

Research Report DCSF-RR030

Education-Related Parenting Contracts Evaluation

Lucy Evans, Louise Hall and Susie Wreford
TNS Social

department for
children, schools and families

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction

A Parenting Contract is a two-sided formal agreement between a parent and either the local authority (LA) or the governing body of a school. This is offered to a parent¹ if their child fails to attend school regularly or their behaviour puts them at risk of exclusion. Entry into a Parenting Contract is voluntary. The parent cannot be compelled to enter into a Parenting Contract and there is no obligation on the LA or governing body to offer one. Contracts are supportive interventions and should not be seen or used as a punitive measure against the parent. Education-related Parenting Contracts have been available to LAs and schools since February 2004 following the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003.

Parenting Contracts are intended to provide parents with the professional support that they need and to encourage a positive joint working relationship between school, LA and parents to tackle unauthorised absence or poor behaviour in school and any underlying causes for this. Parenting Contracts are not intended to replace existing practice but to provide a way of formalising work with the parent to bring about an improvement in the pupil's behaviour or attendance. Parenting Contracts are a useful tool in crystallising the issues behind the non-attendance or the misbehaviour and in developing a productive relationship with parents to address these issues.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) commissioned TNS Social to conduct research to assess the effectiveness of the use of Parenting Contracts.

1.2 Key findings

Prevalence and patterns of usage and reporting of usage of Parenting Contracts

- The research highlights the difficulty in assessing the **effectiveness** of education-related Parenting Contracts. The reason for this lies in the

¹ Throughout this report “parent” refers to the parent or carer of a child, whether they live with the child or not.

differences of opinion about what constitutes a Parenting Contract. This difference of opinion affects general awareness, especially in schools. Furthermore, the accuracy of the reporting of Parenting Contracts may be affected by a lack of awareness or difference in opinion.

- The difference in opinion means that LAs either **under report or over report** the actual number of Parenting Contracts when supplying data to the DCSF. Furthermore, LAs are unaware of how many schools in their area are offering Parenting Contracts without their involvement.
- The research indicates that Parenting Contracts are being used more for attendance than behaviour. The case studies research suggests that use may be even greater than Parental Responsibility data (PRAB)² returns indicate.
- The research also indicates that where Parenting Contracts are used LAs, schools and parents have found them beneficial in improving the child's attendance and behaviour and the relationship between school and parents.
- Some Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) did not always realise that they could offer Parenting Contracts where they used the Fast Track case management system for dealing with attendance.

Barriers towards LAs and schools offering a Parenting Contract

- The concept of a Parenting Contract was rarely criticised by respondents. The main reason given for not using contracts was that there are existing mechanisms in place which have worked well and some uncertainty about its usefulness as a tool.
- Another reason given for not using a contract was the link to potential prosecution (attendance cases) and thus the fear of alienating the parent. However, for many, the link to prosecution was felt to be pivotal in motivating the parent or child to make changes. This barrier was overcome to a certain extent by careful management of the relationship and by diluting the prosecution message in certain cases or at certain times throughout the life of a Parenting Contract.

² The DCSF collects data from LAs on the number of Penalty Notices, number of children entering Fast Track case management system for unauthorised absence, number of Parenting Orders and number of Parenting Contracts offered and accepted for unauthorised absence and exclusions. These data are referred to as PRAB returns (Parental Responsibility data).

Support and training of staff offering Parenting Contracts

- LAs offered various types of **support** to schools.
- Schools benefited from LAs' expertise and skills in dealing with more challenging children. More specifically, schools valued using the LA for advice and in managing the liaison, administration and overall responsibility for the Parenting Contract.
- A third of all LAs that responded to the survey claimed to offer training to schools or other agencies in administering Parenting Contracts.
- LAs reported offering a wide range of different types of support to parents as part of the Parenting Contract. The most frequently mentioned type of support was referral to parenting classes followed by referral to mental health services.

Implementation of a Parenting Contract

- The **trigger** for offering a Parenting Contract for attendance came about when a child's attendance level fell below a set threshold consistently (usually 80%). The LA monitors this closely along with the school and together they make a decision about suitable intervention. For behaviour, Parenting Contracts are usually brought in after previous interventions have been tried and failed, in particular after a PSP (Pastoral Support Plan). However, there were reports of great success when used as more of a **preventative measure**; at an earlier Key Stage, earlier in the academic year and or when a child with a history of exclusions joins a new school.
- Parenting Contracts were deemed most suitable for situations where it was clear that a family would benefit from support and or if the parent was not engaging with previous interventions or if the relationship between parent and school had broken down.
- The importance of the '**mediator**' role was stressed by all those involved in a Parenting Contract to be objective and supportive and reinforced the parent, child and school commitment. In the few instances where a school governor was involved, this was welcomed as additional enforcement for the school.

Support offered to parents and children

- **Targets** were felt to work best when parents and children were encouraged to suggest their own. Targets offered varied considerably according to the parent and child's needs and situation. Parenting classes were reported to have had a tremendous effect on parent's confidence and skills and relationship with their children. This, in turn, helped improve the child's attendance and behaviour. Children stressed the importance of having 'a mentor' or someone they could talk to that was not a stranger who they could confide in and trust.

Monitoring and evaluation processes

- LAs **monitor** individual Parenting Contracts by holding regular reviews and extending and or adapting the contract depending on progress being made by the child and parent.
- Some authorities had processes in place to check the quality of contracts and to check that targets suggested were in fact SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-based).
- The monitoring of specific Parenting Contracts varied depending on whether the contract was for attendance or behaviour. For attendance, the process and time period for measuring impact tended to be time specific and transparent with possibly one or a few review meetings. For behaviour, this process was often more fluid with sometimes many review meetings and the period of time extended to a year in some cases.
- There was some confusion on the part of schools and parents about when a Parenting Order would come into place for their situation, at what point the contract was considered breached and how many chances they would receive. Schools were not always sure about whose decision it would be to make a judgment about this.

Impact of Parenting Contracts

- Clear systems were in place to monitor the effectiveness of each individual Parenting Contract through reviews. The factors used to determine success varied.
- For both attendance and behaviour, impact was often difficult to assess mainly because other factors in the family's circumstance could affect the child's attendance or behaviour. Furthermore, staff often felt that for some children, the effects of the Parenting Contract would take time to see, especially amongst those who had experienced problems for many years. In addition, the Parenting Contract was often one of a number of interventions being used to support the child.
- The success of a Parenting Contract was generally dependent on each individual case and various factors could be used to determine this success including improved relationship between school and parents, improved attendance and reduction in the frequency of disciplinary actions taken in respect of the child. As such, it was difficult to make comparisons or record, collate or measure the impact of all Parenting Contracts offered within an LA department except for whether they had resulted in a Parenting Order or Penalty Notice.
- LAs generally used both hard and soft measures to ascertain the impact of a specific Parenting Contract. The hard measures were based on attendance levels and patterns or staff feedback on behaviour and frequency and or severity of disciplinary measures. The soft measures varied considerably across the areas but tended to include: the child's attitude and relationship with the school, the parent and other siblings and their general attainment.
- LAs were very positive about using Parenting Contracts as part of their existing processes for attendance. They reported very good statistics on attendance levels after intervention. The Parenting Contract was appreciated for formalising the practice that they were already carrying out.
- For behaviour issues, schools and LAs were in agreement that the Parenting Contract had helped to avoid exclusions and been the catalyst for changes to support the child, thus leading to improvements.
- Very few Parenting Contracts had been offered for children in Key Stage 1 and 2 and this affected coverage within the case studies. However, the research team have included a selection of specific case studies towards the

end of the report that relate to each educational stage to give a flavour of the results for each educational stage.

1.3 Methodology

The research was a multi-stage project, with each phase feeding into the next. It began with an exploratory qualitative phase to inform the development of the questionnaire. This was followed by a paper questionnaire being sent to the LAs in England. This stage was followed by a schools survey to 450 schools carried out in the summer. Due to a low response rate, schools were offered a further reminder and the opportunity of completing an online questionnaire in the autumn. 74 LAs returned questionnaires (representing a 49% response rate) and of these 61 (82%) have used Parenting Contracts for attendance, and 39 (45%) have used them for behaviour.

The final stage of the research consisted of ten case studies with LAs, schools, parents and children. This followed an iterative and linked process whereby, wherever possible, for each of the ten areas: LA staff were interviewed first, followed by two schools, four parents and two children all with experience of a Parenting Contract.

The overall objective behind the interviews was to understand the process involved in offering the Parenting Contract and ultimately to explore what impact the Parenting Contract had had on the child and their family.

1.4 Policy Implications

- There is variation between LAs in terms of what they include in their PRAB returns to DCSF. Some LAs include Parenting Contracts offered when they enter cases into Fast Track case management system for attendance and others include those contracts offered following a pupil's permanent exclusion and transfer to a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) or an alternative provision. Also some LAs include the information collected from schools and others do not.
- There is therefore some inconsistency in what LAs count as a Parenting Contract. Clearer guidance to LAs on the overlap between Fast Track case management system for attendance, Individual Education Plans (IEP),

Pastoral Support Plans and Parenting Contracts will help to increase the accuracy of data collected.

- The research suggests that good practice on how to use Parenting Contracts includes:
 - The importance of the mediator role in the set up. This role could be fulfilled by the LA or by a school governor as appropriate.
 - The need for review meetings to be impartial and evaluate the progress made by the parent and child; and the support offered by the school and or LA.
 - Make sure that the targets set are SMART; and
 - Support offered to include parenting skills courses and /or one to one mentoring for the parent and a mentor for the child.

2. Background

All children have a right to education and the law requires parents to ensure that their children receive an education. It is important that those children who are registered at school attend in order to learn and raise their educational achievements so that they can contribute meaningfully in society. This means that parents must play their part in supporting schools by ensuring that their children attend school regularly and behave well whilst they are there.

In 2004 the Government following the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003, introduced a range of legal measures including Parenting Contracts, Parenting Orders and Penalty Notices designed to provide a balance of support and sanctions to help those parents who are willing to take responsibility for their children's behaviour and attendance in schools. The measures enable schools and LAs to engage with parents effectively, whether on a voluntary basis as in the case of Parenting Contracts or compulsory basis as in the case of Parenting Orders and Penalty Notices in respect of parents who are unwilling to engage in improving their children's behaviour and attendance.

The Anti-social Behaviour Act gave LAs and schools powers to make formal agreements (Parenting Contracts) with parents to address their children's behaviour and attendance at school. Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) were also given similar powers to offer Parenting Contracts to parents whose children are involved in criminal conduct or anti-social behaviour within the community.

A Parenting Contract is a two-sided formal agreement between a parent and either the LA or the governing body of a school. Both school and LA are usually involved in the issuing, administration and review process. It is purely a voluntary arrangement. Neither the parents nor the LA or school can be forced to make this sort of agreement. However, if the LA later prosecutes a parent for irregular school attendance under s444 of the Education Act 1996 or applies for a Parenting Order following exclusion (either fixed period or permanent) under s20 of the Anti-social Behaviour Act, they will use any evidence of a parent's refusal to make this sort of agreement or failure to keep to its terms in those proceedings.

Parenting Contracts are intended to provide parents with the professional support they need and to encourage a positive joint working relationship between school, LA and parents to tackle unauthorised absence or poor behaviour in school and any underlying causes for this. They are intended to help parents build a productive relationship with the school/LA and access the support they need.

The LA or the governing body of the school will consider whether it would be appropriate to offer a Parenting Contract to the parent. A contract may be offered either where a child fails to regularly attend school or is perceived by the LA and or school to be at risk of exclusion (either fixed period or permanent exclusion). New provisions under the Education and Inspections Act 2006 that came into force on 1 September 2007 allow contracts to be offered earlier, following a child's misbehaviour, prior to exclusion.

Under the Parenting Contract, the parent agrees to comply with specified requirements, for instance, to ensure that the child attends school regularly and punctually over a specified time period. In return, the LA / governing body agrees to provide specified support (tailored to the parents' needs) to enable the parent to comply, e.g. help with transporting the child to school or support to attend parenting classes.

Education-related Parenting Contracts have been used by LAs and schools since February 2004. The DCSF collects and publishes data from LAs on the number of Penalty Notices issued and number of children entering Fast-Track case management system in the case of non attendance; and number of Parenting Orders and number of Parenting Contracts offered and accepted in cases of unauthorised absence and exclusions. These data are referred to as PRAB (Parental Responsibility for Attendance and Behaviour) data returns.

Research was needed to assess the effectiveness of the use of Parenting Contracts. The DCSF commissioned TNS Social to conduct the research with LAs, schools, parents and children.

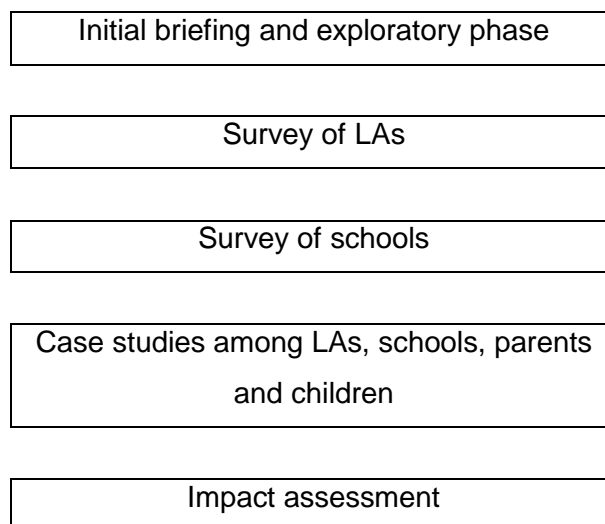
2.1 Research objectives

The **overall aim** of the research was to assess the effectiveness of the use of education-related Parenting Contracts by schools and LAs to improve school attendance and behaviour. More specifically, the research team sought to understand:

- The prevalence of Parenting Contracts in maintained schools. Furthermore, to explore patterns of usage and reporting of usage of Parenting Contracts;
- How Parenting Contracts were being established and implemented by schools and LAs (including thresholds set before considering a Parenting Contract);
- What specific qualifications, training and attributes staff offering the contracts have;
- What types of support are offered to parents through the Parenting Contract and the relative impact of each of these types of support;
- What monitoring and evaluation processes are in place; and
- What the impact of education-related Parenting Contracts is on:-
 - Behaviour and attendance;
 - Key Stages 1, 2, 3 and 4;
 - Home/school relations; and
 - Parents/carers and the extended family.

2.2 Overview of evaluation programme

The research consisted of a multi-stage project, with each phase feeding into the next one, as follows:



2.3 Exploratory phase

Exploratory visits were conducted in three areas to delve deeper into the collection of information by LAs on the way Parenting Contracts were being used and administered in their area. The findings from these visits were useful for informing the design of the later stages of research and more specifically for the design of the questionnaires and recruitment processes.

Three LAs were picked to reflect different types of usage and geographical spread. Interviews were conducted with those responsible for Parenting Contracts at the LA and schools.

2.4 Survey of LAs

The next stage of the research was a survey of LAs.

A list of contact names at each of the 150 LAs in England was provided to TNS by the DCSF. A 15 minute paper questionnaire was sent to every LA which covered use and non-use of Parenting Contracts, administration of Parenting Contracts, support offered to schools, terms of Parenting Contracts and referrals made in Parenting Contracts. Respondents were given a long fieldwork period (just under two months) in which to return the questionnaires. TNS attempted to reach non-responsive LAs by telephone several times in order to maximise response rates. This meant that any reasons for refusing to complete the questionnaire were recorded at this stage.

In total, 74 LAs responded out of 150 representing a 49% response rate. Less than half, 39, of these said their authority used Parenting Contracts following exclusion, 36 of which had used at least one Parenting Contract in the last year. Most LAs, 61 had used them for unauthorised absences, 59 of which had used a Parenting Contract in the past year.

2.5 Survey of schools

This stage was followed by a schools survey.

The returned questionnaires from 74 LAs provided lists of schools in the authority that were using Parenting Contracts. From this list of schools, a stratified sample was drawn of 450 schools across all the LAs that said they used Parenting Contracts, proportional to the number of schools using them in each authority and a spread of different school types. The final sample included 150 primary schools, 214 secondary schools and 86 other schools (including PRUs). Traditionally, primary school research elicits higher response rates, so the proportion of secondary schools included in the sample was slightly higher than the primaries, in order to counteract the expected lower response rate from the secondary schools. One LA proved to be a slight anomaly as it said all its schools were using Parenting Contracts which would have meant this LA made up a large proportion of the final sample. The information provided by this LA was down-weighted to adjust for this. (A full note on the sampling

method is included in the appendices.) Originally it had been intended to use a sample of 300 schools but since the LA survey had a lower than anticipated response rate, a larger sample was drawn at the start.

Each school in the sample was sent a 10 minute questionnaire, and again were given a long fieldwork period to respond. However the timing of the survey meant that many schools were busy at the end of the summer term and could not find time to respond. In total schools were given just under four months to respond, although this time also included the summer holidays. Despite telephone chasing, response rates were a lot lower than anticipated, so a second mailing of the questionnaire to non-responsive schools was carried out in September. At this time schools were also offered an online version of the questionnaire to complete if that was considered more convenient for the respondent. From the 450 questionnaires sent out, the following response was achieved:

Figure 1

SCHOOL SURVEY RESPONSE PROFILE

	Nos (450)	% (100)
<i>Total</i>		
Returned questionnaires	131	29
<i>Primary school completed returns</i>	49	11
<i>Secondary school completed returns</i>	57	13
<i>Other school returns</i>	21	5
<i>Returned blank</i>	4	
<i>Schools using Parenting Contracts following exclusion from returned questionnaires</i>	20	4
<i>Schools using Parenting Contracts following unauthorised absence returned questionnaires</i>	30	7
Refusals	21	5
Did not respond as they do not use Parenting Contracts at their school	47	10
Contacted school but questionnaire not returned	251	56

Base: 450 schools in sample

In total, 131 questionnaires were received (29%). However 80 of these schools said they did not use Parenting Contracts at all. Of these around two-fifths were primary schools, a third were secondary schools, and the remaining quarter were other schools. A total of 47 of the schools which returned questionnaires indicated they were using Parenting Contracts.

Although the sample was derived from lists from the LAs who claimed those schools were using Parenting Contracts, 10% of the sample did not see the questionnaire as relevant to them as they were not using Parenting Contracts. 5% of the sample refused to complete the survey, mainly on the grounds that the school never completes surveys due to lack of time. The remaining 56% were contacted several times but completed questionnaires were never received.

Due to the relatively low final numbers of schools using Parenting Contracts in the results, many of the findings of the schools survey can only be reported at a top level and have not been broken down by subgroup. A clear finding from the difficulties which emerged in the sampling procedure is that LAs' knowledge of their schools' use of Parenting Contracts is somewhat less than previously appreciated.

2.6 Case studies with LAs, schools, parents and children

The final strand of the research consisted of a case study approach with all the relevant audiences involved within a Parenting Contract.

The starting point for this was identifying a good cross section of LAs out of those that responded to the survey. Ten LAs were chosen based on:

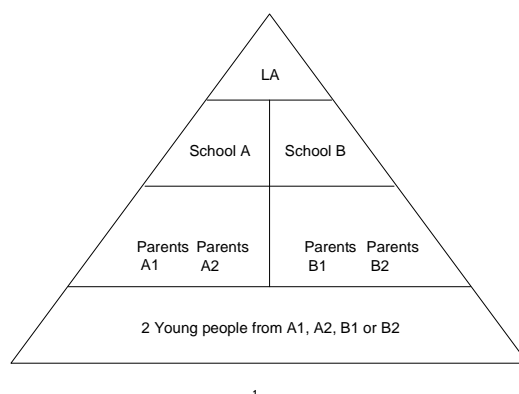
- Geographical distribution
- Rural / urban split
- Prevalence: high and low volumes
- Usage type: attendance or behaviour or both
- Those displaying good practice and/ or those encountering problems

As far as was possible, the case studies were linked so that across the ten areas the research team interviewed staff at the LA, schools, parents and children connected with an individual Parenting Contract. This was achievable in almost all of the areas. However, it was not always possible to conduct the number of parent and child

interviews required in each LA (four parents and two children) so the research team recruited extra interviews in other LAs.

The table below shows the model of research that the research team aimed to follow in each of the ten LA areas:

Model 1: Case study approach



The case study research followed an iterative and linked process whereby for each of the ten areas: LAs were interviewed first, followed by schools and then parents and children. Recruitment was generally more successful in those areas where the LA helped TNS to recruit schools and parents and arranged appointments on our behalf.

The overall objective behind the interviews was to understand the process involved in offering the Parenting Contract and ultimately to explore what impact the Parenting Contract had had on the child and their family. Specific research objectives are detailed in Section 2.1 of this report.

LAs were generally optimistic about helping with the case studies research but after the first stage some were unable to assist in helping to identify suitable schools and parents. In this scenario, the research team attempted a number of strategies to boost their sample of schools, parents and children:

- Approaching schools that had completed the schools survey;
- Approaching again the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) or LA staff in the areas already researched with a high volume of Parenting Contracts;

- Targeting different staff at the LA that may be involved in offering Parenting Contracts;
- Approaching other agencies responsible for offering Parenting Contracts;
- Approaching another LA; and
- Conducting telephone interviews where face to face interviews were not possible.

The actual number of LAs included within the research was eleven.

The majority of interviews were face to face and the duration of these varied from forty minutes to two hours.

At the LA level, the research team interviewed at least two employees responsible for Parenting Contracts, someone senior with involvement in policy and then someone more junior with day to day responsibility. In most LAs the research team carried out a number of interviews to ensure that the research team fully understood the way Parenting Contracts were being used. This often meant talking to staff with responsibility for both the behaviour and the attendance.

At the school level, the research team interviewed those staff with responsibility for delivering the Parenting Contract along with the LA - usually this was someone from senior management and a member of staff responsible for attendance (school secretary, attendance officer) or pastoral care.

Parents were interviewed in their home or at school depending on their preference and offered an incentive of £20 to cover their out of pocket expenses - travel cost or babysitting.

The interviews with children were noticeably shorter in duration (30 minutes) and again they were given a cash incentive of £10 as compensation for their time.

