

29th April 2019

CONSULTATION FOR CHANGING THE LENGTH OF SCHOOL DAYS AT MEADOW WOOD SCHOOL

Dear Parents, Carers, Staff and other Stakeholders,

We are writing to inform you of some proposed changes to the structure of the school day at Meadow Wood School. The background information, rationale for the changes and the timescale are set out below. We would like to take on board your views before putting in place any changes that are due to start September 2019.

In short, the proposal seeks to ensure;

- Ending the students' school day for one day for one hour earlier; e.g. finishing every Thursday at 2.15 pm.
- The staff work till 4.30 on Thursdays so this proposal will provide a longer period for staff collaboration as described below.

Background information

We have carefully researched the legal guidance relating to the students' school hours;

- The governing board of the school is responsible for setting the length of the school day.
- The minimum requirement is to have two sessions during the day divided by a break.
- The governing board has the power to revise the length of the school day as it sees fit.
- There is no legal requirement to consult the parents on revisions to the school day but it is good practice that the governing board considers parents' views.
- Schools must meet for at least 380 sessions e.g. 190 days during the school year to educate their pupils.
- The Department of Education has advised that schools must generally be open for a minimum of 5 hours per day. The students' recommended school hours can vary between in the primary years between 15 to 22.5 (and in secondary up to 25 hours per week).

*) For additional information see DfE guidance for 'School Attendance', September 2018

We are currently providing Meadow Wood students with 32.5 hours school time weekly; this is 10 hours more than the recommended minimum for primary age students. Our proposal would mean, that in the future we will be providing the students with 31.5 hours school time that is 9.5 hours more than the suggested minimum.

When preparing our proposal we have taken advice from some other local special needs schools who, a year or two ago made a similar decision. These are for example: Woodfield (SLD) and Collette (LD) Schools in Hemel Hempstead. Both of these schools confirmed for us the positive outcomes of their decision.

We have also confirmed that shortening the students' school days would not compromise their access to our school curriculum in the different curriculum areas. The previously set hour frame for different curriculum areas can be followed as before.

Rationale for changing the length of school days

Better student outcomes: Any decision within the school organisation must be weighed in relation to the impact on the quality of provision and students' teaching and learning. By shortening students' school hours for a total 1 hour per week we gain time for the staff to work collaboratively and effectively together which will have a positive impact on our provision.

1. **Training:** It has been increasingly difficult to provide our staff with sufficient training during the 5 dedicated INSET days during the academic year. The difficulties are driven because of the complexity of our students and their very specific educational and medical needs as well as our increased staffing numbers. Therefore we have needed to organise a significant amount of training during teaching hours; this has caused us great difficulties to organise sufficient cover for the classes to ensure we maintain the quality of teaching and learning as well as health and safety issues.
2. **Curriculum and assessment:** National changes in the guidance of developing a school curriculum and pupil assessment means that the accountability to monitor the students' progress is significantly different than before. It would be more effective to carry out our statutory duty to monitor students' progress if the class teams could have more time to plan, prepare and evaluate outcomes together.
3. **Team communication:** Currently class teams have only one 45 min session every second week to meet as a class team and short 10-15 minute time daily. During this time they share information concerning the students, discuss their individual behaviour – eating and drinking plans, moving and handling or any other specific issues as well as developing the curriculum and assessment. The lack of regular team meeting time impacts negatively on communication.
4. **1 hour shorter school day on one day:** In order to have sufficient time for school and staff development and to ensure maximum impact of this time resource it is considered to be more effective to finish on one day for a longer period of time because staff are already contracted to 4.30 on Thursdays.

Summary:

The governing board of the Sunflower Federation believes shortening the students' school days will

- provide an effective structure for staff training and school development
- have a positive impact on your child's teaching and learning and daily school experience
- be beneficial to the school community supporting the wellbeing of all its members.

Commencing September 2019 the students' school days will be between 8.45 – 3.15 on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday; Their school day would be 8.45 -2.15 on Thursdays.

The information in this letter has also been sent to our school transport providers, the Local Authority and our NHS colleagues. We will make sure that we work together so that there is minimal disruption.

We appreciate this change may affect you, in terms of child care or working arrangements. For this reason, we would like to invite you to give your feedback by sending your responses to School by 13th May 2019 using the email address feedback@meadowwood.herts.sch.uk

We will share the results of the consultation by 27th May 2019 by sending you a letter. The letter will be also published on our website.

Yours sincerely,

Merja Paakkonen
Head teacher

Jane Rogers
Acting Chair of Governors