

Report of Director of Children's Services

Report to Executive Board

Date: 19 June 2013

Subject: School Easter Holiday Consultation



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

The purpose of this report is to outline the recent consultation on the Leeds school Easter break, and recommend the Easter holiday pattern to be adopted from 2014-15 onwards.

Recommendations

The Executive Board are asked to:

- Note the outcome of the school Easter holiday consultation carried out from January to April 2013.
- Consider the preferred option of the Children's Services Leadership Team in making a decision regarding the Leeds Easter break for schools. This means that the Easter break will continue to be fixed as the first two weeks of April regardless of when the Easter bank holidays fall.
- Agree to the proposed school calendar for the 2014-15 academic year (attached at appendix 1)

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the recent consultation on the Leeds school Easter break, and recommend the Easter holiday pattern to be adopted from 2014-15 onwards.

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 been set on an annual basis. Draft dates are prepared each January and shared with 23 local authorities across Yorkshire and the North East region. Draft dates have been shared with the Headteacher Forum, Governors Forum and the Joint Consultative Committee. This annual process will continue to take place.
- 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 in favour with 60% of respondents preferring a fixed Easter break. The May 2009 Executive Board approved a move in Leeds to adopt a fixed break of the first two full weeks in April, irrespective of when Easter falls.
- 2.4 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.

3 Main issues

- 3.1 In years where the bank holidays fall outside of the two week school break, this can result in a number of four-day weeks.
- 3.2 Leeds works with 23 local authorities across Yorkshire and the north east region to ensure a joined up approach in sharing dates and agreeing a standard calendar where possible. Guiding principles for setting the school calendar across this group were established in 2006 and revised in March 2012. All of these authorities have a moveable Easter break which means in some years Leeds is out of line with its neighbours, causing difficulties for families who live and work/attend school across these boundaries.
 - 3.2.1 The fixed Easter break was implemented for the 2010-11 academic year. In 2011 the Easter bank holidays fell entirely outside of the two week school holiday. Whilst consultation in 2008 was 60% in favour of a move to a fixed Easter break, the decision has not been unanimously popular and many more parental complaints have been received than in previous years. The nature of these complaints included the following:
 - Working parents having to take additional leave or pay extra childcare.

- Harder for families to spend time together or visit relatives in other parts of the country.
- Negative impact on families who live and work across local authority boundaries. Also a negative impact on staff working in Leeds schools that have children at school in neighbouring authorities.
- Pupils in school for only eight days in April 2011, which some feel hindered preparation for GCSEs and SATs, and is not in the best interests of children's learning. (In 2011 the situation was intensified by the additional April bank holiday for the Royal Wedding).
- Some recruitment challenges for schools as there was a four week window when schools could not interview.
- Children and families missing out on events run by national organisations such as the National Trust, as these were held at different times to the Leeds Easter break.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.2 When the Executive Board took the decision to fix the Easter break in May 2009, a request was made to review the success of this decision.
- 4.1.3 In January 2013 the Children's Services Leadership Team gave the go ahead to run a consultation on the council website. This was facilitated through Talking Point from 10 January to 30 April 2013. In total 1,223 responses were received. Below is a breakdown of respondents. 78% of respondents are in favour of retaining a fixed Easter break. 22% would prefer to see a return to a moveable Easter break for schools.

The following Data from Talking point provides a breakdown of respondents:

	Number of responses	Option 1 Fixed Easter	Option 2 Moveable Easter
Parent/carer	844	533	311
Headteacher	51	39	12
School employee	252	193	59
Local authority employee	263	165	98
Governor	100	70	30
Pupil	8	7	1
Elected Member	5	2	3
TOTAL		78%	22%

Respondents favouring Option 1 do so for the following reasons:

Equal terms, planning and delivering schemes of work	48%
Planning leave/childcare	30%
Cost of holidays, cheaper ones available	19%
Religion	2%
Other <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Commute is easier, less traffic on the roads - With a moveable Easter there can be two school Easter breaks in one financial year and annual leave year, puts pressure on working parents 	1%

Respondents favouring Option 2 do so for the following reasons:

Planning childcare/leave, need to take less time off school	50%
Religion (Easter festival should be within the school break)	18%
Synchronicity with other authorities	15%
Cost of childcare, cheaper with option 2	13%
Other <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4-day weeks disruptive - Activities for families i.e. National Trust run during traditional school break - Cannot meet up with family in other parts of the country - Less time for exam prep if Easter is fixed - End of financial year work is harder when school office staff/bursars are on Easter break at beginning of April. 	4%

- 4.1.4 Views were sought from Headteachers both individually and through the March 2013 Headteacher Forum where the view was mixed. Some of the 28 Headteachers at this meeting had welcomed the introduction of equal length spring and summer terms, whilst others felt a return to the traditional Easter break would be preferable. The consultation was also circulated to Children's centre managers although the response was minimal.
- 4.1.5 Posters to advertise the consultation to parents were circulated to all schools. A press release was issued in March and an article appeared in About Leeds. Use was made of the Child Friendly Leeds Twitter account.
- 4.1.6 All council employees were informed of the consultation via the 'essentials' communication in March, and invited to submit their view.
- 4.1.7 Views were sought from the TJCC Union Group on 20 May 2013. Colleagues did not raise any issues.
- 4.1.8 Views were sought from Elected Members.

- 4.1.9 All school governors were invited to submit their view.
- 4.1.10 Views were sought from both the Catholic and C of E Dioceses. Responses from both are awaited.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.11 An Equality Impact screening has been undertaken and identified that a full assessment is not required (see appendix 2).

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

- 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 The 2013 consultation has indicated that 78% of respondents support the continuation of a fixed Easter break for Leeds schools. After consideration of the consultation responses, and the high percentage of participants expressing a preference for a fixed Easter break, the preferred option is to continue with the current arrangement.
- 5.2 Many Headteacher colleagues agree that fixed dates to secure more evenly spaced half term teaching periods, will be beneficial. The concern that in the years when the Easter bank holidays fell outside of the two weeks - creating a period of 4-day teaching weeks - might impact on standards (and preparation of KS2 SATs in particular) seems to be offset by the overall rise in standards in 2011, at the end of KS2 overall in Leeds primary schools, when this pattern of shortened working weeks occurred.
- 5.3 Pupil attendance has not been adversely affected by the introduction of the fixed Easter break.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 The Executive Board are asked to:

- Note the outcome of the school Easter holiday consultation carried out from January to April 2013.
- Consider the preferred option of the Children's Services Leadership Team in making a decision regarding the Leeds Easter break for schools. This means that the Easter break will continue to be fixed as the first two weeks of April regardless of when the Easter bank holidays fall.
- Agree to the proposed school calendar for the 2014-15 academic year.

7 Background documents¹

7.2 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.