



THE COOPERS' COMPANY
AND COBORN SCHOOL

Love as Brethren

Q&A Document for Parents

Proposal to amend the School Day/Year

April 2020

My biggest concern is school finishing at 4.15pm on Wednesday. During winter this means children will be walking home from school in the dark. This is an unnecessary higher risk.

We discussed this issue at length with our students as part of the consultation process and whilst it was clear that this was less of an issue for students in Years 10-13, it certainly was a factor for students lower down the school. It is important to point out that many students already leave school at this time due to involvement in extra-curricular provision. Also, it is important to recognise that an earlier finish on four days a week should assist students in the darker, winter months.

On a Wednesday, we would anticipate that there will be more parents/carers who decide to pick up their son/daughter to mitigate this issue, especially as the later finish may be more convenient for those parents/carers who work. Where this wasn't the case, we would continue to encourage students to be sensible with their personal safety when travelling home from school; for example, not travelling home alone. We will also continue to ensure senior-staff visibility at the front of the school and work closely with the Metropolitan Police to safeguard our students. The school has recently employed Special Constable, Mr Edwards to assist us with this; it is hoped that his role in the local area on a Wednesday will help to mitigate concerns.

Many students represent the school in sport and sometimes already have to miss the last lesson of a day. My concern is that these students could possibly have to miss at least one more lesson if they are playing sporting fixtures on a Wednesday. I'm worried that students will miss important lessons and work in certain subjects on a regular basis. How will this be addressed?

Extra-curricular provision is very much part of the DNA of our school and is something that makes us unique. We remain as committed as ever to this aspect of our provision in line with our ethos of 'Love as Brethren'. Due to the fact that we are delaying implementation of the proposal to September 2021, we now have over 15 months to put in place the required planning with all aspects of our extra-curricular provision to mitigate the point you make above. It is important to recognise, that this point will only impact those students who are representing the school in competitive sport on a Wednesday on a regular basis, and so will not affect the overwhelming majority of our students. It is also not an issue throughout the entire academic year, as in the summer months there is less of a requirement to start fixtures early. It is important, however that we look at how we can limit the impact of this issue. One way we can do this is through careful timetabling of the Wednesday Period 6 slot. It is true to say, there will still be some impact on students but we will work with them to support them to manage any learning that they miss out on.

My son/daughter has a long journey to/from school and so on a Wednesday once he/she gets home there won't be much time to do extra work. It might be worth considering a longer extension for homework or maybe none at all. It is important for students not to feel extra stress and pressure.

In almost in every department, in every year group, students are routinely given a number of days in order to complete homework. Teaching staff are aware of the pressures that students face and also the commitments that many of them are involved in outside of school. As such, homework is almost never set for the next day; this therefore should not be an issue. In rare instances, there may be homework set on a Wednesday, which is required to be completed the next day. This occurs in a very small minority of subjects, where the learning is sequential and consolidation/preparatory work is needed before the next learning can take place. This practice occurs very rarely and if it does it is for sound educational reasons. Your son/daughter will obviously benefit from getting home earlier four days a week and so this should

also help him/her manage time more effectively. We are also completing a review of our current homework policy to consider its function and impact, particularly in Years 7, 8 and 9.

I am concerned about the impact on your staff, particularly those who give up their time, such as PE staff, with a potential later finish on the Wednesday.

As you will note from the proposal document sent to parents, student/staff wellbeing was an important factor in our decision to implement this change. Staff have been consulted on the proposal and voted overwhelmingly in favour (83%) of the proposal. Although teaching time increases in the new model, there is actually a net gain for teaching staff in terms of their contact time (with the removal of afternoon registration), as well as the additional weeks's holiday at half term in a October. Admittedly, there will be a longer day on a Wednesday, but it is hoped that the earlier finish four days a week as well as the longer October half term will mitigate any negative impacts.

It states that the students are in favour; how was this proposal put to the students prior to this consultation?

