



24 February 2016

All Headteachers, Principals and Chairs of Governors

Dear Colleague

### **Update on the Deregulation Act and implications for the school calendar 2017/18**

You may recall that there was a proposal within the Deregulation Bill 2015 to remove the duty from Local Authorities to consult upon and determine the school calendar for Community, Voluntary Controlled and Community Special Schools previously required under Section 32 of the Education Act 2002.

Schools that are their own Admission Authority already have the powers to set their own school calendar, including Academies and Voluntary Aided Schools. The change would have extended this power to all community and voluntary controlled schools.

On 18 September 2015 the Government issued the following confirmation that this part of the Act would be removed:

*“The provision which gives the governing bodies of community, voluntary controlled, community special schools, and maintained nursery schools in England the responsibility for setting their own school term and holiday dates **will not** be commenced. These schools will not therefore be given the power to set their own term dates”*

Given this change, the Local Authority is now required to consult upon and determine a school calendar for the 2017/18 Academic Year for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools.

As part of this process the Executive Director and Cabinet Member are keen to hear your views on the current format of the school calendar and whether or not it still provides the best framework to enhance the educational experiences of all our children and young people.

To allow further exploration and discussion we are working with Learn Sheffield, so that we can get a good understanding of the views of different school communities. In addition to suggesting this issue as an agenda item at sector partnership meetings we are arranging a workshop, which will be open to any school leaders, governors, etc. with an interest in this area.

School Calendar Consultation – **Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> March** (1.00-3.00pm)  
Venue – **Learn Sheffield** (Training and Development Hub, Lees Hall Road, S8 9JP)

### **The Current School Calendar Model**

By way of background, the current model was originally devised in 2005 by the Yorkshire and Humberside Officer Group. A pilot was led by Leeds Authority and a set of principles were agreed to provide the basis for a consistent approach. This did not impose a calendar as each Authority retained the responsibility for setting its own, it did however provide a framework that was agreed with Trade Unions and Headteachers.

The model supported the principles of:

1. Avoiding split weeks wherever possible
2. Creating even half terms where possible
3. In the event that of two uneven half terms, the longest term will be the first half term
4. The Christmas break will be for at least 10 weekdays

These basic principles enabled the four South Yorkshire Authorities to normally co-ordinate the main holidays within the year. During consultation this has been a regular request. This was an important factor that came out regularly in the consultation process.

### **Alternative Models**

The calendar should support schools to provide the best possible environment and educational outcomes for all pupils. Other factors such as possible access to cheaper holidays whilst important should not be the basis for setting the school calendar. It should be assumed that the majority of stakeholders will still want a two week break around Christmas and Easter. There is however scope for further debate with regard to the length of the summer break, with some arguing that 6 weeks is too long. The following options are by no means exhaustive but along with the current model at Option 1, present alternatives including longer half terms and shorter summer breaks:

#### **Option 1 – Standard School Calendar**

This option is based upon the existing framework with a one week half term holiday in October and at Spring Bank. The standard model provides a six week summer break.

Half Term 1 - 8 weeks  
Half Term 2 - 7 weeks  
Half Term 3 - 5 weeks  
Half Term 4 - 5 weeks  
Half Term 5 - 7 weeks  
Half Term 6 - 7 weeks and 1 day

The last day of summer term is Monday 23 July. This is necessary to ensure 190 teaching days but could be nominated as one of the inset days by individual schools.

#### **Option 2 – Extended October Half Term**

It is a regular feature of the consultation process that the Autumn Term is too long and places a great deal of strain on teachers and children, especially younger children. The current first Autumn Term for example is 8 weeks long and the second half term 7 weeks long.

It would be possible to create a two week October half term break week commencing 23 October instead of the current one week. This would create two even half terms in Autumn of 7 weeks each. This additional week would be taken from the 6 weeks currently take over the summer meaning a later finish on Monday 30 July and a shorter summer break of 4 weeks and 4 days. The academic year 2018/19 commencing on Monday 3 September.

Half Term 1 - 7 weeks  
Half Term 2 - 7 weeks  
Half Term 3 - 5 weeks  
Half Term 4 - 5 weeks  
Half Term 5 - 7 weeks  
Half Term 6 - 8 weeks and 1 day

### Option 3 – Two Week Spring Bank and October Break

Up to 2005 Primary Schools always took a two week break at Spring Bank whereas Secondary School only took one. This created problems for families with primary and secondary aged children.

