

Committee: **Corporate Parenting Panel**  
Date: **23 July 2010**  
Title of Report: **Report on Attendance and Exclusions of Looked after Children**  
By: **Director of Children's Services**  
Purpose of Report: **To update the Panel on the latest statistics**

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**Recommendation: The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the contents of the report.**

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### **1. Attendance**

1.1 All data for East Sussex Looked after Children (LAC) is obtained through Welfare Call Attendance monitoring by the Virtual School. Figures for local and national comparisons are mainly derived from the Statistical First Release data and from East Sussex Reports. Some of the data in this report relates to the full year 2008/9 and some to the year to date September 2009 to end of April 2010.

1.2 The only nationally available data for LAC relates to the % of children who miss 25 or more days in a year. In 2008/9 the percentage of LAC in East Sussex who missed more than 25 days of schools was 9.9% against 11.9% of LAC nationally as attached in **Appendix 1**.

Overall attendance in this academic year has improved and is currently 91.38% (September 2009 – April 2010).

### **2. Persistent Absence**

2.1 Somewhat anomalously LAC absence levels have been collected nationally in terms of the number of LAC missing 25 days of schooling within a year, however persistent absence for the whole school population is defined as those children who miss more than 20% of school time – which translates into 64 or more half day sessions between the beginning of the Autumn Term and the end of the May half term. From 2010 there will no longer be reporting of the 25 days figure for LAC and my guess is that these two measures will come into line.

2.2 There are 20 LAC of school age who have missed more than 25 days of school; this represents about 6.5% of school aged LAC. 18 of these children missed more than 32 days which is 6% of the school LAC population. This overall figure is very close to the National figure for the population as a whole, attached as **Appendix 2**.

2.3 Of the 18 LAC who are persistently absent 8 of them were in Year 11, 6 in Year 10, 1 in Year 9 and three are primary aged (two special and one mainstream). At the time of writing this report there were 6 children not currently attending school, 4 in Year 11 and 2 in Year 10.

2.4 Some of these children have missed school because of placement moves or because of school moves (which obviously should never happen if we absolutely enforce the notion of 6<sup>th</sup> day full time provision and act robustly to avoid placement moves wherever possible and ensure school placements are set up in advance of moves). However, the significant number of persistent absence is as a result of young people simply refusing to attend school and this is proving to be one of the most difficult barriers to success to overcome.

2.5 In conclusion, overall absence levels and overall persistent absence levels are low and close to the figure for all children. This will be in part as a result of foster carers placing high value on school attendance and cross county monitoring of attendance of LAC by the Virtual School. However, the overall figures do disguise a small number of looked after children who miss significant amounts of school time either as a result of placement breakdowns or as a result of school refusal. More work needs to be done to look for patterns of persistent absence and whether there is a correlation between this and placement type.

### **3. Exclusions**

3.1 The number of permanent exclusions has fallen from 2 last year to (so far) none this year which reflects the overall reduction in permanent exclusions across East Sussex largely as a result of managed move protocols. Fixed term exclusions have remained approximately at the same level as last year (130 fixed term exclusions last year against 114 so far this year); These exclusions were spread across 44

looked after children last year and 46 (so far this year), which amount to around 15% of school aged looked after children having been excluded at least once in the school year, attached as **Appendix 3**.

3.2 I have not been able to find any national LAC fixed term exclusion data so the picture painted can not be compared with LAC fixed term exclusions in other authorities or with figures for LAC exclusions across England as whole.

3.3 In East Sussex last year the number of exclusions as a percentage of the primary pupil population was 1.5% and in secondary schools 10.5%. This figure counts the number of exclusions not the number of children (a child excluded twice in a year counts as two events). There are no separate figures (that I could find) available for Special Schools. As can be seen in chart 18, LAC would appear to be about 5 times more likely to be excluded in primary schools and twice as likely in secondary schools as the rest of the East Sussex school population.

