



William Edwards School  
*'Inspirational learning with a strong sporting ethos'*

## **Consultation regarding extension of October half term to two weeks.**

### **Summary of parental responses:**

19 Responses to the consultation were received from parents. Of those 19, 3 were completely positive about the change, 8 were positive about the 2 week October half term but raised associated concerns, questions or issues and 8 were not in favour of the proposal.

### **The positive comments received are summarised with the following parental comments:**

I would just like to let you know that I think it's a great idea. It makes sense if the first term back to school is often affected by lots of sickness and absence. Families would be able to take holidays at a cooler time of year and hopefully, as you suggest, a cheaper time of year.

I think time can be better used throughout the year when children are not exhausted and get greater benefit from it. Tired children are rarely productive children! A good idea, I hope other schools follow your lead.

### **The concerns, questions and issues raised are summarised below.**

Comments from actual parental responses have been anonymously used.

**Issue 1:** Organising childcare for all the school holidays is an expensive and time consuming process.

**Response:** SCP and WES will be hosting half term provision to support parents that would like to engage their children in positive activity. This will be provided at the lowest cost possible.

**Issue 2:** The increase in the school day to counter for the loss of a week in school would not sufficiently recompense for the time lost. Why can't the week be taken off the summer holiday?

**Response:** The school is proposing to redistribute the 25 hours (1 week) of time by adding 40 minutes to each of the remaining 38 weeks.  $38 \times 40\text{minutes} = 25\text{ hours and }20\text{minutes}$ .

The redistribution of time proposed is central to this proposal and is intended to have maximum impact. The extended session of 30 minutes on a Monday (when added to the existing form time) will be used to extend pupils educational experience in the broadest and most appropriate way. All teachers will be timetabled in this slot (unlike the normal timetable) allowing for smaller group sizes where appropriate. The evidence of high impact 30minute sessions with smaller groups this academic year indicates that these can be very powerful. The additional time also provides flexibility in a number of ways outlined in the original letter.

Reducing the summer holidays would only serve to move the problem of tired pupils and teachers to the end of the school year or leave the status quo by starting the school year a week earlier.

Reducing the summer break also runs the risk of being a push factor when recruiting the best teachers. The most important factor in any school is the quality of its teachers. The school currently has the strongest staffing for many years and is fully staffed in all national shortage subjects with fully qualified teachers including English, maths, Science, MFL, Geography and History.

**Issue 3:** Parents are unlikely to book holidays in October as they are probably still paying for their summer holidays, and bracing themselves for the expense of Christmas. It won't take long for the prices to be raised to a premium when holiday companies realise the change to school holidays.

**Response:** It is clearly for parents to choose how to arrange their holiday plans and it is not a central strand of the rationale. However, holiday companies and airlines already graduate their prices either side of the main school holidays but with significant reductions outside the main weeks.

Of the 20,000+ state schools nationally only 23% are currently academies. Only academies are able to make changes to the school year as are proposed here. Thurrock has a much higher proportion of academies than is the case nationally, however, even if every academy in Thurrock chose to amend their year in a similar way, the effect nationally would be very small. Thurrock schools proportionally represent approximately 0.2% of the total number of schools in the country. There may be change in time in this area, (including possible legislation from government relating to the leisure industry to support school attendance) but it is highly unlikely it will be any time soon.

**Issue 4:** I thought there was to be a national debate regarding school holidays being more evenly spread throughout the year with the view to reducing the summer holiday as the long summer holiday does not support continuous learning.

**Response:** Most professionals involved in education would completely agree that the extended summer holiday is not ideal educationally. The long summer break was set at a time historically when many school children would help their families and work in the fields during the summer. Successive governments have spoken about this but have been both unable, due to academy legislation and unwilling, due to the recruitment difficulties being faced by the profession and significant shortage of new graduates entering the profession. Remaining fully staffed with the very best teachers is the most significant factor in any schools success.

**Issue 5:** What about those pupils who catch the school bus and also C2C train? Will the school enter into discussion with these transport providers to ensure that any agreed revision to the school timetable is subsequently discussed and agreed with the transport providers?

**Response:** School transport providers will adjust their times accordingly. We will inform other transport providers of any changes.

**Issue 6:** What is the extent of the spike in pupil absence in the half term before Christmas?

**Response:** Over the last three school years attendance has reduced by an average of 1.54% in the second half term of the year. This equates to an extra 19 children absent every day than in the first half term. The average difference in second and third terms of the year for the same three year period is 0.4%.

When children are absent from class, it affects more than just those absent, particularly in relation to group or project work. Reducing the number of times any child is not in the right class with the right teacher is central to this proposal.

A very small change in overall attendance during the second half term of the year will have a significant effect on the educational experience for all. The additional rest in the middle of what is the longest term of the year should aid pupil resilience and attendance.

**Issue 7:** You are considering this proposal along with the other schools in the Trust. You must surely be aware that many of your students have siblings who attend schools outside the Trust which have no intention of changing their holiday schedules.

**Response:** Following the consultation at William Edwards and Harris Academy, a significant number of secondary schools in Thurrock are now also considering the proposal. A number of other primary schools are also considering their position. From the evidence of professional dialogue locally it is expected that many more Thurrock schools will move to the same arrangement for similar reasons.

**Issue 8:** You mention 'early intervention and support' for targeted children. How far in advance would this be notified to parents? Many might book an extended holiday on the basis of the school schedule, then find out their child has been 'targeted'. Would the family be obliged to give up their holiday for the sake of a couple of hour's tuition during that time, and would they be compensated, as I doubt this would be covered by any travel insurance company?

**Response:** This extended holiday in October provides another opportunity for early intervention and support. The offer would of course be dependent on student availability. It would clearly be unreasonable to ask any family to cancel booked holiday plans.

**Issue 9:** I understand that at a meeting last summer, between the Head and some parents, the subject of holidays was discussed. He apparently stated then that he would never change the holidays - has he now gone back on this promise?

**Response:** This is incorrect. The Headteacher has said previously that he was not considering changes to holiday arrangements "at this time". The current educational landscape is in a period of unprecedented change and we must remain open any proposals that will improve outcomes for young people.

**Issue 10:** I hope this is not some kind of backdoor attempt to get extra time off for teachers. I appreciate they do many things outside of regular school hours, and many schools would fall apart without this. However, to counter that, they have the most generous holidays of any profession I know of, and would surely be aware of that when choosing this career path.

This proposal is about improving outcomes for young people. This remains at the centre of every decision taken by the school. As previously mentioned, the school currently has the strongest staffing for many years and is fully staffed in all national shortage subjects with fully qualified teachers including English, Maths, Science, MFL, Geography and History.