



## **Protecting a child's right to education**

Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs) are employed by schools, academies and local authorities throughout the country to offer advice, support and guidance to parents who need support in ensuring that their child attends schools regularly.

If a school contacts an EWO with concerns in relation to a student's school attendance, the EWO will talk to the school principal or designated school staff member and find out what efforts have been made to date to help the child. The EWO will then contact the family and meet with them. Home visits are an essential part of an EWO's work and the first meeting with an EWO very often opens up a pathway of solutions for a child and family in need. Once underlying problems or issues are identified, the EWO can then seek to address the family's unique set of circumstances in conjunction with school staff and other local support services as necessary.

The main work of an Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) is around the welfare of the child and the family and on ensuring that concerns and problems are dealt with before school attendance becomes a crisis issue.

However, if a parent fails in his or her duty to ensure that their child attends school, then the EWO has the power to take legal action against the parent under the Education Act 1996 (section 444 1 & 444 1a)

Taking legal action against a parent or guardian is a very serious matter. It is an action of last resort when all other offers of support have failed and the parent has refused to co-operate with the EWO.

Imposing a sanction on parents or guardians for non-attendance is the responsibility of the Local Authority in each case having heard all the evidence including that of the EWO and the parent/guardian. The law provides that upon conviction either a fine or up to one month's imprisonment, or both, be imposed.