3.4 The discrepancy between Chart 2 and Chart 1 arises because of the number of multiple exclusions there have been in this period – each LAC who was excluded for an average of 2.4 times with one child being excluded 9 times. These percentages are made up of 9 primary aged children in mainstream schools having been excluded at least once (average 1.7 times each) out of a total 107 pupils in primary schools; 19 secondary aged children in mainstream schools having been excluded at least once (average 2.4 times each) out of a total of 131 pupils and 18 pupils in special schools having been excluded at least once (average 2.89 times each) out of a total of 77 pupils.

3.5 In conclusion, it is concerning that exclusions are so high, particularly with Looked after children from primary schools and special schools, although with out national comparisons it is difficult to compare our overall performance. There has been significant improvement both nationally and locally to reduce permanent exclusions but this does not seem to have impacted on the number of fixed term exclusions. It could be argued that the high occurrence of fixed term exclusions amongst looked after children is as a consequence of schools' extreme reluctance to permanently exclude looked after children as evidenced by the permanent exclusion levels

3.6 However, the concern is that for a few children, frequent and repeated fixed term exclusions from school, even if though the best intentions have become the norm. For looked after children in particular, this is not acceptable and a positive alternative to fixed term exclusions needs to be found. Some schools have successfully reduced fixed term exclusions by introducing internal isolation of one form or another. Whilst this approach certainly has its merits in keeping children in school and accessing education the approach must be managed in a way that is sensitive to the particular issues surrounding severe attachment difficulties often experienced by children in care. Schools also need to be made aware of our combined corporate parenting role, and where schools have embraced inclusive practice, provide personalised learning and individual support for young people we must ensure that additional external support – be it through the Virtual School or the Virtual College, Special Educational Needs or Behaviour Support – is available to enable looked after children to remain successfully in school.

3.7 The Virtual School operates in a number of ways to help reduce the frequency of exclusions or to lessen the impact exclusion has on learning loss. We support schools to manage behaviours, particularly those associated with attachment issues, more effectively through providing whole school training – this year eight schools in the County have received dedicated whole school training from us and 100 Designated Teachers attended our annual conference in the Spring. We also provide direct support to schools in managing the behaviour of individual children by providing in class support from our own caseworkers. A targeted group of older “at risk” children attend our re-engagement programme at Hindleap Warren adventure centre – a one day a week six week programme offered three times a year and a week long residential programme for Year 6/7 pupils in August. In addition to supporting schools and children we also challenge schools, although up to this point this has tended to be around permanent exclusions rather than fixed term exclusions. I have joined the Behaviour Board (chaired by Penny Gaunt) that is currently looking at reducing the number of fixed term exclusions across the county. Finally, when exclusion is issued we are able to support children access education out of school, either by providing off site provision at our centre in Hailsham or by providing access to educational material on-line.

