



Our Ref: AF/IC/SWD

9 February 2026

Dear Parents and Carers

Adjusting school days and terms to increase learning and well-being

I am writing to let you know about our proposal to adjust the length of each school day and to reduce the length of the autumn and summer terms. The practical impact will be to increase the length of each school day by 25 minutes, starting each day a little earlier and finishing a little later. This will enable us to increase the length of the autumn half term break to two weeks and to finish the summer term one week earlier, extending the summer break. Each lesson will increase in length by five minutes, increasing valuable learning time in the middle part of the lesson. We believe that this proposed change will bring well-being benefits for students and families, and also for staff.

We invite you to read the full proposal, which can be found at the end of this letter.

We are offering opportunities for discussion and feedback. You will receive a link to a short questionnaire on Friday 13 February. You are also invited to sign up to one of four consultation events over the next two weeks, where we can explain the proposal more fully, listen to your comments, and answer any questions. Some of these consultation events will be in person, and some will be online. To express your interest in one of these consultation events, please contact us at proposal@lordlawson.academy.

The period of consultation begins today and ends on Monday 23 February.

Yours faithfully

Dr A Fowler
Principal

Consultation events:

- Tuesday 10 February, 4pm – in person, at Lord Lawson of Beamish Academy
- Thursday 12 February, 1:30pm – online via Microsoft Teams
- Monday 16 February, 9:30am -10:30am in person, in our community: Birtley Community Centre, Ravensworth Road, DH3 1EN
- Thursday 19 February, 5:30pm – online via Microsoft Teams

Consultation Proposal: Adjusting school days and terms to increase learning and well-being

Executive Summary

Lord Lawson of Beamish Academy is consulting on a proposed change to the structure of the school year and school day, which would increase the length of school days and reduce the length of school terms. Under this proposal, the length of each school day would increase slightly, and the length of the autumn and summer terms would reduce. The practical impact would involve moving from a one-week to a two-week October half term holiday and extending the summer break to seven weeks instead of six. This proposal ensures that the school continues to meet all Department for Education (DfE) requirements for total annual learning hours and the minimum 32.5-hour school week.

To achieve this, the proposal involves:

- Increasing the length of each school day by 25 minutes of learning time, by
- Adjusting the start and end times to the school day, resulting in
- Reducing the number of school days from 190 to 180 per year

Current model

The school currently operates a 190 -day academic year with a weekly timetable of 32 hours and 30 minutes on site, including 25 hours of learning time and 1 hour and 40 minutes of tutor time. The school day runs for 6 hours and 30 minutes, structured around five 60-minute lessons, tutor time, break and lunch. The annual holiday pattern totals 13 weeks.

Current model – holidays:

- October half term (1 week)
- Christmas and New Year (2 weeks)
- February half term (1 week)
- Easter (2 weeks)
- May half term (1 week)
- Summer (6 weeks)
- **Total = 13 weeks**

Current model timetable (190 days):

Period	Time	Duration
Tutor time	08:50 – 09:10	20 minutes
Period 1	09:10 – 10:10	60 minutes
Break	10:10 – 10:30	20 minutes
Period 2	10:30 – 11:30	60 minutes
Period 3	11:30 – 12:30	60 minutes
Lunch	12:30 – 13:20	50 minutes
Period 4	13:20 – 14:20	60 minutes
Period 5	14:20 – 15:20	60 minutes

Rationale for change

Improving well-being for students and staff

The autumn term is widely recognised as the longest and most demanding period of the school year. In response, several multi-academy trusts and local authorities have introduced extended autumn breaks and longer summer holidays to better support the mental and physical well-being of both students and staff.

There is growing evidence that longer breaks reduce fatigue, burnout and illness. Extended breaks provide students and staff with valuable time to unwind and recover from sustained academic pressures, supporting improved mental health and emotional regulation. This is particularly important during the autumn term, when illness rates are high. A longer mid-term break may also act as a “circuit breaker”, helping to reduce the spread of seasonal illnesses and improve overall attendance.

Improved well-being is closely linked to improved outcomes. Reduced stress enables students to regulate emotions more effectively, concentrate for longer periods and engage more positively in learning. Research indicates that longer breaks can improve mood and self-regulation, supporting healthier sleep patterns. These are all factors strongly associated with higher academic performance and reduced risk of burnout. Students are therefore more likely to return to school refreshed, reinvigorated and ready to learn.

Extended breaks also offer broader developmental benefits. Additional time away from school allows students to spend meaningful time with family and friends, pursue hobbies and participate in activities that promote relaxation and personal growth. Students may engage in extracurricular opportunities such as music, drama, art or sport, develop new skills including coding or creative disciplines, or gain valuable life experience through volunteering or part-time work. Opportunities to travel or

explore different cultures can further broaden students' perspectives and contribute positively to their personal development.