2.7 Case study sample profile

Appendix 2 shows the distribution of interviews within each of the audiences across the eleven LA areas included in the research.

3. Definition of a Parenting Contract

For the purposes of the research, a Parenting Contract was defined as a formal written agreement between parents and either the LA or the governing body of a school that contains:

- a) a statement by the parents that they have agreed to comply for a specified period with whatever requirements are specified in the contract; and
- b) a statement by the LA or governing body agreeing to provide support to the parents for the purpose of complying with the contract.

The Parenting Contract may include (in particular) a requirement to attend a counselling or guidance programme³.

The research indicated that schools and LAs usually made decisions together about when it would be appropriate to offer a Parenting Contract with the LA taking a lead on running the meetings, organising the administration and managing the review period and meetings. However, the research did not include schools that may be offering Parenting Contracts without LA involvement.⁴

Based on the above definition, many LAs and schools were found to be using Parenting Contracts but under another guise or name. However, for some, the agreement was only distinguished as a Parenting Contract if:

- the LA was involved; or
- a Pastoral Support Plan (PSP) had been implemented for behaviour; or
- the document was signed; or
- a Parenting Order or Penalty Notice was stressed at the initial meeting.

Adding to the confusion (especially for schools) was the wealth of other names, labels and terms to refer to formal written agreements meaning that the term

³ More detailed information about Parenting Contracts can be found in Section 19 of the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003.

⁴ The sampling and recruitment method

'Parenting Contract' was not always being used and in some schools not even heard of. Examples are:

- 'Parenting / Pastoral Support Plan' or programme (PSP) for behaviour;
- 'Parenting Responsibility Contract';
- 'Attendance Panels' for attendance meetings with LA;
- 'Attendance Case Conference' (ACC); and
- 'School Attendance Review meetings' (SARM).

Exacerbating the confusion further for all, especially for parents and children was the host of other interventions using a contract or referring to the word 'contract' used by schools or LAs:

- A home school agreement;
- Parent school agreement;
- Acceptable Behaviour Contract (ABC);
- Attendance contract; and
- Being 'on contract' at school as part of the discipline procedure.

In some cases, these 'other' interventions, were actually no different from a Parenting Contract. However, there were other uses of the word contract and a document for parents to sign that were very distinct from an education-related Parenting Contract.

Schools referred to a contract for parents to sign when their child joined the school to confirm their role in making sure the child will do certain things such as homework and having the correct equipment and clothes for school. There were also cases of parents signing a contract when their child chooses to study off-site for certain parts of the week as part of their vocational course to approve their time commitments between both the school and the other site and their behaviour at the other site.

There was general confusion over whether a Parenting Contract was a generic term for all types of behaviour or attendance contracts or something very separate. In one LA, a child and their parent may be part of at any one time, a pupil acceptable behaviour contract, an attendance contract and a Parenting Contract. Other LAs offered the parent one contract with references to both behaviour and attendance as the two were considered to be so closely linked.

Parents often confessed to being very confused and found it hard to distinguish between the interventions especially for behaviour problems. Rarely had parents and children heard of a 'Parenting Contract' before being part of one. Even while on the contract, many had only a vague awareness of being on a Parenting Contract, thinking about it more in terms of 'lots of meetings and signing some documents'.

4. Use of Parenting Contracts

4.1 The prevalence of Parenting Contracts

LAs collate the number of Parenting Contracts being offered in their area and report this to the DCSF through the PRAB returns. LAs and schools usually decided together whether it was appropriate to offer a Parenting Contract and then the LA would take responsibility for the management of the contract.

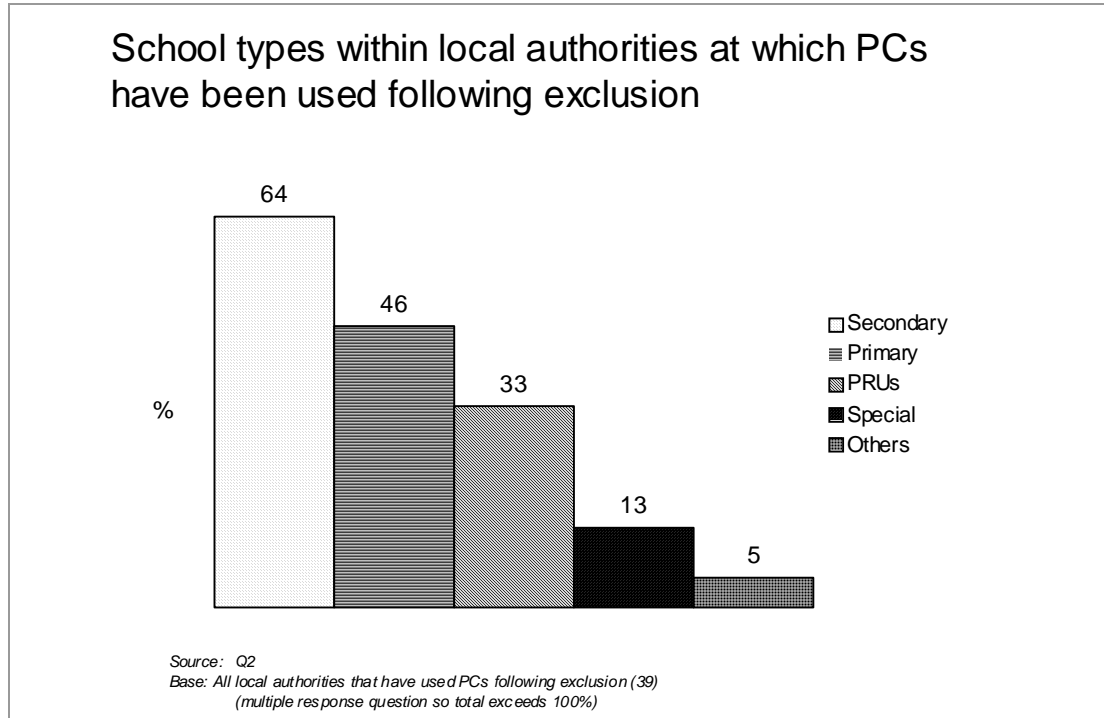
The quantitative survey of LAs and schools showed that there was greater use of Parenting Contracts for attendance rather than for behaviour.

For the LAs who use Parenting Contracts, the survey showed that this is usually something that has been done for a few years for attendance, where almost three-quarters (71%) have been using them since 2005 or before. For behaviour, they tended to have been implemented more recently with just over half (55%) having used them so far.

In the quantitative survey 45% of LAs reported using Parenting Contracts following exclusion, while 82% did so for attendance.⁵ Where they were used within an LA, this tended to be across different types of school and Key Stages. They are however; most commonly used within secondary schools and at Key Stages 3 and 4. For behaviour following exclusion, where LAs have used them, almost two-thirds have used them within secondary schools, and almost half within primary schools, as Chart 1 shows.

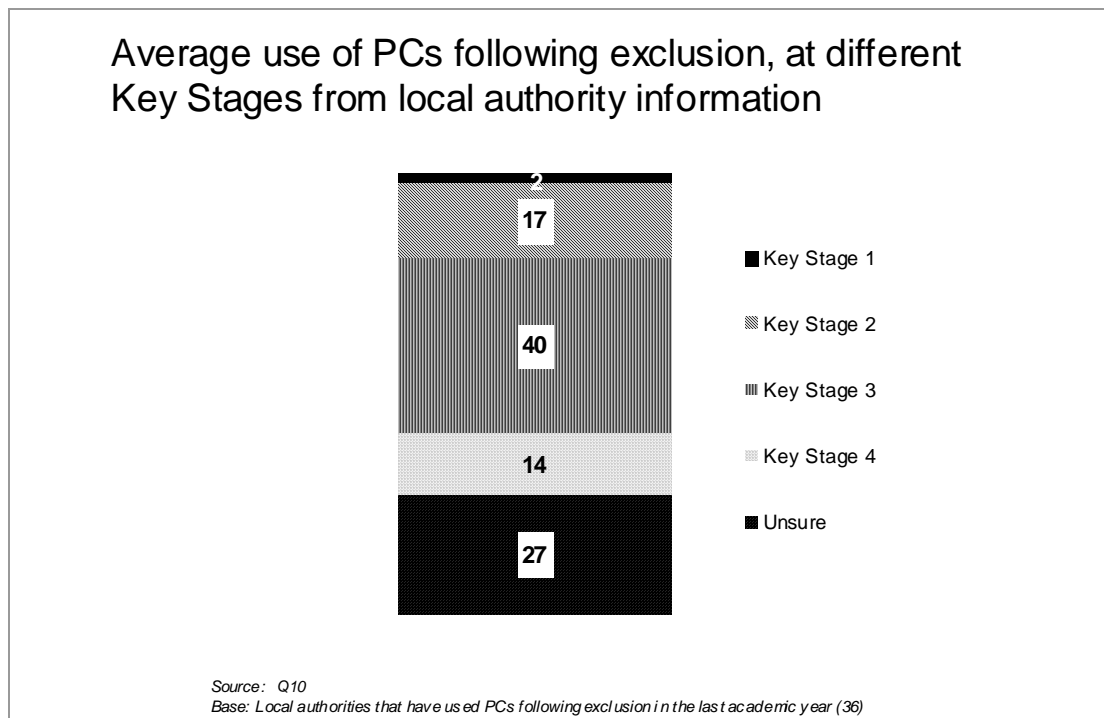
⁵ In effect though, later in the paper questionnaire, slightly higher numbers answered the questions around usage and processes in place in their LA, when they had answered 'unsure' in the usage question. Their responses were analysed, which explains the slight increase in base sizes on some charts.

Chart 1



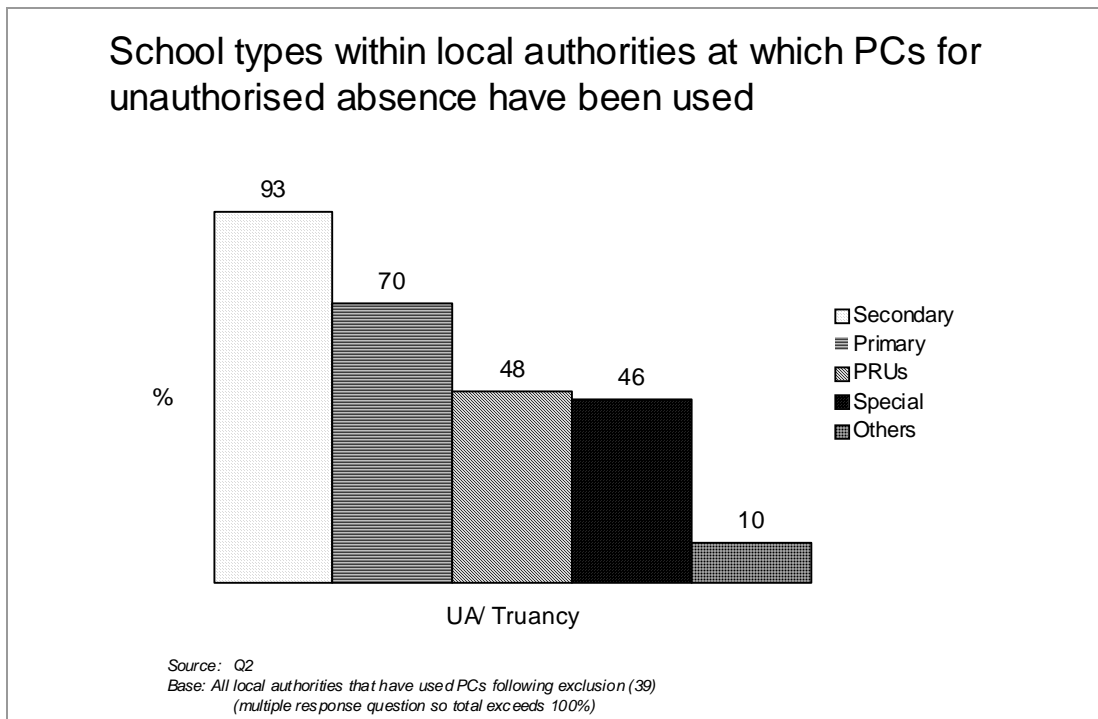
LAs were asked to give a breakdown of the proportions of the Key Stages of children where Parenting Contracts were offered. On average for behaviour, 40% of them were thought to be with children at Key Stage 3, but with substantial numbers also at Key Stages 2 and 4, as shown in Chart 2.

Chart 2



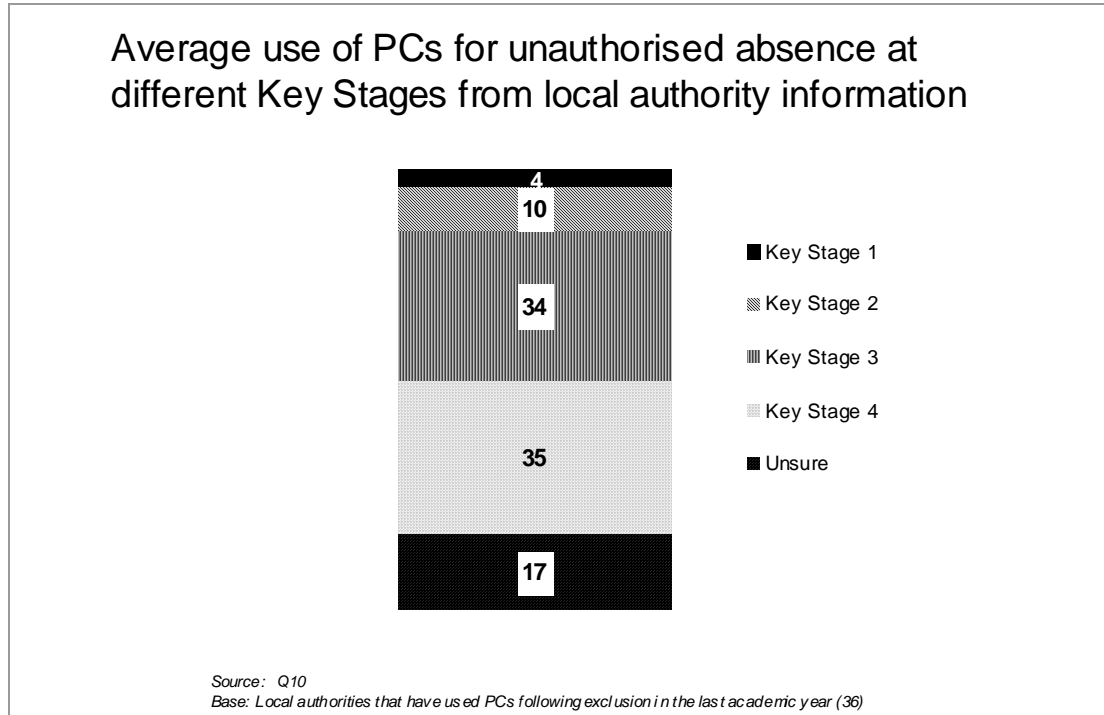
For attendance, of the LAs which use Parenting Contracts, almost all have used them within secondary schools, but also in substantial numbers in primaries, special schools and Pupil Referral Units as Chart 3 illustrates.

Chart 3



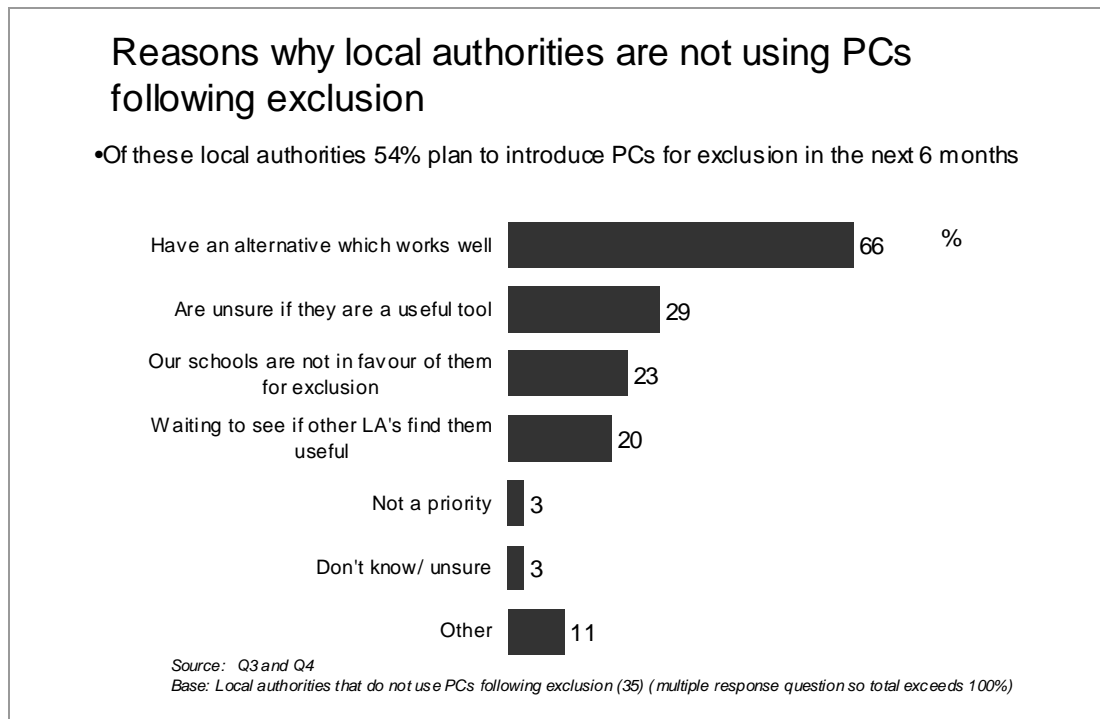
In the case of attendance, Parenting Contracts usage is more evenly split between Key Stages 3 and 4 (see Chart 4). This is in contrast to Parenting Contracts for behaviour, with an average of just over a third of the total being done for each of these age groups.

Chart 4



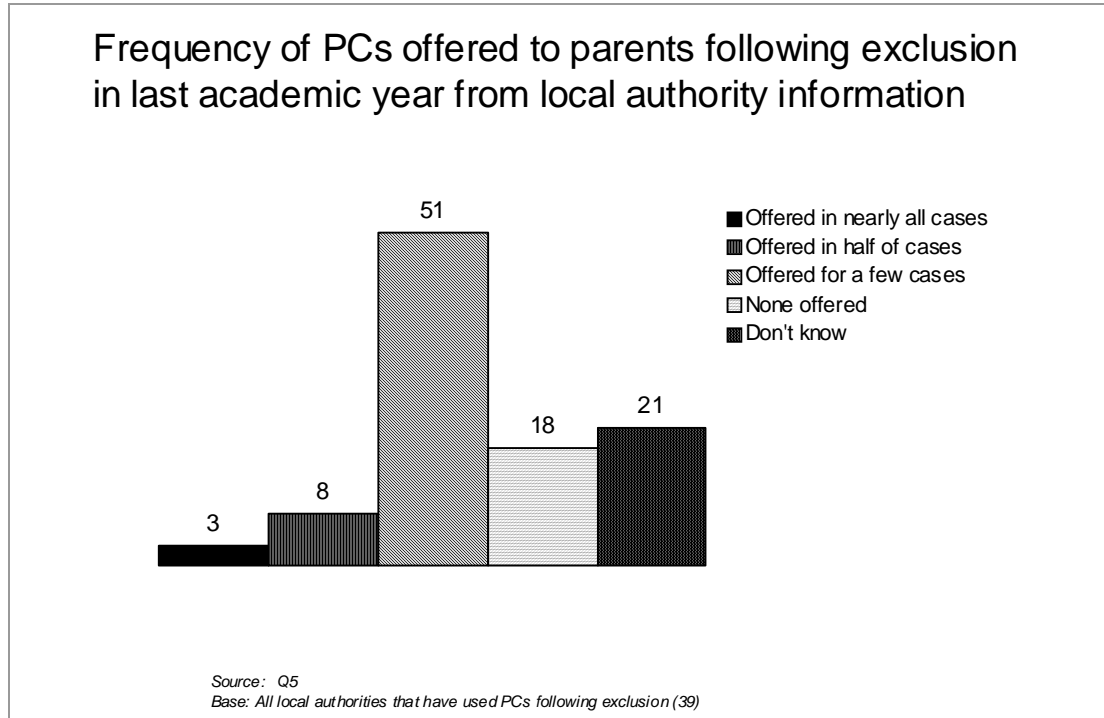
Where Parenting Contracts are not used, the main reason given is that there was an existing mechanism in place which has worked well in the past. However 54% of those not currently using Parenting Contracts following exclusion intend to introduce them in the next six months. As Chart 5 shows, two-thirds of LAs gave this reason for not using them when tackling children's behaviour, while for attendance only 13 LAs (18%) were not using them so it is not possible to analyse further.

Chart 5



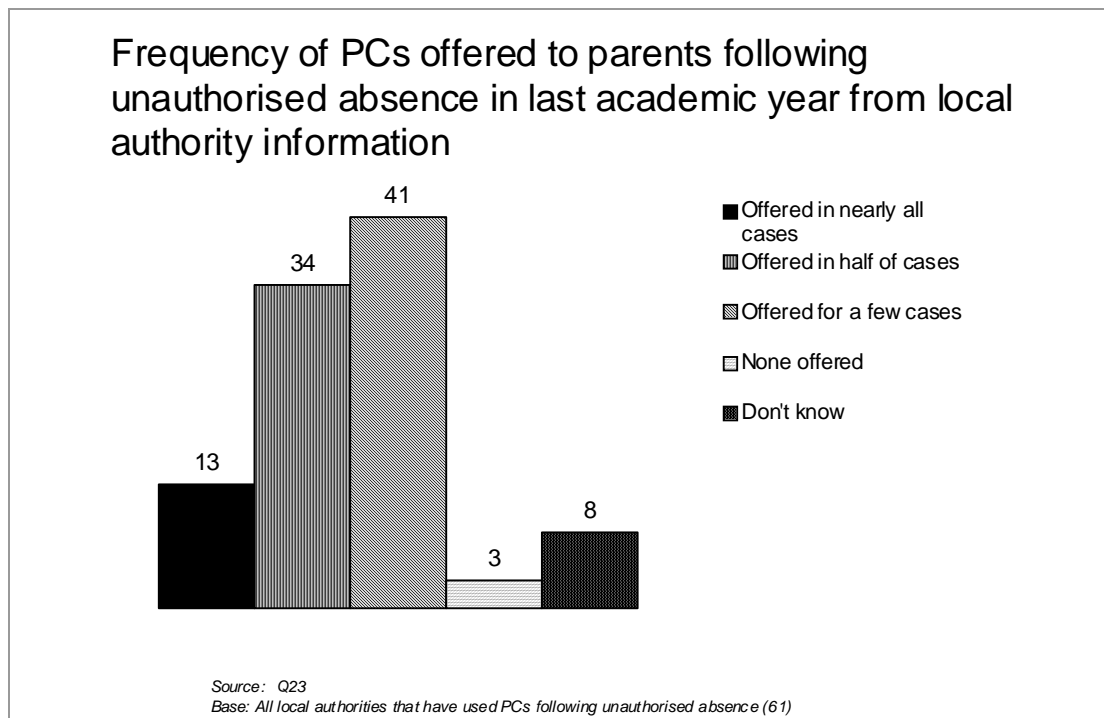
LAs reported that Parenting Contracts in the last academic year were generally offered in a minority of cases for behaviour, as Chart 6 illustrates. This supports the qualitative findings that they are generally specifically chosen as a targeted intervention in particular child / family situation, rather than as part of a process-driven response to non-attendance.