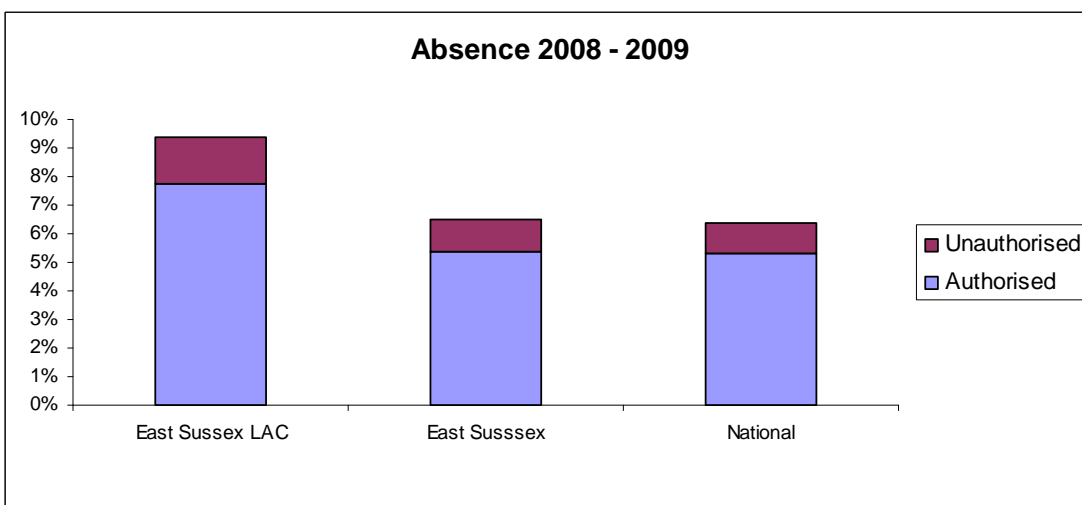
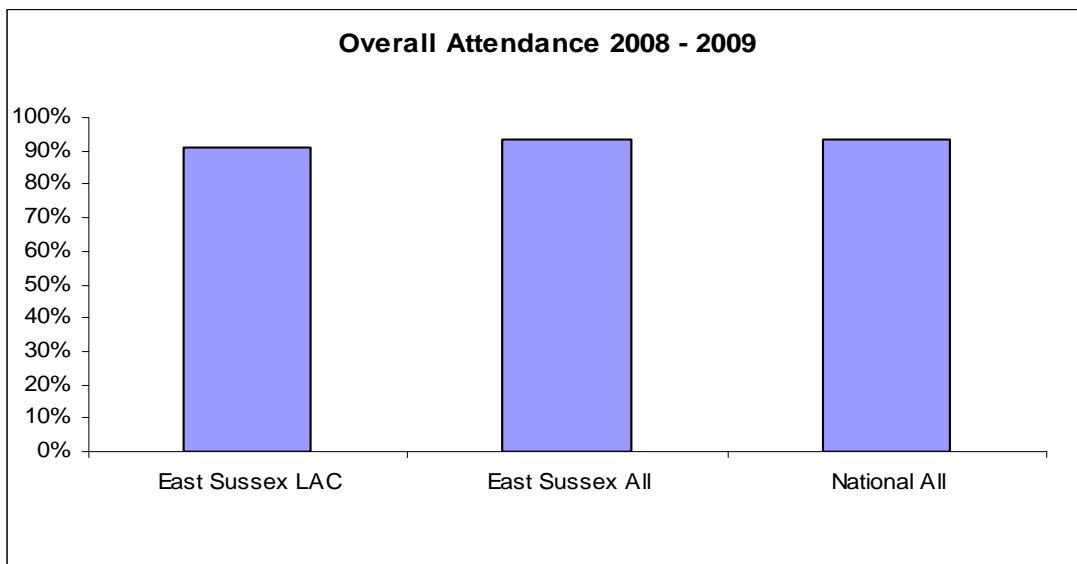
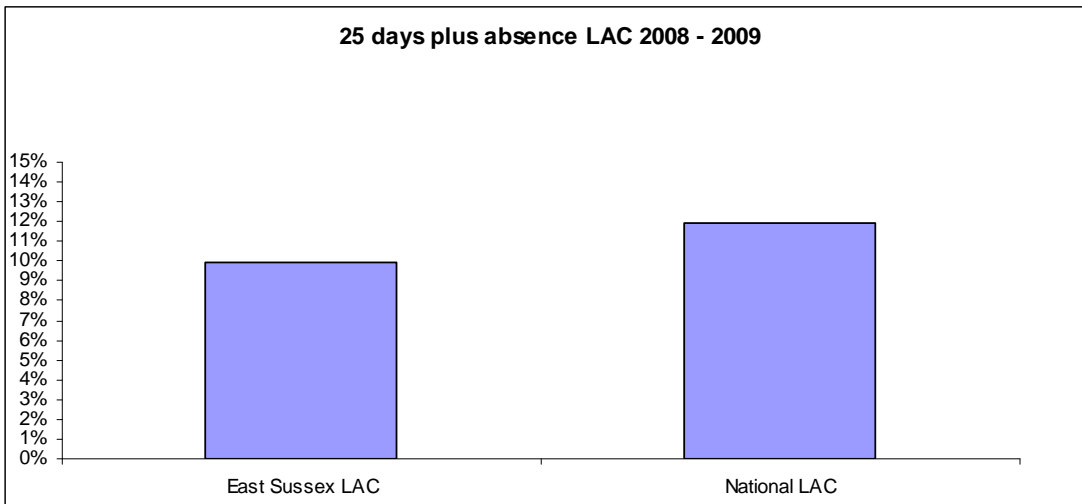