Staff benefit similarly. Improved work–life balance and reduced stress levels, including reduced risk of burnout, directly support enhanced teaching quality. Evidence from schools already operating extended holidays indicates that teachers return with higher morale, improved well-being and greater readiness to deliver high-quality instruction. Longer breaks may also contribute to lower staff absence, reducing reliance on cover supervisors or supply staff. This ensures greater continuity in lesson delivery, strengthens relationships with students, and helps minimise cover-related expenditure.

Enhanced teaching quality, recruitment and retention

Schools with longer mid-term breaks report lower staff absence and better work–life balance. These outcomes directly support the DfE's expectation that schools take proactive steps to manage workload and promote staff well-being, recognising the clear link between teacher well-being, retention and classroom effectiveness.

Despite a reduction in the number of school days, it is likely the proposed model will have minimal impact on planning, preparation or assessment demands for teaching or support staff. Teachers will continue to plan and deliver the same curriculum content as under the current model, ensuring continuity and consistency in teaching quality. For subjects with controlled assessment requirements, submission deadlines and assessment structures are not affected by the proposed changes. This ensures that curriculum delivery is maintained without adding complexity or additional workload for staff.

From a workforce perspective, enhanced holiday entitlement is not widely offered across the local school system. By promoting a supportive, balanced and well-being focused working environment, the school positions itself as an attractive employer in a competitive recruitment market. This supports the DfE's workforce objectives by improving recruitment quality, strengthening staff retention and reducing reliance on supply staff, which in turn benefits continuity of learning for students.

Supporting families

A further key rationale for the proposed changes is the substantial financial, practical and relational benefits for families arising from increased holiday flexibility. Travel during traditional school holiday periods is significantly more expensive, placing considerable strain on family finances and in some cases, making holidays entirely inaccessible. These financial pressures are felt most significantly by families reliant on lower incomes.

Greater flexibility would allow families to manage childcare more effectively, plan holidays more affordably and engage in shared family activities that strengthen relationships and support overall well-being. This is particularly important for families

with adolescents, for whom sustained, high-quality family time is strongly linked to emotional well-being and resilience.

Extended breaks also reduce the pressure many families experience during peak holiday periods when availability, staffing and accessibility are limited, and costs are at their highest. Booking travel during off-peak periods can result in substantial savings, enabling some families, who might otherwise be unable to do so, to access holidays and enrichment opportunities.

Importantly, increased flexibility will have a positive impact on attendance. School data indicates that the majority of unauthorised term-time holidays occur during the autumn and summer terms, often driven by financial necessity rather than parental disregard for attendance expectations. By aligning holiday structures more closely with family needs and affordability, the proposed model is likely to reduce the incidence of unauthorised absence, improving compliance with attendance policies while maintaining positive relationships between schools and families.

The proposed model would therefore support families by:

- Enabling more affordable holiday planning through access to off-peak travel
- Reducing stress related to childcare and school holiday scheduling
- Increasing access to family experiences and enrichment opportunities
- Strengthening family relationships and overall well-being
- Reducing the likelihood of unauthorised term-time absence

Rebalancing the school calendar provides a more equitable and family-centred approach, supporting well-being, improving attendance and fostering stronger partnerships between schools and families.

Financial sustainability and efficient use of resources

The proposed calendar model offers modest financial efficiencies by reducing energy use such as heating, lighting and water during longer closure periods. This also enables planned maintenance, refurbishment and deep cleaning to be carried out more effectively when the site is not in daily operation.

National Context

Across England, a growing number of schools and local authorities have adopted extended holiday models, supported by carefully structured adjustments to the school day. Feedback from several local schools in the region that have already implemented similar calendar models has been consistently positive. These schools report notable improvements in attendance, enhanced well-being for both staff and students, and

strengthened academic outcomes, demonstrating the potential benefits of adopting this approach.

Proposed model

The proposed model restructures the school year through a revised daily timetable and an updated holiday pattern, while maintaining the full curriculum offer. The school day would run from 08:35 to 15:30, with five 65-minute lessons and a 20-minute tutor period, creating a slightly longer day. The annual holiday entitlement would increase from 13 to 15 weeks, with an extended two week break in October and a seven week summer in July. Under this model, the school year operates over 180 days.

Proposed model holidays:

- October half term (2 weeks)
- Christmas and New Year (2 weeks)
- February half term (1 week)
- Easter (2 weeks)
- May half term (1 week)
- Summer (7 weeks)
- **Total = 15 weeks**

Proposed model timetable (180 days):

Period	Time	Duration
Tutor time	08:35 – 08:55	20 minutes
Period 1	08:55 – 10:00	65 minutes
Break	10:00 – 10:20	20 minutes
Period 2	10:20 – 11:25	65 minutes
Period 3	11:25 – 12:30	65 minutes
Lunch	12:30 – 13:20	50 minutes
Period 4	13:20 – 14:25	65 minutes
Period 5	14:25 – 15:30	65 minutes

School leaders, including governors, will monitor the implementation and impact of this proposal. This monitoring will take place after the first and second year of the proposed change. We always compare pastoral and academic data, including attendance, over a multi-year time frame. We will continue to do this.