Chart 6



In dealing with attendance, 47% of LAs claim they are offered for all or half of cases, while for behaviour only 11% (caution as small sample size) offer them this frequently. This substantiates the finding from the case studies that it is frequently much more seen as part of a case-management process for attendance. Take up of Parenting Contracts is covered further in Section 3.1.

Chart 7



An interesting finding in itself is that although the sample of schools was generated from the LA providing details of those schools thought to be using Parenting Contracts, the actual situation was more complicated.

In the survey of schools, of the responding sample, only 16% claimed to use Parenting Contracts for behaviour issues following exclusion and 24% for attendance issues. This means that there were only 30 schools using them for attendance and 20 for behaviour. Due to the small base size, the difference in interpretation around definition of Parenting Contracts and the sampling method meaning that the schools are known to be atypical, the research team are reluctant to produce detailed analysis on the behaviour of schools.

Where Parenting Contracts are used, as in the results of the LA survey, they tend to have been used for slightly longer period in the case of attendance, than behaviour and are more likely to be used more selectively for behaviour than for attendance. Schools which have used them report doing so in small numbers, with over half having offered fewer than five in the last academic year for both behaviour and attendance.

There is no clear consensus between schools which use them already as to whether they expect usage to increase, decrease or stay the same in the next year.

The reporting of Parenting Contracts both in the PRAB return and on the returned questionnaires will no doubt be hugely affected by the variations in what constitutes a Parenting Contract. As already discussed, many LAs were using Parenting Contracts but referring to these as being something else or referring to a similar type of intervention as a Parenting Contract.

Indeed from the responses to the quantitative surveys of both LAs and schools, and the great depth of information gathered from the case studies, which explains that answering the questionnaires seems to have been done on an inconsistent basis, the research team are reluctant to draw conclusions from the quantitative data in isolation. However, survey findings are reported throughout, where base sizes allow, but the research team recommend that they are treated with some caution and in the context of the qualitative analysis in each section.

For example, one LA was selected as a case study area because of the high number of Parenting Contracts offered to tackling behaviour issues, reported to the DCSF in the regular PRAB returns. It soon became clear in the first meeting during the case study research that they have historically reported entries to the PRU after exclusion as behaviour-related Parenting Contracts. This was the way the guidance was interpreted at the time (i.e. follows an exclusion, parents are consulted and a plan of action is drawn up and a contract document is signed by the parents) along with a reluctance by the LA to increase the burden on schools by asking them to provide these returns regularly. This LA therefore does not actually offer any Parenting Contracts for behaviour via the Behaviour Support Service within the LA. However they are sure that schools are independently setting up what are effectively Parenting Contracts with parents following exclusion, but these may be called various other names.

Conversely, this LA reported doing a handful of attendance Parenting Contracts in its regular PRAB returns. However there is a well established process where parents agree to certain conditions and a formal agreement is signed to address attendance problems, which is in essence a Parenting Contract.

Within LAs it was apparent that Parenting Contracts were being offered across a few departments and in one case, through an external company on behalf of the authority. During the case studies research, inaccuracies in the survey data were discovered as departments had failed to share the survey with each other, thus underreporting the number of Parenting Contracts being offered by the LA as a whole.

Furthermore, there was acknowledgement from LAs that schools were not always informing them about interventions and specifically, Parenting Contracts that are being offered within the school without the LAs' involvement. Systems for communicating the number of Parenting Contracts between schools and the LA were limited for behaviour.

One LA in particular had very limited control and knowledge about whether some of its schools were using Parenting Contracts independently as schools had the option to 'buy in' services from the Education Welfare / behaviour support services or not meaning that a proportion of the schools had limited contact with EWOs.

Some LAs had not previously reflected that their systems and procedures for attendance (Fast Track case management system) could incorporate the use of a Parenting Contract which could be counted separately when completing the PRAB returns.

The spread of Parenting Contract usage across schools varied considerably. For attendance, this varied according to the type of school and extent of the problem, the resources within the LA and the EWO assigned to the school. For behaviour, there were far fewer Parenting Contracts offered by the LA but the research team cannot be sure of the volume of Parenting Contracts being used by schools under the guise of something else (often being called a Pastoral Support Plan). LAs offering Parenting Contracts for behaviour tended to have one or two schools in their area that had embraced the concept and that they were working with on a regular basis.

“The head at that school just thinks it’s a great idea and he’s seen the impact of us coming in and working with them... he wants us to do more and more Parenting Contracts.” (Local Authority)

The greatest volume of Parenting Contract use reported through the case studies research was in an LA where the offering of Parenting Contracts had been outsourced.

Some LAs said that they were preparing to use Parenting Contracts more for behaviour in the future and some had received training and mentoring from the DCSF consultants on how to use and implement them.

4.2 How Parenting Contracts were being used

For attendance issues there was much more consistency in the use and management of a Parenting Contract than for behaviour. The contract was often used as part of the existing process (Fast Track case management system) with clear penalties if the Parenting Contract was not adhered to.

“They are embedded in our case management system (CMS). Not a separate entity.”(Local Authority)

“We thought we (Education Welfare Service) should use Parenting Contracts as part of our strategy of working with families - with the cooperation of the schools” (Local Authority)

For behaviour, there was much less structure about when to use Parenting Contracts, in particular, concerning the triggers for offering them and the review system. Parenting Contracts were offered as one of an array of tools to deal with the situation. Many Parenting Contracts were breached. The review period was therefore either extended or the targets revised; or the contract was closed completely and the child referred to a PRU. In these situations, some LAs did not feel that taking further action against the parent would lead to improvements and applying to the courts for a Parenting Order could do more harm than good.

Attendance and behaviour issues were closely linked. Staff observed that a child often misbehaved with the objective of getting excluded to spend more time away from school. Staff also talked about non attendance leading to the child ‘falling behind’ and therefore getting distracted during lessons.

“The kids we’ve tended to use them with are those with behaviour problems because of the lack of attendance because they are so far behind.... Those with persistent truancy problems are the ones with behaviour problems... it’s very closely linked.” (School)

Therefore, it was deemed likely that a child’s parents could receive a Parenting Contract for both behaviour and attendance, although the research team did not

come across this in the case study research. However, some behaviour Parenting Contracts included targets around attendance. In areas where the LA was not involved in behaviour Parenting Contracts the EWOs claimed to include some behaviour targets within the contract if needed. This decision to include behaviour targets in addition to attendance targets was always supported by the school.

Non-attendance often featured within behaviour contracts, as unauthorised absence was regarded as a behaviour problem by some schools. This was therefore dealt with by some schools within the sanctions of the disciplinary system.

4.2.1 The trigger for offering a Parenting Contract

For attendance, generally the LA gets involved when a child's unauthorised absence is not resolved and drops to a specified level within a term. An EWO would usually be in regular contact with the school and would identify those children below a certain percentage of attendance. A school may also contact the LA in other situations e.g. when a child's attendance pattern is very unusual.

Schools varied in their systems and procedures for establishing the reason for non-attendance but almost always, the parent was contacted on the same day of an absence to find out the reason for their child not being in school. Schools requested that parents kept in regular communication about their child's absence. After a period of absence, a phone call or meeting from the child's head of year or someone responsible for pastoral care would be organised in an attempt to discover what the deeper cause for the absenteeism was. In primary schools, the system of allocation for pastoral care was not always transparent or clear to teaching staff. Therefore, interventions and support were not always offered until the LA stepped in.

For behaviour, the LA may have been involved in an informal Pastoral Support Plan first and or may be monitoring specific children with a history of exclusions and may suggest a Parenting Contract in respect of a particular child in the school. Usually though, the school would either carry out their own PSP or similar intervention and or contact the LA if this did not achieve the desired outcome. Agreeing a Parenting Contract was often a last resort attempt when other school interventions had been tried and failed.

“Generally the pupil has to be well down the PSP...if it’s not working, it’s a way of tying down parental commitment.” (School)

In other instances, a Parenting Contract was started relatively early on in the process as more of a preventative measure, especially for those children at Key Stages 2 and 3.

“(A child in year 8) He needed to see how serious his behaviour was... they [Parenting Contracts] are very reactive but we are starting to use them on the younger students as a preventative measure.” (School)

Parenting Contracts were also offered in a preventative way either following exclusion or when a child with a previous record of non-attendance joined a new school.

In one instance, Parenting Contracts were offered to parents of four children simultaneously to deal with a wider behaviour problem in a particular year group.

“We took the ring leaders...the worst four to try and address the problems in that year group. We hoped it would rub off on everyone else.” (School)

Often the family was well known to the school and LA because a number of interventions had been tried before getting to the point of offering a Parenting Contract. The main reasons for offering the Parenting Contract were:

- It was very clear that the family would benefit from support;
- The parent would specifically benefit from a parenting skills course;
- Previous interventions had not engaged the parent;
- The parent was fighting against the school’s wish to improve attendance or behaviour; or
- Communication between the parent and the school was breaking down.

“A Parenting Contract may come after other meetings have been called that the parent just doesn’t turn up for.” (School)

“The family doesn’t engage and were constantly complaining and blaming the school for what’s wrong in their lives so it was an attempt to get the parents involved as a partnership.”(School)

In a few instances, the parent approached the school to request a more serious intervention either because the child was proving too difficult to engage or if they needed additional support.

The quantitative survey of schools shows that the school most commonly decides whether a Parenting Contract is to be used in the case of behaviour by looking at the severity of the behaviour, and the child’s previous behaviour. They also make an evaluation of whether the parents will be receptive and supportive. In the case of attendance, the triggers for offering a Parenting Contract were often cited as being: no improvements after letters etc. to parents; persistent absence; and when attendance falls below 80%.

4.3 Motivations and challenges towards use of Parenting Contracts

On the whole, LAs and schools were very positive towards using Parenting Contracts. The concept and model of support was embraced, especially the aspect of all parties working together framed around a written agreement.

4.3.1 Motivations

Firstly, LAs explained that Parenting Contracts were being used because of, to a certain extent, government guidance and promotion. Furthermore, many teams within the LAs had received one-to-one training, support and mentoring by National Strategies Behaviour and Attendance Advisers on the use of Parenting Contracts - especially for behaviour.

LA staff strongly subscribed to the child being at the heart of policy and, for the majority, their motivation for using Parenting Contracts was about supporting children and helping to prevent exclusion.

“We don’t want them to be excluded and we have to spell that out... that’s what we are trying to avoid. We’ve also got targets to reach!” (Local Authority)

Schools also were reluctant to exclude a child.

“It’s a tool in a multi-tool approach to keeping certain kids in school and in mainstream education.” (School)

“We are there to stop them being expelled and it’s a positive meeting and we are doing it for them.” (School)

The seriousness of a Parenting Contract in that, if breached, could lead to prosecution or sanctions, was for some practitioners a motivator to use.

“We felt that what we needed...was a last ditch attempt to do something...to say to parents how serious this is...it’s amazing how people think you don’t mean it” (Local Authority)

In those cases relating to attendance where a refusal to accept a Parenting Contract or breach of its terms had led to a prosecution and a Parenting Order or a Penalty Notice, it was suggested by those LA officers that this had been a strong deterrent to other families, who had heard about the outcome from the families involved.

There were differences in the emphasis of the Parenting Order or the Penalty Notice and also who this message was directed at - the parents or the child. In those situations where the parent was complying with the school and the LA, then the message was stressed to the child. If the child was in Key Stages 1 or 2 then the messages were usually always directed only at the parent for fear of frightening the child.

The fact that Parenting Contracts were written and signed documents rarely made them unique as such documentation was already being used for other interventions by the LA and in schools for attendance and behaviour issues. Nonetheless, this aspect was valued for many reasons:

- A formalised plan
- A template to offer structure and consistency to the meeting

- Written evidence (for court) / meeting documented
- A reference for parents, schools and LAs to review
- Another format for communication

Parenting Contracts were almost always run by the LA in the case study areas (aside from any Parenting Contracts being offered that the LA were unaware of) and for schools this was a strong benefit. LA involvement was valued by schools for taking away the liaison and administrative work of offering Parenting Contracts. It was also considered especially useful in those situations where communication had broken down between the school and the family.

Furthermore, LA involvement was appreciated for opening up access to a greater range of support services. In one particular LA, there was access to transportation for parents to get to and from various interventions and programs - parenting skills courses, counselling.

“Without the local authority on board, it’d be frustrating, especially if we’re suggesting provision from outside parties that the local authority is responsible for ...e.g. transportation and funding issues.” (School)

For attendance issues, schools were already familiar with EWOs taking the lead and accepted this as part of the protocol. Schools encouraged any interventions to resolve attendance problems but were happy to take a more passive role within the Parenting Contract or intervention.

The Parenting Contract model of involving all parties was deemed crucial to ensure maximum impact and to encourage parents and children to take the issue seriously. Many families responded positively to seeing the school and LA investing time and effort into supporting them as a joint plan.

“It gives you the opportunity to set clear guidelines for everyone so all work from a clear hymn sheet and for parents to see that it’s not one sided. The school does their bit, parents do their bit.”(Local Authority)

The quantitative survey results show that LAs offer various types of support to schools, with visits to schools and offering templates for Parenting Contracts offered by over half, as Chart 8 shows.

Chart 8

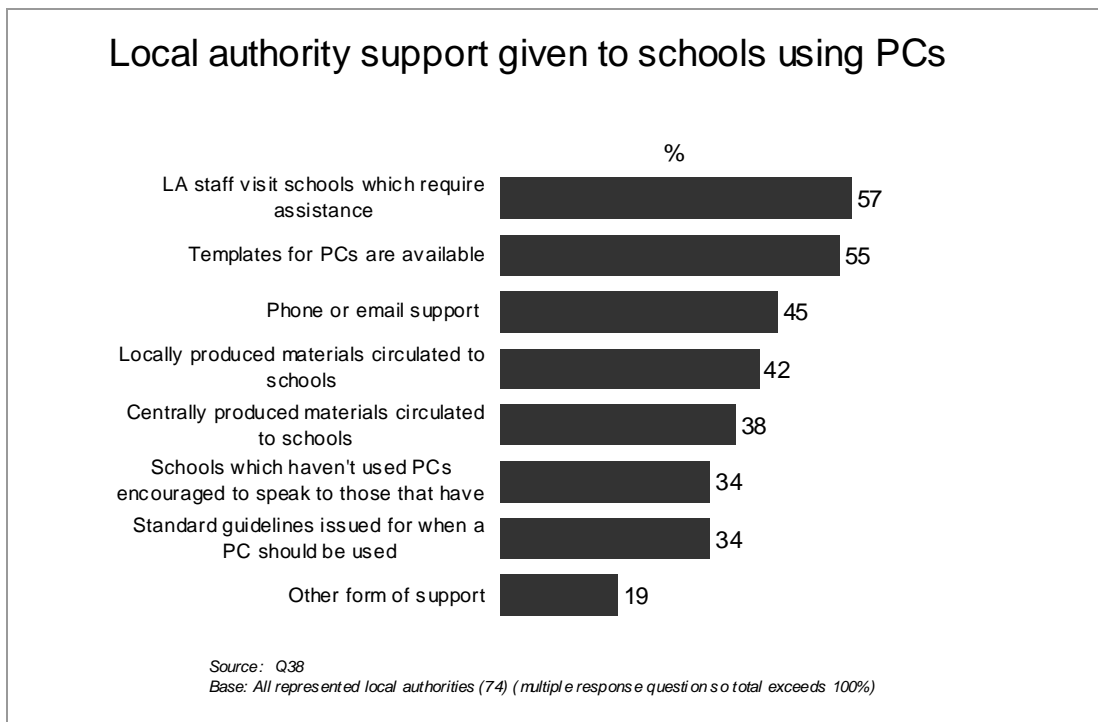
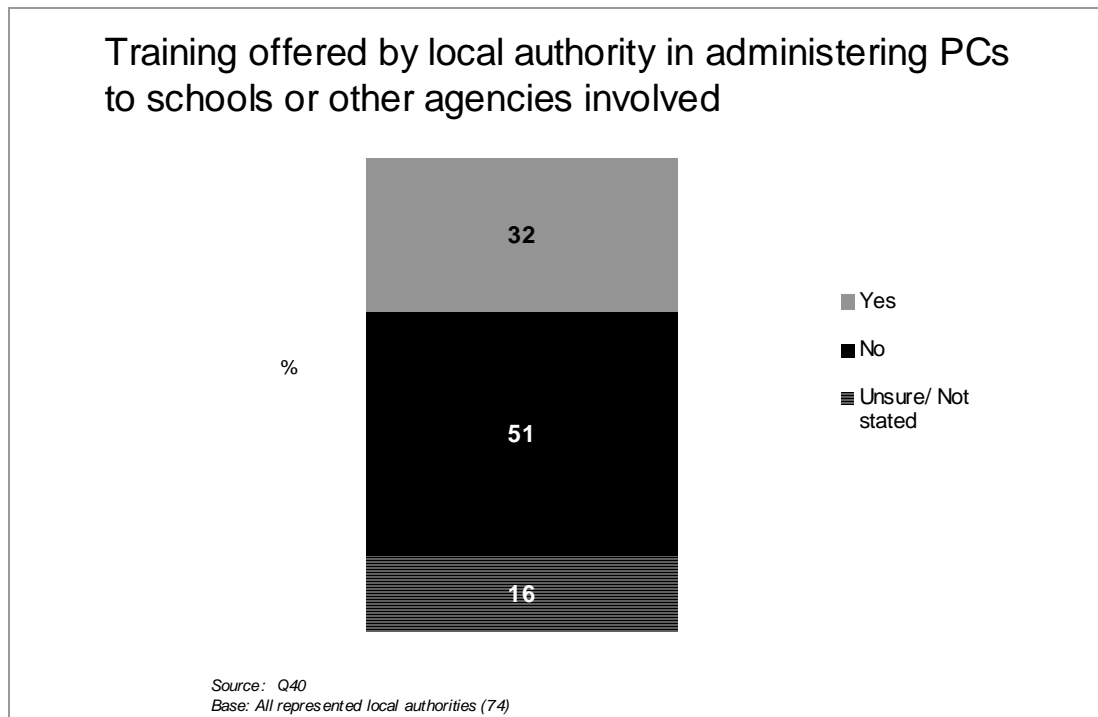


Chart 8 shows that around a third (of all LAs which responded) offer training to schools or other agencies in administering Parenting Contracts.

Chart 9



4.3.2 Challenges to the use of Parenting Contracts

For some LAs and schools, the distinguishing feature of a Parenting Contract from other types of interventions was the possibility of it leading to a Parenting Order or Penalty Notice.

Some LA officers and school staff felt strongly that this was not the best route to take for many families. They were concerned that this type of intervention would alienate the family and cause more stress for them. This either stopped the school or LA using a Parenting Contract or Parenting Contracts were modified in their use to avoid a breach in the contract resulting in a Parenting Order or a Penalty Notice when parents were not complying and or if extreme circumstances prevented them from complying.

'Many of our heads will not go into that confrontational culture but would rather frame it as an agreement' (Local Authority)

'There is never one quick fix measure that will bring about any significant long term change really as far as behaviour is concerned it's always about a multi faceted approach. And I think that's the biggest thing for me really: issuing guidance on Parenting Contracts and Parenting Orders suggests that there is a

way of doing this and it looks like this and it can be done this way.... but there are a whole host of different ways of working with parents in a supportive manner to achieve the outcome of improved child's behaviour rather than making it try and fit into that box.' (Local Authority)

'Have to have the parents on side if you want to change the kid's behaviour'.... You risk alienating a parent with a Parenting Contract..... it's far better to have a meeting, where the outcomes are exactly the same...but not as trite as that (Parenting Contract) and there are no penalties as such for not sticking to the agreements...if you're nice to people you can usually get them to do what you want, if you alienate them you don't'. (School)

Schools varied in their level of awareness and knowledge of Parenting Contracts – as for attendance they were often referred to as something else and there was limited knowledge of them being used for behaviour. Demand by schools was therefore limited to the few schools already using for behaviour.

For behaviour, teams were relatively small and resource often did not allow for a larger volume of use. The implementation of a Parenting Contract was considered time intensive and emotionally draining for the LA. For attendance, Parenting Contracts were not much of a departure from what was required through the case management system. They were slotted into existing systems rather than embraced as something different.

LA suggested that schools may be reluctant to find time to dedicate to attending meetings.

