

Report to: **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Date: **19 October 2007**

Title of Report **Report on the educational attainment of looked after children in the school year 2006/07**

By: **Director of Children's Services**

Purpose of Report: **To inform the Panel of the educational outcomes of looked after children (LAC) in 2007 and the strategies used in order to continue to raise attainment in East Sussex.**

---

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**The Panel is recommended to note the contents of the report and the progress of the service.**

---

### **1. Financial Appraisal**

1.1 There are no additional financial costs arising from this report.

### **2. Supporting information**

2.1. This report presents the 2007 GCSE and SATs results for East Sussex looked after young people, and identifies some of the key issues to emerge.

### **3. Performance of LAC in East Sussex for GCSE and SATs 2007**

3.1. The results (attached as Appendix 1) show that there has been a significant drop in the percentage of young people achieving 5 A\*-Cs, a marginal increase in 5 A-Gs, but a substantial increase in the percentage achieving 1 GCSE from 2006 (from 78% to 90%), which is almost in line with the average for East Sussex. Whilst the decrease in the % of 5 A\*-Cs is very disappointing, a number of individual young people were personally successful and exceeded expectations, despite facing particular adversity in their lives.

3.2. The SATs results for Key Stage 3 show a marginal decrease in mathematics and English but a good improvement in science. At Key Stage 2, there were increases in the English and mathematics results, whilst science remained the same at 54%. These results indicate that there is still a challenging gap between looked after children and their peers.

3.3. The rate of attendance for looked after children was 92% which is slightly below the figure for all children across the Authority.

### **4. Key issues**

4.1. Variation within the cohorts from year to year can impact on performance. The % prediction of 5 A\*-Cs based on the young people's SATs results in Year 9, school reports and target grades during Years 10 and 11 and information from the personal education planning meetings was lower for the 2007 cohort than for the 2006 cohort. There were also contributory factors affecting performance which included placement instability, lack of schooling in earlier years and, for some young people, poor emotional/mental health and physical health. Two young people had moved out of East Sussex and their school attendance was severely

impacted. The % of students in the cohort with a statement was quite high at 25% and 19% attended special schools/pupil referral units and had restricted access to a full range of GCSEs.

4.2. Despite significant adversity affecting a number of young people, 90% achieved at least one GCSE. Two young people attending schools for pupils with moderate learning difficulties achieved C and E grades in Art and three young people, who were otherwise low achievers, excelled in obtaining the equivalent of 4 C grades in public service examinations and GNVQ science.

4.3. In Year 9, 31% of the cohort had a statement, mainly for emotional, behavioural and social difficulties and 23% were attending special schools or pupil referral units. Of this group 28% did not take English SATs, either because they attended schools for children with severe disabilities or had exceptionally low literacy levels as a result of disrupted education prior to coming into care.

4.4. Expectations for children with statements and those in schools for pupils with emotional, behavioural and social difficulties should not necessarily be reduced. However, there will be levels of difficulty in accessing learning which will impact on the ability of young people to take and pass GCSE and SATs examinations. Young people with statements for emotional, behavioural and social difficulties, for example, often have behaviours that create barriers to learning. Of those in Year 9 with statements, for example, none achieved the requisite levels in mathematics and English. More generally, the data indicate that young people in mainstream are more likely to be entered for GCSEs and SATs.

4.5. For each of the examination cohorts, approximately 70% of the personal education plans (PEPs) were in place. The PEP is crucial to co-ordinating the planning and tracking of pupil progress and will form the basis of the strategy to improve attainment.

## **5. Possible Factors affecting achievement**

5.1. The young people who achieved their target grades were in stable placements and had no changes of secondary school. Carers were supportive.

5.2. Good quality teaching and learning opportunities, along with supportive pastoral systems in many East Sussex schools, contributed significantly to the young people's achievement of 1 or more GCSEs.

5.3. The bursary scheme, originally established by the Authority in October 2003 in order to support the attainment and attendance of looked after children, continued to operate with £30,000 allocated for 2006/07. Access to the fund was through the young person's personal education planning meeting which generated a strategy for supporting attainment and attendance on the basis of an analysis of the young person's needs, abilities, social circumstances, behaviour, interests, etc. Desired outcomes were identified and evaluated. For 2007/08 TEST has an additional bursary of £50,000 which is being used to target young people in the examination years and preceding years.

5.4. The bursary scheme supported 11 of young people in Year 11 via home tutoring, and most achieved their target grades. Where this was not the case, factors outside of education had a detrimental effect on performance. Many young people reported an increase in confidence and self-esteem as a result of the tutoring and felt their education was recognised as being important.

5.5. Members of the education support service (TEST) also gave direct support to 9 young people in Year 11 who had become very disaffected and underachieving. This support generally took the form of mentoring, and feedback from the young people stated this support was very useful as it kept them motivated and focussed on exams and the value of education.

5.6. There remain a number of social and personal factors for looked after children which continue to impact upon their education to varying degrees and result in young people having difficulties in achieving their full academic potential. Some of the factors adversely affecting education, which many of the young people in the examination cohorts have experienced, are listed below:

- Poor school attendance and family breakdown
- Changes in foster placements and school placements
- Some instability in educational provision or support
- Exclusion from school
- Change in social worker
- Lack of previous performance data resulting in inadequate option guidance
- Inadequate support in the home environment to support learning
- Poor literacy and numeracy
- Unmet emotional needs and low educational expectations

In the light of these findings a number of activities have been included within the business plan of TEST in order to continue to explore appropriate strategies to remove barriers to learning for children and young people in care. These are set out in section 7.