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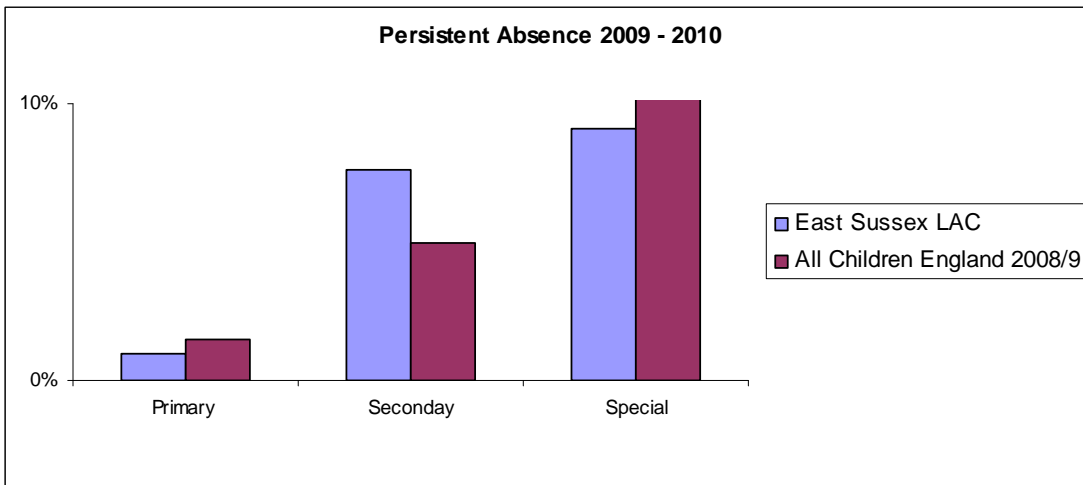
Local Members: All

