



# **Best Value Review**

## **Attendance in Schools**

*A Report by the Project Board*

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**11 March 2004**

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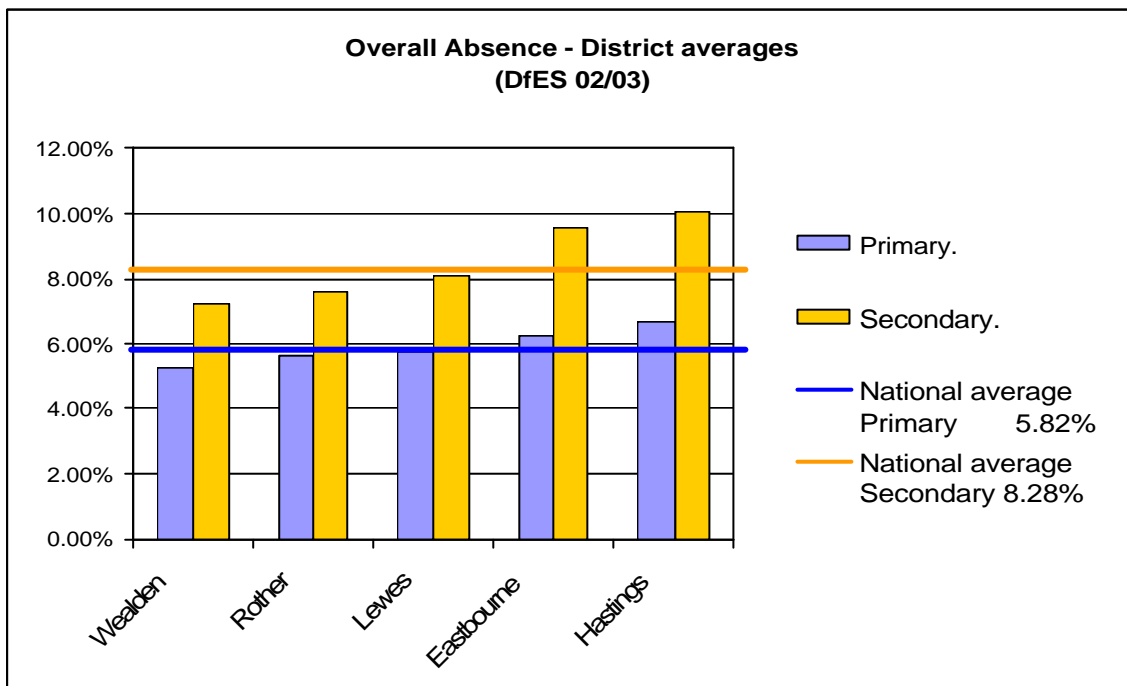
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## Introduction

### Background

1. East Sussex is one of sixty authorities identified by the DfES in March 2003 facing the greatest challenge in contributing to the national Public Service Agreement target to reduce the 2002 level of truancy by 10% in 2004. The LEA in 2002, had already begun a campaign to tackle truancy and raise attendance and has adopted very demanding targets for reducing unauthorised absence.
2. Overall, attendance in East Sussex schools is below the national average. See Figure 1. The combined primary and secondary absence rate for East Sussex in 2003 was 6.95% where nationally it was 6.83%. Absence from schools varies across districts and there are pockets of very poor attendance.

Figure 1



3. Absence is recorded as authorised and unauthorised. Authorised and unauthorised absence, in East Sussex primary schools, is better than the national average.
4. However, the picture changes in the county secondary schools. Authorised absence at 7.05% is lower than the national average of 7.20%. Unauthorised absence at 1.35%, is higher than the national average of 1.10%. It should be noted that small percentage differences reflect significant numbers of student days lost from school.
5. This review was established to explore the effectiveness of strategies used by the Education Welfare Service to combat the poor attendance of students in East Sussex schools. In parallel

- with the Best Value review, the LEA and the DfES began a joint project to audit attendance strategies in East Sussex to identify and support good practice. This has contributed to challenge, comparison and benchmarking activities of this review.
6. Support to the LEA included expert advice from an attendance consultant, advice on enhancing strategic interventions, and project management support. Two questionnaires were completed by the Director of Education and the Principal Education Welfare Officer and returned to the DfES. The questionnaires described the authority's strategic approach to raising school attendance and the practical application of those strategies. These formed the basis for the pre-review position statement of this review.
  7. There has been a 1% improvement in attendance in secondary schools and this reflects the strenuous efforts undertaken by the Education Welfare Service, schools and the LEA since 2002.

### **The scope of the review**

8. The Project Board (the Board) held its first meeting on 2 June 2003. The review covered three areas:
  - strategies for improving attendance and their sustainability
  - the cost effectiveness of the Education Welfare Service
  - the impact of the service.
9. The review examined the impact of the Education Welfare Service on raising levels of attendance in schools and in particular in secondary schools where poor attendance poses the greatest challenge. Only secondary schools have been consulted as part of this review, although it is recognised that patterns of absence and attendance in individual students may have been set during the primary school phase.
10. Operational factors, strategic developments, the role of schools and links with other agencies involved in all aspects of raising attendance were explored as part of the review.
11. The review:
  - challenged why and how support for raising attendance in schools is being provided by the Education Department and in particular the Education Welfare Service;
  - compared this with the performance of others and took into account examples of best practice;
  - consulted with schools, parents, children, Education Welfare Officers and partners in the field and the wider community in identifying scope for improvement;

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- explored alternative procurement methods, as a means of securing economic, efficient and effective support for improving attendance in schools.

## **Summary of Findings**

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1. The combined work of schools, the Education Welfare Service and the LEA during 2002 and 2003 has been effective in raising attendance by 1% in secondary schools.
2. Attendance panels are the Education Welfare Service's main strategy and are effective in raising attendance for a majority of students identified with poor attendance patterns.
3. Attendance Support Teams have had a positive impact on the effectiveness of schools in tackling poor attendance. However, the Education Welfare Service does not have the resources to support all schools at all times with Attendance Support Teams.
4. Attendance improves when the school is willing to divert funding to employ additional specialist attendance staff.
5. Truancy sweeps and the threat of legal action raise awareness of attendance issues and have a positive effect on parents and students.
6. Parents condoning their child's absence from school is the major concern for schools.
7. The use of electronic registration systems and re-defining attendance codes has improved the accuracy and usefulness of attendance data. The better the data on attendance, the better heads are able to identify and then tackle attendance issues. However, it is recognised that electronic attendance systems are only as good as the quality of the data fed in.
8. Attendance figures can be skewed by a few persistent offenders.
9. Attendance data gathered at the primary stage can be used to tackle poor attendance from the start of secondary schooling.
10. Teachers' ability to tackle attendance is variable. The key to success is to appoint somebody with overall responsibility for attendance and the quality of the attendance recording system. Where a senior manager demonstrates a personal involvement in a class through comments on weekly attendance printouts, teacher response improves. Training from the Education Welfare Service in good register keeping and active attendance management is good for all staff, especially new staff.
11. The Education Welfare Service targets support effectively on schools most in need. The primary schools receiving the most help are among the feeder schools for the secondary schools needing and receiving most support.
12. Improving attendance is not the main focus for the partner agencies the Education Welfare Service is trying to work with and influence. The funding the agencies commit to raising attendance is either limited or not specifically identified and monitored.

