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5th May 2023

Consultation in changes to the school day

Dear Families and Stakeholders,

I am writing to you to formally initiate the process of working towards changing the time of the school day, which if broadly supported, would be implemented in September 2023.

The first part of the process was for us to seek the views of staff. Following this we now want to formally consult all families, professionals and other stakeholders. Following this we will be collating responses, and sharing a firm recommendation for the Governing Body to consider. These changes are founded on what we as professional educational leaders believe will support our mission to continue to raise standards in the school. I will describe these reasons in greater detail below.

Our collective intention is to be the leading specialist school in the city, and to be considered as an exceptional school for our pupils, staff and wider community. Please have my reassurance that this process will be led and managed in a fair, open and transparent manner, whilst understanding that any recommendation may not be democratic. The final document for the Governing Body to consider will incorporate a summary of the collated responses.

I anticipate there may be wide-ranging views from all involved groups and it is crucial that all groups engage in the consultation process. For this reason, we ask all individuals wishing to comment or make any suggestions, to please put these in writing in the appropriate spaces within the consultation document. 'Nil responses' from stakeholders who choose not to participate in the consultation will be interpreted as 'broadly supportive' of the proposed change.

We currently operate the school day beginning at 9am and finishing at 3.15pm from Monday to Friday, with the Infants (The Pod) finishing at 3.00 pm. Following a staff consultation, we are now proposing to start the school day at 8.55 and finish the school day at 3.30pm (3.15pm at The Pod). However, on a Wednesday, an earlier finish of 1:45pm.

Briarwood Juniors, Secondary, Nexus and Sixth Form		
Day of the week	Current timetable	Proposed timetable
Monday	9.00am – 3.15pm	8.55am – 3.30pm
Tuesday	9.00am – 3.15pm	8.55am – 3.30pm
Wednesday	9.00am – 3.15pm	8.55am – 1.45pm
Thursday	9.00am – 3.15pm	8.55am – 3.30pm
Friday	9.00am – 3.15pm	8.55am – 3.30pm
Total time in school	31hours & 15 minutes	31hours & 10 minutes

Briarwood Infants (The Pod)		
Day of the week	Current timetable	Proposed timetable
Monday	9.00am – 3.00pm	8.55am – 3.15pm
Tuesday	9.00am – 3.00pm	8.55am – 3.15pm
Wednesday	9.00am – 3.00pm	8.55am – 1.45pm
Thursday	9.00am – 3.00pm	8.55am – 3.15pm
Friday	9.00am – 3.00pm	8.55am – 3.15pm
Total time in school	30hours	30hours & 10minutes

This will allow staff to have 2 hours a week to ensure they have sufficient time to undertake mandatory training. This includes ensuring all staff are appropriately trained in specific teaching practices, interventions, therapies and health and safety requirements as well as enhancing their professional development. It would also improve the quality of our provision by allowing staff greater opportunities to have time to review support and behaviour strategies as part of a team approach. Whilst the earlier finish could be scheduled for another day, a Wednesday maximises the number of staff who would benefit from this proposal taking account of part time workers.

Currently staff at Briarwood are required to be trained in many areas, examples include; administration of medication, epilepsy awareness, buccal midazolam (and other specific and restricted medications), first aid, tube and pump feeding, tracheostomy care, manual handling, team teach (positive behaviour support and restrictive physical intervention), health and safety, safeguarding, sensory integration, specific academic and therapeutic interventions including (but not limited to), Attention autism, TEACCH, PECS, Alternative communication methods, Makaton, Lego therapy, Move (Physiotherapy), Physiotherapy and Hydrotherapy support programs, Hearing Impairments, Visual Impairments, preparing for adulthood, Bristol standard (early years) etc.

Many of these training programmes take a long time to complete and are vital for the safety and welfare of the pupils. We receive no daily support from school nurses or healthcare professionals onsite, so have to ensure that school staff are trained to the correct standard. We always prioritise the safety of pupils and therefore the 5 days used for inset training is quickly used up with mandatory training. However, 5 days is not enough time to complete all the training and therefore we have to remove staff from classes during contact time, which increases the need for supply staff, which increases costs and decreases consistency for pupils. As you may be aware, school budgets (especially special schools) are not being fully funded by government and therefore we have no ability to pay staff overtime or continue to use supply staff in this way. The use of our inset days for mandatory training, means that the opportunities for professional development in educational areas are limited.

Our latest staff surveys and retention data, including exit interviews, indicates that training and professional development is integral to staff wellbeing and a key factor in attracting and retaining staff. As you may be aware, the education sector is facing difficulties in recruitment and retention and we want to both attract and support our staff to be the best they can be for your children and young people. Another key issue is enabling staff to have time in their teams to plan, assess, collect evidence and have quality debriefing sessions which are essential when working in a high pressured and demanding environment.

The latest government advice on the school day allows specialist settings to have flexibility on timing of the school week; *'we do not think it is appropriate to set an expectation for a minimum school week in specialist settings, including special schools, pupil referral units and other forms of alternative provision, as they support a wide range of pupils with diverse needs.'*

The government advice also states that: *'we strongly encourage all schools to deliver a substantive high-quality morning and afternoon session in every school day. Where schools wish to finish earlier on specific days, we encourage these schools to offer longer hours on the remaining days.'*

Our proposal aims to use the flexibility afforded above to enable us to best support the diverse needs of the pupils that attend Briarwood, whilst maintaining our commitment to a high-quality education.

What are the advantages to finishing at 1.45 pm on a Wednesday?

- Time for the class teams to plan, assess and review progress and pastoral (behaviour) evidence and strategies.
- Improved quality of teaching and learning as a result of the increased co-planning. This will lead to improved outcomes for all pupils.
- Enable staff to complete mandatory training.
- Enhancing the professional development opportunities for all staff this will improve provision for pupils.
- Enhancing the wellbeing of staff will increase retention of staff and will improve staff consistency in the classroom.

What are the implications of finishing at 1.45 pm on an additional day?

- There will be a loss of 5 minutes across the school week for Primary, Secondary, Nexus and Sixth Form pupils.
- Families may need to adjust their afternoon home routines in light of the earlier finish on a Wednesday.

Whilst I recognise that some families may be dependent upon the school day to facilitate their own working routines, our primary objective as a school is to provide the very best education for our pupils. Our decision must therefore be based on what we believe will support them to achieve and maximise their potential. In respecting the routines of families, we want to provide sufficient notice to enable families to make any required adjustments. We are therefore keen to obtain feedback as soon as possible.

We would also like to determine if there is any interest in the school providing an after-school club from 1.45pm until 3.30pm on a Wednesday, there would be a cost to families associated with this. The implication of this is that families would have to collect their child from school as no transport will be available. If it is something you would be interested in please use the space in the consultation document.

Again, we are aware that this proposal may raise some concerns; please be assured these concerns will be heard. Please do respond with your thoughts to ensure we are aware of any issues you may have. The consultation will be open for 2 weeks and ends on 19th May 2023. You can access the consultation form here <https://forms.gle/wFEegvJzKphAYBT9A>

Kind regards

Nicolle Deighton
Executive Headteacher