Background Documents: None

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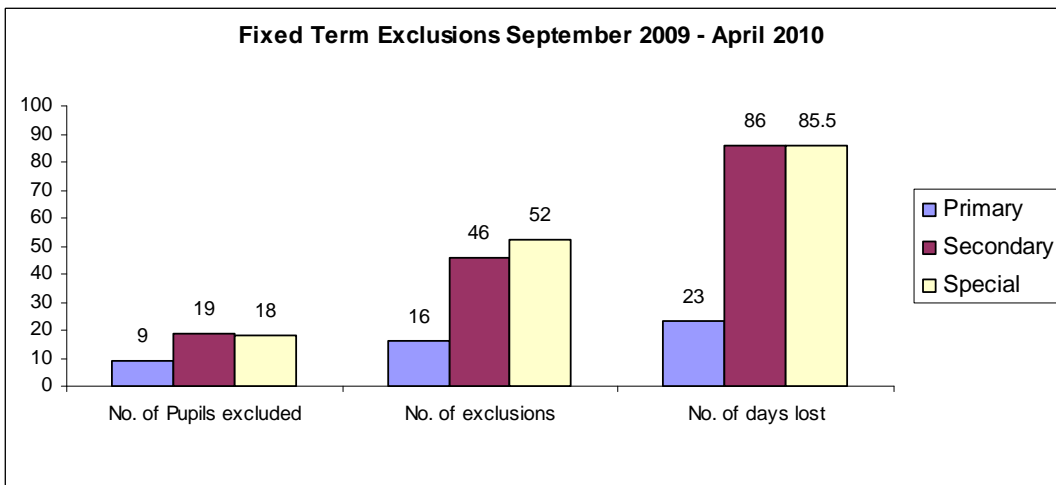
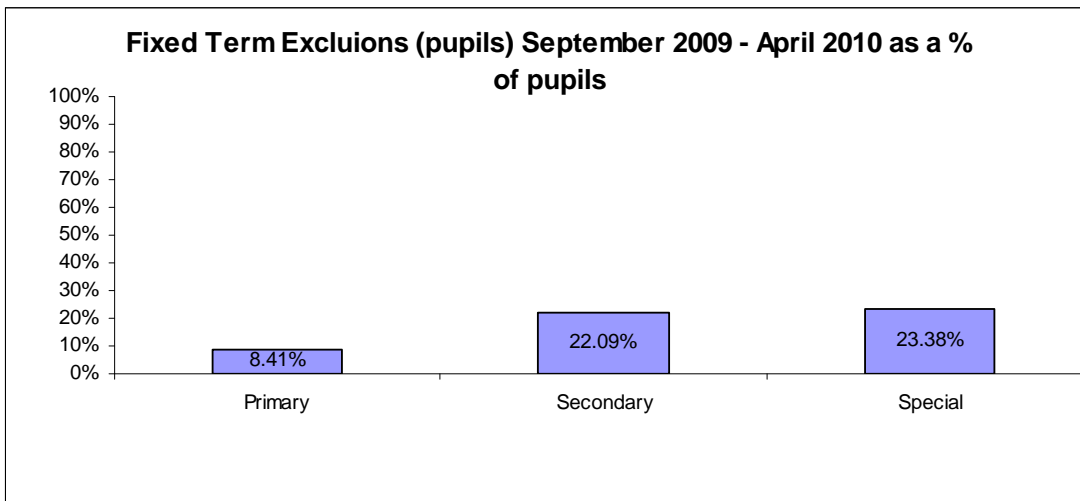


Chart 1

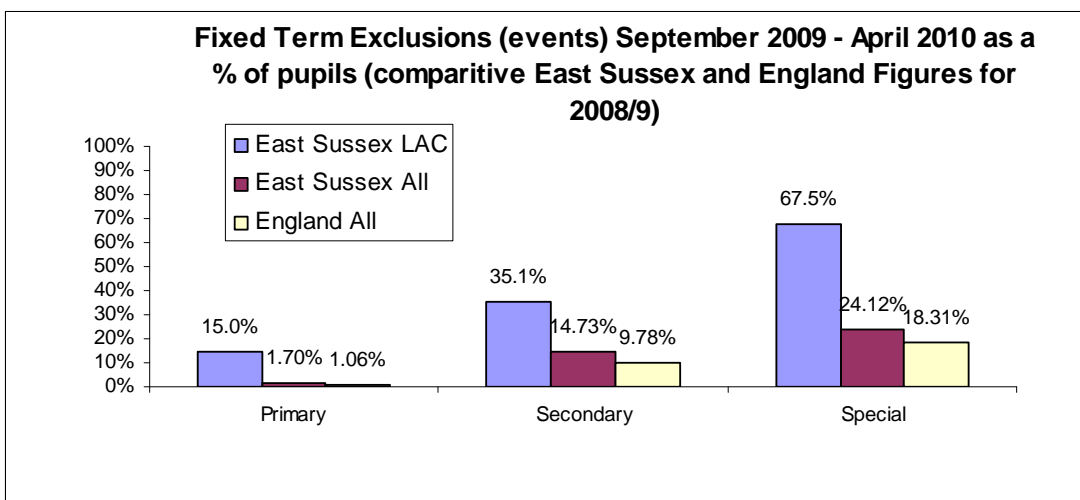


Chart 2