

LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

EXECUTIVE MEETING

29.03.04

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, ARTS & LIBRARIES

NAME OF WARD(S)
ALL

REPORT TITLE: The Standard School Year

FP Ref: EAL-03/04-0040

1.0 SUMMARY

For a number of years, the Association of London Government (ALG) has been in discussion with LEAs about the need to introduce, to all maintained schools, a Standard School Year – a 6 term academic year (currently 3) and a fixed Easter break. Brent consulted with its maintained schools on the proposal in the Autumn 2003.

The result of the consultation shows general support for the Standard School Year, although some schools – particularly some voluntary aided schools are opposed to the suggestion, particularly the fixed Easter break. Most other schools support the proposals provided they are applied across all schools and neighbouring LEAs. The Schools Forum agreed to support the proposals provided they are applied across London. Teacher unions are in favour so long as it is co-ordinated with other boroughs.

The ALG are seeking that two-thirds of London LEAs are in favour of the new proposal and will then recommend that all LEAs move to the Standard School Year. However, the London wide consultation is unlikely to be completed until 2005.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To support the approach taken by the ALG's Education Steering Group and base terms on the traditional school year pattern (3 terms) in 2005/6. (Annex 1)
- 2.2 To support, in principle, the adoption of the Standard School Year from 2006/7 - if LEA wide consultation shows the majority of views in favour of the introduction of the scheme.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no financial implications for the LEA.

4.0 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no staffing implications.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no legal requirements that the school year must have any particular number of terms. The Education (School Day and School Year)(England) Regulations 1999 set out that the school day is divided into a morning session and an afternoon session and the school year must comprise at least 380 sessions. The school year means the period beginning with the first school term to begin after July and ending with the beginning of the first school term to begin after the following July. The proposed change would be in keeping with these regulations.

5.2 Given certain concern about the proposal from Christian denominational schools regarding the periodical loss of the longer Easter break the Council should be aware of possible challenges by members of staff for time off for religious observance under the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003. This could centre on Holy Week and Maundy Thursday in particular for Christians. However, this is probably unlikely in practice as Holy Week days, apart from Good Friday, have not traditionally been bank holidays in any event. Brent has a policy on religious leave which gives certain religious leave entitlement to non Christian members of staff and the policy could be reviewed if and when this change takes place.

5.3 The LEA is responsible for setting the term dates (190 days) for community, foundation and VA schools. In addition schools have 5 inset days (holidays for pupils, training days for staff), which they are able to choose the dates.

6.0 DETAIL

6.1 The Standard School Year is the brainchild of the Local Government Association (LGA) and refers to all maintained schools. The LGA is the driving force nationally, however, the Association of London Government (ALG) is monitoring the situation in London. Adopting the Standard School Year would involve fixing what is currently referred to as the two-week Easter break, so that it is not determined by where the Easter bank holiday falls. Easter would therefore become a two-day bank holiday, which might or might not fall within the two-week break at that time of year.

Other ALG proposals include:

- 6 terms (instead of the current 3 terms)
- 2 terms before Christmas with no term of more than 38 days (7 weeks, 3 days)

- a 2 week October break to reduce pupil and teacher stress
- a Christmas break which is never less than 2 weeks
- the 4 terms after Christmas limited to a maximum of 6 weeks
- a summer break which is always more than 5 weeks
- 5 'flexible' days that can be used for holidays or term days according to regional needs.

6.2 In July 2003, the ALG's Education Steering Group agreed to survey all London Boroughs to find out their position on the Standards School Year. It was agreed that if two-thirds of authorities or more had taken a Member-level decision, based on consultation, in favour of changing to the full Standard School Year, the ALG should recommend that authorities London-wide adopt a pattern of the Standard School Year, defined by the LGA's Standing Committee, for 2005/06.

The ALG survey was conducted during August and September 2003 and responses were received from twenty London Boroughs. The two-thirds threshold required for change was not reached. Just under half the authorities are, in principle, in favour of change, but others are less keen or have not yet consulted or taken a formal position on the issue.