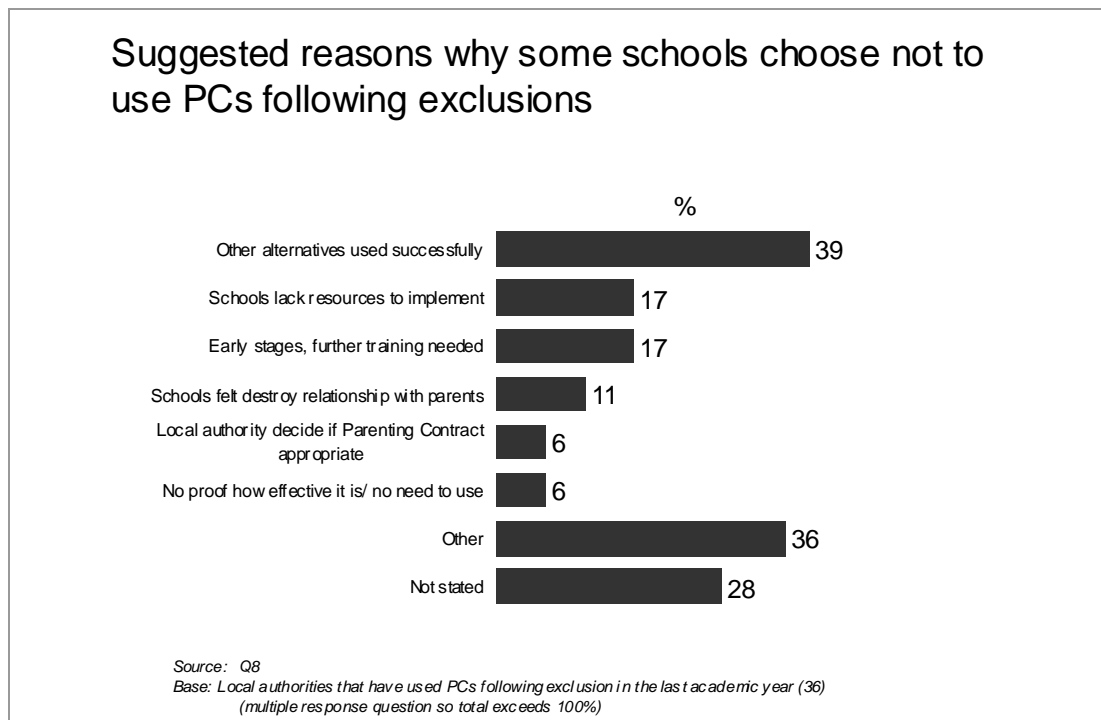
"There has been no resistance from schools but different people have different levels of input. Some people have very long lists of responsibilities and it can be very hard to schedule meetings. The issue of resource management in schools is very real and very complex. It is a continuing challenge for schools"
(Local Authority)

Costs were involved for providing professional support and LAs questioned whether this was why more schools were not offering Parenting Contracts on their own.

In the survey, LAs were asked why they felt some of their schools either did not use Parenting Contracts at all or use them infrequently, even though the LAs and other schools within it use them more.

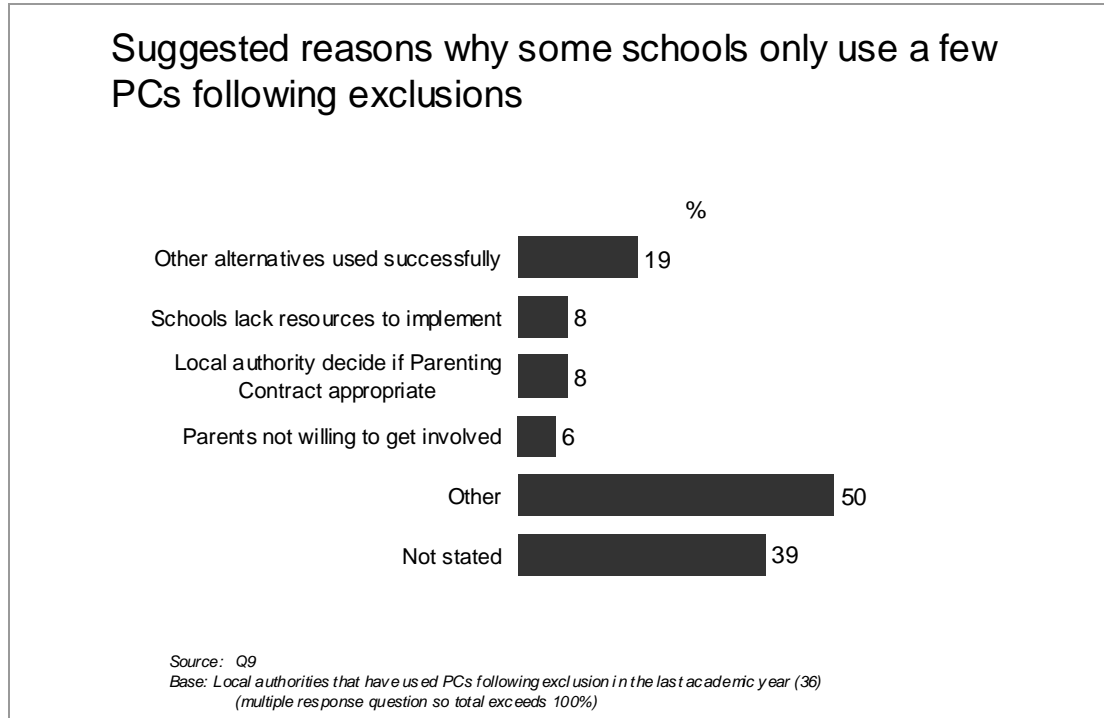
Verbatim answers were provided; however as Charts 10 to 13 show for both attendance and behaviour, the most common reason is that other alternatives are successfully used.

Chart 10



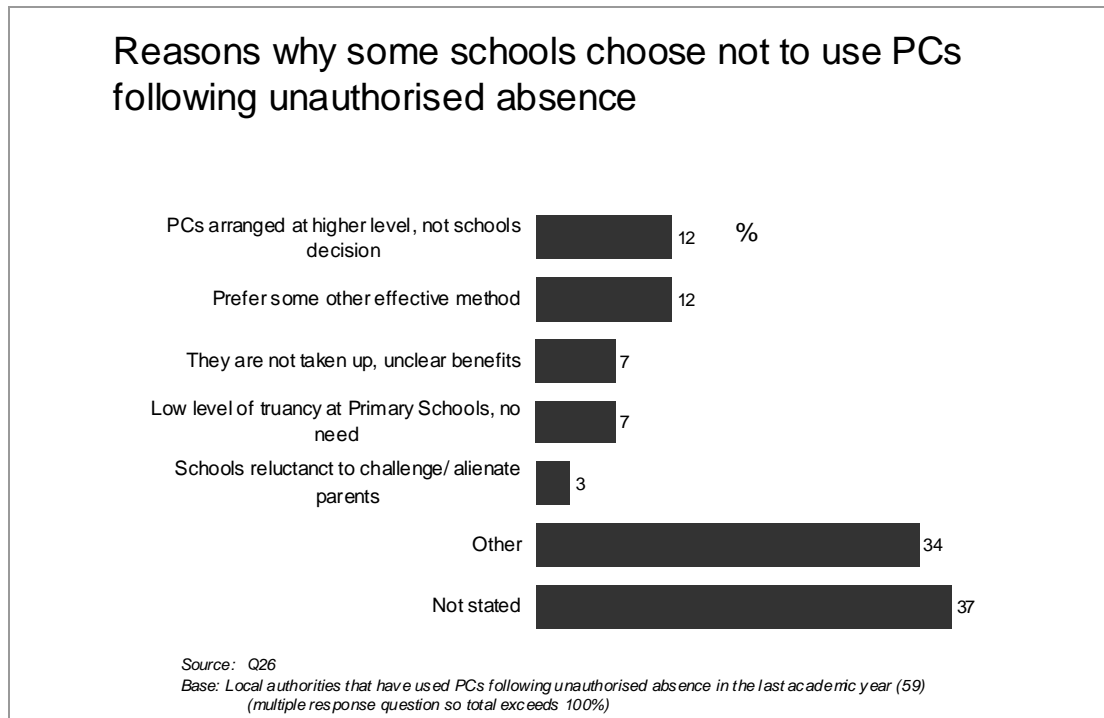
Similar reasons are given for why they are not offered more widely.

Chart 11



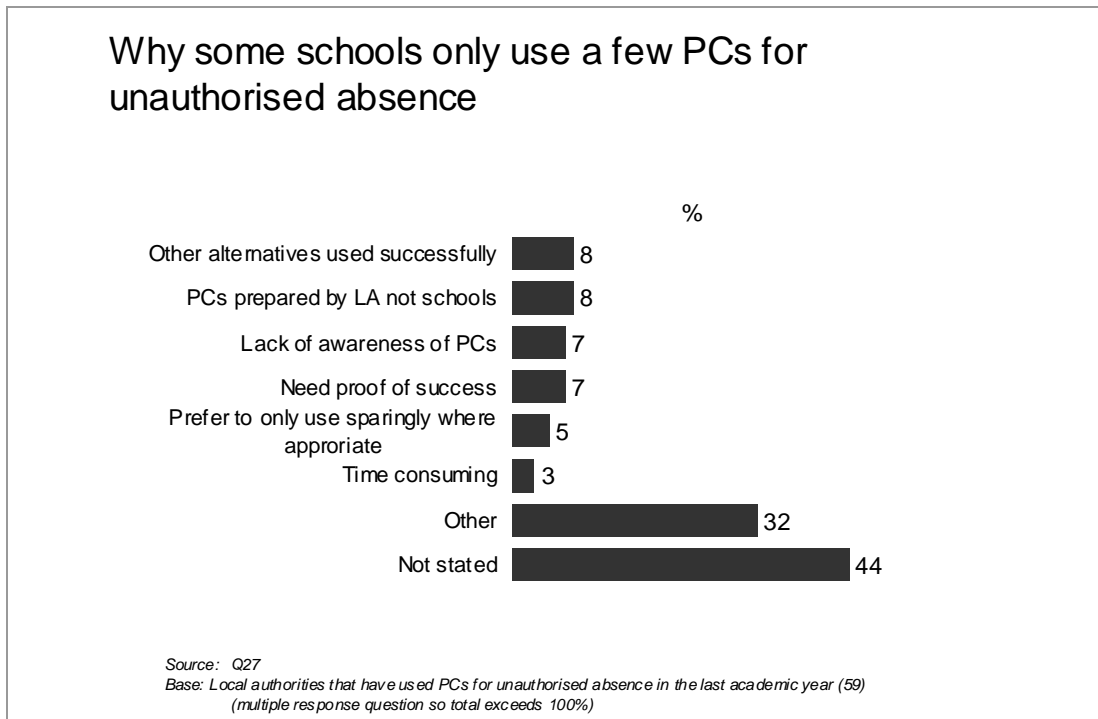
In the case of attendance, the reason that other alternatives were being used was still mentioned most, although less than in the case of behaviour, and the fact that the LA decides on them was raised as frequently.

Chart 12



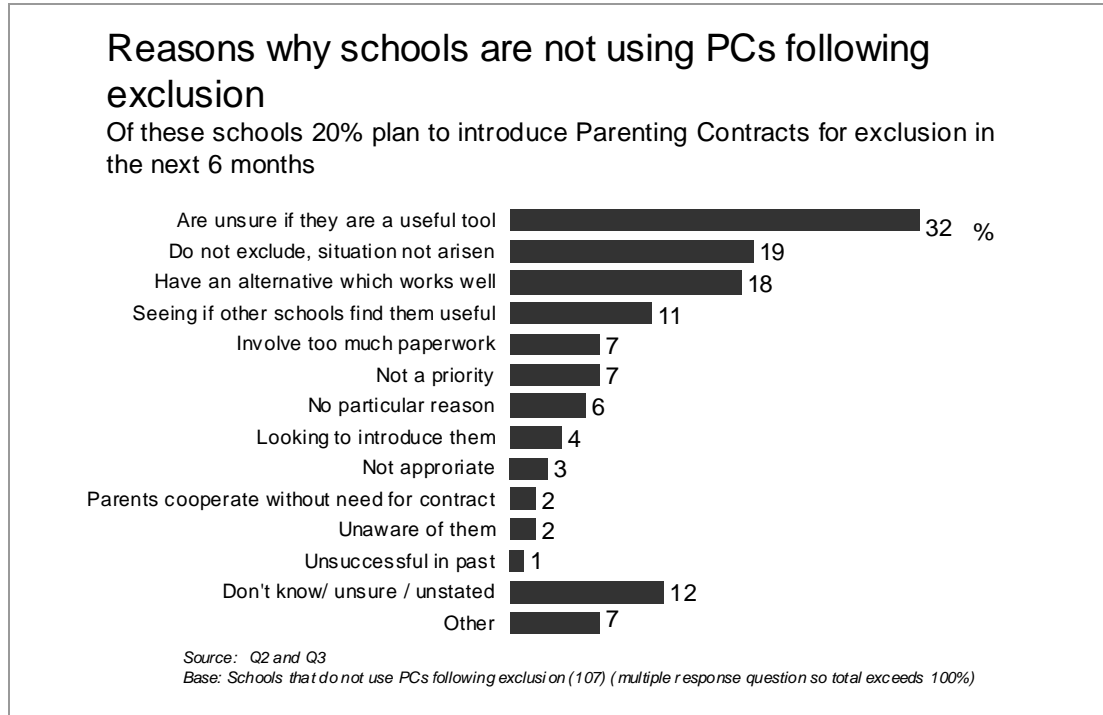
A wide range of answers were given for schools not offering more Parenting Contracts for attendance, with no clear consensus as Chart 13 shows.

Chart 13



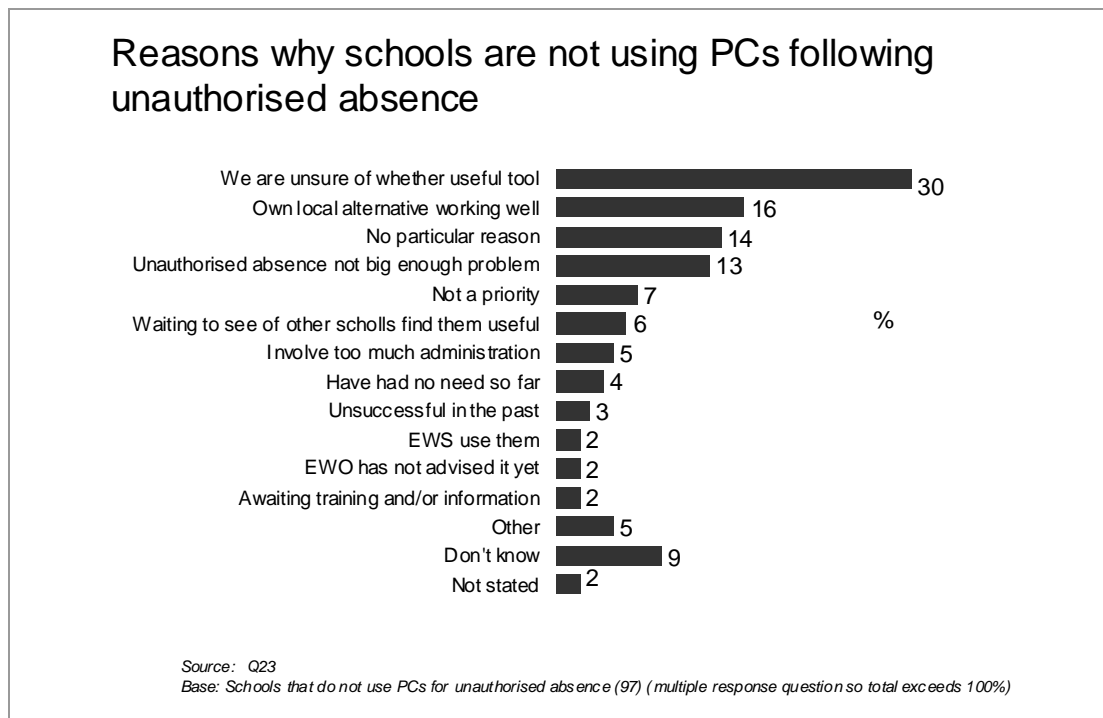
Reasons given by schools for not using Parenting Contracts for behaviour are shown in Chart 14, with the most common ones being ‘unsure whether they are a useful tool’, or that they have an alternative method of handling behaviour issues, which is felt to work well, and the fact that the school does not exclude children. Despite this, the survey revealed that a fifth of the schools which do not currently use Parenting Contracts plan to start using them for behaviour in the next six months.

Chart 14



A similar proportion of schools not using Parenting Contracts for attendance (18%) plan to use them for attendance in the next six months. The reasons given for not using them for attendance are shown in Chart 15. Again, uncertainty about whether they are useful is the main explanation for this.

Chart 15



5. The process of administering the Parenting Contract

The case studies featured just those schools that were using the LA to administer the Parenting Contract because of the sampling and recruitment methods.

There were two distinct ways that Parenting Contracts were used along a spectrum. At one end of the spectrum was using the contract as ‘**a strong deterrent**’, a harsh and very serious initiative where the Parenting Order or the Penalty Notice was stressed and parents were rarely given a second chance. At the other end of the spectrum was using the contract as a ‘**softly, softly**’ approach and diluting the above message and focusing on the support aspect.

“The LA and the school sit on one side and the parent and the child on the other....It is quite intense...it’s like a job interview. That’s the feeling we want the parents to have” (Local Authority)

“First meeting needs to be long to make sure everybody’s comfortable... often you can see that people are really scared and worried and you’re not going to get the best out of them if they feel they’ve come to be assessed... some of the parents were taught by the same teachers facing them in that room.”(Local Authority)

In most cases, the contract was used with both approaches and one or the other dominating at any one time along the life of a contract depending on the engagement of the parent.

There were differences in how Parenting Contracts were administered across the key deliverables of:

- The lead up to offering the Parenting Contract in terms of triggers
- Who was involved
- The meeting / roles
- The contract contents and how this is arrived at
- The document itself
- The review period

5.1 The lead up to offering a Parenting Contract

Prior to the Parenting Contract being offered, a host of other actions will usually have been put in place by the school. The child is likely to have received sanctions within the schools discipline system for their behaviour (and in some cases for their attendance). These usually included detentions, isolation, being 'on contract' and being excluded. Parents were usually informed about these and at some point after the second or third exclusion, invited to the school for a meeting. A Parenting Contract would be offered after this or further meetings and sometimes after a warning.

For attendance, schools followed a very similar and structured system; parents were contacted on the first day of the child's absence and then expected to contact the school for any subsequent days, to authorise the absence.

Absence was monitored closely by staff in school and the LA and children showing continuous periods of absence or unusual patterns were identified. Parents were then notified of this. In one LA, a 'traffic lights' system of communication existed between school and parents. Reports were sent home to parents each term for the child's level of attendance and a colour was attributed to that level: a green report indicated a very good level of attendance (95% or more), amber indicated reasonably good levels of attendance and a red report indicated poor attendance.

"But in our case it's really worked (red, amber green reports) as attendance seems to have improved... they (parents) don't like getting the red letters basically."(School)

The school will usually arrange a meeting with the parent and warn them that if attendance does not improve that the LA will need to get involved. If attendance still does not improve and has reached below 85% in some localities or below 80% in others in a term then the LA sets up an initial meeting to investigate the problem or goes straight to arranging a meeting as the start point for the Parenting Contract. There were a number of alternative names given to these meetings - 'The review meeting' or 'Attendance Panel'. At this point, a plan may be implemented for the level of attendance that needs to be achieved and when this must be achieved by. If

parents do not attend this meeting and fail to contact the EWO or staff responsible then they will often be summoned to court.

For behaviour, the school will either issue a Pastoral Support Plan or a Parenting Contract when the child is at risk of permanent exclusion or if the family are in need of multi-agency support. As indicated earlier though, every situation is unique and schools and LAs use their judgement about when to issue the Parenting Contract or PSP.

The quantitative survey of LAs showed that for both behaviour and attendance, the most common process for deciding whether a Parenting Contract was appropriate was that the school and LA decided on this together (in a third of behaviour cases, and half the attendance ones) Charts 16 and 17 show the breakdown of responses. However, this should be taken with some caution, as the LAs were evidently talking about the schools they deal with, while the qualitative stage revealed that they readily admit that other schools are dealing with situations and possibly doing Parenting Contracts, without reference to the LA.

