

Report of Governance and Partnership Officer

Report to Chief Officer, Learning Improvement

Date: 26 June 2017

Subject: Leeds School Calendar – academic year 2018-19



Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. The purpose of this report is to outline the recent consultation on the Leeds school calendar, and recommend the dates to be adopted for the 2018-19 academic year.

Recommendations

2. The Chief Officer, Learning Improvement is recommended to approve the 2018-19 calendar as detailed in appendix 1.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the recent consultation on the Leeds school calendar, and recommend the dates to be adopted for the 2018-19 academic year.

2 Background information

- 2.1 As agreed by Education Committee in November 1996 the proposed calendar is based on a three term model unified across primary and secondary schools.
- 2.2 Dates in Leeds have historically been set on an annual basis. Draft dates adhere to the guiding principles for the region and are shared with 23 local authorities across Yorkshire and the North East region. Each year draft school calendar options are shared with the Primary Headteacher Forum, Leeds Secondary Heads and Principals, the Governors Forum, the Teachers Joint Consultative Committee, and Lead Members for Children's Services.
- 2.3 Prior to 2011 Leeds always had an Easter break that moved with the Easter bank holiday. As a result of growing support within the education community for more consistency with the length of the spring and summer school terms, in 2008 Leeds consulted on fixing the Easter break to the first two full weeks in April. Public opinion was 60% in favour of this arrangement. Consequently in May 2009 the Executive Board adopted a fixed break of the first two full weeks in April, irrespective of when Easter falls.
- 2.4 In 2013 Children's Services re-consulted on this arrangement. Results of the consultation demonstrated that overall 78% of respondents were in favour of a fixed break. The decision to continue with this arrangement was taken at the June 2013 Executive Board.
- 2.5 The Easter bank holidays usually fall within the two week school break, either at the beginning, middle or end, but once every four to five years they fall entirely outside of the school break. In 2019 they will fall this way. In 2020 the bank holidays fall at the beginning of the school Easter break.
- 2.6 Historically Leeds had always set dates one year at a time. In 2015 we opted to set the dates for two academic years as we believed this would support schools and families to plan ahead. However, when setting dates two years in advance we cannot guarantee that neighbouring authority dates are available, making it harder to align. So for the 2018-19 year we have reverted to setting one year in advance.

3 Main issues

- 3.1 Whilst the majority of respondents appear to be happy with the fixed Easter break, it is also true that some families would prefer the Easter break to always incorporate the bank holidays. Parents who live and work across authority boundaries fall into this category, as when neighbouring authorities have differing holidays it makes spending family time together more difficult, and can also necessitate increased childcare costs.

- 3.2 Leeds had hoped that other authorities would fix their Easter break, but to date the only other authority to do so is Sheffield who will now have a fixed Easter break from 2018.
- 3.3 The Education Act received Royal Assent on 26 March 2015, but the particular provision affecting term dates, allowing maintained schools to set their own calendar was not commenced. So in effect there is no practical change in the law on school term dates as yet. Academies, free schools, foundation schools and voluntary-aided schools have the freedom to set their own term dates, but Section 32 of the Education Act remains unchanged and maintained schools cannot determine their own school terms.
- 3.4 Details of our neighbouring authorities' dates for 2018-19 can be found in appendix 2. Broadly speaking, dates are identical across West Yorkshire. North Yorkshire and York have a later February half term. Given that Leeds has an early Easter break in 2019 we had initially considered an earlier February half term, but discarded this idea when it became apparent that no other authorities were considering this week.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

4.1.1 In Spring 2017 draft dates for 2018-19 were shared with the following groups:

- Primary Headteacher Forum (and then at all Family of Schools meetings)
- Leeds Secondary Heads and Principals
- Governors Forum
- Teachers Joint Consultative Committee
- Executive members for Children & Families

4.1.3 Primary Headteacher Forum recommended that dates be discussed at all Headteacher Family of Schools meetings. Generally Heads welcomed the draft calendar as it is broadly in line with neighbouring authorities. Heads preferred the 18-22 February option over the 11-15 February option for half term as this mirrors other authorities. There was considerable interest in revisiting the fixed Easter break. Out of 14 Families of Schools, 9 were keen to align across the region and suggested Leeds should consult again, 3 were happy with the fixed Easter and 2 stated no preference.

4.1.4 Two secondary Headteachers responded and both would welcome further consultation on the Leeds fixed Easter break.

4.1.5 The Governors Forum felt overall that when the Easter bank holidays fall entirely outside of the school break, significant difficulties are experienced by families who live and work across boundaries. The Leeds Easter holiday is also out of kilter with that of other authorities. Some governors were also concerned about the

underlying message which seems to devalue Easter as a religious festival, whilst accepting the educational argument for having terms of more equal length.

- 4.1.6 Overall the draft dates were well received by the Teachers JCC as they are broadly in line with all neighbouring authorities. Some Staff Side were in favour of fixed Easter and some were not. Staff Side also raised the point of those families that have children who attend different schools across authorities, some with a fixed Easter holiday and some not, as this can pose a significant challenge. TJCC agreed with Headteachers that a further consultation on the fixed Easter would be beneficial and should be as wide as possible to ensure all voices are heard.
- 4.1.7 Executive Members for Children & Families acknowledged feedback received from other commenters, and concurred that the issue of schools in neighbouring authorities having different holidays does manifest itself in a number of ways. These include difficulties for parents who work in educational settings in one authority and whose children attend school in the other, and the associated childcare costs. Children and parents in Leeds schools are also unable to access events put on in other authorities for example York Viking Festival, activities at the National Media Museum in Bradford, and others, because they fall outside of the Leeds school holidays. They also noted that on the plus side parents in Leeds can find it is cheaper to book holidays and short breaks when the Leeds holidays are out of kilter with most other local authorities.

Executive Members feel there is clearly an appetite for looking again at the Easter break, and parents should be given a chance to contribute to that consultation. If consultation were to take place during the 2017-18 academic year the results would shape the calendar for 2019-20. Members suggested that it may be helpful to undertake consultation in spring 2018 when the out of kilter Easter holiday is fresh in the minds of parents and staff in schools.

- 4.1.8 The Children and Families Leadership Team approved the draft calendar and agreed that we should revert to setting dates one year at a time. They agreed that in response to comments from all groups, it would be helpful to revisit the fixed Easter in order to re-determine the public view. However, they noted that in the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years the Easter bank holidays fall within the school Easter break and difficulties are therefore unlikely. Also, as more schools become academies they have freedom to set their own dates and do not need to follow the LA recommended dates.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 An Equality Impact screening has been undertaken and identified that a full assessment is not required (see appendix 3).

4.3 Council policies and Best Council Plan

- 4.3.1 It is a statutory requirement that the local authority produces and publishes the annual school calendar at least four school terms in advance of the commencement of the calendar.

4.4 Resources and value for money

4.4.1 There are no immediate implications.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.5.1 There are no immediate implications. This report is subject to call-in.

4.6 Risk Management

4.6.1 Failure to agree the school calendar will result in us not meeting the statutory timeframe for publishing the calendar.

5 Conclusions

5.1 With the exception of the Easter break, dates align across the West Yorkshire region and have therefore been well received by all groups.

6 Recommendations

6.1 The Chief Officer, Learning Improvement is recommended to approve the draft dates for 2018-19.

7 Background documents¹

7.1 None.

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.