The ALG is therefore recommending that the 2005/06 term dates be based on the traditional school year, but they continue to encourage boroughs that have not already done so to consult and take a Member-level decision on whether they are in favour of change to the Standard School Year.

6.3 The difference between the Standard School Year and the traditional school year patterns in 2005/6 will be small (see ALG recommendations - annexe 1). This is because:

(a) in 2006, Easter will fall sufficiently early in April to make it possible to keep the Easter holiday continuous with the Easter bank weekend (as per the traditional pattern) and to ensure that term lengths are as equal as possible (as per the Standard School Year); and

(b) the latest model of the Standard School Year (to be received from the ALG soon) is partly set on the principle that the school year should start on a September date as soon as possible after the 1st of the month. This means that the terms start and end dates and half term holidays will be almost identical between the two calendars throughout the 2005/6 school year, except for the October break which on the Standard School Year model will be a week and a half long.

6.4 The changes in the academic year 2006/7 will be more significant (although the exact dates have not been set at this stage and the ALG have not yet taken the decision as to what roll authorities will have in setting future dates). From 2006/7 the ALG propose: a two week October break to reduce teacher and pupil stress; 4 terms after Christmas limited to a maximum of 6 weeks; and a summer break which is always more than 5 weeks.

6.5 The result of the Brent consultation, with governing bodies and headteachers of Brent schools, shows a majority support for the Standard School Year provided the

proposals applied to all maintained schools and neighbouring LEAs. At the Teachers' Joint Consultative Committee of 2 March 2004 the teacher unions expressed that they are in favour as long as the scheme is co-ordinated with other boroughs. The issue was raised at the Brent Schools Forum on 3 December 2003 and again on 23 February 2004. The Forum agreed to support the six-term year providing it was applied across London.

- 6.6 However, some voluntary aided schools, particularly Roman Catholic and Jewish are apposed to the Standard School Year as it has implications for Holy Days (see 7.0 Diversity Issues below).
- 6.7 One Roman Catholic headteacher felt there would not necessarily be a problem with the Standard School Year.
- 6.8 Schools will still have the option of choosing occasional days throughout each academic year for inset days and Holy Days.
- 6.9 The Education Secretary, Charles Clarke in an interview with BBC Radio 4's Today programme on 4 March 2004 indicated his support for the Standard School Year However, this is not formally his area of responsibility.

NOTE: If all neighbouring LEAs implement the Standard School Year and Brent does not, Brent will be out of sync with its neighbours causing a variety of difficulties including childcare problems for parents and communication problems between schools.

7.0 DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 7.1 During the consultation process many responses from voluntary aided schools expressed their concerns about the Standard School Year in respect of the fixed Easter break. The lack of flexibility of the Standard School Year could be a problem for any VA school that feels particularly strongly about this issue.
- 7.2 One VA school quoted: 'As a Jewish school we have to take our holidays at times to enable us to observe our Holy Days. We try always to ensure that they are inline with the terms and holidays as organised with the LEA. A prime example of the difficulties that we sometimes encounter, [will] happen in the year 2004/2005 when the Passover does not coincide with Easter. (This happens about once every 9 years). In this case we are out of kilter with the LEA'. With the introduction of the Standard School Year this will occur more frequently.
- 7.3 Responses from Roman Catholic and Church of England schools were mixed. Some Roman Catholic school staff expressed their views against the Standard School Year quoting: 'Easter is our most important festival'. 'The change will have a negative impact on the celebration of Easter'. 'Holy Week (the week before Easter) and Easter Week will be adversely affected'. 'This is one way of de-christianising education'. At least one Roman Catholic school felt there would be no real problem with the new scheme.

