

4. It is clear that protecting vulnerable children is a far more complex issue that cannot be defined by one single identifying factor, and most certainly is not a problem that is related to, or that can be solved through controlling a parents choice of ‘school’ or ‘not school’. In fact, to school or not to school is irrelevant, and I would suggest that tackling bigger problems such as child poverty, the social care crisis, and the SEND crisis would be far more effective and sensible ways to protect and improve children’s wellbeing.

5. I have concerns with regards to the way that the system currently works. Parents of SEND children who are in need of an EHCP are forced to ‘fight’ with their local authority. They must endure a gruelling process that involves multiple appeals, and waiting times between a year to eigteen months. It is protocol that most applications are automatically declined. Parents have to go through long,

complex appeal processes. The LA's ignore and fabricate information in an attempt to stop the applications from proceeding as they do not have a big enough budget. This is absolutely shocking and is deeply affecting the wellbeing and outcomes of the most vulnerable children and their families. The current education system is inaccessible to children with SEND. My concern is that nothing is being done to acknowledge or change this. The government are not holding themselves accountable. It appears that the government intend upon strategically directing focus to the home education community to deflect culpability. I was a SEND child who 'fell through the cracks' over seventeen years ago. I was visible to social services, CAMHS, school, tutors from the pupil referral unit, the hopsital, and GP. I have retrieved files that identify me as being a vulnerable autistic child. I had a social worker throughout my childhood, and multiple agency involvement. At age 14, I appealed against a choice made by social services to remove my services. My teacher supported my appeal. I stated that 'I felt that my social worker was the only person I could talk to about certain things'. Social services chose to reject our appeal, and removed my services. Six months later I was groomed and experienced horrific abuse. I was made pregnant, and almost bled to death when I miscarried my baby. While I was recovering in hospital, social services were informed but decided not to get involved despite knowing I was a vulnerable child. So I endured another five years of serious abuse.

6. I had to live through all of these experiences, and I had nobody to advocate for me. As my daughter was growing up, we ran into difficulties. Some of these difficulties stemmed from the trauma we had both suffered, as well as our neurodivergence. At the time, I did not know that I was autistic or that my daughter was. It was only later on in my adulthood after I started to suspect it, and did a subject access request that I discovered my diagnosis. When I was struggling to manage extreme behaviours from my daughter, I suffered from a mental health breakdown. I had thought that the services would get involved and help us. Unfortunately they blamed my parenting, ignored my concerns, and refused to provide a psychologist for my daughter. They did not help me find the root cause of our difficulties. They ticked their boxes and then went away, leaving us with the same problems we had when they came on board. I found that my daughter's behaviour was getting even more challenging. I called them up one night begging for help. They decided to remove my daughter from my care for four nights. This was deeply traumatic for both of us. Unfortunately my daughter was not kept safe, and important information was kept from me. After that experience we suffered from multiple crises, when trying to access help from social care, we were refused help every time. The professionals turned their backs on us, and left me to manage it all on my own. I was given an early help

worker who I found was not trained to understand our situation. She tried to talk me out of identifying myself and my daughter as being autistic. I tried to explain that we had already been on the waiting lists for CAMHS for years, and that we couldn't wait to find out how to support ourselves.

7. There was no access to help with mental health, no access to a psychologist or camhs to get a diagnosis, no help from social care, no support in the home to help me through the challenging time, and there was inadequate help from school. I made the choice to home educate to take the pressure off of trying to force my daughter into school which was deeply traumatic for us both. The early help worker who was working with us at the time tried to talk me out of making the choice. I thought to myself, that none of the professionals had seemed bothered about helping either of us before, so why did they need to see her now? Were they just speaking a script given to them by the government?

8. I chose not to listen to her, and I spent the next few years heavily researching autism and pathological demand avoidance (PDA). I settled at PDA as I realised that my daughter was definitely pathologically demand avoidant, and that she required a radically different approach to her education and parenting. I was able to find online support groups where I met other families raising PDA kids. I was both amazed and horrified to discover that all of these other parents had also been blamed and refused help by professionals. They all faced the same, unique challenges that I did. They were the most inspiring people I'd ever spoken with. Many of these parents have had to, or are still 'fighting' to enable their PDA children to access a specialist education. Many of them home educate and would be negatively affected by the bill. They all oppose this new bill, and worry about facing even more pressure.