A full Student Congress took place on this issue in January. Student Congress is our student decision-making body which is established in September every year. Students across the school select their Form Representatives and from these representatives, there are 2 'Year Captains' in every year who attend the Student Congress meeting. Initially, in the Student Congress, the students were able to discuss the issue with staff present and then privately; this took place for almost 2 hours. Students raised over 15 different issues that they wanted considered by the school's SLT. Student Congress was in favour of the proposal and gave the school's SLT permission to explore the issue further. Year Captains were then asked, and with the support of Heads of Year, to inform all Form Reps of the proposals and the discussions which took place in a formal meeting. Following this meeting, Form Reps should have spoken to all students in their form group so that every student in the school was aware of what was happening. A second update was then given to the Student Congress on Thursday 5th March; once again students were asked to feed back to their Form Representatives.

What about external extra-curricular activities that start soon after school finishes - are our children just expected to now miss them on a Wednesday as they won't be able to get there in time?

As we are giving over 15 months' notice of this change, this provides an excellent 'lead time' for this issue to be addressed by any provider who offers activities on a Wednesday. Attendance at school would be mandatory for all students until the later finish at 4:15pm. However, it is important to note, that on four days a week the situation is actually beneficial to students engaging in external extra-curricular activities, as these would be able to start earlier than is currently the case.

What happens to those who need to use the 646/648 bus to get home or onward as this will no longer be an option. Are you liaising with TFL about bus services?

We understand that this change will affect different students in different ways, depending on their journey to/from school. We will of course, be informing TFL of the change and as we are giving over 15 months' notice this should provide sufficient notification for any amendments needed to be put in place for September 2021. Our hope is that there will be some flexibility on the part of any transport provision.

Why are you choosing a two week October half term over a three week Christmas break? A three week period over Christmas would enable families more time to visit overseas relatives and relatives in the UK.

As mentioned in the proposal document we have looked at a range of different options and strongly feel that October half term is the most appropriate. It was felt that Easter and May Half Term were never realistic options due to the impact on examination classes. This left us with October, Christmas or February. The key driver here was the longer Autumn Term and the need put a solution in place which we felt could positively impact student/staff wellbeing. Extending Christmas to three weeks is hugely problematic due to the nature of the school calendar in mid-December and extending the holiday further into January wouldn't address the issue of the length of the Autumn Term.

Are you liaising with other schools in the borough to encourage them to adopt a similar model, given that many of us still have children in primary schools and this will present us with a logistical and expensive childcare challenge?

One of the unique aspects of our school is the diversity of our student population in terms of the wide range of 'feeder' schools that students come from. Students join us from a myriad of London Boroughs, as well as from the Essex and Thurrock areas, this therefore isn't a 'borough' issue as the question states. We will be notifying the main stakeholders of our change; for example, we have already informed Havering as part of the consultation process. We will, of course, inform other schools of our decision, but it is not for our school to 'encourage' others to follow our model.

When determining the 2-week break, will you take into consideration other authorities' holidays and make sure your two weeks coincide if their holidays are different - for example, in 2019, Essex and Havering had different 1-week Oct half terms. Otherwise for those of us in this position, we would potentially have 3 weeks of October to cover. Would the extra week off in the October half term be at the same time as other schools that follow the same model?

As mentioned in the response to the last question, this is exceptionally difficult due to the nature of our student population with students coming from such a wide range of locations. The geographical nature of the school (on the boundary of a London Borough/Essex County Council/Thurrock Council) means that there is always the potential for a disconnect over holiday dates, as was the case during the current academic year. Before we make any decision about the exact timing of the 2-week October half term, we will, of course, factor in the term dates in place in a range of locations. It is however, going to prove impossible to put in place a solution which pleases every parent. We will continue to make decisions about term/holiday dates well in advance so that parents are able to plan ahead.

How will the school's extra-curricular provision be affected?