The holiday was reduced to one week for consistency. Many primary Heads have since argued the case for the two week break to be reinstated. This model proposes a two week half term at October and at Spring Bank. This would create a 4 week summer break week commencing 6 August. There is an issue for Secondary Schools with a two week Spring Bank Break as the second week would clash with examinations.

Half Term 1 - 7 weeks  
Half Term 2 - 7 weeks  
Half Term 3 - 5 weeks  
Half Term 4 - 5 weeks  
Half Term 5 - 7 weeks  
Half Term 6 - 8 weeks

### Option 4 – Seven Term Model

This option is based on that currently operated by David Young Academy in Leeds. Again it provides 7 Terms but significantly the academic year begins in June.

	Start	End	
Block 1	Monday 5 June	Friday 14 July	6 Weeks
Block 2	Monday 14 August	Friday 22 September	6 Weeks
Block 3	Monday 2 October	Friday 3 November	5 Weeks
Block 4	Monday 13 November	Wednesday 20 December	5 Weeks 3 days
Block 5	Monday 8 January	Friday 16 February	6 Weeks
Block 6	Monday 26 February	Thursday 29 March	5 Weeks 3 days
Block 7	Monday 23 April	Friday 25 May	5 weeks

Return on 4 Monday June 2018.

Further research indicates that there are issues with the shortened period between the national allocation day (1 March) and start of term. At this time the Primary Schools are focussed on SATs rather than induction procedures.

There is also very little time to hear appeals.

### Consideration of a shorter summer break

There has been significant debate and research about the merits of a longer or shorter summer break. Schools in England and Wales, along with those in Germany and Denmark, have the shortest summer holidays in Europe. At six weeks, the break is less than half the length of the holiday in countries including Bulgaria, Estonia, Italy and Turkey, where schools close for 13 weeks each summer.

Academic research suggests that long summer holidays have a detrimental effect on children's academic performance, with young people forgetting some of what they have learned.

One of the key research papers, a 1996 analysis of 39 US states, found that at best students showed no academic growth over the summer and at worst lost one to three months of learning. Learning loss was greater in mathematics than in reading, and disadvantaged students were disproportionately affected, losing about twice the ground of other pupils in reading.

The National Association of Headteachers has recently made positive statements in support of a shorter summer break citing that the current system causes stress and illness in teachers and pupils. It is argued that a more even calendar would also enable parents to take advantage of cheaper holidays outside the normal pattern where holiday companies place a premium on holiday prices.

The adverse impact on learning is however strongly refuted by the National Union of Teachers which claims that there is no research to prove any link between the length of the break and detrimental impact on learning. A recent proposal for a 4 weeks summer in Nottingham was rejected in the face of opposition by the NUT but Nottingham does now operate a 5 week summer break.

In addition to the impact on children's learning of a long summer break, especially on children from low income families, there are also significant concerns about the impact on low income families and their ability to feed their children. A survey of parents with a household income of less than £25K found that 31% of parents missed a meal to ensure that their children are fed. For families earning less than £15K this rises to 41%.

### **Key Factors for Consideration**

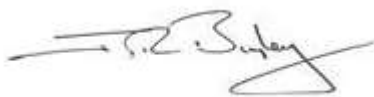
The Authority consulted with both Primary and Secondary Headteacher Groups in the Autumn of 2014 when the proposals within the Deregulation Bill first came to light. The clear consensus was that Headteachers would still want the Authority to produce a model school calendar and that all schools should continue to operate it.

This does also present an opportunity to explore the educational benefits of reducing the summer break and increasing the length of the October and Spring Bank half term and reduce the length of the summer break. The summer break has been subject to a great deal of debate with many observing that the current 6 week break is too long for children and can increase educational inequality. It can be especially detrimental to children from poorer backgrounds. There is evidence to suggest that they are less likely to have a stimulating home learning environment or have parents that can afford summer activities.

Options 1, 2 and 3 are also being considered by Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham. As in previous years it is hoped to agree the same school calendar between us. We will also consult with Derbyshire but it is more difficult to reach agreement there as they have 13 neighbours.

This is a genuine opportunity to have your proposals and opinions heard as the Authority considers the best options for the future. If you do wish to confirm your attendance at the workshop please email [bookings@learnsheffield.co.uk](mailto:bookings@learnsheffield.co.uk). If you wish to send in any written views then please email [enquiries@learnsheffield.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@learnsheffield.co.uk).

Yours sincerely



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