Chart 16

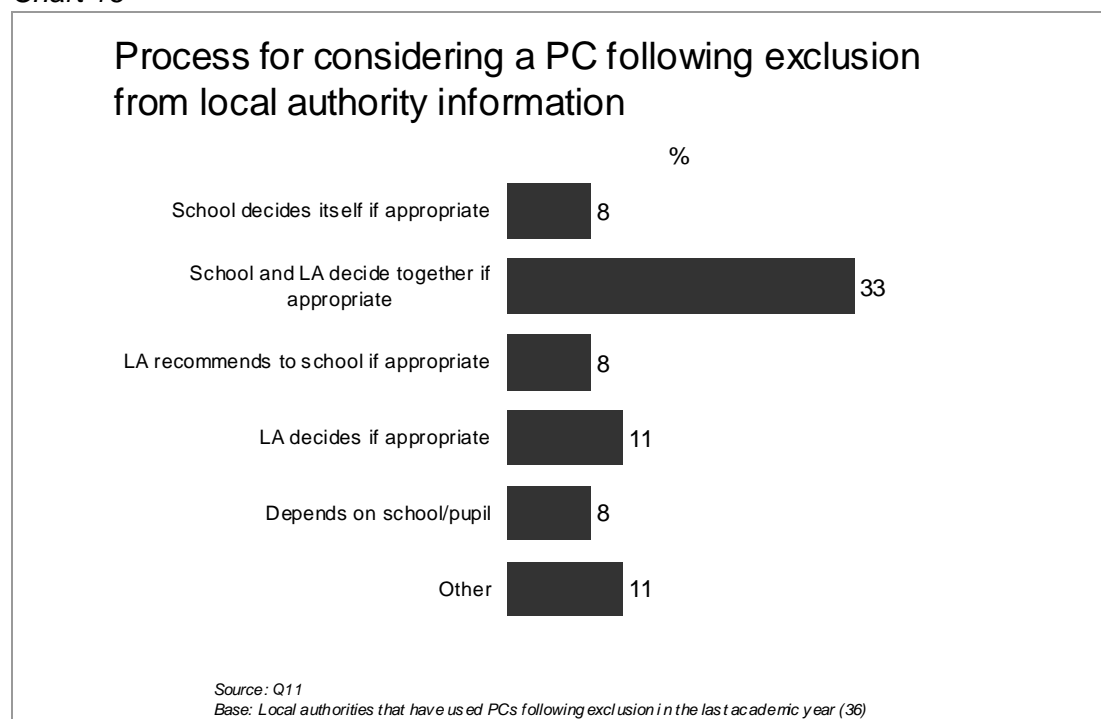
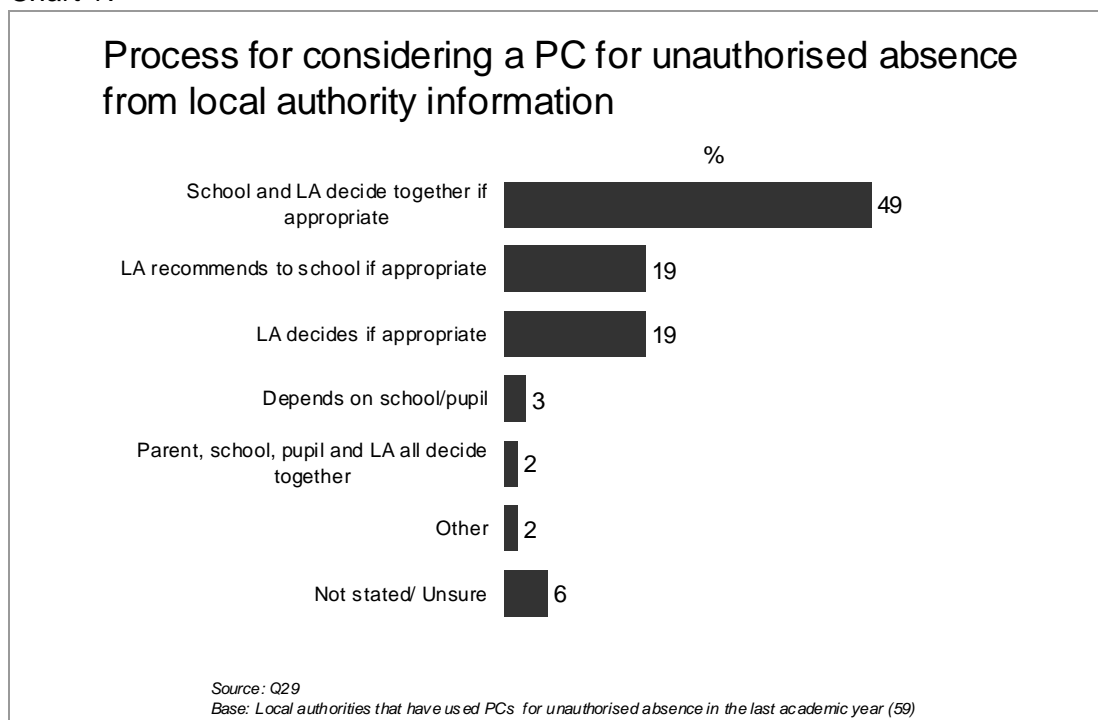


Chart 17



Caution is needed because of the small base sizes, but in the quantitative schools survey for behaviour, they tended to say that it was the school that decided that a Parenting Contract would be appropriate, more often than a combined decision with the LA. For attendance though, the 'joint decision' option was most commonly chosen.

It also revealed that there have frequently been instances where the parent has not accepted the Parenting Contract, indicating that there may sometimes be an issue in terms of how the principle is presented to parents. Charts 18 and 19 illustrate the extent of this for both behaviour and attendance Parenting Contracts and indeed half of the LAs have experienced this at least a handful of times for attendance.

Chart 18

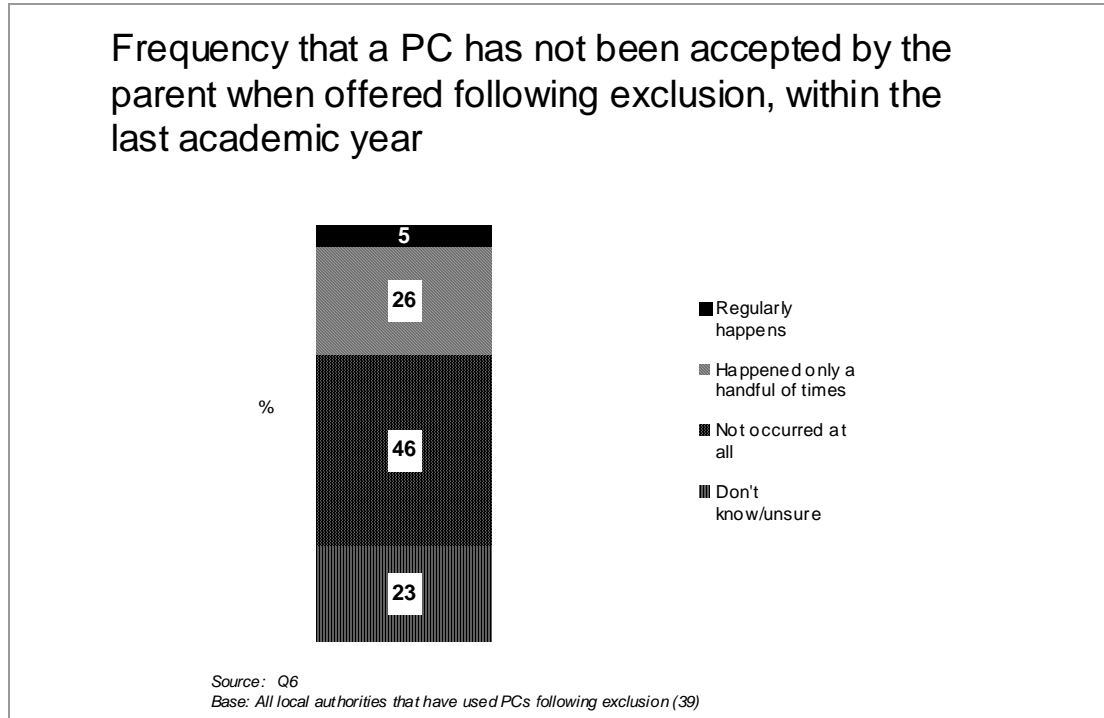
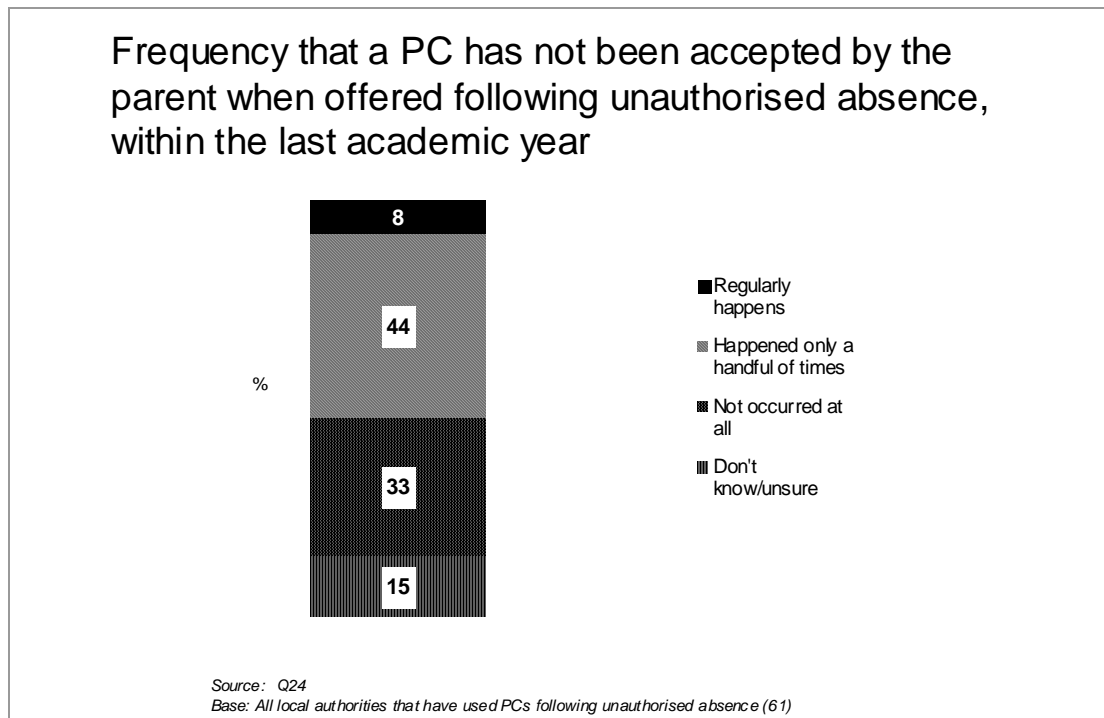


Chart 19



5.2 Who was involved in the Parenting Contract

The LA played a key role in all the Parenting Contracts within the case studies. In addition to communicating with parents, the LA chaired the initial and subsequent meetings and arranged any support and third party interventions.

The child was usually, but not always present. There were mixed views about whether it was useful for the child to be present; in some cases, it was felt necessary to highlight to the child the severity of their actions. However, some LAs felt that the intervention should be directed more at parents.

“It’s called a Parenting Contract after all.” (Local Authority)

“The contract is with the parent.” (Local Authority)

“In some cases obviously it could be disadvantageous to have the child there listening to what the parent intends to do” (Local Authority)

Schools varied as to who was allocated to be involved in the Parenting Contract and to some extent, this depended on the volume of Parenting Contracts being administered at the school. In some schools, the deputy head or head teacher would be the one to initiate contacting the LA and being present at the first meeting. The view was held by many, that having very senior staff involved increased the seriousness of the problem to the parents and child and was therefore necessary. However, some of the larger secondary schools were increasingly making attempts to minimise the amount of pastoral care being done by their teaching staff. Responsibility for pastoral care was either being divided between lots of teaching staff (heads of years) or performed by non-teaching staff (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) , ‘Learning Managers’ and ‘Attendance Officers’).

Furthermore, senior staff confessed that, as the volume of Parenting Contracts being administered increased, their availability to be involved would be more limited.

LAs did report that school governors were sometimes involved in a Parenting Contract although this was rare. However, when a governor did get involved this was claimed to be beneficial for a number of reasons:

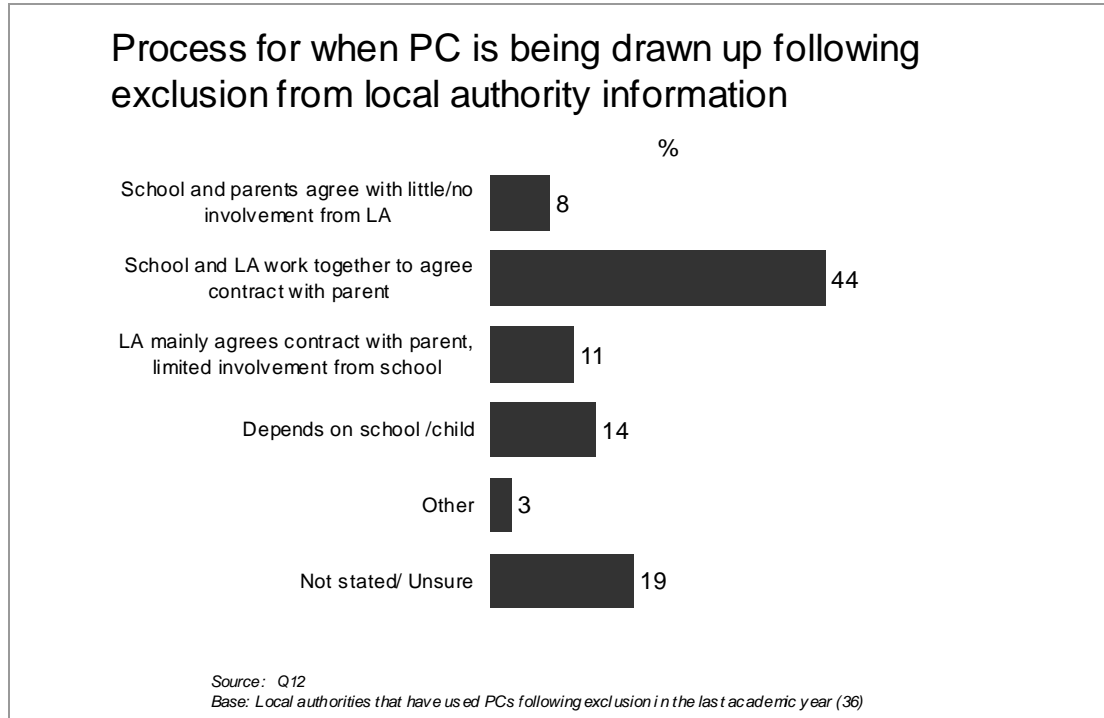
- To add more gravity and seriousness to the situation;
- To be objective and or to help mediate between the parents and the school;
and
- To enforce the school to support the child.

“I have some schools where a governor gets involved and it works really well.... It means the school has to sit up and take notice and do what they say they are going to do..... It’s good for the parent to see that there is someone checking up on the school.” (Local Authority)

In one LA, schools referred also to having translators and/or social workers from Somali and Vietnamese backgrounds available when necessary to address cultural issues with regards to behaviour or attendance.

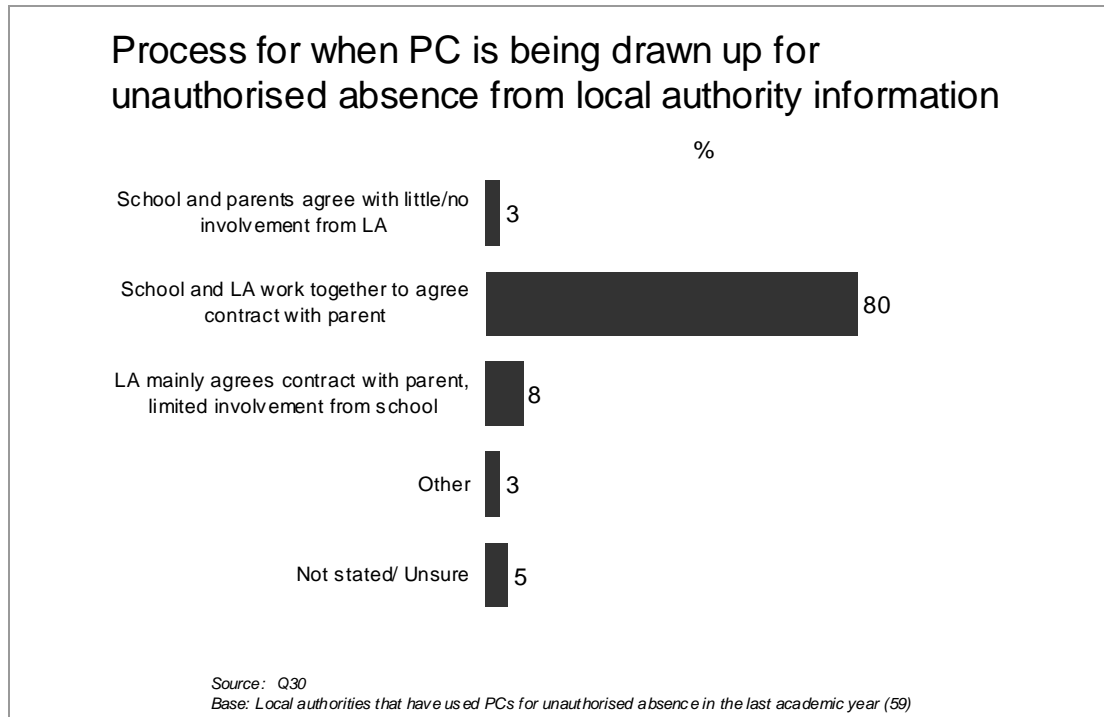
The LA quantitative survey revealed that when the Parenting Contract is being drawn up the most common process is for the LA and the school to work together with the parent to agree the contents. In the case of behaviour, 44% of LAs claim this is the model, as can be seen in Chart 20.

Chart 20



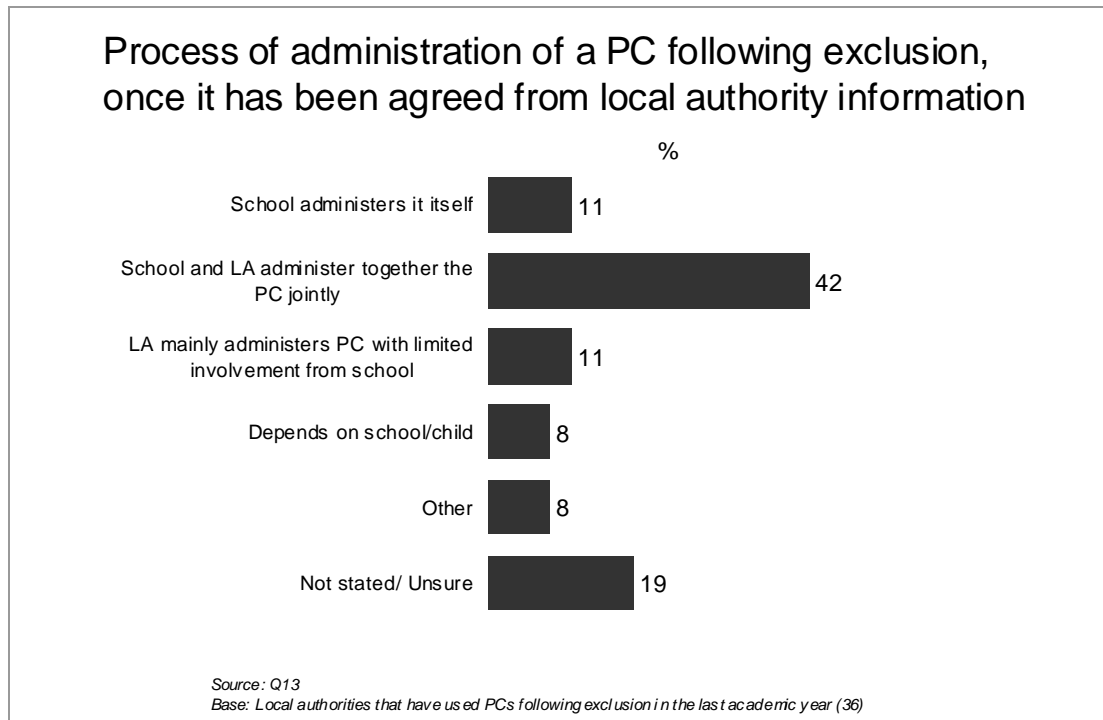
This is particularly the case with attendance Parenting Contracts, where 80% of LAs agree this is what happens, as Chart 21 illustrates.

Chart 21



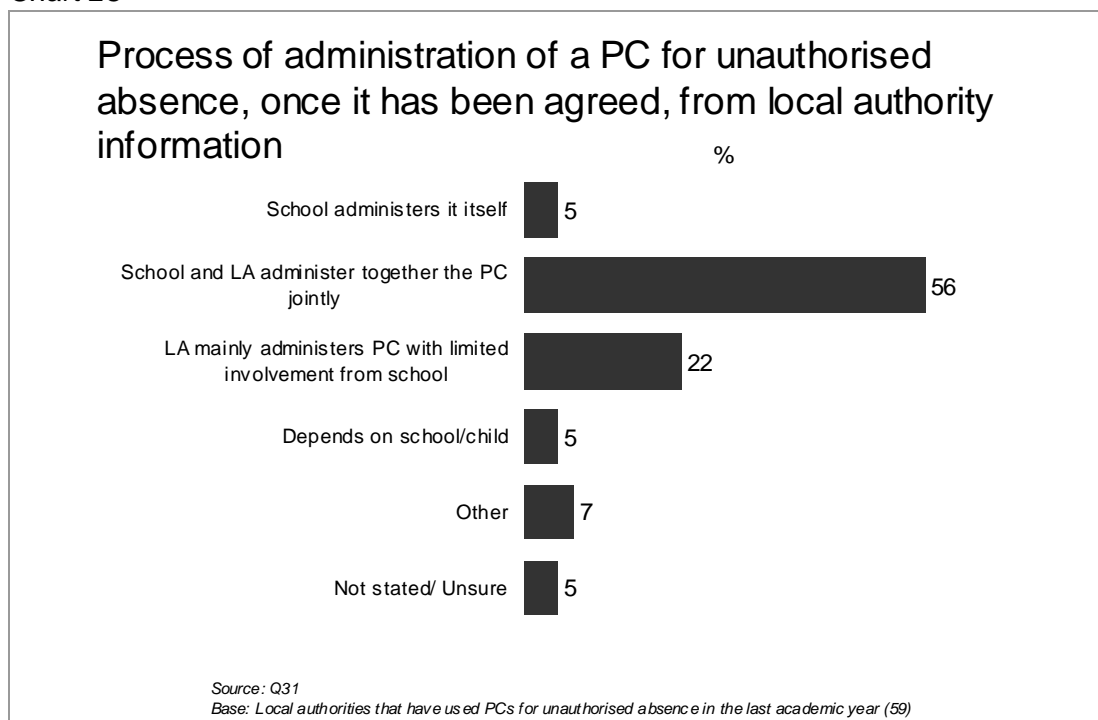
Charts 22 and 23 illustrate that the LA and school tend to share responsibility for the administration of the Parenting Contract for both attendance and behaviour. This contradicts the findings of the case studies which indicated that LAs took on the majority of the administration.

Chart 22



In the case of attendance, the school is less likely to act without the assistance of the LA.

Chart 23



5.3 The initial Parenting Contract meeting

The initial meeting was significant in that, this was what parents recalled most clearly when describing the Parenting Contract. This first meeting usually set the tone for how the Parenting Contract would be managed by the LA and school. This was usually held on school premises. The number of people, seating arrangements, tone and duration of the meeting varied, and in some cases, these aspects were controlled to suggest the formality and seriousness of the situation or to create a friendly, non threatening environment.

Parents generally acknowledged that these meetings maintained a balance of formality and friendliness. Parents were sometimes keen for the tone of the meeting to be serious and threatening so as to impact on their child, if the child was attending.