Extra-curricular provision is such a critical aspect of the school and we will continue to support and encourage its provision. On four days a week, with an earlier finish, we hope extra-curricular participation will increase as there will be slightly more time available for students to become involved after school, before travelling home. The situation on a Wednesday is slightly more complex; due to the later finish. As we are now delaying the implementation of this change to September 2021, there is extensive time to address any issues around extra-curricular provision that currently takes place on a Wednesday. One solution would be for this provision, where possible, to move to other slots in the week.

An additional week holiday in October is an unnecessary further financial burden for some parents (re child care arrangements).

We are conscious of this issue and this was one of the reasons why we have decided to delay implementation of this change until September 2021. The experience of extended lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic has highlighted that time at home, does not necessarily need to be expensive for parents or students. Furthermore, fortunately, our school context is one where for the vast majority of our families are financially stable, however, we understand that in a number of cases this will be problematic which is why we asked parents about their views on this specific matter in the online consultation; it did not appear to be a significant issue/concern, with few showing an interest in provision provided by the school when asked in the consultation. However, we will continue to investigate possible support that could be put in place for the additional week of holiday. For example, the possibility of offering an activities week style of provision, through a private company such as Mega Camps or Barracudas. The funding of this for Pupil Premium students would need careful consideration. Ultimately, we would be constrained by the demand that existed for such provision and we would look at this issue carefully as there is now more time available to us for implementation from September 2021.

Wednesday is a very popular day, in the sporting calendar for fixtures, both taking place within the Borough and wider. Would a Monday not be a better day to start off the week on a busy full on day after 2 restful days of the weekend?

We considered every day. The only day that we felt was never going to be possible was Friday. Monday was the day that was initially proposed but it was clear from the staff consultation that many staff were not in favour of this day. Most significantly, the students were strongly opposed to a Monday. Thursday was seen as problematic as we envisage this continuing as a dedicated meeting/Parents' Evening day. This would have extended these events much further into the evening which we felt was unacceptable for staff wellbeing. The remaining options were Tuesday and Wednesday. Wednesday has ultimately been selected as it provides us with greatest flexibility from a timetabling and curriculum perspective, as it is the day when we have most staff on site. This is due to fact that it is the day when many of our part time staff work.

My concern would be the quality of learning from the children working longer days; I do not believe the longer days would be effective

We don't feel that this is a major issue. We will still continue to provide an extensive lunch break of an hour for students to unwind during the day; many also take advantage of the extra-curricular provision on offer at lunch. One of the benefits of the model is that on four days week, fatigue should actually be lessened as we finish earlier. Many educational systems around the world have much more extensive school days and we are confident that students will be able to adapt. We will obviously monitor this issue as well as afternoon behaviour, but we need to have high expectations of our students; there is no reason why they cannot 'step up' on a Wednesday!

Why can't the new PSHE curriculum be built in to the existing morning registration time?

As you will have read from the parent consultation document the new statutory PSHE curriculum is much more significant than that which is currently being delivered on a non-statutory basis. With 18 key areas of learning that need to be covered, it is not possible to cover the required content in the morning

registration time. Moreover, the extremely sensitive nature of some of the content (such as bereavement, divorce, or sex or drugs education) means that this cannot be delivered in a slot of 25 minutes. Additionally, some of the content will be delivered by outside speakers who will be delivering sessions of up to one hour.

Removing the afternoon registration means no contact with the form tutor. Less contact with the form tutors represents fewer opportunities for them to pick up on issues such as bullying, mental health problems, and so on. How are you going to ensure that there is no knock-on effect on the welfare and safeguarding of children and reassure parents that issues will still be picked up on and communicated home where necessary?

Afternoon registration does not currently meet the objective that you raise in your question; students were very clear on this when they were consulted as part of the Student Congress meeting. In most instances, this registration slot is barely enough time to take a register before the last lesson of the day. However, we are mindful of the point you make and are looking to further extend our Peer Mentoring scheme in 2020-21 as well as a range of other pastoral initiatives. Crucially, issues such as bullying and mental health will be explicitly addressed as part of the new PSHE programme, that this change helps facilitate. Therefore a more extensive PSHE programme will play a critical role in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of our students.

