

Press Release

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For Immediate Release

Tough line continues on school absence

An East Sussex parent who has appeared before magistrates six times for failing to ensure her child attended school has received two suspended jail sentences.

The woman pleaded guilty at the hearing in Hastings and was given one eight-week suspended sentence for breaching a previous conditional discharge and a further eight-week suspended sentence for the latest offence.

The case was one of 73 brought by East Sussex County Council against parents who have ignored their child's absence from school and have failed to co-operate to resolve the problem.

During July, August and September cases have been brought by the Council's Education Welfare Service at courts in Hastings, Eastbourne and Lewes resulting in a total of £4,175 in fines and £4,682 in costs.

The prosecutions are part of the council's on-going drive to improve school attendance and hold parents to account.

In Eastbourne 37 cases were heard by the Magistrates Court, resulting in a total of £2,007 in fines and £2,682 in costs. One parent, whose son had failed to attend school between January and May, pleaded guilty and received a conditional discharge with £120 costs.

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Fines totalling £950 with £1,020 in costs were given to parents in 23 cases brought before Hastings Magistrates. The daughter of the parent who was given the two suspended jail sentences had attended just 23% of lessons between February and June.

At Lewes Magistrates Court, 13 prosecutions led to fines totalling £1,218 and costs of £980. In one case two parents who failed to appear before magistrates were fined £175 with £150 costs. Their son had attended just 57% of lessons and their daughter only 71% between January and May.

The cases were brought by Education Welfare Officers who work hard to support, help and advise parents if they are having difficulty with their child's attendance.

Councillor David Elkin, the County Council's Lead Member for Learning and School Effectiveness said: "Court action against parents is obviously a last resort and I'm pleased to say we only end up in court in a relatively small number of cases.

"Through a number of positive schemes our Education Welfare Service is educating all our pupils about the importance of school and their education and how important their study is for their future. They also actively help parents tackle problems they may have with their child's attendance. But parents who refuse work with us to address a serious absence problem should be aware that we will take them to court if necessary."

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