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13. Targets for raising attendance are not shared or set by some of the partner agencies.
14. Home visits to the families of persistent non-attenders are not cost effective for the Education Welfare Service. There are agencies who now use home visits as a key activity in their intervention strategies.
15. Collection, co-ordination and sharing of attendance data is not consistent or effective. The Information Referral Tracking system (IRT) has the potential to be the single source for attendance data.
16. In schools where students, parents and the Education Welfare Service work together to create a tailored timetable or a modified curriculum, attendance improves. This is most effective in years 10 and 11. The standard curriculum is felt to be inappropriate for some students and may be one of the causes of their poor attendance.
17. Rewarding good attendance is more effective than punishing poor attendance.
18. Parents and students say that interesting lessons and meeting friends are the main reasons why students want to go to school. Being bullied is given as a main reason for non-attendance.
19. Some parents do not yet understand or accept their own importance in influencing their child's attendance or the link between attendance and achievement. They believe that authorised absence is acceptable and authorisation in some way erases the negative affects of the missed schooling.
20. Schools are able to demonstrate to parents that a 10% improvement in attendance can lead to an improvement of up to one grade at GCSE.
21. Appointments for specialist medical services such as orthodontics are frequently given during the school day. The child inevitably misses schooling.
22. The East Sussex County Council website provides parents and carers with good information about attendance. The site is easily accessible and compares favourably with other council websites.
23. East Sussex spends £12 per student on its Education Welfare Service. This is less than the £13 per student national average but higher than our statistical neighbours.
24. The average salary for an East Sussex Education Welfare Officer is lower than its neighbours and the number of students per officer at 4444 is higher than the average of our neighbours at 3810.
25. The East Sussex Education Welfare Service gives value for money. The Board believes that the recommendations can all be achieved within existing resources and will lead to better service and efficiency gains. Attendance in schools is a key improvement target and this is not an area from which the Board believes savings should be found.

## **Recommendations**

		<i>Paragraph Reference</i>	<i>Target Date</i>
R1	<i>The Education Welfare Service should develop the model used by the Attendance Support Teams.</i>	12	September 2004
R2	<i>Attendance Panels should continue to be the main focus of the work of Education Welfare Officers and should operate in all schools.</i>	18	March 2005
R3	<i>The Education Welfare Service should establish firmer links with magistrates to ensure legal procedures are used effectively and truancy sweeps should be planned around Youth Court days.</i>	26	September 2004
R4	<i>Secondary schools should have a senior manager responsible for attendance.</i>	15	January 2005
R5	<i>Attendance Support Teams should support secondary schools in making the best use of attendance data from feeder primary schools to establish good attendance patterns in students from year 7.</i>	38	September 2004
R6	<i>The Education Welfare Service should establish a common easily accessible shared bank of attendance data.</i>	46	March 2005
R7	<i>The Education Welfare Service should work with all partner agencies to ensure LEA attendance targets are known and each identifies resources to support raising attendance.</i>	61	March 2005
R8	<i>The Education Welfare Service should work with schools to make the best use of the 14-19 curriculum and modified timetables to support attendance strategies.</i>	47	December 2004
R9	<i>The Education Welfare Service should work to devise policy frameworks supporting medical appointments for students outside school hours.</i>	33	September 2004
R10	<i>The LEA should continue to develop the attendance section of the County Council web site.</i>	51	Ongoing



## **Sustainable Strategies for Improving Attendance**

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### **Attendance Support Teams**

12. The East Sussex Education Welfare Service has been piloting a new strategy to focus support in schools with most need. Using the red/amber/green identifier system (described in the section of the report covering targeted support on page 12) the Education Welfare Officers work in small teams in individual schools.
13. The attendance support team focuses entirely on reducing unauthorized absence in schools where the overall attendance is below the DfES thresholds. The team undertakes a detailed analysis of the work the school does to combat absence and from this analysis makes an assessment of the work the school needs to do to improve attendance.
14. The team:
  - reviews the efficiency of the systems the school has in place to see if the underlying issue is unauthorised absence or a weakness in the absence recording system;
  - checks if the school has a senior manager reviewing trends in absence and overseeing strategies;
  - assesses the practices the school uses on a day to day basis to see if all staff (teaching and non-teaching) are committed to giving attendance a high priority.
15. From this, the team will identify key actions to give the most impact. If the systems are weak, attempts will be made to resolve the weaknesses or call in experts to give advice. Where the attitude of staff is identified as needing change the Education Welfare Officers will provide inset sessions or attend staff meetings to raise awareness of the importance of staff attitude. If the senior management of attendance is weak the team will speak to the head about the role of the deputy or senior management in leading attendance work. They will also suggest budget shifts to produce resource levels to support rewards for improved attendance and work to reduce absence. The team could also discuss with the governors their role in tackling truancy and raising attendance.
16. The Attendance Support Team will concentrate its efforts on the students who are not intractable non-attenders but who nevertheless have unsatisfactory levels of attendance and implement attendance panels. Additional strategies may include reward ceremonies to congratulate improvers and students with sustained good attendance, reviews of the absence recording systems, lateness sweeps and truancy sweeps.
17. Accordingly, the Attendance Support Team will stay in a school for one term. A key element of the team's work is the exit strategy.

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The aim is to import good practice into the school and lay the foundations for the school to sustain school-based activities into the future.

R1

*The Education Welfare Service should develop the model used by the Attendance Support Teams.*

September  
2004

### Attendance Panels

18. One of the key strategies adopted by the Education Welfare Service is the introduction of attendance panels. The Board observed attendance panels at Filsham Valley School in Hastings and at Priory School in Lewes. Attendance panels are aimed at students whose attendance record falls below a level set by the school. This varies slightly from school to school but is typically about 90%. The Education Welfare Officer, a member of the school staff with responsibility for attendance, the year head, the tutor, a school governor, the parent, and sometimes, the student gather round a table and discuss the reasons for the poor attendance. The purpose is to reach agreement between all parties for a sincere effort to improve attendance. The sessions aim to establish effective strategies, can include support and may lead to warnings and sanctions.
19. The brief summary notes from one of the interviews the Board observed will serve to illustrate the impact of attendance panels.

**Interview Four:** *Mother and stepfather attended to discuss the 78% attendance record of their 12 year old daughter. The daughter had told the school that part of her absence was because of the need to walk her younger siblings to school and housework. This excuse was discovered to be untrue before the meeting. The parents regularly rang the school to say that the girl was ill and at other times she left home for school but never arrived. During the interview it came to light that the girl found the work extremely hard and the mother was not in a position to help. She also felt bullied with name-calling. There had been difficulties at home and the relationship between mother and daughter was running into problems.*

**The Education Welfare Officer had an agreement signed saying the school would look into some extra help in the classroom and address the bullying problem. The Education Welfare Officer would talk to the daughter directly and the Deputy Head of House would offer extra help with homework after school hours. A target of 95% attendance was agreed to be reviewed six weeks later.**

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Attendance improved and at the time of this report is currently at 89%. The parents will receive a letter warning them that the 95% target has not yet been met.

20. Using Education Welfare Officer time to manage and arrange attendance panels is a shift away from the more traditional approach of Education Welfare Officers conducting home visits to individual families and has significant advantages.
21. In East Sussex the *welfare* element of the service has significantly reduced as the focus has shifted to practical strategies for raising attendance generally. In a majority of cases these interventions are effective and attendance improves. However, in cases of persistent truancy, and these usually involve a whole family, the truant child is often beyond the reach of the school and the Education Welfare Service and at this point the services of other more specialised agencies may be more appropriate. This releases Education Welfare Officer time to support schools in raising attendance by working with them in dealing with authorised absence and parentally condoned absence. This is a strength of the East Sussex service and is not yet replicated generally throughout the country.
22. The effectiveness of attendance panels relies on accurate attendance data. Detailed information at attendance panels makes the extent of the non-attendance absolutely clear to the child and the parent and removes any doubt or misunderstanding. It also reveals patterns of non-attendance and unpunctuality. Electronic registration systems for individual lessons are proving to be effective. Having all the parties involved in the same meeting is an effective way to expose a child's attempts to play off one agency against another. Supportive parents make use of the attendance panel and the information they receive to guide their interventions in their child's behaviour, particularly when the panel reveals to them information the child had been hiding.
23. At Filsham Valley during the autumn term of 2003, fourteen attendance panels were arranged to review a total of eighty-one cases and the parents were invited to attend. What is encouraging for both the school and the Education Welfare Service is that of eighty-one students targeted sixty-four have shown improvement in their attendance patterns.
24. The parents of two students were summoned to appear at Hastings Magistrates at the end of January 2004 charged with failing to ensure regular attendance. The parents of a further five students are due to be summoned unless their child's attendance improves. These students do not appear to be improving despite this.