Would extra homework be set for this additional week off? It would be beneficial for pupils to be set some homework, in order to keep their attitude to learning in check and their brains stimulated.

Views on homework across the parent/student/staff body are extremely mixed and many parents/students/staff would not see it as beneficial for additional homework to be set in this extra week. One of the key rationales for us to introduce this change is to safeguard student well-being in a very long Autumn Term; additional homework set would arguably defeat the objective of the change we are looking to make. However, for students studying GCSE and A Level programmes of study, may staff may choose to set more extensive work over the 2 week period, to address the point that you make, however this would not be an official expectation.

Why has shortening the lunch break been ruled out?

Over the past year, we have been considering a wide range of models to help us achieve the 4 rationales for change outlined in the proposal document. The PSHE working party also looked at the issue and proposed a range of models. Every other model we considered was felt to have significant drawbacks. These drawbacks ranged from impacting curriculum time, to adversely affecting student or staff wellbeing, or because we knew they would be too problematic for parents. An example would be shortening lunch time. We considered this, but it would have had an adverse effect on extra-curricular provision on every day of the week, particularly from a sporting perspective.

Does this model provide the equivalent curriculum hours as the children have now? I understand that extra hours are created but after the PSHE quota of time has been taught, are the children having less time spent on the current curriculum?

Page 7 of the parent consultation document provides a breakdown of the curriculum hours. Students will not be receiving less curriculum hours than currently offered; they will actually receive more time. Students are currently taught for 950 hours (of which 10 hours equate to the two PSHE days), so in a

simplistic sense our current model provides for 940 hours of curriculum teaching. The new model creates 962 hours of curriculum time (an overall increase of 12 hours – 2 teaching days). We are anticipating that around 18 hours of this new time will be dedicated to PSHE – 1 hour every other week, which will leave 946 hours for curriculum teaching, an increase of 6 hours from the current situation.

I am concerned about Year 11 pupils missing a week of school prior to mock exams in December

This issue was discussed at length as part of the decision making process. As a school we will do all we can to ensure that students in Year 11 are continuing to maintain their momentum in the run up to the all-important mock examinations. For example, during the first year of implementation, we could exempt Year 11 from the PSHE programme in the Autumn Term and provide additional curriculum time to mitigate the loss of teaching from the 2nd week of October half term. Moreover, it is likely that students will be set specific revision tasks during the additional week of holiday in October half term. When students were consulted about this exact issue, many felt that it would provide beneficial 'independent study time' and that a period of two weeks would enable them to 'kick start' their mock preparation; we do recognise that not all students will share this view. In the longer term, as a result of this wider change, students will have benefited from an additional 12 days of teaching (12 hours x 5 = 60 hours) over their five years at the school, so there will be tangible educational benefits.

Although there will be an additional period one day a week what will this be timetabled for? How many teaching hours is the school required to devote to PHSE? If we are to lose a week of teaching where in GCSE it can be difficult to deliver the curriculum and complete teaching until very close to examinations, what compelling evidence is there that losing a week of dedicated curriculum time can be in the best interest of students?

These issues were addressed in the parent consultation document. The additional period one day a week would be split between the existing curriculum and the PSHE curriculum. In total, this additional period provides an additional 37 hours and these 37 hours will be split between the current curriculum on offer and dedicated PSHE time. It is expected that this will be an equal split, however this is not certain until the school has fully audited its exact PSHE needs; a process which is currently underway. The point you make about 'losing a week of dedicated curriculum time' is not correct if you review the hours that are actually gained in teaching time from the proposal. By the end of Year 11, a student at Coopers' Coborn will have gained an additional 12 days of teaching from the change; there is no loss of teaching time.