

The Standardised School Year

In Greater Merseyside, discussions have been taking place with regard to introducing a standardised school year across the region from 2010/2011.

It is proposed that future term dates are changed, particularly around the Easter break, to benefit children, their families and the staff in schools. The proposed changes will allow for better work/life balance as the school terms will be more evenly spaced out and the standardised approach will help with forward planning, holiday booking etc.

The proposals were agreed, in principal, at a meeting between the Greater Merseyside Directors of Children's Services, and it has been agreed that a consultation exercise will take place across the region in the Autumn term 2008 to obtain the views of parents, staff, governors, trade unions, elected members, the Diocese and Archdiocese and any other stakeholders.

This consultation exercise will give you all the chance to let us know what you think about the proposals and what you feel would be the advantages and disadvantages of moving to a standardised school year across the region.

In addition to the consultation process, Liverpool City Council have agreed to pilot the term dates based upon the standardised school year in 2009/2010. During that year, feedback will be obtained from parents and staff to identify whether the new approach has been beneficial, and this information will be considered alongside the feedback from the consultation process before any final decisions are made.

The principles for the calculation of standardised term dates are:

- All terms will start on a Monday (except where a bank holiday prevents this, in which case the term will start on a Tuesday).
- October half term will always be the last full week in October.
- February half term will always be the third full week in February.
- The Easter Break will be moved and replaced by a fixed holiday at the beginning of April and will be known as the Spring Break. This will always be the first two full weeks in April and will not move with the Easter holiday.
- Easter may still fall in the Spring Break, but even where it doesn't, it will still be observed by the two bank holidays for Good Friday and Easter Monday. This will give a more even distribution between terms, thus providing a better balance for children and staff in schools and avoiding exhausting long terms that are caused by early (2008) or late (2011) Easters.
- In any case where the school is open for part of a week, the school will be open for 3 or more days to encourage good attendance.

Under the current system, even slight variations in terms dates between the Authorities can have a serious impact on some families who live, work and go to school across our boundaries. This is not an ideal situation, as the children will potentially have different holiday patterns which is further complicated if the parents work in school settings too. If the school year is standardised across Greater Merseyside, it should provide greater stability across the region and improved work/life balance for staff in schools, the children and their families.