25. However, this intense support from the Education Welfare Service cannot be sustained over long periods in individual schools. The Attendance Support Team have allocated forty-five hours a week to support the school's attendance strategies and must now move on to support other schools. The school can build on success achieved and will need to make internal decisions about resource issues. The involvement of the governing body in attendance panels supports a school in making difficult decisions about resource allocation to attendance issues.

R2

*Attendance Panels should continue to be the main focus of the work of Education Welfare Officers and should operate in all schools.*

March 2005

## **Prosecution and Truancy Sweeps**

26. The Education Welfare Service fulfils the statutory function in respect of school attendance on behalf of the LEA. There has recently been encouragement through the Government fast-track prosecutions process to progress cases to court within prescribed timescales. This was already the usual practice but the Education Welfare Service has formally adopted the fast-track process within its service practice and procedure guidance.
27. The policy on prosecution of parents for non-attendance can be summarised as follows:
- Schools are expected to have taken initial steps to resolve attendance difficulties before referring to the Education Welfare Service.
  - Once a referral is accepted support to parent/child to improve attendance is provided, a target attendance figure is set and a review date agreed.
  - Throughout the process the parent will be encouraged to communicate to the Education Welfare Service any difficulties in achieving the target.
  - Where parents fully engage with the School and the Education Welfare Officer to effect an improvement in attendance no legal action against them is considered, even if the target attendance has not been achieved.
28. Cases result in prosecution where:
- the parent/carer regularly fails to respond to any communication from Education Welfare Service or the school;
  - the parent has agreed to take certain actions or agreed the target but then fails to respond to further communication from the Education Welfare Officer;
  - the evidence exists that the parent is not fulfilling their legal responsibility to ensure the regular attendance at school of their child who is of statutory school age and who is a registered student;

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- the parents/carers child is in year 11 and their non-attendance will have a strong influence their non-attendance has on younger siblings and one of the above conditions also applies.
29. The main impact of the prosecutions is to reinforce in the parents the need for them to take full responsibility for their child's attendance in school. Few cases at present result in fines. Of nine prosecutions brought at Eastbourne, two resulted in fines. A common outcome from prosecutions is a conditional discharge. This keeps school attendance as a high priority in the mind of the parent who will be returned to court if attendance does not improve and then face a fine for both the first and any subsequent offence. The deferred sentence and the possibility of the imposition of a sterner sentence should there be a further prosecution is believed to be a powerful motivator. This gives support to the Education Welfare Service and the school in their efforts to compel parents to accept their responsibility for attendance.
30. Truancy sweeps are conducted at countywide and local level. Careful advance planning between the police and the Education Welfare Service produces synchronised action with the sweeps targeted at particular areas and specific times of day. The dates of the sweeps are kept secret to give maximum impact.
31. Between October 2003 and February 2004 thirteen sweeps were conducted resulting in a total of 194 children being stopped and 31 being returned to school. The following table shows the details.

Date	Location	Stopped	Returned
06.10.03	Cross County and:	27	2
06.10.03	Hastings	6	3
06.10.03	Rye	3	0
07.11.03	Newhaven/Lewes	10	0
19.11.03	Uckfield	5	0
16.12.03	Cross County and:	47	6
16.12.03	Bexhill	18	10
16.12.03	Hastings	27	3
16.12.03	Rye	2	1
21.01.04	Hailsham	11	2
22.01.04	Bexhill	12	0
22.01.04	Rye	13	2
11.02.04	Hastings	13	2
<b>Totals</b>		<b>194</b>	<b>31</b>

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32. This demonstrates the effectiveness of sweeps in finding children who are absent from school. Children found during sweeps are only returned to school if they are absent without authorisation using Police Powers and Crime and Disorder legislation. It also points out the high level of authorised absence and this includes absence for medical appointments, and the relatively low level of unauthorised absence.
33. Changes in the way that hospital services are provided have had an impact on school attendance. Children living in Newhaven/Peacehaven area now have to travel to Hove for orthodontic appointments and this often means a child has to be out of school all day. Previously they were able to attend an orthodontist in Newhaven.

R3	<i>The Education Welfare Service should establish firmer links with magistrates to ensure legal procedures are used effectively and truancy sweeps should be planned around Youth Court days.</i>	September 2004
R9	<i>The Education Welfare Service should work to devise policy frameworks supporting medical appointments for students outside school hours.</i>	September 2004

### **Absence coding**

34. Schools use a set of codes defined by the LEA to differentiate and identify types of absence. There are three codes for unauthorised absence and seven codes Heads may use for authorising absence. Authorised absences include excluded students, annual holidays agreed by the Head, illness, religious observance and traveller absence.
35. There is misunderstanding among parents about the impact of authorised absence. Some parents fail to consider the impact of absence on a child's learning whether the absence is authorised or not. Parents have the impression that if an absence is authorised by the school the lost schooling will not have a detrimental effect.
36. The DfES has a focus on reducing truancy. Unauthorised absence rates have been stable for the last five years with East Sussex in line with national trends. The distinction between truancy and absence is not helpful if the aim is to have more children spending more days in school. Schools and Education Welfare Officers are concerned most when neither the school nor the parent know where a child is.
37. The Education Welfare Service can encourage Heads to acknowledge their responsibility in reducing disruption to teaching by authorising absences. The ability of teachers to improve attendance levels and add value will be increased if children attend regularly and there is not the demand to repeat lessons for the benefit of students who have been absent. Heads can send a clear message to parents that only in exceptional circumstances can absence be authorised.

R4	<i>Secondary schools should have a senior manager responsible for attendance.</i>	January 2005
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### **Targeted Support**

38. The immediate problem with poor attendance is in secondary schools and that is where the Education Welfare Service targets its resources. Only secondary schools have been consulted as part of this review, although it is recognised that patterns of attendance may be set in primary schools.

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39. The Education Welfare Service spends a total 341 hours of Education Welfare Officer time each week working in schools. Primary schools use 137 hours which averaged out amongst the 156 schools gives a weekly total of 0.87 hours for each school. In practice the Education Welfare Officers visit the majority of primary schools twice a term and spend up to an hour at the school. They visit schools in geographical clusters to reduce travel time.
40. The upper range of support is up to 4 hours each week. This is in schools with high student numbers, above average absences and high free school meals. Seven schools fall into this category: six in Hastings, one in Eastbourne.
41. Secondary schools have 204 hours of Education Welfare Officer support each week which averaged out amongst the 27 schools gives a weekly total of 7.5 hours. In practice the upper range of support lies between 13 and 28 hours each week. These schools are in Hastings and Eastbourne. Three schools receiving over 20 hours of support each week have absence rates at 11.9% or higher and high free school meals rates.
42. The Education Welfare Service uses a RED/AMBER/GREEN system to identify the attendance levels in individual schools. Schools are categorised according to their performance using the measures set out in the table below. A school is given a two colour code. The first colour relates to unauthorised absence and the second colour is for total absence.

	Red	Amber	Green
<b>Secondary Unauthorised Absence</b>	<b>Greater than 0.8%</b>	<b>Between 0.79% and 0.5%</b>	<b>0.5% or lower</b>
<b>Secondary Overall Absence</b>	<b>Greater than 10%</b>	<b>Between 9.9% and 8.1%</b>	<b>8.0% or lower</b>
<b>Primary Unauthorised Absence</b>	<b>Greater than 0.3%</b>	<b>Between 0.29 and 0.11%</b>	<b>0.1% or lower</b>
<b>Primary Overall Absence</b>	<b>Greater than 7.0%</b>	<b>Between 6.9% and 5.1%</b>	<b>5% or lower</b>

43. A secondary school with more than 0.5% unauthorised absence will be coded RED. It may have authorised absence well in control and so have an overall absence rate of less than 8% and thus be coded GREEN. Thus, it will be coded RED/GREEN. Schools can have combinations of RED, AMBER and GREEN. The Education Welfare Service monitors the performance of school on a six weekly (half-term) basis and will focus support on a school in the RED/RED category and will closely monitor a school displaying RED/AMBER.