8.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The following papers were used in the compilation of this report:-

- i) Letters from the Association of London Government
- ii) Letters from the LGA
- iii) Brent Consultation Spreadsheet
- iv) Brent's Standard School Year (Six Term Year) Briefing Paper

Any person wishing to inspect the above papers should contact:
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Annex 1

ALG School Term Dates Recommendation for London 2005/6

2005	July					August					September					
Monday		4	11	18	25	1	8	15	22	29	5	12	19	26		
Tuesday		5	12	19	26	2	9	16	23	30	6	13	20	27		
Wednesday		6	13	20	27	3	10	17	24	31	7	14	21	28		
Thursday		7	14	21	28	4	11	18	25	1	8	15	22	29		
Friday	1	8	15	22	29	5	12	19	26	2	9	16	23	30		
Saturday	2	9	16	23	30	6	13	20	27	3	10	17	24	31		
Sunday	3	10	17	24	31	7	14	21	28	4	11	18	25			
2005	October					November					December					
Monday		3	10	17	24	31		7	14	21	28	5	12	19	26	
Tuesday		4	11	18	25	1	8	15	22	29	6	13	20	27		
Wednesday		5	12	19	26	2	9	16	23	30	7	14	21	28		
Thursday		6	13	20	27	3	10	17	24	1	8	15	22	29		
Friday		7	14	21	28	4	11	18	25	2	9	16	23	30		
Saturday	1	8	15	22	29	5	12	19	26	3	10	17	24	31		
Sunday	2	9	16	23	30	6	13	20	27	4	11	18	25			
2006	January					February					March					
Monday		2	9	16	23	30		6	13	20	27		6	13	20	27
Tuesday		3	10	17	24	31		7	14	21	28		7	14	21	28
Wednesday		4	11	18	25	1	8	15	22	1	8	15	22	29		
Thursday		5	12	19	26	2	9	16	23	2	9	16	23	30		
Friday		6	13	20	27	3	10	17	24	3	10	17	24	31		
Saturday		7	14	21	28	4	11	18	25	4	11	18	25			
Sunday	1	8	15	22	29	5	12	19	26	5	12	19	26			
2006	April					May					June					
Monday		3	10	17	24	1	8	15	22	29		5	12	19	26	
Tuesday		4	11	18	25	2	9	16	23	30		6	13	20	27	
Wednesday		5	12	19	26	3	10	17	24	31		7	14	21	28	
Thursday		6	13	20	27	4	11	18	25	1	8	15	22	29		
Friday		7	14	21	28	5	12	19	26	2	9	16	23	30		
Saturday	1	8	15	22	29	6	13	20	27	3	10	17	24			
Sunday	2	9	16	23	30	7	14	21	28	4	11	18	25			
2006	July					August					September					
Monday		3	10	17	24	31		7	14	21	28		4	11	18	25
Tuesday		4	11	18	25	1	8	15	22	29		5	12	19	26	
Wednesday		5	12	19	26	2	9	16	23	30		6	13	20	27	
Thursday		6	13	20	27	3	10	17	24	31		7	14	21	28	
Friday		7	14	21	28	4	11	18	25	1	8	15	22	29		
Saturday	1	8	15	22	29	5	12	19	26	2	9	16	23	30		
Sunday	2	9	16	23	30	6	13	20	27	3	10	17	24			
Key																
	Weekend or Bank Holiday															
	Optional days for 195 model															
13	Holiday															
	Total Days: 193*															
	* = with options for 195 (either 1-2 September 05 or															

							24-25 July 06)
	1st & last day of the school year on 195 model				2006/7: Start of autumn term - 4 September 2006		
	Half-Term 1		No.	Half-Term 2		No.	Holidays
	Start	End		Start	End		
Autumn 2004	Mon 5 Sept	Fri 21 Oct	35	Mon 31 Oct	Tue 20 Dec	37	Mon 24 Oct to Fri 28 Oct
							Wed 21 Dec to Tue 3 Jan
Spring 2005	Wed 4 Jan	Fri 10 Feb	28	Mon 20 Feb	Fri 31 Mar	30	Mon 13 to Fri 17 Feb
							Mon 3 Apr to Mon 17 Apr
Summer 2005	Tue 18 Apr	Fri 26 May	28	Mon 5 Jun	Fri 21 July	35	Mon 29 May to Fri 2 June
							Mon 24 July to Friday 1 September
Inset days:	One to be taken on 1st day of school year, 4 to be determined locally and can be replaced with twilight sessions						