

14 THE STANDARD SCHOOL YEAR**Report By: School Services Manager****Wards Affected**

Countywide.

Purpose

1. To consider the views of the Scrutiny Committee about the proposed standard school year for 2004/5, following decision by other West Midlands LEAs to move away from the earlier agreement.

Financial Implications

2. None.

Report

3. The LGA set up an Independent Commission, in December 1999, to consider the organisation of the school year. The Commission initially reported in September 2000.
4. The Commission's principles for a six-term year included –
 - an organic development of the current 'three term year';
 - a move towards six roughly equal terms, with a fixed two-week spring break in the first half of April;
 - allowing flexibility for LEAs and foundation/voluntary schools to respond to the wishes of all 'faith' groups within their schools while moderating the impact of the varying date for Easter;
 - providing opportunities for a more rational pattern of learning, assessment and transfer;
 - allowing for an assessment term (term 5) for SATs and public examinations with incidental benefits for children and young people (post qualification assessment for transfer to HE and avoidance of assessment during the height of the hay fever season);
 - allowing for the maintenance of current practice over the length of the summer break;
 - a system of annual review which allows for consultation on further flexibility and change in future years;
 - while making pupils' learning a prime consideration, seek to balance the interests and needs of parents, teachers and those working within schools and have regard, where possible, to the concerns of the tourism industries.

5. The Commission's made further recommendations in September 2002 which reviewed progress on the national consultation process and offered a suggested timetable for 2004/5.
6. Following the presentation of this report, 2 meetings were held in Birmingham involving all the West Midlands LEAs to try to produce term dates that would be uniform across the West Midlands area.

On Friday, 17 January 2003 the officers present agreed 3 basic principles for the 2004/5 term dates –

- 1) that the school year should start in September. The PD day on 31 August 2004 was not supported;
 - 2) that the 3 half term dates should be the same across the area;
 - 3) that Good Friday and Easter Monday should be stand-alone holiday dates in March with a 2-week holiday break being held in April.
7. As a result of these meetings 4 possible options were produced, including the LGA recommended dates and these are attached to this report at Appendix 1.
 8. Headteachers, Diocesan Authorities and Professional Associations gave their views on the proposals with the preferences ranked as follows:-

1st	Option 3
2nd	Option 2
3rd	Option 4
4th	Option 1

(Option 4 was the LGA recommended dates and was by far the least supported)

9. On the 8 May 2003 a report was submitted to the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership which, after a detailed debate, supported Option 3.
10. On the 15 May 2003 the views of the Teacher Trades Union were requested and they were strongly opposed to the Easter Festival being separated from the main 2-week holiday break in April. The Regional Officials expressed concern that, despite the meeting held on 17 January, a number of LEAs had reverted to the original holiday arrangements. It was reported that Birmingham LEA had taken the lead, resulting in the surrounding LEAs feeling obliged to follow suit.
11. Since the May meeting, the Directorate have received a number of e-mails indicating that the Midland LEAs were reverting to the original holiday date arrangements. The problem has been compounded within the past week with Gloucestershire and Worcestershire changing their proposals and now including Good Friday and Easter Monday in the 2-week holiday break.
12. Herefordshire will now need to make a decision whether or not to follow the recommended LGA proposals or to follow the pattern of our neighbours, thus avoiding problems with staff and parents live on the borders of the county but may attend or work in an adjoining authority. On balance, that appears to be the sensible course of action in the circumstances.

13. The proposed term dates for 2004/5 shown as Appendix 2 use the best parts of Option 3, starting on Monday 6 September and having the same half term dates. The Easter holidays have been moved forward to include Good Friday and Easter Monday.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Committee considers the action taken to date and give advice on whether or not the term dates for 2004/5 should be approved, as now proposed in Appendix 1.

BACKGROUND PAPERS