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44. Combinations RED/GREEN or GREEN/RED will also give cause for concern because it suggests anomalies in school attendance procedures or recording systems.
45. The Education Welfare Service targets support effectively on schools most in need. The primary schools receiving the most help are among the feeder schools for the secondary schools receiving most support.
46. Secondary schools using the School Information Management System (SIMS) attendance module are able to provide student level data about attendance. This data can be used to identify patterns of attendance in individual students in specific primary schools and so pinpoint developing patterns of absence to inform the work of secondary schools.

R5	<i>Attendance Support Teams should support secondary schools in making the best use of attendance data from feeder primary schools to establish good attendance patterns in students from year 7.</i>	September 2004
R6	<i>The Education Welfare Service should establish a common easily accessible shared bank of attendance data.</i>	March 2005
R7	<i>The Education Welfare Service should work with all partner agencies to ensure LEA attendance targets are known and each identifies resources to support raising attendance.</i>	March 2005

### Modified Timetable and Curriculum

47. The traditional mainstream curriculum, ethos, atmosphere, and learning styles may not be suitable for some children and may even be adding to the causes of poor attendance. A more flexible 14-19 curriculum with vocational options can be a means of supporting a child back into mainstream education.
48. Every student who has established a pattern of poor attendance needs a supportive programmed, re-integration package. Schools are able to negotiate flexible packages as part of a phased re-integration. However, full time provision and full time attendance should be the goal for both student and school.

R8	<i>The Education Welfare Service should work with schools to make the best use of the 14-19 curriculum and modified timetables to support attendance strategies.</i>	December 2004
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### Other Strategies

49. Extensive activities to support improvement in attendance have been undertaken by the LEA during 2003. Circulars were to schools on standardising absence recording codes in registers; there was an initiative combating holidays out of school time; and a widespread publicity campaign on buses. These have been effective. Attendance in secondary schools has improved by 1%, significantly higher than any of our statistical neighbours.

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Improvements in primary attendance are also higher than our statistical neighbours.

50. One of the schools visited uses a scatter graph plotting attendance against achievement at GCSE. The school is able to demonstrate to parents and students that a 10% improvement in attendance can lead to an improvement of up to one grade level at GCSE.
51. East Sussex has good links to attendance on its website and gives useful information together with contact details. Research to compare other county council websites shows that the East Sussex website provides easier access to information on attendance than the websites of statistical neighbours.

R10

*The LEA should continue to develop the attendance section of the County Council web site.*

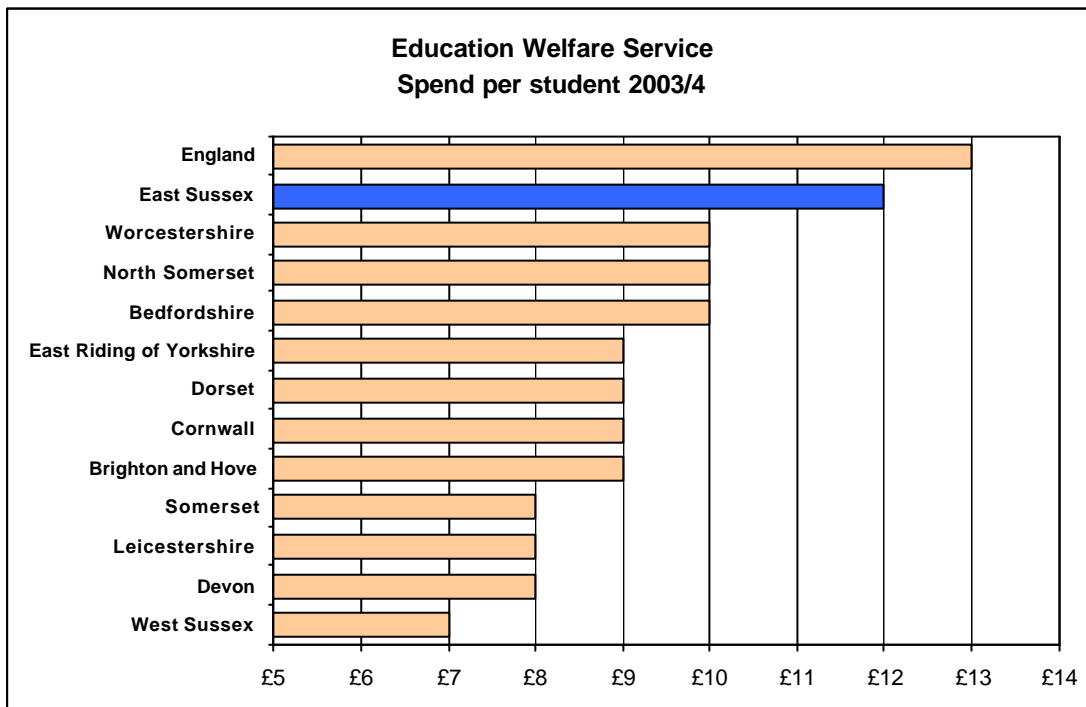
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## **The Cost Effectiveness of the Education Welfare Service**

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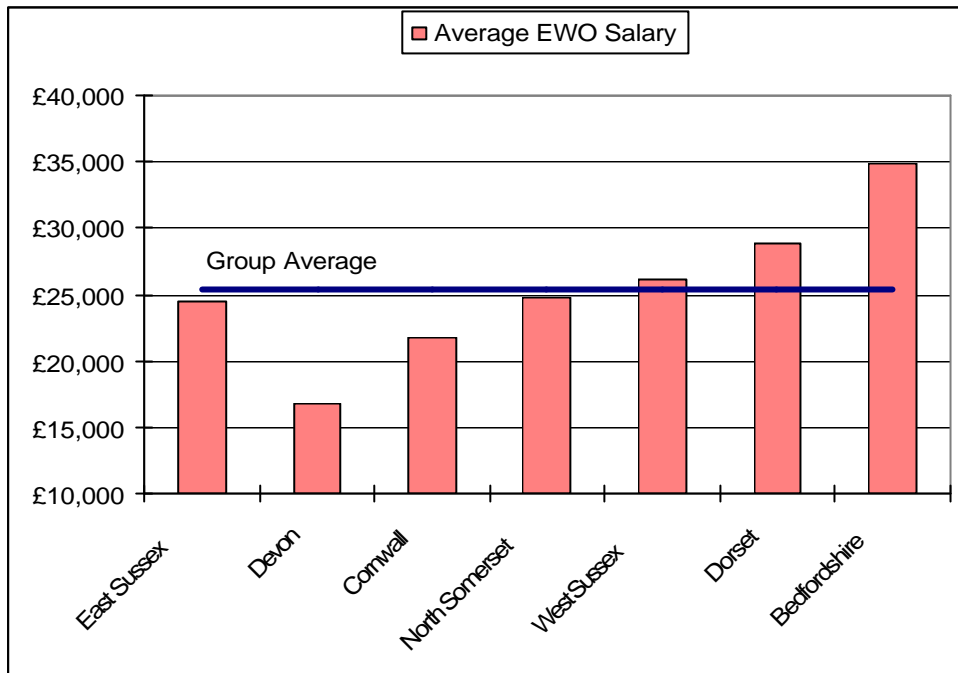
52. The Board gathered information from our statistical neighbour authorities to support a comparison of cost effectiveness. Figure 2 shows the comparative spend per student on the Education Welfare Service. East Sussex spent £12 per head which is £1 less than the England average. It is however the highest level of spending among our neighbours by at least £2 per head. The additional expenditure may be the cause of the 1.0% improvement in secondary attendance. However West Sussex achieved 0.6% improvement spending £7 per student and Dorset achieved 0.5% spending £9 per student.

