

# Council to sue parents over truants

✘ The City of Edinburgh Council has commenced criminal proceedings in the Justice of the Peace Court against three parents who it is alleged have failed to ensure their child attends school regularly. The Council is taking these steps to help improve attendance at school and pupil participation and performance.

Once a child's attendance drops below 85 per cent this triggers a formal process to look into what issues are causing this absence.

New targets for the current school year are to increase attendance in primary schools from 94.5 to 94.9 per cent, which is the equivalent of around 17,000 additional pupil days. The target for secondary schools is to increase attendance from 91 to 91.4 per cent which is the equivalent of around 13,000 pupil days.

Councillor Paul Godzik, Education, Children and Families Committee Convener said: "Prosecution is a last resort; before we consider it we will use all available recourses and statutory interventions to try and improve a pupil's attendance. If, however, these steps do not help, and parents do not take adequate measures to improve their child's attendance at school, then they will need to answer for their child's poor attendance in court."

"This sends out a clear message to parents that poor attendance at school has serious consequences, and also that we as a Council will do everything possible to help children get the education they deserve."

For those found guilty, the penalties include, a fine of up to £1,000 or imprisonment of up to one month as outlined in the Education (Scotland) Act 1980.

Under this Act local authorities are obliged to address the issue of non-attendance and to support the on-going work of the Area Attendance Advisory Groups and the Attendance Order Review Group.

The current process usually follows similar steps;

- child is absent from school regularly
- referral to Education Welfare Officer who will visit and work with the family, despite this intervention absences continue
- parent asked to appear before Area Attendance Advisory Group
- still no improvement – parent will be summoned to appear before the AORG (Attendance Order Review Group)

Complaints have been lodged in three separate cases to the Justice of the Peace Court. It is believed these cases will first call in court in the next 4-6 weeks.