“It was a bit tense, but friendly as well.”(Parent)

“For the boys, that first meeting felt like a punishment, unfriendly and abrupt. The tactics were good....the boys are different now.”(Parent)

“There have been five meetings. I always feel they have his best interests at heart.... They’re always nice and friendly... didn’t feel like a punishment.”(Parent)

All stressed the importance of the role of the mediator at this meeting. In the majority of cases, the LA played this role. Parents and children in particular appreciated there being someone reasonably objective present. This was especially important for those parents whose relationship with the school had broken down.

“At the beginning having the LA there was good. He (son) understood the seriousness of it with the others there. It’s nice to have someone from outside. Teachers work together but the LA are unbiased and put their own opinions forward. It’s helpful. It felt like it wasn’t just (son) being ganged up on. She was nice to him.” (Parent)

“Basically we all sat round and X had his say, the school had their say, I had my say and the people who do the contract said what they think and in all fairness they really did stick up for X against the school and X ended up with a time out card.” (Parent)

“The first meeting they actually stuck up for him... he’s not used to this; they listened to him without talking down to him.” (Parent)

*“I had one where the deputy head came in and said right, so and so you’ve been a right **** and this can’t go on and it carried on like this for a while.....I said ‘so how can we move forward’ to gently shut him up.” (Local Authority)*

“The role we play in Parenting Contracts is as a broker and sometimes the relationship may have broken down between the school and the family.... The child is having difficulty communicating with the teaching staff and the teaching staff is having difficulty communicating with the parent....We have to get the school to see the side of the child.” (Local Authority)

Again the intention behind meetings varied but it was deemed important to investigate the situation at home and to allow the parent the time and comfort to be able to disclose this during the meeting. Schools were not always as cooperative with this approach because of time constraints.

“We like to set aside up to an hour for the first meeting....they (School) say can we move this on because its their break or they’ve got a lesson but you can’t because someone’s just divulging something that is absolutely crucial...”(Local Authority)

“We only have half an hour before the next parents come in or its break time..... We often know the situation at home because the head of year has met with them already... we are not social workers!” (School)

5.4 The Parenting Contract contents

All parties were generally encouraged to suggest their own targets and objectives and a good initial meeting helped all to establish what type of targets would be useful. In particular, the importance of parents taking ownership of the targets was stressed.

“We need to give them (parents) reasonable things to do...things that are achievable...we ask them for solutions so they can take ownership of the decisions that are made - I think that’s why they (Parenting Contracts) are very successful.” (Local Authority)

There were some instances where the Parenting Contract was drawn up ahead of the meeting and presented to the parent who was just made to sign.

LA staff took overall responsibility for moderating the targets and based on the discussions, helping to create suitable and supportive targets.

“It (the Parenting Contract) has to start off as a blank canvas because it needs to be driven by their (parent and child) needs.” (Local Authority)

In one LA, the school was asked to write a report on the child prior to the meeting and the child was given a form in which to write down what they wanted to achieve and how they thought they could be supported to make those achievements. This encouraged the child to contribute in the meeting.

In some LAs they worked from a typical list that was constantly being adapted but more often than not, a list existed 'in their head' as to what kinds of support was available in their area.

All or most were given a list of targets 'things they had to do' to support the child into acceptable behaviour or attending school. Contracts varied considerably as to how SMART these targets or objectives were. For example, 'I will encourage my child to attend school on a regular basis' versus 'I will escort my child to the school and then handover to the learning mentor every day for the next month'

In some areas, parents were always offered a parenting skills course typically lasting between 10-16 weeks. In more extreme cases where the parent was not able to cope with being with other people, there was the facility to have one-to-one parenting training and or support. In a few areas, LA staff had access to their own parenting expert (a EWO that had been trained to offer one-to-one parenting support). In other areas, they were only occasionally offered, either because it was felt that the parent would not benefit or if in that area there was poor transportation or the courses were oversubscribed. Other support measures offered by the LA varied according to the need but included any of the following:

- Buying the family an alarm clock for attendance problems
- Referrals to Pupil Referral Unit or private off site units
- Referrals to Youth Inclusion Projects or other schemes involving an activity
- Referrals to counselling or support groups.

Contracts varied according to how many (if any) targets or objectives were set for the school to do.

Schools often benefited from LA suggestions for supporting the child and in one case study; this had led to a new initiative being used throughout the school for all children.

"They suggested a 'time out card' which we had not heard of before....The child can use this card for when they get very frustrated to ask to be let out of the lesson and to find an allocated member of staff... they then can be helped to calm down and escorted back to lesson. It avoids them disrupting the rest of

the class and getting into trouble. It's worked well for X and now we use it within school for other pupils." (School)

School targets varied according to the situation but more common targets included:

- Arranging for the child to have a mentor;
- Rearranging the child's lessons if particular classes were difficult;
- Allowing the child to swap their options if a particular subject or teacher was causing them significant stress;
- Allowing the child a place to go in school at the end of term to catch up on work missed during absences or exclusions;
- Arranging for the child to see the school nurse for issues relating to menstruation, nits or any other medical problem;
- Offering children in Key Stage 4 the option of studying off site temporarily or for some of the week (vocational course);
- Offering the child a work experience placement as an incentive; or
- Offering vouchers or money (funded by the police in one particular LA).

Parents were encouraged to suggest their own solutions or objectives and often this was part of the communication prior to the first meeting to help facilitate their involvement in the meeting.

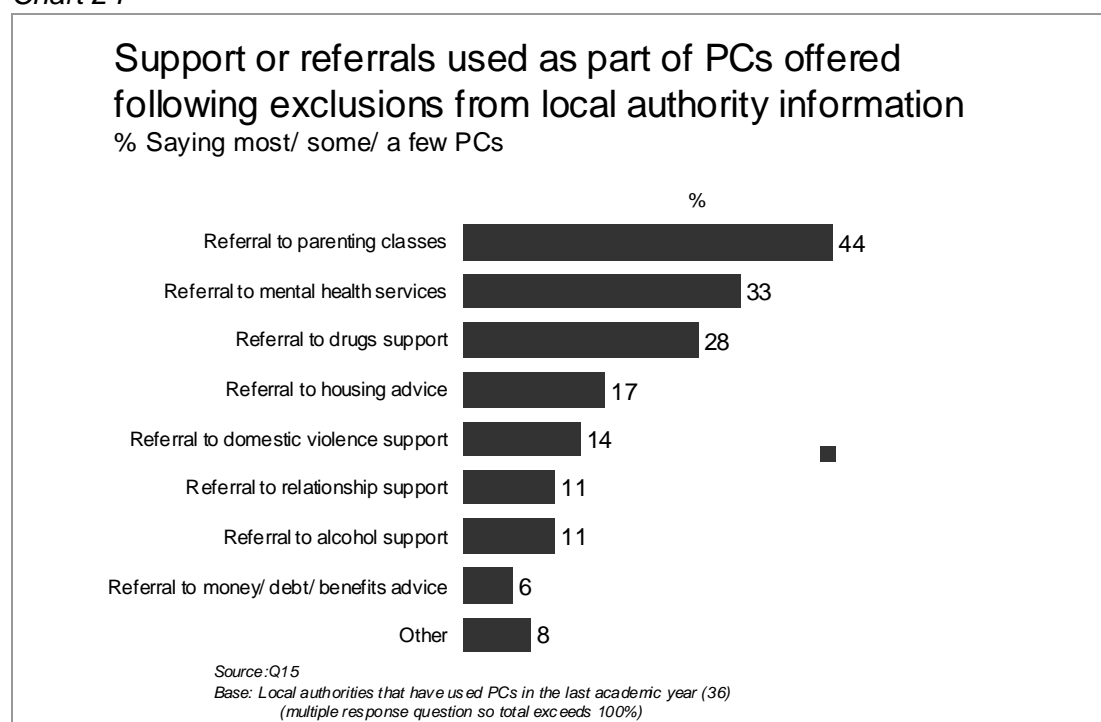
Other more common objectives or solutions for parents included:

- Using rewards and sanctions on the child;
- Keeping a behaviour diary on the child (especially in the morning if the problem was only non attendance);
- Making sure the child has full equipment and uniform on a daily basis;
- Making sure that a doctor's note or medical certificate is provided to school for absences due to illness;
- Escorting the child to school if the problem is non attendance;
- Receiving visits from a parent support advisor;
- Attending a support group or having counselling; or
- Attending parental skills courses.

The child's targets closely mirrored the other parties' targets; they were asked to commit to using the support being offered to them. Furthermore, they were given clear targets for the level of attendance needed (either above 85% or 100%) and told not to receive any disciplinary procedures in school to risk getting excluded.

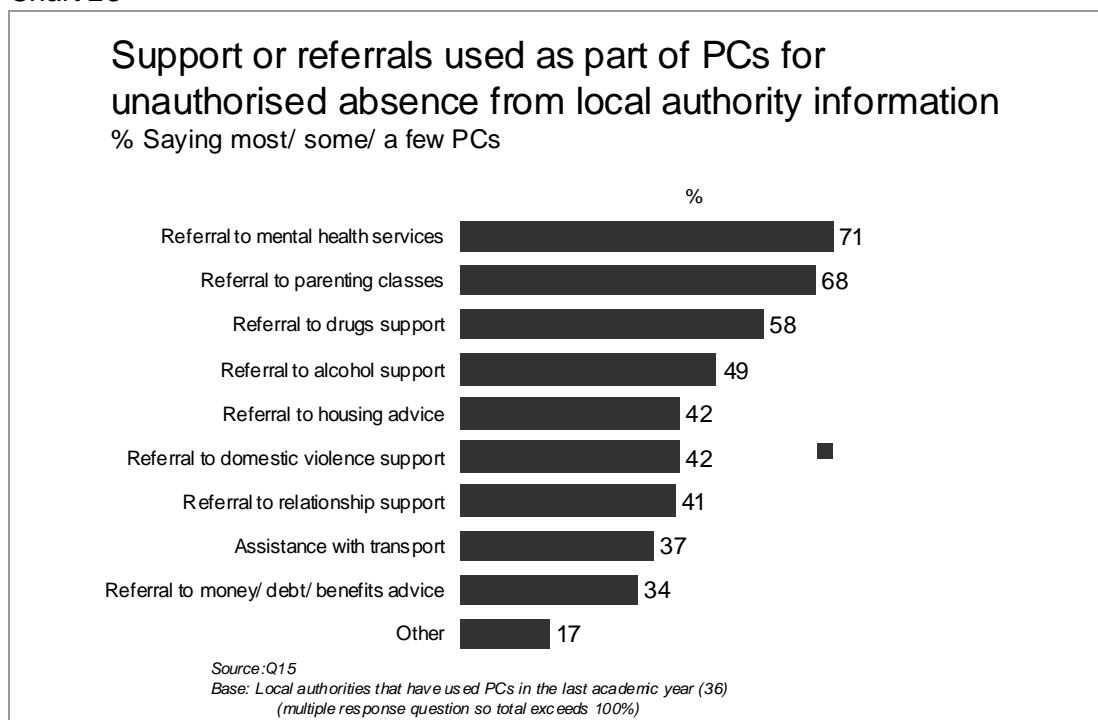
The LA survey also indicated that a wide range of different types of support were being offered to parents in the establishment of Parenting Contracts, with mental health services and parenting classes having been offered in some cases by the largest proportion of LAs for both types (see Charts 24 and 25).

Chart 24



Generally more responses were given for the same question for attendance, but this is likely to be due to the LAs' greater involvement with the contract details for attendance than for behaviour.

Chart 25



The schools' survey also indicated that a range of types of support and referral were used in the establishment of Parenting Contracts.

5.5 Signing the document

The Parenting Contract document varied considerably but LAs generally agreed that it was essential that these were short, simple, user friendly and contained SMART targets. Some LA areas had been involved in the piloting of the Parenting Contracts and their templates had been approved and deemed exemplary by the DCSF.

If the parent failed to attend, a contract would be drawn up and sent out to the parent but of course, the targets would not then always be based on their specific situation. This scenario was rare and in most cases, parents did attend or meetings were rearranged for another time.

In some areas, the meeting and document was arranged around the child being involved and they were given the opportunity to sign the document.

Another difference was evident in the focus placed on the written document. Some parents (and most children) still in a live contract struggled to recall what was in the

contract and others were encouraged by LA staff to display the contract. In one case, a parent had laminated the contract and was using it as the child's placemat!

5.6 Communication

Schools were generally not that well informed about Parenting Contracts and they lacked knowledge about how they could be used. The term Parenting Contract had often been lost amidst the host of other terms being used to describe the intervention. Some LAs reported gathering together the heads of schools and informing them about Parenting Contracts. Some also said they had sent out information to schools showing how and when a Parenting Contract could be used along with a template for documentation. In one LA, a handbook was provided for schools to use on Parenting Contracts.

In terms of support required by schools to administer Parenting Contracts, in the quantitative survey, both for behaviour and attendance, there was little consensus. The most common requests were for more financial and legal support and clearer guidance.

LAs relied on the leaflets provided by the DCSF on Parenting Contracts and these were sent out to parents prior to the first Parenting Contract meeting. These were valued tremendously for their emphasis on support and helping to avoid the instinctive defensiveness from parents that was common at the first meeting.

Parents had been unaware of Parenting Contracts until informed about it when being offered by the school or LA.

There was some confusion on the part of schools and parents about when a Parenting Order would come into place for their situation, at what point the contract was considered breached and how many chances they would receive. Schools were not always sure about whose decision it would be to make a judgment about this.

LAs were not always sure about how their colleagues in other departments were using Parenting Contracts and only some LAs had shared practices and templates across attendance and behaviour. Similarly, staff were vague about whether systems

were in place to avoid a parent being offered a Parenting Contract for both attendance and behaviour.

“It’s no good us issuing a Parenting Contract for behaviour and then the following week the EWO turns up and wants to issue a Parenting Contract for attendance.” (Local authority)

Alongside the Parenting Contract intervention, LAs were focusing to various extents on prevention work for attendance. In one LA, this was recognised as being overwhelmingly successful by both schools and the children. Attendance levels had noticeably increased in the case study school after the LA had featured an attendance week at the school. A child spontaneously referred to the impact of this on herself.

“It was really good and got me thinking about why I should go to school... they should do more of that... I thought about the fact that I want to go onto college.” (Child)

6. The Impact of Parenting Contracts

For both attendance and behaviour, the impact of an individual Parenting Contract was also difficult to assess and attribute because of the other factors involved in a case that could affect the Parenting Contract either being successful or unsuccessful. Furthermore, staff felt that for some children, the effects of the Parenting Contract would take time to see, especially for those who had experienced problems for many years.

“But where there’s high deprivation and need, it can be inappropriate to prosecute because it won’t help...so we’ll review and sign up to something else. When problems have been in place for years, you don’t necessarily see changes in six weeks.” (School)

Schools and families were generally positive about the purpose of a Parenting Contract and the effect it had had on them in comparison to other interventions.

6.1 Monitoring and evaluation

Some LAs reported that contracts were checked for targets being SMART, including all relevant details such as parent’s full name and being signed.

“If the right name or an incomplete name is on the contract then we can’t prosecute and you’d be surprised how many contracts did not have the full or proper name.” (Local Authority)

In those areas where schools were offering Parenting Contracts on their own, LA staff reported having no involvement on the monitoring or evaluation of these.

Departments in a few LAs had started to identify good practice and had plans to evaluate the effectiveness of Parenting Contracts. However, beyond team meetings and general discussion there generally seemed to be little evidence of systems in place to collect information about the effectiveness of all Parenting Contracts offered within the LA.

Individual Parenting Contracts were monitored closely by both the school and the LA through a review procedure to see if targets set had been achieved or not and why.

6.1.1 The review period and meetings

As already stated, the review periods differed tremendously between LAs and between individual cases. For attendance, there was more consistency over the time period and process but for behaviour, this was more fluid.

Generally, an initial period of time would be given for the child's behaviour or attendance to improve. This varied from two to six weeks. In most cases, the review period would be extended if there was little or no improvement and closed if attendance or behaviour reached the target set.

The LA would start prosecution procedures if there were no improvements or positive outcomes from the support and the family were continuously failing to attend meetings or being uncooperative. The point of imposing prosecution was seemingly subjective and based on a range of factors to do with the family's situation and the child's history.

There were cases for both attendance and behaviour Parenting Contracts where the child was showing no sign of improvement yet the parent was complying with all the targets set for them and in this scenario, LAs often deemed it unfair to prosecute. Instead, support for the parent and or child was usually continued and the situation monitored, albeit less frequently.

In some instances, softer measures were considered outside of the targets set e.g. the child's attitude, relationship with their parents and siblings, and general behaviour in the home. Parents would be asked to feedback on how the support offered to them had affected them and their family.

“Well, in the meeting I said that he's a nicer person now to have around the home... he helps with stuff around the house and helps his brother with homework.” (Parent)

Schools and LAs often felt it was necessary to keep monitoring specific cases and adapting the targets. Some behaviour Parenting Contracts had been live for almost 12 months with monthly review meetings.

“It would be doing a disservice to the child and the parents if we said you’ve had six meetings now we have to close the case.... Some cases are very complicated.... in keeping this child in a Parenting Contract we can get them into year 10.” (Local Authority)

LAs varied in the targets they set for the level of expected attendance. Some insisted on the child improving to 100% attendance in a term, others set the target at 85% in an attempt to make the target more achievable.

“We set it at 85% for him and being late at 50% of the time...we want to see steady improvements, as targets are achieved new targets are set... it’s ongoing, carrot rather than stick.” (School)

Parents were generally appreciative of the review meetings. Although, in some instances, it was very inconvenient and stressful for the parent to be taking time away from work. Parents were often reluctant and anxious about trying to rearrange the times of these meetings because they did not want to be seen as being uncooperative.

“It’s not good at all that I have to keep taking time off.... I’m a single parent and can’t afford to lose my job....I have to be seen to be cooperating and if the school say ‘3pm on Monday’ then I have to say ‘yeah sure’. (Parent)

“They (School) bring in reports on how she’s doing in class in respect of her behaviour, temperament, clothes, attitude, school work...and we see how she’s doing and discuss it, anything disruptive that’s happened, if she’s been sent out, discuss how it’s been at home for me...we review it...” (Parent)

Parents welcomed positive feedback during these meetings and this was generally felt to be encouraging for both parent and child.

During the review period, the LA usually checked that the parent was using the support being offered (for example, attending a parenting skills course). There was contact with service providers to find out the frequency of attendance and general attitude of the parent while there.

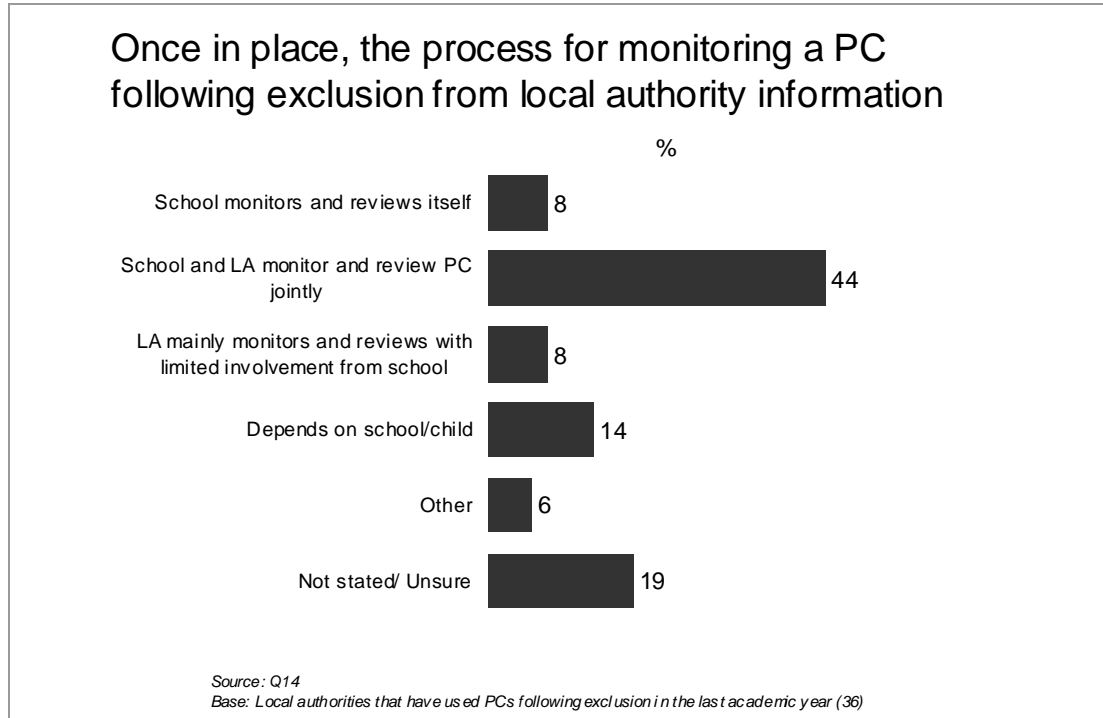
“They (parenting skills course provider) tell me if parents don’t turn up.” (Local Authority)

In between review meetings, LA staff sometimes visited parents to check on the progress being made. In the case of behaviour, schools monitored the child’s progress very closely.

In general, the offering and finalising of a Parenting Contract was variable for attendance and behaviour and across LA areas and for different families.