Figure 2



53. This information is taken from the National LEA Benchmarking Tables. The demarcation between Education Welfare Officers and the staff supporting their work may not be same in all authorities and this may distort the figures. The total Education Welfare Service budget includes provision of an employment and entertainment officer, a training officer and responsibility for child protection functions on behalf of the LEA including a designated officer. These functions may not be replicated in other authorities.
54. Spend per student on Education Welfare Services needs to be viewed alongside the next three charts which look at the ratio of students to Education Welfare Officers, the average salaries of Education Welfare Officers and the percent improvement achieved. Information is presented from those authorities who responded to the review's questions.

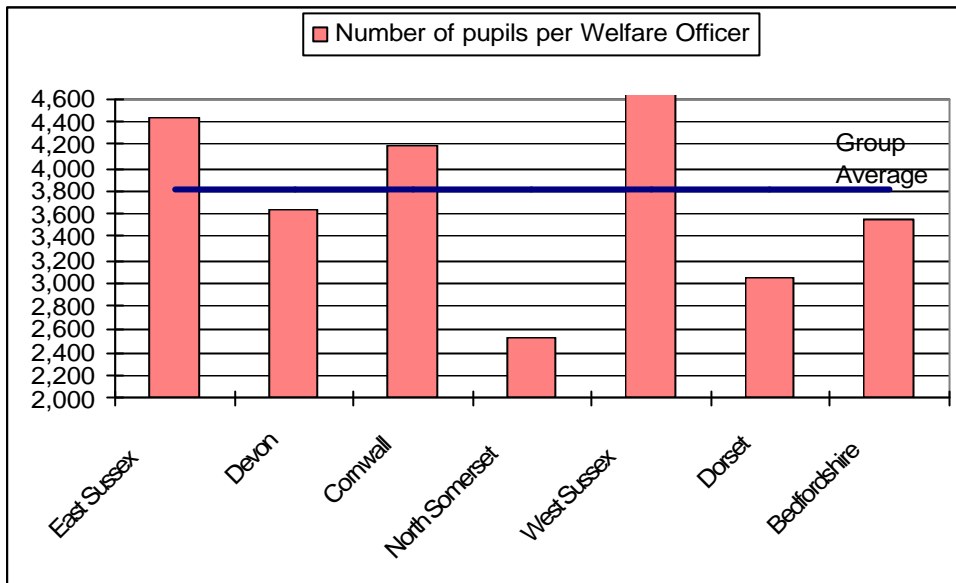
Figure 3



55. East Sussex at the time of this data had a Principal Education Welfare Officer, a Senior Education Welfare Officer and the equivalent of 14.6 Education Welfare Officers. The average salary across the team was £25,169. In simple cost terms this compares favourably with our neighbours. See Figure 3. However it must be remembered that East Sussex is one of the intervention authorities targeted by the DfES because the levels of attendance in schools is below the national average.
56. In terms of numerical efficiency the Education Welfare Officers in East Sussex cover more students than the average for Education Welfare Officers in our statistical neighbour authorities. See Figure 4.

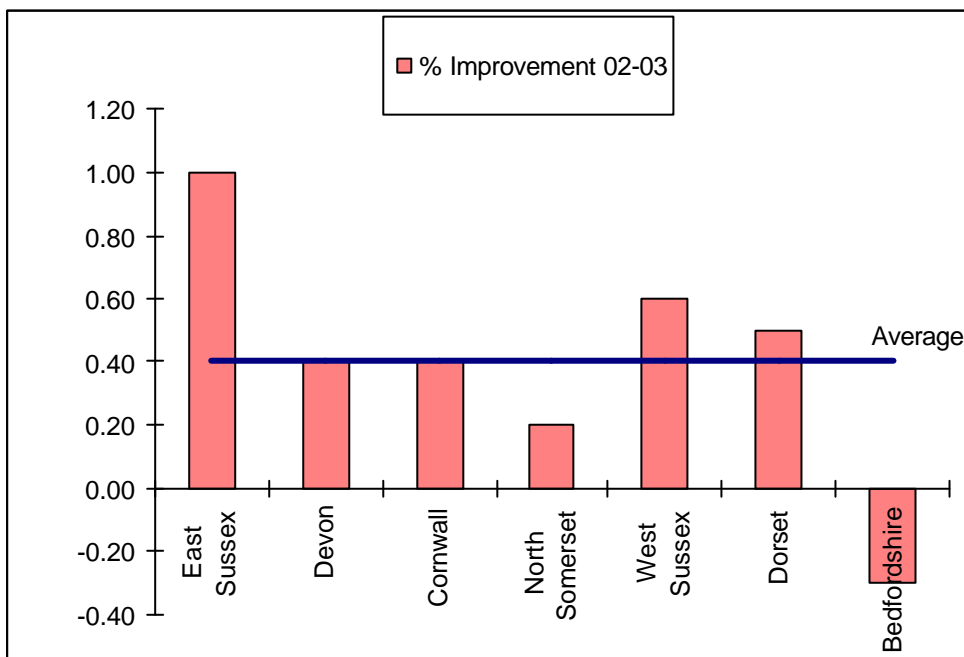
Figure 4

## Best Value Review of Attendance in Schools Final Report



57. Figure 5 shows the 1% improvement in attendance achieved in East Sussex schools in the year 2002-2003.

Figure 5



58. To assess the cost effectiveness of the Education Welfare Service we need to compare the rate of improvement with another authority whose attendance was lower than the national average. Cornwall is one such where the spend per student is lower than East Sussex, the average salary is lower and the caseload per Education Welfare Officer is higher. However Cornwall has improved 0.4% compared to the 1.0% improvement achieved in East Sussex.

59. East Sussex spends £12 per student on its Education Welfare Service. This is less than the £13 per student national average

but higher than our statistical neighbours. The average salary for an East Sussex Education Welfare Officer is lower than its neighbours and the number of students per officer at 4444 is higher than the average of our statistical neighbours at 3810. This represents value for money because attendance rates have improved, although the improvement has been from a low base point.

60. To increase cost effectiveness the intervention of the Attendance Support Team has to be focused on specific schools, be time limited and include an exit strategy. Attendance Support Teams will be most effective when they act as a catalyst for systemic change in schools where attendance is poor .

## **The Impact of the Education Welfare Service**

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61. The Education Welfare Service does not work in a vacuum. Other agencies have an interest in a student's welfare. The Board consulted a range of partner organisations and assessed the effectiveness of the partnerships and collaboration. In particular the Board wanted to find out whether other agencies assumed any share of the responsibility for raising attendance.

### **Summary Comment on the Partner Consultations**

62. The Board conducted an extensive series of consultations with senior executives of the partner agencies working with the Education Welfare Service. This was a key element in the review and the evidence gained from these interviews is pivotal in the development of the Board's final judgements.
63. The impact on attendance by much of the agencies' work is indirect. Improvement in a child's attendance at school is often a by-product of the intervention that is the main purpose of the agency. The agencies reviewed deal with difficult cases where attendance at school is not the top priority. There is a belief amongst the agencies that behaviour modification producing a more positive attitude to education will lead to improved attendance.
64. Only limited funding is specifically targeted at raising attendance levels. Agencies are not able and are not asked to account for any proportion of their funding which is used to support efforts to raise attendance. There is a multiplicity of funding streams and agencies.
65. In cases where agencies acknowledge attendance targets they are the same as the LEA. However not all agencies are aware of the LEA targets. Targets for attendance do not feature in the programmes of some of the agencies interviewed because their primary concern is most often about behaviour or interventions peripheral to attendance.
66. Collection, co-ordination and sharing of commonly held data on individual children is seen as a key area for improvement by agencies interviewed.
67. A second theme is the need for the atmosphere, ethos and curriculum in schools to reflect the needs of all children and adapt to the particular needs of children with attendance difficulties.
68. The Board devised a series of core questions, based on the DfES Attendance Strategy Framework, and supplemented these with questions aimed specifically at the individuals being interviewed.