Further notes and explanation

School Transport

The school transport operator, Nexus, has confirmed that the proposed changes to the school calendar will not create any operational issues for the bus service. All students using the scholars' transport will arrive on site by 8:30am and all scholar services will operate as normal at the end of the school day.

A detailed itinerary for each bus route will be published once Nexus completes the updated timetable later in the academic year. The school will share this timetable with families as soon as it becomes available to ensure a smooth transition and continued reliable transport for all students.

For students who do not use the scholars' service, families can continue to access the local bus network, which provides a wide variety of routes and services to ensure that children can arrive at school on time.

Timescales

Week commencing 2 February 2026

- Proposal discussed with governors

Week commencing 9 February 2026

- Consultation launched with staff, parents/carers and students:
 - Staff briefing and questionnaire issued to staff
 - Letter and questionnaire issued to parents/carers
 - Whole-school assembly for students
- Proposal document shared with trade union partners and external stakeholders

Weeks commencing 9 February and 16 February 2026

- Consultation events for staff and parents/carers:
 - **Parents/carers:** One in-person meeting and one online meeting each week
 - **Staff:** Two drop-in slots available each week

Week commencing 23 February 2026

- Consultation period closes, Monday 23 February 2026

Week commencing 2 March 2026

- Governors and senior leaders meet to consider outcome of consultation
- Decision communicated.

Frequently asked questions

1. Why is the school proposing to change the structure of the school year?

The main aims are to improve student and staff well-being, reduce fatigue during long terms, support better attendance, offer families greater flexibility, and ensure the school continues to meet all Department for Education (DfE) requirements for annual learning hours and the minimum 32.5-hour school week.

2. What are the key changes being proposed?

- Moving from 190 school days per year to 180.
- Extending the October half term to two weeks.
- Extending the summer holiday to seven weeks.
- Lengthening the school day by 25 minutes.
- Introducing 65-minute lessons rather than 60-minute lessons.

3. Will students still receive the same amount of teaching?

Yes. The school will continue to meet the required annual learning hours. Lessons will be slightly longer (65 minutes), supporting deeper learning.

4. How will the school day change?

Proposed school day:

- Start: 08:35
- Finish: 15:30
- Five 65-minute lessons and a 20-minute tutor period
- Break and lunchtime remain the same length

5. What will the new holiday pattern look like?

The total holiday entitlement would increase from 13 to 15 weeks per year:

- October half term (2 weeks)
- Christmas and New Year (2 weeks)
- February half term (1 week)

- Easter (2 weeks)
- May half term (1 week)
- Summer (7 weeks)

6. Why increase holidays in both October and summer?

Evidence from national pilots shows that extended October breaks improve attendance and reduce illness, while modest increases to the summer break support deep rest, cognitive recovery and personal development. Both adjustments are balanced by increased teaching time during the school year.

7. How will longer holidays benefit students?

Research shows that longer breaks help reduce fatigue, stress and illness. Students return more focused, better rested and more ready to learn. A longer October break can also act as a “circuit breaker” for seasonal illnesses.

8. How will it benefit families?

Families often struggle with childcare costs, availability during peak periods, and rising travel prices. The new model will:

1. Allow families to book holidays in more affordable off peak periods-peak periods
2. Reduce pressure during busy school holiday times
3. Provide more opportunities for shared family experiences
4. Reduce unauthorised termtime absences driven by financial pressures

9. Will this affect the curriculum or exam preparation?

No. Curriculum content remains the same. GCSE and A level assessment timelines and requirements are unchanged. Subjects with controlled assessments will not be disadvantaged.

10. How does this support staff well-being?

Longer mid-term and summer breaks reduce burnout and support better work–life balance. This can lead to higher teaching quality, improved staff retention and fewer absences. This overall benefitting students.

11. Has this type of calendar been used elsewhere?

Yes. A growing number of schools and local authorities nationally have adopted extended holiday models. Feedback from local schools already using similar structures has been positive, with improvements in attendance, well-being and academic engagement. There are some local authorities who have adopted this approach for all schools within their area.

12. Will school transport be affected?

No. Nexus has confirmed that the proposed calendar will not cause any operational issues. The scholars' buses will continue to arrive by 8:30am and operate as normal at the end of the school day. Updated route timetables will be shared should this proposal be accepted.

13. Will the changes affect families who rely on the local bus network?

No. Families can continue to use regular public bus services in the same way as they do currently.

14. Are there any financial implications for the school?

Financial implications are not the purpose of this change. However, the proposed model may create modest efficiencies through reduced energy use during longer closure periods and more effective scheduling of maintenance, refurbishment and deep cleaning.

15. How can parents/carers provide feedback on the proposal?

Feedback can be shared through:

- Consultation meetings (in person and online)
- Questionnaire