## **6. Conclusion**

6.1 Although there has been mixed progress at each key stage, the attainment of looked after children is, generally, well below that of their peers. It is hoped that implementation of the measures recommended below, and the increase of the bursary scheme for 2007–2008, will continue to contribute to producing significant and sustained improvements in GCSE and SATs results.

6.2 While difficulties can arise at any point during the education of a young person in care, research findings indicate that specific problems more commonly arise during Key Stage 4. In addition, there are often significant changes within the composition of the cohort at this point. Consequently, the TEST team will adopt specific strategies such as targeted bursary funding and service support for this key stage.

6.3 Closer tracking and regular monitoring of the performance of young people in the examination cohorts will be a critical component in driving up the performance for 2007/08. This will be taken forward through the enforcement of 100% completion of PEPs. The personal education plan is an invaluable tool through which the young people's performance can be charted and appropriate intervention/support provided.

6.4 Recruitment is in hand for a virtual headteacher for looked after children. This is one of the recommendations in the Care Matters Green Paper. Although East Sussex was not successful in its application to access Government funding to pilot this post, the Schools Forum has agreed to make funding available from January 2008-July 2009 for this post. The virtual headteacher will have overall responsibility for the attainment, achievement and attendance of all children looked after by the County Council.

## **7. Recommendations**

7.1 The Education Support Service (TEST) service will:

- Ensure each child/young person has a current, high quality PEP in place, involving participation of the young people where appropriate. Each young person will have a PEP twice a year and for the young people in Years 9, 10 and 11 a member of TEST will be present wherever possible.
- Provide ongoing training on attachment issues to schools in order that teaching staff have an understanding of the impact of trauma and compromised attachment on children's behavioural, social, cognitive and emotional development. A successful conference in June 2007 on attachment and trauma was attended by over 100 teaching staff, and all secondary schools except one were represented.
- Provide training to new and existing carers on ways of supporting the young people in the home environment. New carers to receive a copy of the 'Welcome to Education Pack' with associated age-appropriate materials.
- Continue to establish early identification of young people in Years 10 and 11 at risk of not taking, not being entered for, or underperforming in GCSEs, and recommend a needs led profile of all Year 10 and 11 pupils in care.
- Encourage greater uptake of tutors by the young people in all age groups.

- Expand the direct support of the team to young people at risk of disaffection/failure or underachievement.
- Create support packages for looked after children not on school roll, disaffected or excluded.
- Explore viable alternatives for children not in education and establish speedy access to alternative provision.
- Ensure there is better use of data to inform planning and service delivery.

MATT DUNKLEY

Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Ruth Henson, Education Adviser for Looked After Children, Tel: 01323 841470

Local Members: All

Background Papers

None

## Appendix 1

The following tables show percentage pass rates at GCSE for Year 11 and SATs results for looked after children in Years 2, 6 and 9 for the academic years 2006–2007.

### GCSE Results (Total pupils looked after for 1 year or more: 32)

Table 1	LAC - %1 or more A* to G						<b>EAST SUSSEX</b>
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	<b>2007</b>
GCSE	48%	68%	81%	67%	78%	90%	<b>96.2%</b>

Table 2	LAC - % 5 or more A* to G						<b>EAST SUSSEX</b>
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	<b>2007</b>
GCSE	30%	39%	46%	53%	59%	60%	<b>90.3%</b>

Table 3	LAC - % 5 or more A* to C						<b>EAST SUSSEX</b>
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	<b>2007</b>
GCSE	4%	4%	11%	14%	25%	6%	<b>58.3%</b>

The figures for East Sussex are provisional.

### Key Stage 3 SATs (Year 9, age 13/14)

Total pupils looked after for 1 year or more: 35

	% at or above level 5						<b>EAST SUSSEX</b>
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	<b>2007</b>
English	23%	25%	29%	28%	24%	23%	<b>69.7%</b>
Maths	27%	32%	33%	31%	32%	31%	<b>76.5%</b>
Science	27%	29%	29%	17%	26%	37%	<b>72.0%</b>

### Key Stage 2 SATs (Year 6, age 10/11)

Total pupils looked after for 1 year or more: 26

	% at or above level 4						<b>EAST SUSSEX</b>
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	<b>2007</b>
English	33%	35%	44%	47%	42%	46%	<b>80.0%</b>
Maths	41%	15%	29%	43%	33%	42%	<b>76.2%</b>
Science	52%	55%	59%	50%	54%	54%	<b>88.2%</b>

**Key Stage 1 SATs (Year 2, age 7)****Total pupils looked after: 12**

	% at or above level 2						<b>EAST SUSSEX</b>
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	<b>2007</b>
Reading Task	33%	37%	42%	62%	71%	42%	<b>84%</b>
Speaking & Listening				62%	62%	42%	N/A
Writing	42%	40%	36%	38%	58%		<b>80%</b>
Maths	83%	46%	42%	62%	62%	42%	<b>91%</b>
Science				63%	58%	42%	<b>90%</b>