69. The core questions were:
- What do you do to improve attendance currently?
  - What funding/resources are targeted at tackling school attendance issues?
  - What targets do you have for raising school attendance?
  - Are these the same as LEA targets or have they been set to compliment the LEA targets?
  - How do these contribute to the overall attendance target for the LEA?
  - What improvements would you recommend in how you work with the LEA to tackle school attendance issues?
  - What issues and concerns you would you like to raise about current school attendance activities?
  - Are there recommendations you would like to make that could be used to target school attendance or encourage better working with the LEA?
70. Below is a brief description of the agency, its funding for attendance work, any attendance targets set and their views on improving attendance.

### **Connexions**

71. This is a partnership Board. It provides sub-contracted services to agencies working with young people and links with senior staff in schools to allocate Personal Advisers appropriately and fairly. Attendance, behaviour and learning support are all part of the Personal Advisers remit.
72. Most of its £677,000 total budget passes on to Youth Development Service to fund and manage Personal Advisers. Connexions targets are the same as LEA. Connexions use the combined figure for authorised and unauthorised attendance and do not differentiate at present.
73. When Personal Advisers are involved there is a tendency for others to draw back and rely too heavily on the Personal Advisers. This means that instead of the Personal Advisers being an addition to the existing efforts they become an alternative and thus reduces the effectiveness. The primary target for secondary schools is qualification success. This may conflict with attempts to raise attendance.

### **Youth Offending Team (YOT)**

74. Young people are referred to the YOT following a conviction or if the Police have issued the young person with a final warning. The objective is to make sure that the young person is in full time education by the end of the order.
75. No specific funds allocated to attendance. The aim is behaviour change over the long-term.



76. YOT would like to see young people being engaged in purposeful education activities accepted as attendance.

### **Youth Development Service (YDS)**

77. YDS aims to challenge existing behaviour and move this towards more acceptable behaviour. It recognises the importance of education and tries to instil in young people that it is vital. YDS staff try to be positive about school attendance with young people.
78. YDS uses Connexions funding for PAs but does not allocate funding specific to attendance issues and shares the LEA targets. Attendance can mean training, college or constructive activity.
79. There are issues for YDS accessing the information to enable monitoring e.g. access to SIMS. Youth workers and personal advisers do not work extensively with education welfare officers and there is a need to meet more often and share ideas on improving attendance. The suggestion was made that any referral to a personal adviser should come via Education Welfare Service

### **Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP)**

80. PAYP is not specifically about attendance but improved attendance can be a consequence of support. The referral enrolment form can provide information on improved attendance through links with the Inclusive Learning Team.
81. Budget for PAYP is £42,000 plus other grants. No specific funding for attendance. PAYP reports to GOSE and has specific targets for children supported by the scheme relating to 'engagement' but does not have specific school attendance related targets. LEA attendance targets have not been sent to PAYP.
82. They would like to see improve data collection and access to a pool of shared verified information about student attendance. PAYP needs to be able to readily access school held data.

### **Sussex Police**

83. More than twenty truancy sweeps are programmed each year, jointly planned and carried out by Police and Educational Welfare Officers together. Data from the sweeps is collated and held by Education Welfare Service. Police school liaison officers use PSHE sessions and the INSPIRE teaching materials to encourage engagement with education.
84. There is no direct funding for raising attendance. Any attendance related activities, including truancy sweeps are included in the duties under the police officer's job description. The Police do not have attendance targets in their Local Policing Plan, their main concern is crime. There are joint targets in the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership plan. The Police do have the LEA attendance targets.

85. The officer interviewed believed that the curriculum offer for students of compulsory school age must reflect the vocational needs of children who do not sit comfortably with an academic programme. Educational activities taking place other than at school but still with an educational outcome should be available.

### **Unions**

86. Unions support the belief that every day at school is of value to the child and has a significant impact. Unions give strong support to policies and activities which encourage school attendance. Encouraging attendance is not seen as part of their role. The challenge is to convince parents of the value of school and show the evidence that connects attendance with achievement in exam success.
87. Unions do not allocate any funding/resources to tackling school attendance issues. They support government and LEA targets but have none of their own.
88. Changes in the way that hospital services are provided have had an impact on school attendance. Children living in Newhaven/Peacehaven area now have to travel to Hove for orthodontic appointments and this often means a child has to be out of school all day. Previously they were able to attend an orthodontist in Newhaven.

### **Hastings and St Leonards Education Action Zone (EAZ)**

89. The EAZ provides initial funding for experimental initiatives which schools alone would not be able to afford to try. If schools find a scheme successful they then find ways of funding it themselves as the EAZ funding is tapered.
90. The EAZ has a budget of approximately £90,000 spent on attendance related work. This is supplemented by funding through Neighbourhood Renewal and Children's Fund. The EAZ target was to improve attendance in secondary schools by 1% and in primary schools by 2%. So far these targets have not been met. EAZ knows the LEA attendance targets and contributes to the overall picture.
91. Traditional mainstream curriculum and learning styles may not be suitable for students with severe attendance difficulties.

### **Children's Services, Social Services**

92. Work concerned with attendance primarily involves Looked After Children (LAC). The Team works with any LAC who is not attending school because of emotional problems or who has been excluded. The objective is to ensure that the young person returns to school.
93. Funding to support Looked After Children (LAC) from Quality Protects grant is not specific to attendance. Their targets are the

same as Education and include monitoring of the percentage of LAC who missed 25 or more days of school in the previous year and the number of children permanently excluded.

94. Ultimately the key to success is an established joint approach between Social Services and Education working in partnership to improve attendance, raise attainment, and reduce unauthorised absences. There is a need to clearly establish the roles and responsibilities within this joint approach. Both services need to continue to look for better ways of working together.

### **Children's Fund**

95. This work is not specifically targeted at raising attendance. A key presumption is that improved attendance will follow from the generally improved circumstances coming from the coordinated interventions. Although not formally part of this Review, one Member of the Board did see the work of the East Sussex Children's Fund Partnership Link Worker Programme which focuses on those young people most at risk of social exclusion with one of the objectives being the promotion of school attendance. This is tackled by seeking to improve self esteem by giving the young people the chance to succeed at something – which they feel they never do at school. An independent Evaluation of the Programme showed the 3 groups had improved school attendance records of 60%, 67%, and 80%.
96. Some portion of the £550,000 available for the IRT scheme could be attributed to raising attendance but a figure has not been calculated. £10,000 Standards Fund for Vulnerable Children similarly supports attendance but is not specifically calculated. Unfortunately there is uncertainty over the level of funding for the near future, and is time limited in the long term. Targets are not specified for raising attendance but support the general targets of the Education Development Plan and the Council's PSA targets. The Information Referral Tracking system (IRT) has the potential to be the single source for attendance data.
97. The school ethos, a school's willingness to support the development of life skills in students and the school's ability to deal effectively with bullying are seen as key elements in supporting all children and in particular the vulnerable groups supported by these strategies in achieving regular school attendance. With a number of strategies being used to tackle school non-attendance, it is not possible to say which one may have been the most effective in individual cases.

### **Children's Services Strategic Development (Health)**

98. There are no NHS targets aimed specifically at attendance. However, there are a number of activities and campaigns such as healthy eating, anti-smoking, and sexual health programmes which could help improve attendance indirectly.

99. Very little funding is targeted to tackle school attendance and any targets are not specific to attendance.
100. There are concerns at the lack of engagement with individual schools which can impact on projects. Health would like to see a mechanism to overcome this lack of engagement. Schools should make use of the school nurse to challenge incidences where absence is due to illness and check the authenticity of the illness.

### **Community Learning Centres and Full Service Schools**

101. The focus is on neighbourhood renewal. Schools in the initiative have identified attendance, achievement and behaviour as key aims. Attendance is also a key issue in the local Neighbourhood Forum.
102. No funding specifically targeted at attendance with no specific attendance targets.
103. When groups of young people gather during school hours in certain areas residents need know who to contact for advice or action to see whether the children should be in school.

### **KS3 Strategy and Behaviour and Attendance Consultant**

104. The consultant will lead on attendance through teaching and learning and look at issues such as why a student is missing particular lessons or the reasons behind a student's non-attendance.
105. Any available funding is primarily aimed at behaviour with no specific target to raise attendance. Schools that are above the overall attendance target of 92% will be looked at with a view of finding about best practice.
106. Key Stage 3 needs to be integrated and not seen in isolation.