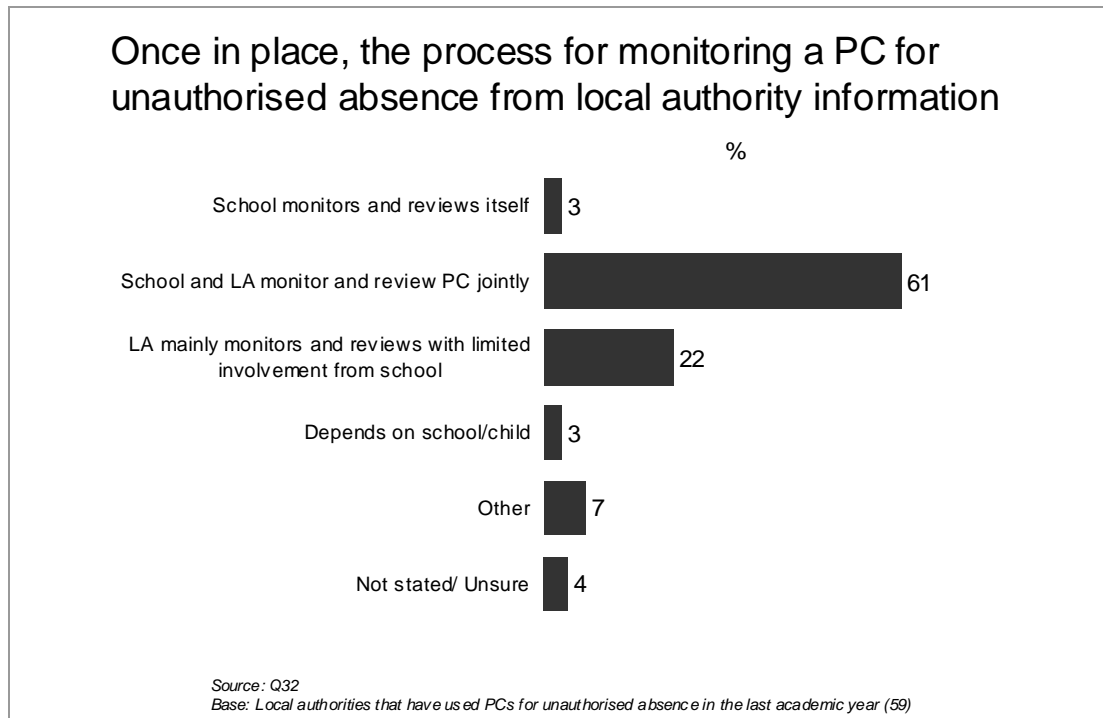
The LA quantitative survey again suggests that the combined team from the LA and school work together to monitor and review the Parenting Contract in the majority of cases, indicating that there is a consistent presence throughout the process from start to finish. Chart 26 illustrates this joint working for behaviour Parenting Contracts. However, nearly a fifth of respondents said they were not sure, who monitored the Parenting Contract following exclusion.

Chart 26



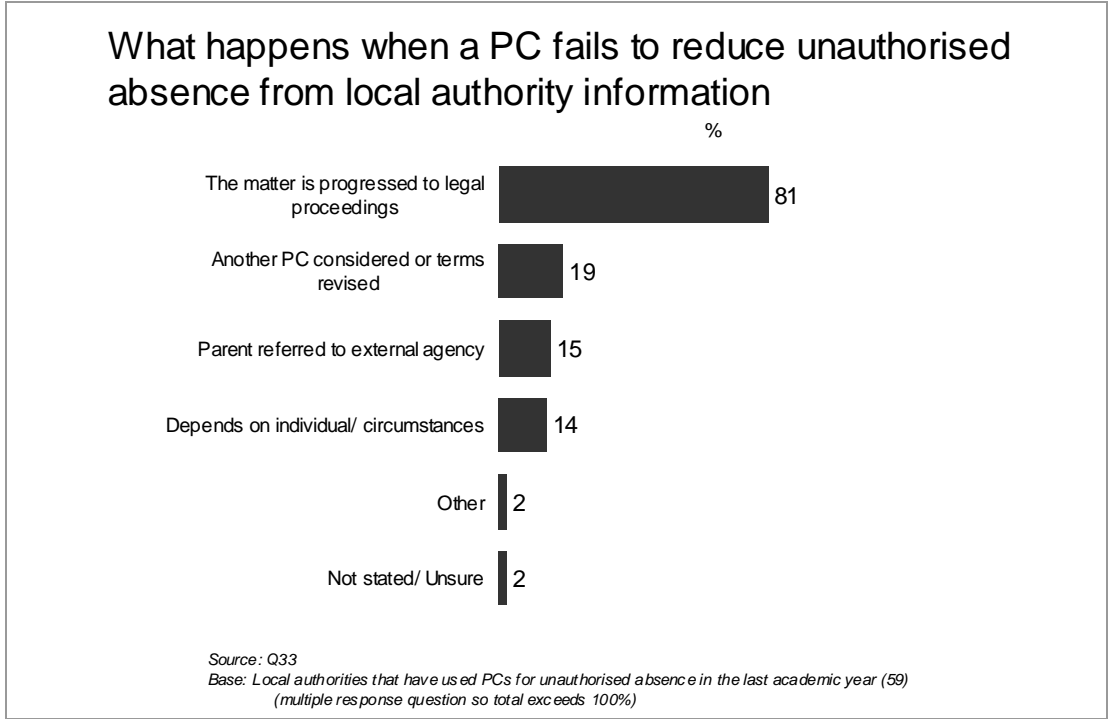
As seen already, this is even more likely to be the case for attendance-related Parenting Contracts. Chart 27 shows that 61% of LAs said there was more joint working with schools and only 4% were unclear about who monitored this.

Chart 27



In the case of an attendance-related Parenting Contract failing to improve attendance to the required levels, eight out of ten LAs said that they would progress the case to legal proceedings, as can be seen in Chart 28. This bears out the case study findings that often the Parenting Contract is one stage in a standard, structured case management process for many LAs and schools.

Chart 28



6.2 Attendance

LAs using Parenting Contracts for attendance reported very few instances where they needed to prosecute or witnessed a high number of repeat instances to offer Parenting Contracts.

“For every 1000 pupils that are referred to us we prosecute 10% and then of that 100 only 10% are repeat offenders.” (Local Authority)

The schools included as part of the case study research had observed attendance improving for most of those pupils involved in Parenting Contracts. Schools also reported improved attendance in the processes put in place prior to a Parenting Contract showing that the threat of a Parenting Contract was enough for changes to be made to ensure better attendance. As a consequence of this, schools were very positive about the involvement of the LA to improve their attendance records.

LA staff reported that the Parenting Contract formalised the practice that they were carrying out already but as a tool within this framework it was very useful and that practice generally, was having a very good impact on attendance and unauthorised absence in their area.

“They really have changed the way they work....helped us to set a really clear structure, getting us to ask the right questions, getting the school to think about their role.” (Local Authority)

They referred to the importance of diagnosis via the Parenting Contract initial meeting in understanding why there was an attendance problem. Often, the problem for the attendance was easy to solve but needed diagnosis and help and suggestions to solve the problem.

“He was being kept up all night by his brother playing his play station in the same room as him so couldn’t get up in the morning... we just made sure that his brother played his play station in another room and this helped.”(Local Authority)

“We found out that the reason for not wanting to go to school was because she had nits.... so I can refer her to a school nurse and get it sorted...it’s about eliminating all possible excuses.”(Local Authority)

The LA involvement and threat of prosecution were both motivators to encourage the family to be part of the solution.

Although taking a parent to court was likely to have negative consequences for the family, attendance was reported as usually improving just prior to the court case and afterwards.

6.3 Behaviour

Parenting Contracts offered for behaviour were much fewer than those being offered for attendance. Schools offering Parenting Contracts for behaviour had rarely offered more than five in total following exclusions (whether fixed period or permanent).

LAs said that it was generally difficult to isolate the effectiveness of the Parenting Contracts as it was often just one of a number of interventions put in place for a family. However, both schools and LAs were in agreement that in most cases, the Parenting Contract used following a fixed period exclusion had helped to avoid the child in question being permanently excluded and that generally, their behaviour in school had improved.

For the school, the LA’s involvement had impacted on their way of dealing with behaviour issues more generally and this was appreciated. Staff in schools described benefiting from sitting in on the meetings and learning more about how to deal with more challenging pupils. Furthermore, suggestions made by LA staff had been added to the school’s discipline and support portfolio and procedures.

“For me, it’s good because we don’t always know the best way to deal with these children.... I can sit in on the meeting and watch and learn.” (School)

The Parenting Contract was often considered the catalyst for other changes; for example, one school reported that the parents had changed their working hours to be home at a different time of the day so the child was not alone at home.

LAs and schools reported that the majority of behaviour Parenting Contracts had a positive impact in some way, shape or form even if all the targets were not met. Staff had observed in the majority of cases all or some of the following improvements in the child's:

- outlook and general attitude;
- confidence and maturity;
- relationship with school and teachers;
- relationship with the parent;
- relationship with their siblings; and
- their general attainment.

“He apologised to his father and he’s never done that before.” (School)

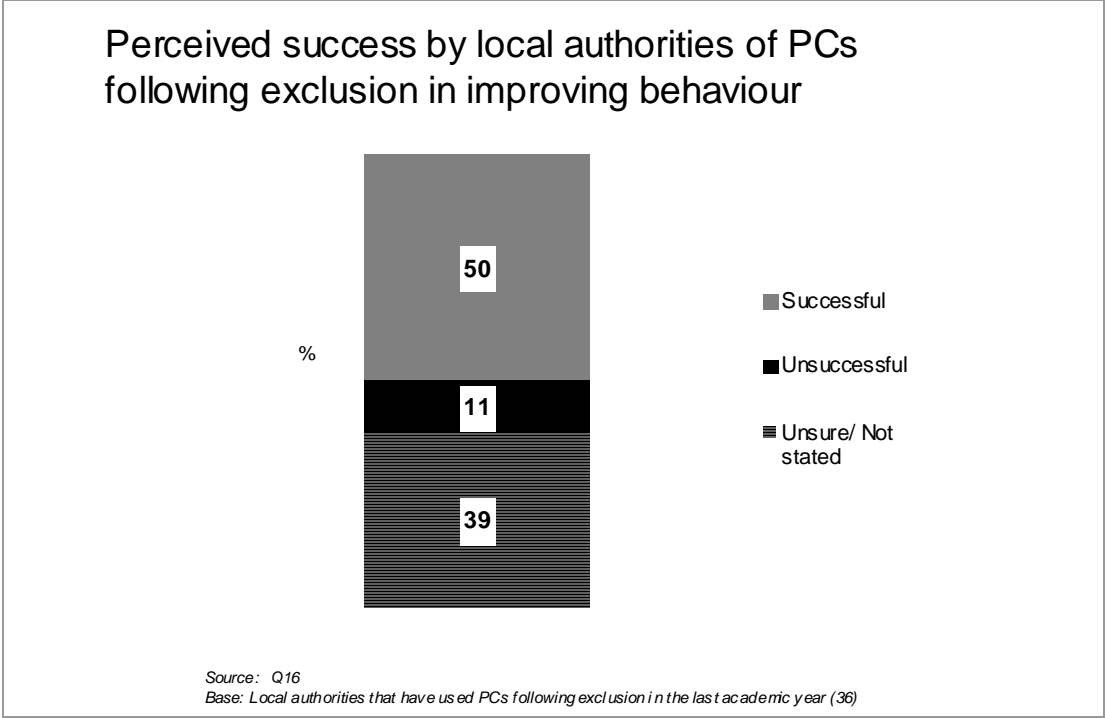
“He’s starting helping his younger brother with his homework which is really great to see.” (Parent)

“The head said to me... what have you done with (child) he’s even waving at me nowadays and saying hello.” (School)

The quantitative survey results reinforce the qualitative findings wholeheartedly. They revealed that Parenting Contracts were felt to be successful by LAs which used them both for behaviour and attendance.

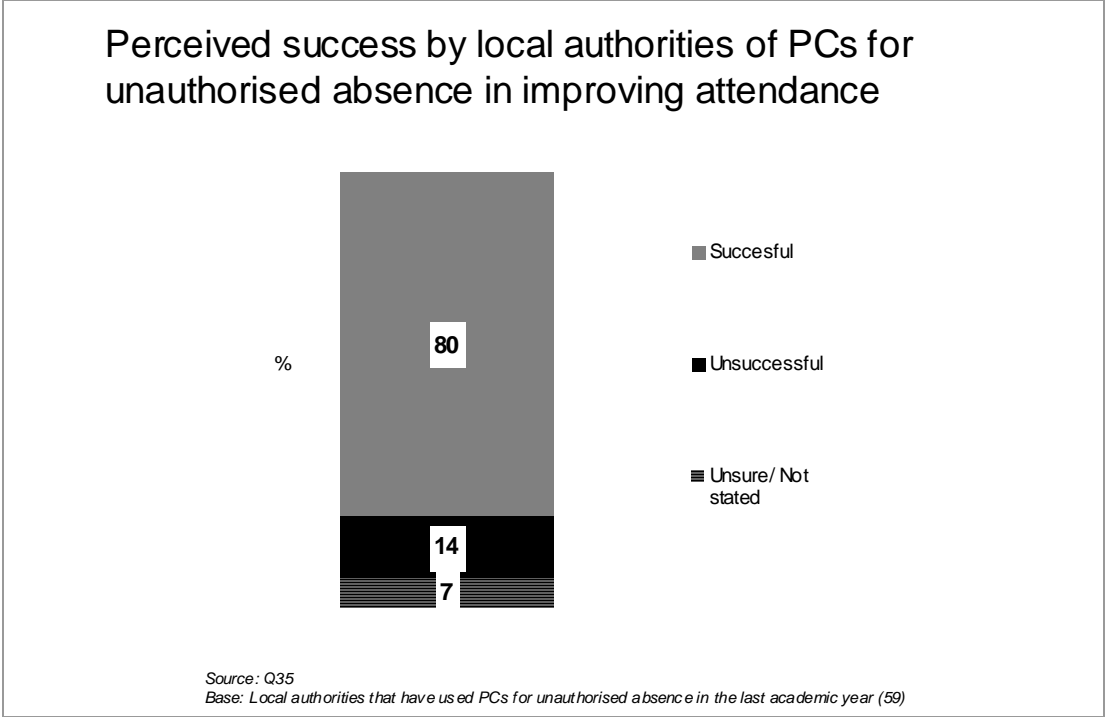
For behaviour, as Chart 29 illustrates, half of LAs using them saw them as successful, with the remaining LAs being unsure, rather than saying that they were unsuccessful.

Chart 29



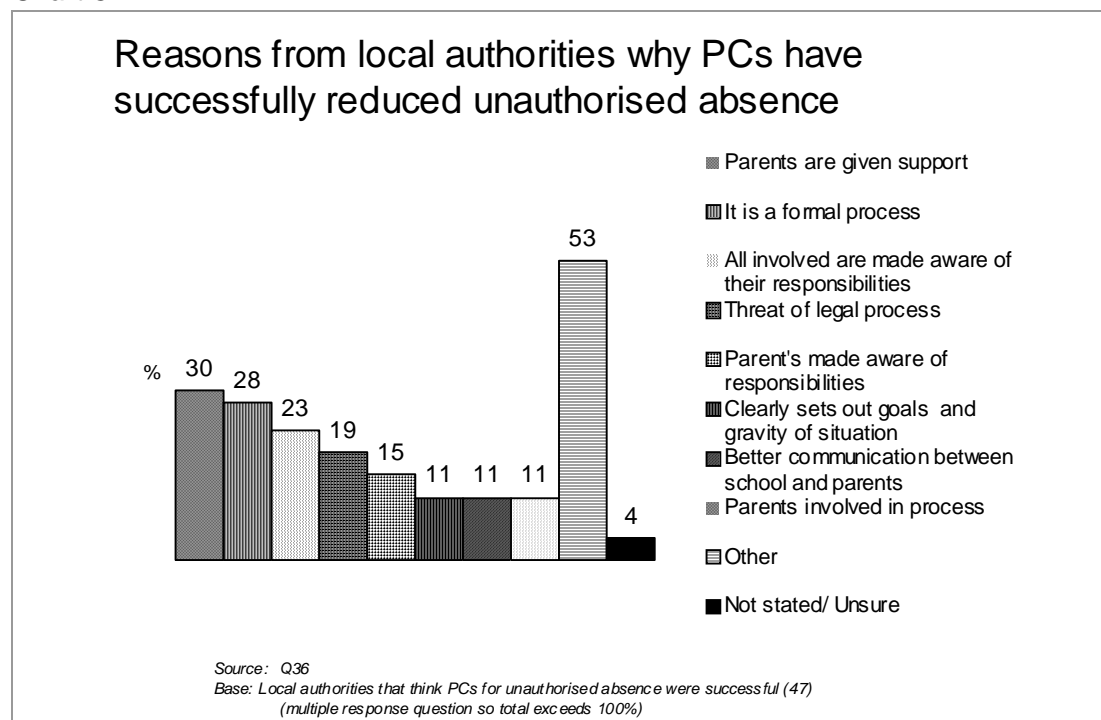
As Chart 30 shows Parenting Contracts for attendance are seen as successful by 80% of LAs, however, the case study stage reveals that in actual fact LAs may be evaluating their whole process, of which the Parenting Contract is a significant part, rather than the Parenting Contract in isolation.

Chart 30



As the case studies showed, a whole host of reasons were given for Parenting Contracts being successful in the quantitative research. The main reasons why Parenting Contracts are perceived to have been successful in improving behaviour are varied, as Chart 31 illustrates. The reasons centre on the support given to parents, formalising the process and emphasising the severity of the situation and the legal threat which forms part of it.

Chart 31



Similarly, and in line with the qualitative results, the quantitative survey shows that schools which use Parenting Contracts are broadly positive and see them as being successful. Six out of ten think they are successful for behaviour, and seven out of ten for attendance.

6.4 The parent’s experience of the Parenting Contract

Parents were often at a loss regarding how to handle their child’s behaviour or attendance problem. In the majority of the case studies parents had, or were still going through, very difficult circumstances. Some had felt low, depressed and unable to cope. They were often unavailable to their children both emotionally and practically. Some simply lacked the skills or confidence to deal with the problem.

“I was just desperate to have someone come in and help me... I was calling anyone to say I'm just sick of him” (Parent)

The Parenting Contract had a whole variety of effects on the parent and to some extent this depended on the parent's initial attitude.

A few parents appreciated the intervention because the relationship between them and the school had broken down and/or this forced the school to put into place changes that the parent wanted.

“Now the school is pulling their weight at long last.”(Parent)

There was recognition by parents that the Parenting Contract was intended to be a supportive measure and this aspect was viewed positively. However, it often took some time for them to recognise that the school and the LA were helping to prevent the child from being excluded.

“They are all there to help (child). No one wants him to be excluded.”(Parents)

For most parents their first reaction to the Parenting Contract was to be defensive, especially when not adequately informed and prepared for the first meeting. Initial feelings included feeling judged, intimidated and uncomfortable.

“You feel as though you're not doing things right as a parent...It makes you feel as though you're being undermined.” (Parent)

“Everyone's first reaction is that you're telling them they are a crap parent.” (Local Authority)

Parents' feelings or experiences were often dependent on the tone and format of the first meeting. As already mentioned, they did not always feel involved or comfortable to ask questions or express their views. If unrealistic targets were set, they did not always challenge these.

“There were too many people there... I didn’t want to talk about what was going on at home.” (Parent)

“They said I had to have a doctor’s note for any illness from now on.... These cost and if she just has a 24 hour thing, I can’t go bothering a doctor.” (Parent)

Often, parents felt that the responsibility being put on their shoulders was unfair, particularly if they had tried their best. They were concerned about external events beyond their control impacting on attendance or behaviour. In some cases, they had lost the child’s respect completely and were unable to exert any discipline. These parents felt helpless and were very anxious about being prosecuted.

“It was a very pressurised three months...unavoidable things could have happened.” (Parent)

“It’s hard to commit to some of the things on it because I have to work and I’m not at home so I can’t...It’s a bit hard as a single parent to stick to everything they say when you’re out at work a lot.”(Parent)

“I was doing everything I could and she was laughing at me. Her attitude is ‘whatever’”. (Parent)

Parents often projected the anxiety of prosecution onto the child in the hope that this would scare them into making changes.

“I kept telling her, do you want me to go to prison?” (Parent)

“We had to work it out because I’m a single parent and I can’t afford to pay a fine... he knows that.” (Parent)

“It gets her to focus and see the seriousness of it.” (Parent)

Generally, parents were comfortable about having signed the contract in retrospect but recalled feeling uneasy about it at the time. Almost all the parents included in the case studies either signed the contract or couldn’t recall if they had or not. Some of those that had signed it confessed to signing because they felt under some duress

and were not always clear about what they were signing. Some were not sure if they were given the contract and many had forgotten some or all of the targets they and their child were working towards (even in live cases).

“To be honest I signed it but ...I felt I’d lost him at that point...I just don’t know what I signed. It wasn’t explained at length and I was so upset at that point... So much was going on; I just couldn’t absorb it all.” (Parent)

“I was bad that day, I wasn’t feeling well...I can’t remember. I just signed up...I felt I had to do it...something about court. I can’t remember what it said or when it was.”(Parent)

Generally, parents were given just a few targets to commit to and these tended to be quite successful. Depending on the type of non-attendance, parents were often asked to accompany the child to school and this concept worked well to prevent further non-attendance (whether implemented or not).

“He was so embarrassed about having his mum walk him to school that he agreed there and then to get his attendance up to 100%” (Local Authority)

For attendance issues, parents were also often asked to contact the school on a regular basis to check that the child had registered. Most were happy to cooperate and do this but one parent did exclaim that this had increased her phone bill tremendously. In instances where the child was refusing to go to school in spite of these and similar actions the parent was issued with a behaviour diary to record the child’s refusals and behaviour when the parent makes attempts to get them up and walk them to school.

For behaviour and attendance issues, parents were frequently asked to impose rewards and sanctions and this generally worked well to motivate the child. This was considered relatively easy to put in place and parents welcomed it as a good suggestion.

Where appropriate, parents were offered or referred to a support service in relation to any problems they might have been experiencing e.g. for bereavement or substance abuse. This was welcomed and more so when transport was also provided to get to and from the provision.

In some areas, parenting skills courses were suggested as part of the contract.

6.4.1 Parenting skills courses

Parents were usually resistant to the idea of a course in parenting skills. However, many reported feeling very supported while there and that sharing their experiences was often therapeutic. Furthermore, the courses were sometimes enjoyed as a social event. In one instance, the course was referred to as 'inspirational'.

Parents described the courses as focusing on the emotional intelligence required to deal with bringing up a child. They referred specifically to learning how to manage their anger by role play and useful tips and hints.

Parents often claimed that the course had had a succession of positive outcomes; firstly, that it had increased their confidence and self esteem which then had a knock on effect on the way they related to their family and specifically the relationship with their child. In most cases, this had led to the child's behaviour improving and willingness to attend school. Some case studies featured parents whose attendance at these courses had been the catalyst for huge changes to improve family life.

