

Easter 2011 and the Royal Wedding

The Easter Break for the current academic year was a difficult one to set, even before the announcement of the Royal Wedding. Due to the timing of the New Year Bank Holiday, and a very late Easter, the only way of accommodating a calendar of the required number of days was to shorten one of the school holidays, or to open schools during August Bank Holiday week. As many parents and staff enjoy late summer breaks during this week, a shortened Easter was eventually decided on.

Since the announcement of the Royal Wedding, we have been contacted by a number of schools and parents requesting a change to the Local Authority's published term dates. An end date for the Spring Term of Friday 15 April has been the most common suggestion, as this would allow a full two week break (plus the May Day Bank Holiday) for staff and students.

The Department for Education has confirmed that they will be making the necessary legislative changes to reduce the 2010/11 school year by one day (from the normal 190 to 189). Changes will also be made to the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document for the 2010/11 academic year. This will reduce the number of days a teacher must be available for work, as well the number of hours a teacher must be available to perform their duties. All schools will therefore be able to take 29 April as an additional closure day.

While a revised Easter break does initially seem sensible, there are a number of potential issues with making such a change. These are set out below.

1) Where parents have booked a holiday departing on the 14th or 15th of April

Students would be forced to miss time in school, which goes against Local Authority / DfE guidance. In some cases, it would take students over the ten days absence schools can grant in 'exceptional circumstances'. Parents who had already booked a holiday departing on the 14th / 15th could object to their child being forced to miss time in school.

2) Where staff have booked a holiday departing on the 14th / 15th of April

Naturally, if term dates were to be changed, it would be unfair to ask staff to change their plans. However, this could then leave them short of the number of days or hours they are required to be available for work as part of their terms and conditions. There could also be a subsequent cost of covering these members of staff.

3) Transport

There is no guarantee operators would be able to provide their services if the dates were now changed.

4) The need to consult

There is an expectation that if published term dates are to be changed, that a consultation exercise be carried out. Due to the late announcement of the Royal Wedding, there has been very little time to consult.

In light of the above, the decision has been taken not to change the Local Authority's published term dates. Some local variation is unavoidable due to the fact that in Aided and Foundation Schools, it is the Governing Body that sets the term dates. In such a school, it is relatively easy to make late changes, as consultation is with a fairly small, very specific group of individuals. For the Local Authority, it is much harder.

Parents are advised to contact their child's school directly to confirm exact holiday dates for 2011.