### **Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership**

107. Various initiatives are in place which have a direct effect on school attendance. These include out of school hours learning activities. The Learning team target particular students who are missing school and work with them for a period of six weeks or longer.
108. No funding specific to attendance with no specific attendance targets. However, public sector agreement with early years is seen to subscribe to attendance.
109. The challenge is to engage parents and children.

### **Magistrates' Courts Service**

110. They would like to encourage the Education Welfare Service to conduct truancy sweeps to coincide with the Youth Courts. These Youth Court sittings sometimes attract the friends of the accused.

A young person is only called to a hearing if it is necessary so that they do not miss schooldays unnecessarily.

111. There is no funding specific to reducing truancy. Raising school attendance is not a core objective for magistrates but the service recognises its shared involvement with the issue of attendance and truancy.
112. The viability of using a parenting order target could be considered but this would need detailed discussion with Education Welfare Officers who have to implement the orders.

### **School Improvement Service**

113. This service gives advice to schools on strategies for improving attendance and link between Government Office of the South East and Education Welfare Service.
114. They work to support the overall LEA targets and advise schools in setting their own targets.
115. The curriculum should meet the needs of all children to encourage more active engagement in school. Attendance and behaviour issues must be tackled by all teachers even those who are inexperienced.

## Visits to Secondary Schools

116. The Board chose to visit three secondary schools spread across the county. At each school the Board met students drawn from all year groups and showing varying levels of attendance. The sessions were informal and the students were assured that what they said would be kept in strictest confidence. No comments have been ascribed to any individual students.
117. The Board also interviewed either the head teacher or deputy head responsible for attendance. The sessions had a framework of questions to guide the discussions and to ensure common ground was covered.
118. The chart below begins to give an impression of the schools visited. One of the schools was in Wealden, the area with the best attendance record, and the other two were from areas where absence is a serious problem with attendance in both primary and secondary schools lower than the national average. To set the figures in context Ringer Community College has the lowest free school meals in the county, at 3.3% and its absence rate is low at 6.7%.

	Beacon School Crowborough	Filsham Valley School Hastings	Eastbourne Technology College
% Free School Meals	5.9	29.6	25.7
Number on Roll	1748	961	949
<b>% 2002</b>			
Authorised Absence	9.2	10.6	9.7
Unauthorised Absence	0.8	3.2	1.5
<b>Combined Absence 2002</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13.8</b>	<b>11.2</b>
<b>% 2003</b>			
Authorised Absence	6.4	9.4	7.4
Unauthorised Absence	0.9	2.5	6.3
<b>Combined Absence 2003</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>11.9</b>	<b>13.7</b>
<b>% Change</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>-2.5</b>

119. The Beacon School at Crowborough has a low percentage of free school meals. Absence rates have improved by 2.7% and are now below the national average.

120. Filsham Valley has almost 30% free school meals and has improved attendance by 1.9 % but is still well above the national average for combined absence.
121. Eastbourne Technical College has 25.7% free school meals and the attendance has not improved. It has gone down by 2.5%. The school disputes the accuracy of the attendance figures.

### **The Views of the Students**

122. The students told the Board they went to school because the government said they had to and that being in school was better than having to go out to work. There was acceptance of the legal compulsion to attend. They had no choice other than to go to school - "it was just something you had to do". They thought on balance it was better to be educated than not.
123. Ease of getting to school was neither an issue nor one of the reasons why students stay away. To arrive at school by bus some students have to leave home at 7.30. Getting to school was either an easy walk or a bus journey depending entirely on where the child lived. A boy who admitted to just 30% attendance earlier in his school career walked two miles to school out of choice.
124. Things they like about school included friends and practical subjects. Students said they liked hands-on lessons such as PE and technology and disliked homework. The first thing they did on arrival was find their friends and then go to registration. Boys and girls agreed that friendship was a key element in getting them to school.
125. Bullying, boredom with dull lessons from particular individual teachers and lack of teacher control in lessons were given as reasons for wanting to stay away. This group said that they often felt like staying away that but always changed their minds and came to school.
126. A further reason for staying away from school was having too much work or coursework to do and either they stayed at home to have the time to get it done or to avoid the teacher to whom the work was owed. Homework was given as a reason for not wanting to go to school. Those students who do not have a computer/resources at home find visiting the school library at lunch time or after school an intrusion into their own time.
127. They were appreciative of the school's effort to construct individualised timetables. Two boys and one of the girls explained how they found their reduced timetables helpful in improving their attendance levels because they were attending lessons they appreciated.
128. The students were vague about what they would do if they didn't come to school but visiting the shopping centre was mentioned.

129. There was a feeling that parents should receive escalating warnings if their child was not attending school. The general impression we got was that for many students their parents are not too bothered about attendance at school. Prosecuting parents was seen as a bad strategy. They felt that parents should not be sent to prison - the government should find out why the children are not attending - and if necessary fund monies for a carer to help. Prison damages the family and the child more than the absence from school does. Reasons for being kept home by parents regardless of whether the child wishes to attend were; parent not well, looking after younger siblings and being the main carer for a parent.
130. There was a suggestion that radical changes to the curriculum might make school more attractive to more students. The idea was to provide more practical and vocational courses and allow students who did not want to do the traditional academic subjects to do just practical subjects. There was agreement that punishing poor attendance was counter-productive and that interesting lessons and enthusiastic teaching would have more effect.
131. Rewarding good attendance was far more successful than punishing poor attendance. Punishment does not help but the threat of court action against mothers was the main influence in changing poor attendance patterns. The irony of punishing bad attendance did not escape the students. The students of all ages value rewards such as a whole form Attendance Certificates awarded for over 95% attendance. A 100% attendance certificate is a significant bargaining tool when applying for a college place.
132. The value of education for its own sake was emphasised by one boy who explained the pressure to attend that came from his elder brother. The elder brother had been less successful at school and even used cash incentives to get the boy to attend. This came over as a supportive family environment. The girl who had been a poor attender earlier in her school life cited her older successful sister as a major influence in encouraging her to attend. This girl had achieved 100% attendance recently.

### **The Views of the Vice Principal at Beacon School**

133. The school has used £26230, a one-off injection of DfES funding, to install a BromCom electronic registration system.
134. The aim is to reduce unauthorised attendance from the current 0.9% level down to 0.5 or 0.6 %. The attendance figures can be skewed by the very poor attendance of say three children from the same family who all were persistent truants.
135. The school approaches requests for holidays in term time on an individual student basis. The Board saw the record book of applications for authorised absence and heard some examples of the reasons parents gave for the request for authorised absence. The school will authorise up to ten days but there were some



- requests that were turned down although in such cases most parents ignored the refusal and the non-attendance is recorded as unauthorised.
136. The school believes in working in partnership with parents and students to achieve good attendance and did not want to jeopardise a good working relationship through denying reasonable requests for absence. Parents still take holidays even if the request is not authorised.
137. A key factor in good attendance is friendship and the companionship provided by school. For a minority of students their home circumstances were such that school was a nicer or safer place to be than at home.
138. Work with other agencies is supportive with Connexions being cited as good value for money. The Wealden schools pool resources to employ a police officer who attends each school for two half-days each week. The emphasis of this work is on truancy and its knock-on impacts but it does support raising levels of attendance.
139. A system of attendance rewards operates in school with certificates being issued to students with 100% attendance in the first term and with 97% attendance in the summer term. This allows the school to recognise all the students who have done their level best to get to school every day. Linked to this are the rewards of invitations to specific school organised social functions such as an end of term nightclub session, the Valentine's disco or the school camp but this was for overall achievement with an element of attendance included.
140. Sanctions are less effective though there are detentions for lateness.
141. Teachers are variable in their ability to tackle attendance but when the Vice Principal demonstrates a personal involvement in a class through comments on the weekly attendance printout it does lead to improved responses.
142. Training from the Education Welfare Service in good register keeping and to emphasise the need for active attendance management is good for all staff, especially new staff.
143. The most effective initiative has been the employment from within the schools already deficit budget a First Day Response Officer. She works approximately half-time and has been a key incentive in raising attendance and is now part of the annual school budget. If a child is not in school the parent is contacted by phone. In some cases the parent then phones the absent child's mobile phone and tells the child to get to school.
144. Sharing a single Education Welfare Officer between three secondary schools and 26 feeder schools means that Education Welfare Officer meets the Beacon Heads of Year for 30 minutes

- each week. The result is that all work is reactive rather than the old-style proactive home-visit style of Education Welfare Officer working which the Vice Principal prefers.
145. Attendance panels have not been useful as a strategy in Beacon because the parents just do not turn up and truancy sweeps in Crowborough are not effective.
  146. The Attendance Officer compiles weekly printouts of each year group attendance figures and these are sent to the Vice-Principal for monitoring.
  147. More emphasis is needed on strategies for encouraging regular attendance in the primary schools and in the early years of secondary schooling because by year 10 or 11 it is too late to have any real impact.