"They give you a new way of looking at it."(Parent)

"They do work, I'm quite impressed."(Parent)

"She (the trainer) said don't let them rule you and that stuck with me and the classes have made me and my partner stick at our relationship." (Parent)

"With the parenting skills, she comes home and talks about what she's learned...and she's made friends." (Child)

"Now we sit down and talk about things... I don't shout... we are much closer... I can't say enough how good those parenting classes were....she (daughter) was glad I did it and said 'I'm proud of you mum for going'... we sat down and had a talk about her not going to school and how important it is and she respected me." (Parent)

"I get support though the classes and have learned about boundaries...and I get 1 to 1 support for me dealing with a disruptive child."(Parent)

“Once you can get the parent past the fear, embarrassment and denial, ‘if I go to a parent class it’s saying I’m a bad parent, I’m not’, once you can get past that and they sit down with another half dozen people in the same boat and suddenly they’re not isolated, they realise, well actually I’m not that bloody bad a parent. It’s as much about being a self help group as it is about somebody telling them what to do. It’s about their self esteem, knowledge, confidence to go back and change the way they manage their lives. If they can engage, they suddenly find they get something positive out of it and it improves the whole family life when it works. They’ve got to want it. I’ve got less faith in the coercive end.”(Local authority)

“The support from accessing a Parent Support Group can do wonders for self esteem and the confidence and ability to deal with children.”(Local Authority)

The popularity was evidenced by parents’ suggestions to extend the courses to being offered to more parents and to offer more specialised topics such as ‘dealing with adolescents’ or ‘psychology’ or ‘counselling your teenager’

“Extend the courses...there’s lots more mums that would benefit from it.”(Parent)

The challenges for attending for some were being with other parents in their area. They felt embarrassment about the possibility of being recognised and or anxiety about the type of parent that would likely be there.

“I thought I’d go and see if I can learn to deal with him a bit better..... I said to him (son) ‘look what you’re making me do, sitting with all these ‘smack heads’. How do you think I feel?’ he said ‘I’m sorry’”. (Parent)

“My husband wouldn’t be seen dead having lessons on how to be a parent... you don’t know who’s going to be there.” (Parent)

Parents were more receptive to receiving one to one parenting skills training or mentoring but this was not always offered. Parents gained support from both group and one to one courses and for the most part, they felt better for having the opportunity to talk to someone about their child. In one case, a mediator was offered

to talk to both the parent and the child because the relationship had completely broken down.

“I was just desperate to talk to someone....she was great and I felt so much better having her to talk to about it... she did help.... He would never talk to me and I think got through to him” (Parent)

6.5 The child’s experience of the Parenting Contract

Children were rarely able to separate out the Parenting Contract from other interventions and meetings held about their behaviour or attendance. Some claimed to not have been aware of a document or of having targets to work towards. Some admitted to being disengaged during the meeting and appeared to be blasé about the sanctions and maintained an ‘it won’t happen to me’ attitude with regards to their parent being prosecuted.

However, it was evident that even for the most apathetic of children; the Parenting Contract had exerted considerable stress onto them, their parents and their relationship with their parents. In most of our case studies, this had worked to motivate them to change their behaviour but in few cases, this only exacerbated the situation and worsened the relationship between parent and child.

“It was just more and more pressure and then the more I rebelled” (Child)

“I was just really angry with him... he had put me into this situation where I was in trouble.” (Parent)

“She’s horrible... she just sat there in the meeting muttering swear words and cursing us throughout.” (Parent)

The seriousness of the contract usually had an effect on some children and behaviour and or attendance had improved dramatically along with the other less tangible aspects following suit in most of the case studies. ‘Seriousness’ was communicated by:

- Prosecution;
- Someone other than the school being involved; or
- The personality of the LA staff and their communication.

For some children, the distinguishing factor of the Parenting Contract was another person involved along with the school and there was strong appreciation for this other person taking their side and seeing things from their point of view.

The child welcomed support for their parents and in some instances this had improved home life and their relationship with their parent. Children gained from seeing their parent helping themselves and gaining confidence.

Out of all the interventions offered or discussed, the importance of a mentor was stressed by almost all children as much needed. Most were crying out for someone to talk to that they could trust. Outside experts such as counsellors and psychologists were discredited for being strangers and authoritarian. They wanted someone they could talk to on a regular basis and spontaneously as opposed to set appointments. Sometimes, a staff member at the school fulfilled this role or the EWO but rarely was the need fully met.

“I wanted more time with EWO.... One time I started to talk to her at the end of the meeting and it was really good but then when I tried to talk to her again she didn't want to take an interest... it was like she would say have you got any problems at home and then when I started to talk about it, she would say I need to refer you to a counsellor.” (Child)

“The only person I wanted to talk to was X at the school because she's the only nice one...” (Child)

“They arranged for me to see a counsellor type person but I didn't go... it was up to me anyway... I didn't want to talk to a stranger... I can't open up to a stranger.... I just really needed someone to talk to that wouldn't get cross with me.” (Child)

6.6 A selection of case studies

The research team chose a few case studies to illustrate the variety of effects and outcomes of a Parenting Contract for both attendance and behaviour and across the educational Key Stages:

Case study 1: A dramatic improvement in behaviour and child's life

Case study 2: An improvement in family life but not attendance / behaviour

Case study 3: Improvement in attendance but negative impact on family

Case study 4: A dramatic improvement in attendance and child's behaviour

These are detailed in the appendix.

7. Conclusions and next steps

- The research highlights the difficulty in assessing the **effectiveness** of education-related Parenting Contracts. This is partly due to the differences of opinion about what constitutes a Parenting Contract and when it is appropriate to use it. This difference of opinion affects general awareness, especially in schools. Furthermore, the accuracy of the reporting of Parenting Contracts may be affected by lack of awareness or difference in opinion. This general confusion may have been the cause for the low response rates for the quantitative research.
- This difference in opinion means that LAs either **under report or over report** the actual number of Parenting Contracts when supplying data to the DCSF. Furthermore, LAs are unaware of how many schools in their area are offering Parenting Contracts without their involvement.
- The research indicates that Parenting Contracts are being used more for attendance than behaviour and the case studies research suggests that use may be even greater than PRAB returns indicate.
- The research findings indicate that where Parenting Contracts are used LAs, schools and parents have found them beneficial in improving the child's attendance and behaviour and the relationship between school and parents.
- The research findings indicate that both LAs and schools took joint responsibility for offering a Parenting Contract. Although LAs may have managed the review process, schools were very involved.
- The concept of a Parenting Contract was rarely criticised by respondents. The main reasons given for not using contracts were that there are existing mechanisms in place which have worked well and some uncertainty about its usefulness as a tool. Another reason given for not using a contract was the link to potential prosecution (attendance cases) and thus the fear of alienating the parent. However, for many LAs, the link to prosecution was felt to be pivotal in motivating the parent or child to make changes. This barrier was

overcome to a certain extent by careful management of the relationship and by diluting the prosecution message in certain cases or at certain times throughout the life of a Parenting Contract.

- LAs reported offering a wide range of different types of support to parents as part of the Parenting Contract. The most frequently mentioned type of support was referral to parenting classes followed by referral to mental health services.
- Parenting classes were reported to have a tremendous effect on parent's confidence and skills and relationship with their children. This, in turn, helped improve the child's attendance and behaviour.
- The **trigger** for offering a Parenting Contract for attendance came about when a child's attendance level fell below a set threshold consistently (usually 80%). The LA monitors this closely along with the school and together they make a decision about suitable intervention. For behaviour, Parenting Contracts are usually brought in after previous interventions have been tried and failed, in particular after a PSP (Pastoral Support Plan). However, there were reports of great success when used as more of a preventative measure; at an earlier Key Stage, earlier in the academic year and or when a child with a history of exclusions joins a new school.
- Parenting Contracts were deemed most suitable for situations where it was clear that a family would benefit from support and or if the parent was not engaging with previous interventions or if the relationship between parent and school had broken down. Children stressed the importance of having 'a mentor' or someone they could talk to that was not a stranger who they could confide in and trust.
- The importance of the '**mediator**' role was stressed by all those involved in a Parenting Contract to be objective and support and enforce the parent, child and school. In the few instances where a school governor was involved, this was welcomed as additional enforcement for the school.

- **Targets** were felt to work best when parents and children were encouraged to suggest their own. Targets offered varied considerably according to the parent and child's needs and situation.
- LAs **monitor** individual Parenting Contracts by holding regular reviews and extending and or adapting the contract depending on progress being made by the child and parent. Some authorities had processes in place to check the quality of contracts and to check that targets suggested were in fact SMART.
- The monitoring of specific Parenting Contracts varied depending on whether the contract was for attendance or behaviour. For attendance, the process and time period for measuring impact tended to be time specific and transparent with possibly one or a few review meetings. For behaviour, this process was often more fluid with sometimes many review meetings and the period of time extended to a year in some cases.
- Clear systems were in place to monitor the effectiveness of each individual Parenting Contracts through a review system. For both attendance and behaviour, impact was often difficult to assess. Other factors involved in the family's situation could affect the child's attendance or behaviour. Furthermore, staff often felt that for some children, the effects of the Parenting Contract would take time to see, especially amongst those who had experienced problems for many years. In addition, the Parenting Contract was often one of a number of interventions being used to support the child.
- There was some confusion on the part of schools and parents about when a Parenting Order would come into place for their situation, at what point the contract was considered breached and how many chances they would receive. Schools were not always sure about whose decision it would be to make a judgment about this.
- LAs were very positive about using Parenting Contracts as part of their existing processes for attendance. They reported very good statistics on attendance levels after intervention. LA staff reported that the Parenting Contract formalised the practice that they were carrying out already but as a tool within this framework it was very useful and that practice generally was having a very good impact on attendance and unauthorised absence in their area.

- The success of a Parenting Contract was generally - dependent on each individual case. This was assessed individually according to various factors including improved relationship between school and parents, improved attendance and a reduction in the frequency of disciplinary actions taken in respect of the child. There was rarely any system to measure, collate or record the impact of all Parenting Contracts within a department except for whether they had resulted in a Parenting Order or Penalty Notice. If comparing the effectiveness of Parenting Contracts across an LA department, consideration may need to be given to using specific attributes to measure and perhaps a rating scale and guidance on what rating to select.
- LAs generally used both hard and soft measures to ascertain the impact of a specific Parenting Contract. The hard measures were based on attendance levels and patterns or staff feedback on behaviour and frequency and or severity of disciplinary measures. The soft measures varied considerably across the areas but tended to include: the child's attitude and relationship between the school and child, school and parent, and between parent and child.
- For behaviour, schools and LAs were in agreement that the Parenting Contract had helped to avoid permanent exclusions and been the catalyst for changes to support the child thus leading to improvements.
- There is undoubtedly variation between LAs in terms of what they include in their PRAB returns to DCSF because of what they consider as a Parenting Contract. Also some include the information collected from schools and others do not.

Next Steps

- We recommend that good practice on how to use Parenting Contracts should include :
 - The importance of the mediator role in the set up. This role could be fulfilled by the LA or by a school governor;
 - Review meetings to be impartial and evaluate the progress and support offered by the school, and the progress made by the parent and child.
 - Making sure that the targets set are SMART; and
 - Support offered to include parenting classes and/or one to one mentoring for parents and a mentor for the child.

8. Appendix 1

8.1 Sampling for schools' survey

The sample was drawn on 18th June 2007 based on a total of 1,565 schools from 31 LAs using Parenting Contracts:

	All schools	A high usage LA	Other LAs
Unauthorised	658	0	658
Absence Only			
Exclusion Only	63	0	63
Both	844	727	117
Totals	1,565	727	838

In total, 450 schools were chosen. For the purposes of sampling, "middle deemed primaries" were counted as "primaries", and "middle deemed secondaries" were counted as "secondaries" - "16 plus" and "not applicables" went into "other".

A high usage LA

One particular LA was down-weighted to the average no of schools per LA using Parenting Contracts.

$(658+63+117)/30= 27.9$ schools.

Therefore, 28 schools were chosen from this LA. The sample frame from this LA was stratified by school type, then alphabetised by school name. One in every 26 schools were chosen.

Main sample

The 28 schools from the high usage LA were put back into the main sampling frame, and it was stratified by school type, LA name and alphabetised by school name.

Primaries - in order to obtain 150 from 544:

1 in 4 provided 136

1 in 39 provided 150

Secondaries - in order to obtain 214 from 246:

1 in 2 provided 123

1 in 3 provided 205

1 in 27 provided 214

Others - all other schools in the main sample were chosen (76 in total). These were topped up with 10 Pupil Referral Units from the high usage LA totalling 86.

Total is 150 primaries, 214 secondaries, 86 others = 450

9. Appendix 2

9.1 Case study sample profile

The table below illustrates who was interviewed in each of the case study LAs and schools.

	LA	Schools	Parents	YP
LA 1	<u>Behaviour</u> 1. School Exclusions Officer 2. Senior Ed, Psy. 3. Case officer	School A: Secondary 1. Deputy head 2. Attendance Officer School B: Secondary 3. Assistant head	A1 A2 B1 B2	A2 B1 B2
	<u>Attendance</u> 4. Principal EWO 5. Case worker			
LA 2	<u>Behaviour</u> 1. Pupil Inclusion Manger 2. Pupil Inclusion Officer	School A: Secondary 1. Deputy head 2. Support Inclusion and Guidance Mentor 3. Head	A1	
	<u>Attendance</u> 3. Attendance and Welfare Manager	School B: Secondary 4. EWO 5. Attendance officer 6. Deputy head School C: Secondary 7. Head	B1 B2 B3 B4 C1 C2 C3 C4	B1 B2 B3 C1 C2 C3 C4
LA 3	<u>Behaviour</u> 1. Programme Director, <i>Partnerships and Localities</i> 2. Strategy Leader –			

	RESPECT,(Multi Agency Working) 3. Advisor for Attendance and Participation			
	<u>Attendance</u> 4. Team Manager with Educational Welfare Service			
LA 4	<u>Attendance</u> 1. Principal EWO 2. Case worker	School A: Primary 1. School secretary 2. School governor School B. Secondary 3. Attendance Officer 4. Deputy head School C. Secondary (from survey) 5. Deputy head	A1 B1 B2 B3 B4 C1 C2	B1 B2 B3
	<u>Behaviour</u> 3. Manager, Reintegration Services			
LA 5	<u>Attendance</u> 1. Principal EWO 2. EWO	School A: Secondary 1. Deputy head 2. Attendance Officer	A1	
LA 6	<u>Attendance</u> 1. Head of Educational and Welfare			
	<u>Behaviour</u> 2. Head of Behaviour Support Service (left post end Oct) 3. Head of Behaviour Support Service (since start Nov, previously deputy)			

	4. Deputy Head of Behaviour Support Service 5. Deputy Head of Behaviour Support Service 6. Senior Parenting Co-ordinator (Respect funding)			
LA 7	<u>Attendance</u> 1. Senior EWO 2. EWO 3. EWO	School A: Secondary 1. Deputy head 2. Attendance manager 3. Head of year School B: Secondary 1. Acting deputy head 2. Head of year 3. Year 10/11 mentor	A1 A2 X1	A1 A2
LA 8	<u>Attendance</u> 1. Head of Attendance	School A: Primary 1. Deputy head	A1	A1
	<u>Behaviour</u> 2. Head of Exclusions	School B: Primary 1. SENCO		
LA 9	<u>Attendance</u> 1. Head of Attendance	School B: Secondary 1. Attendance and welfare officer		
	<u>Behaviour</u> 2. Exclusions officer	School A: Ex PRU 2. Head teacher School C: Secondary (from survey) 3. Head teacher	C1 C2 C3	C1 C2
LA 10	<u>Behaviour</u> 1. Principal Pupil Support Officer			
	<u>Attendance</u> 2. Senior Ed social worker	School A: Secondary 1. Parent Support Advisor	A1 A2	A1 A2

	3. EWO	School B: Secondary 2. Attendance Support Officer 3. Head	A3 B1	A3
LA 11	1. EWO		X1 X2 X3 X4 X5	

10. Appendix 3

10.1 A selection of case studies for each Key Stage

Case study 1: Behaviour Parenting Contract - Key Stage 3

- Dramatic improvement in behaviour over six months
- Single parent family, child offered contract in Year 8 for being excluded caused by being physically violent during unstructured time
- Contract reviewed monthly
- Child aware of prosecution but meeting itself and involvement of the LA highlighted the seriousness of the Parenting Contract

“If you don’t pay the fine you might get arrested... I didn’t like it because I don’t want my Dad to have to pay a fine.”

“It feels like its right important coz there’s four teachers in room and X (Local Authority staff) and my Dad.”

- Child appreciative of the school being enforced to support him

“They give the school targets and if they don’t stick to them they get told off.”

- Child’s targets were to attend anger management sessions, attend Youth Inclusion and Support Programme (YISP) if he feels it’s appropriate and to return to school in September with a really positive attitude
- The child talked more about target 3 and correcting the behaviour leading to detentions e.g. his determination not to swear, to wear his uniform correctly and to accept detentions and isolations rather than getting upset about them

“I have to take the punishment and not react in a bad way.”

“I’m happier now coz teachers listen and I don’t go off in a mood when I get told off... I just stick it.”

- Improved relationship between the child and the school evident. The school supplied child with a mentor and this was appreciated

“When I put my hand up to answer a question they give me a chance now and listen to what I’ve got to say.”

“I have someone to tell if get bullied or hurt etc.”

- Although not part of the written contract, rewards were verbalised in the meeting and this aspect of contract worked particularly well on the child both in school and at home and through external provider - Youth Inclusion and Support Team (YIST)

“If you’re good they praise you and if you’re bad, they punish you.... If you talk nicely and use your manners they give you stamps and credits. I wanted to behave because then I get praised more.”

“Dad said he’ll get me a motorbike if I behave. “If I’m behaving he gives me money and stuff.”

“Contractors said that when I behave I can get to do after school clubs and activities (YIST).”

- School and LA pleased with progress made - behaviour generally improved but not perfect. Relationship between child and family improved but there had been considerable stress in the home as a result of the Parenting Contract.

Case study 2: Attendance Parenting Contract - Key Stage 4

- Attendance and behaviour problem not resolved but relationship with parent and general family life had improved as a result of the support offered through the Parenting Contract
- Family circumstances are extremely difficult - bereavement, financial problems, addiction and mental health
- Specific support offered to parent with addiction problems and help with transport to and from this intervention
- Parent reports that she is personally gaining from the huge amount of support that has been put in place
- Child refuses to accept any support and was still very much affected by her circumstances

"She still refusing help... she just lies on the settee doesn't want to do anything and won't talk."

- Relationship between parent and child had improved

"Mum's happier and brighter. It's easier to be with mum now because she's not drinking all the time so it's easier to be with her. We're closer now and happier at home now."

"I talk to her (mum) a little bit more now and I'm getting on better with my sisters."

Case study 3: Attendance Parenting Contract - Key Stage 1

- Improvement in attendance but parent adamant that this was not as a result of the Parenting Contract. Parent under considerable stress and much resentment about being involved in a Parenting Contract
- Child had a period of absences from school and this included random days. School was concerned about this pattern and that it suggested parentally condoned absence
- Family under considerable stress during this time caused by bereavement. Child had been particularly affected and had experienced a number of illnesses and sleep problems

“She is very sensitive and the stress of it all had lowered her immune system. She was picking up all the bugs going.”

- Parent was surprised and anxious to have been contacted by LA as parent claimed to have spoken to school about the reason for the absence which was bullying
- Initial meeting was very difficult and upsetting for parent who was disappointed that the school had not recalled specific discussions she had had earlier with them
- There was no review meeting but parent was written to by LA and informed of child's attendance level and that this had improved
- The period while the Parenting Contract was live was very stressful for parent and parent was very concerned about what would happen if the child was ill. Parent generally felt accused and patronised by the process. Parent continually defended her case by the fact that an older sibling in the same school had an almost perfect level of attendance to prove that as a parent she was not condoning the absence

“I was just made to feel like this naughty school girl who should be doing better and must sign the contract to say I'll be a good girl.”

- Exacerbating the stress further was the fact that the older sibling found the contract and was very frightened by this

“It wasn't useful having the contract because (older child) found it and was convinced I was going to prison.”

- Parent felt that support should have been offered by the school and earlier on in the attendance problem

“It was too little too late... if when I'd written the note a few days after the bereavement the school had offered bereavement counselling then this might have been helpful but by the time the Parenting Contract came about we were getting better and stronger and her attendance had improved. I think school's need to reach out to families.”

Case study 4: Attendance Parenting Contract - Key Stage 2

- Dramatic improvement in attendance to 95% over the three month Parenting Contract.
- Single parent family, father moved out around the time the child started to miss days at school
- Child offered contract in Year 5 for continued unauthorised absence and parentally condoned absence

The parent said she was *“very, very pale in the face kept heaving...and I’m thinking what’s the point in sending her to school”, “As I said to the school as long as I phone you there shouldn’t be no problem...apart from that been going to school regular.”*

- Initially the school tried setting targets but these did not improve attendance
- Parent had already been taken to court over the attendance/behaviour of other children in the family in the past, so understood the consequences of a failed Parenting Contract
- The child’s attitude towards the school was generally positive; there had not been a problem with attendance previously
- Child relatively unaware of the Parenting Contract, its implications and the process as a whole
- This was the schools first use of a Parenting Contract, but was deemed to be a great success and is looking to use them more in future

“Child sees all the adults in its life, sitting around a table talking about how they’re going to help and it often allows us to have a dialogue with the parent and carer where we can begin to model or explore things that may not necessarily be happening...we might use it as an opportunity to point out the positives, ...but also creates a sense of honesty.”

- Child’s targets were to raise attendance to 95%
- Contract reviewed continuously as part of the usual attendance monitoring at the school.
- If the child was sick they had to show a medicine bottle of prescription from the doctor (rather than a doctor’s letter which can sometimes be charged for)
- The parent felt they had the opportunity to say all they wanted at the meetings about the child
- Attendance has improved to over 95%
- The parent gave small rewards for the child attending school such as renting DVDs from the library
- As well as the attendance, the child’s behaviour at school and at home has improved as a result

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