9. Now, several years on, after overcoming extreme adversity, trauma, and being unable to get any help from the system, my daughter is now in a very strong position. We have a very close relationship that is in the process of healing from our past experiences. It will take a long time to fully repair the damage that was done to us by the system and the authorities, but we are well on our way to living a peaceful life together. Her wellbeing is the best that it's been, and she now wants to try out a specialist school.

10. My daughter will need a specialist education that allows her to be an autonomous learning. She is currently an auto-didactic learner which means that she doesn't need to have a teacher. Home education allows her to access this

type of education, my concern is that the new bill does not take this into account. My concern is that specialist schools are over subscribed. The government needs to provide more specialist school places. In fact, the whole education system needs a complete overhaul.

11. Having survived extreme trauma and adversity, I now aim to be the voice for all of the children who ‘fall through the gaps’. The educational system is simply not fit for purpose. I never felt safe at school, and school felt like a prison to me. I call for a radical overhaul. It is very clear that the system has been designed in a way to uphold its own position, but does nothing to serve and protect the rights of an individual or a child. It is clear that the system is keen to punish people who do not fit into its narrow view of life, and that it applies a one size fits all approach. It would appear that the system has been harming children for hundreds of years through its hunger, and need for domination and control, and that there is no serious accountability or concern for human beings being shown. It seems that once again, the government want to hand out further sanctions to strip away children’s and parents rights to experience life freely.

12. I have overcome extreme adversity with my own SEND child including advocating for her rights, carrying out my own research, doing deep work around our neurodivergence, and ending patterns of generational trauma, while interfaced with a system that has continuously refused to recognise my daughters needs or offer us any support through social care, or provide my daughter with an accessible and adequate education. Many of our rights have already been denied and infringed upon. My daughter wants to try out a specialist school. The reality of that involves me having to ‘fight’ the system through a complex, long-winding process of seeking an EHCP. I will be extraordinarily lucky if I am able to get her a place at our local specialist school. If I do, then I may have to worry about our rights being further infringed upon, should my daughter decide that she wants to return to home education, under part of the new bill, we would be at the mercy of the LA.

13. I am concerned that our politicians and leaders are attempting to create more division by getting us to focus on the argument of school vs home education, and professionals vs parents. I am also deeply concerned about cult-like behaviours such as attacking the family systems by renouncing parental rights, encouraging breakfast clubs rather than tackling poverty and providing opportunities to have breakfast in the family home. It seems that the government are attempting to form an elitist totalitarian society, and we people rely on the committee to stop

this. The government is using its wealth and writing up policies in a way that does not support us. Rather than spending money on creating a register of ‘children not in school’, why not use the money to help our most vulnerable SEND children by providing them with fairer access to EHCP’s as well as more specialist school places? This could positively impact the wellbeing of up to the 1.7million children who have SEND, and prevent children like me from ‘falling through the cracks’. This would be a true example of promoting the wellbeing of children. It is clear that the education secretary, the leaders, and politicians are unwilling to take any responsibility or accountability for their shortcomings, and they are unwilling to admit the truth that the system in place isn’t working, and will require a radical transformation. I have no faith in the members of Parliament, and I call for the committee to scrap the bill proposal. I call for the government to seriously consider how we might come together as a nation to create long lasting permanent changes within our society. I suggest that rather than hogging all of the power, that they start to share their power more freely with every man, woman, and child, and that we start to work on a ‘power with’ rather than a top-down, 'power over' basis. I make no apologies in speaking the truth, and I will not stop speaking out until I see some real changes made to improve the wellbeing of vulnerable children. Until we face the truth and extent of the mess, children will continue to suffer. It is time for change.

14. **Call for actions**
    - The committee to order the government to scrap the bill proposal
    - The committee to advise the government to seriously reconsider how they are going to hold themselves accountable, and ensure they are willing to face the real crisis including SEND, social care, CAHMS, cost of living crisis, and the unfit for purpose education system.
    - The committee to advise the government to re-think and redesign the whole system
    - The government to hold themselves accountable
    - The education secretary Bridgett Phillips on to step down
    - The government to admit to the failings of the system
    - The government to protect the rights of how parents choose to educate their children
    - The government to work to provide more specialist school places
    - The government to provide more funding to social care, camhs and local authorities.
    - The government to acknowledge and honour the lived experiences of neurodivergent people, and to provide the appropriate training and support packages through social care, cahms and other vital services.

- The government to stop hogging all of the power and begin to distribute its power with every man, woman, and child.

Naomi Moksha
(A child who fell through the cracks)

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