### **The Views of the Deputy Head at Filsham Valley**

148. The schools intake of about 5% per year of students with physical disabilities and the attendance issues linked to their disabilities puts additional downward pressures on the schools attendance figures. This compounds socio-economic pressures which are common to other schools in Hastings. A new code for long-term illness may reduce this downward pressure. The free-school meals indicator of almost 30% shows the high level of deprivation in some students attending the school.
149. The Deputy Head is satisfied with the progress the school is making in raising attendance. Taking into account the circumstances, Filsham Valley will be satisfied, but not complacent, if the school can achieve 92.5% attendance - just 0.5% below the national average. This represents extraordinary success in benchmarking terms.
150. A teaching assistant for each tutor group deals with attendance issues, relieving the teacher of some of the burden and providing consistency of approach across the school. Registration times changed from 1 Sept 2003. The school day starts at 8.45 and students now go directly to their first lesson. Registration is at 10.45 after the first two periods.
151. The Education Welfare Service has been very supportive. Success in raising attendance is directly related to the impact of individual Education Welfare Officers and their ability to tune in to the specific needs of the school. The school has chosen to pay for an additional day each week of the Education Welfare Officer originally sent into school through the Education Welfare Service. Parents around Filsham Valley are not all supportive of school attendance and the direct approach taken by the Education Welfare Officer has been instrumental in changing many attitudes. We were shown a series of letters from parents which reinforced our view that parents do not yet understand their own importance in influencing their child's attendance or the link between

- attendance and achievement. The fact that absence has been authorised is felt to make it acceptable and in some way erase the negative affects of missing the schooling.
152. A red/amber/green attendance system is in use at Filsham - 95% + green, 85-94% amber, 84% percent or less, red. Although the strict application of the regime has alienated a few parents and damaged the working relationship with those few, the overall success of the scheme with the majority of parents and students means that the Deputy Head is prepared to face up to the challenge of dealing with the disgruntled few for the greater benefit of the whole school. The school's main problem is parentally condoned absence, not truancy and this system deals directly with parental attitudes to attendance.
153. The Deputy Head monitors the Red/Amber/Green reports at six weekly intervals. Any change can be identified and either rewarded or challenged. This means that students who get red or amber in one-half term can receive a green letter the next term if they improve their attendance. This is in contrast with a longer reporting interval, which makes it difficult to improve, or to pick up on rapid deterioration in attendance.
154. The EAZ has been supportive in providing rewards for 100% attendance. This supports the schools system of accolades and the universal appeal this reward system seems to have. Students prize green letters.
155. Magistrates have not been as supportive as they could be. They need to have a better understanding of how parents in Filsham Valley and Hastings and St Leonards respond to legal action.
156. Links with primary schools are good. The Year 7 Coordinator collects attendance data from schools. Average primary school attendance in the Filsham feeder primaries is about 90% compared to the national average of about 94.2%. The school informs new parents in the Summer term of Year 6, of their child's red/amber/green status and points out any shortcomings in attendance patterns in the primary school. This is a very effective strategy. The year group in question have improved to 94% from less than 90%.
157. Governors at Filsham are very supportive of the measures being taken to improve attendance. One in particular is proactive in attendance panels, where she gains a first hand view of the challenges faced.

### **The Views of the Head Teacher at Eastbourne Technical College (ETC)**

158. The school battles against a poor reputation and is surrounded by pockets of extreme deprivation. However the school has to work at its full capacity and it takes a high percentage of casual admissions each year. 45% of years 10 and 11 are students who

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### *Final Report*

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- did not start at ETC in year 7. Last year of 250 admissions to Eastbourne schools 125 were placed at ETC and of those, only 11 students did not have particular issues related to their schooling.
159. Electronic registration using laptops has not been totally successful. The school is divorcing attendance from the role of the class teacher and attempting to make students responsible for their own attendance. A school ambition is to install an electronic card-swipe registration system that is activated at each lesson by the students themselves.
  160. Parentally condoned absence is the major problem. The school invested £10,000 in an automated first day call system and this has had an impact in raising parental awareness of absence. The school is aiming for at least 90% and wants to achieve the national average. Many ETC parents do not value education and are almost school phobic themselves. This has an impact when trying to link with feeder primary schools to establish attendance patterns and develop support systems. The parents of the new intake do not attend induction evenings even though they are invited.
  161. Holidays in school time remains an issue though the school has adopted a well publicised zero tolerance policy. The head monitors tutor group attendance returns on a weekly basis and contacts tutors if there are any questions about attendance levels. Supply teachers are not good at completing the paper based registers.
  162. The Attendance Support Team work has been effective in improving attendance and that team have now gone to work at Ratton. The current Education Welfare Officer's lack of experience is a disadvantage although the school is actively directing the work of the Education Welfare Officer.
  163. The most effective strategy is raising staff awareness of the need to monitor for patterns of absence in individual students and initiate appropriate action. The school now has five Assistant Year Heads who are trained or training Teaching Assistants supporting the Year Heads by taking on the attendance related issues. The Assistant Year Heads are currently mornings only but will be full-time.
  164. The school supports young carers, students who are supporting young mothers by taking younger siblings to school and school phobics by either creating individual learning programmes or providing home support.
  165. Connexions, the police intervention officer and Crime Reduction Partnership Street Wardens have all be useful support for the school.
  166. Poor attendance in individual peoples detracts from the teachers ability to maintain the flow of the curriculum for the whole class as the constantly have to re-cap for the absentees. The school

builds plans for those who have been absent into its lesson planning process. Achievement and attendance are inseparable.

## **Consultation with the public**

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167. A questionnaire inviting parents to submit their views was posted on the council website from October to February. The questionnaire was also made available on paper in public libraries with a freepost reply address. Copies of the questionnaire with a reply-paid envelope were given to the students who took part in the school interviews for their parents or carers to return. The response was disappointing although the information in the replies confirms the views the Board had been forming from other consultations.
168. Thirteen parents of primary school children responded to the web site and five responded on paper. Eight secondary parents used the web site and 15 used the paper forms available.
169. Bullying, not enjoying the subject and poor rapport with teachers were given as reasons for children saying they did not want to go to school. Special family circumstances and in particular funerals, family holidays and unavoidable appointments in school time were given as reasons why parents would keep their children away from school. Friendship, enjoyable lessons and understanding, effective teachers were given as reasons why parents thought their children wanted to go to school.

## **Media Activities**

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170. The review issued two press releases which were taken up and used by local newspapers and a member of the Board gave a radio interview with Arrow FM in Hastings.

## **The Review Board**

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Councillor Michael Murphy (Chair)  
Councillor Mary McPherson  
Councillor Jay Kramer  
Julie LaCoste, Parent Governor

DFES Consultants  
John Barnes  
Aneel Sharma

### **Officers:**

Jill Muggleton, Principal Education Welfare Officer  
Peter Davidson, Scrutiny Lead Officer  
Sam White, Scrutiny Support