

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Executive Director of Educational Services

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee: 10 June 2009

Subject: Proposed consultation on changes to secondary school timetabling arrangements from August 2010

1. Purpose

- 1.1** The purpose of this consultation paper is to seek approval from Committee for the Department to consult staff, parents and pupils on a proposed amendment to the current timetabling arrangements in West Dunbartonshire secondary schools which would take effect from August 2010.

2. Background

- 2.1** All West Dunbartonshire secondary schools currently operate a timetabling model based on the 30 period week.
- 2.2** While this model has served the Authority well for many years, it contains inherent weaknesses, given the current pressures on the secondary curriculum. For instance, the 30 period week struggles to deliver the following:
- the Government's target of 2 hours of quality Physical Education (PE) per week for all pupils, or even 2 periods per week (an allocation which falls slightly short of the Government's target);
 - parity of time for all subjects in the upper school;
 - a core provision of Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and/or Religious Education (RE) in the upper school in non-denominational schools;
 - 2 periods per week of RE and one period of PSHE in the middle and upper schools in denominational schools.
- 2.3** The fact that school rolls continue to fall in West Dunbartonshire secondary schools places further pressure on school timetables; timetabling inefficiencies inherent in the 30 period week timetabling model have made it increasingly difficult for schools to continue to offer a wide range of courses at Advanced Higher level and Higher and Intermediate courses in "minority" subjects in S5 and S6. Although there has been no overall reduction in the number of such courses offered in West Dunbartonshire secondary schools over recent years, it will become extremely difficult to maintain this level of provision as rolls fall further.
- 2.4** Developments arising out of A Curriculum for Excellence demand further flexibility from the timetable which the 30 period week cannot effectively deliver.

- 2.5** Several local authorities have addressed the issues outlined in 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 above by introducing alternative timetable models based on 31, 32 or 33 periods per week.
- 2.6** The move to alternative timetabling models in some other local authorities has been depicted by some as an indirect way of cutting staffing levels, given the greater timetabling efficiency of the other models when compared to the 30 period week. It should be stressed that there is no plan in West Dunbartonshire to use any change as a reason to cut staffing. Rather, the greater efficiency of any revised timetabling structure which might be adopted will be used to address the challenges outlined in 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 above.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** Secondary Head Teachers within West Dunbartonshire are unanimous in their view that the 30 period week can no longer deliver a timetable which meets the demands of the modern curriculum, particularly in the upper school. In a series of workshops involving head teachers and members of the department's senior management and quality improvement teams, a range of alternative curricular structures have been explored.

The 33 Period Week

- 3.2** Despite its efficiency and the fact that several other local authorities have adopted it, it is the unanimous view of secondary head teachers in West Dunbartonshire that the 33 period week presents disadvantages, principally related to workload, for teachers and pupils. These difficulties arise from the fact that there are three longer working days in the week. Evidence from other authorities indicates that staff and – to a lesser extent – pupils have significant reservations about this model.

Furthermore, the most efficient version of the 33 period week necessitates the removal of the registration period. Most West Dunbartonshire head teachers believe that the registration period plays an important role in facilitating daily contact between pastoral care teachers and the pupils for whom they have responsibility. It also allows regular year group or house assemblies to take place without interruption to teaching time. Head teachers therefore agree that removal of registration would, on balance, be a retrograde step. (See Appendix 1 for a possible 33 period week model.)

The 31 period week

- 3.2** This model would entail a daily 20 minute registration period to be used for assemblies, mentoring, tutor groups etc. It would allow an additional period for PE in S1 – S4 and would allow PSHE to have a discrete timeslot. However, it would still prove difficult to deliver adequate PE in the upper school and denominational schools would continue to struggle to provide PE, RE and PSHE in S5 and S6.

It is the unanimous opinion of West Dunbartonshire secondary head teachers that the 31 period week would deliver limited advantages over the present model. In particular, the 20 minute registration period was felt to be too long for administrative purposes but not long enough to deliver educational advantages. (See Appendix 2 for a possible 31 period week model.)

The 32 period week

- 3.3** This model would entail a daily 10 minute registration period which could facilitate effective pastoral care, first line guidance, pupil support and year group or house assemblies. It would also allow additional time for PE in all year groups and would help schools to provide PSHE. in S5/6. Specific arrangements would vary in denominational and non-denominational schools but all schools would benefit from the additional flexibility.

It is the unanimous opinion of West Dunbartonshire secondary head teachers that the 32 period week would deliver significant advantages over the present model. In addition to the timetabling advantages listed above, this model would also facilitate the provision of supported study, extra-curricular activities, cross-curricular work, staff-based collegiate activities and work relating to Curriculum for Excellence on one or more of the 3 shorter working days. (See Appendix 3 for a possible 32 period week model.)

- 3.5** If any of the alternative timetable models listed above were to be adopted, it would be important, in the interests of equity and to facilitate “consortium arrangements” for pupils in the upper school, for all West Dunbartonshire secondary schools to adopt the same model. In addition, while any changes to the school day would require individual schools to consult with parents on the timings of the start and end of the school day and the length of lunch breaks, it would also be advantageous if all schools were to agree to similar timings.

4 Personnel Issues

- 4.1** If any of the alternative models were adopted, there would be no change to the conditions of service of teachers or other staff in schools, although patterns of non-contact time and the timings of the beginning and end of the school day would be altered.

5 Financial Implications

- 5.1** It is possible that the adoption of a model involving a variety of different finishing times to the school day on different days of the week could have financial implications for the Council in relation to contracts for school buses. In at least one other local authority which has adopted such a model, bus contractors increased their charges to compensate for the fact that they are no longer able to use the same buses and drivers for primary and secondary schools every day, since on some days primary and secondary schools have similar closing times. It is not possible to quantify the extent of the financial implications of such a change for West Dunbartonshire Council at this time.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** If a new timetabling model is not adopted for West Dunbartonshire's secondary schools, there is a real risk that our schools will be unable to deliver key educational objectives and priorities. The consequences are outlined in paragraphs 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 above.
- 6.2** There is a risk that costs may increase for transport. However, as any change will not be implemented until August 2010, there will be scope for this to be accounted for in next year's budget.

7. Conclusions and Officers' Recommendations

- 7.1** In light of the fact that the 30 period week can no longer meet the demands of the modern secondary school curriculum, it is recommended that staff, parents and pupils be asked to consider which of the 3 other options (31, 32 or 33 periods per week) they would favour.
- 7.2** It should be noted in the documentation issued to support the consultation that head teachers and the senior management of the Department of Educational Services favour the 32 period week for reasons outlined in 3.4 above.
- 7.3** It should also be noted that any changes agreed would be implemented from August 2010 and formal consultation on changes to the timing of the school day would be carried out at individual school level during session 2009/10.
- 7.4** It is recommended that members of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee approve the proposal that staff, parents and pupils be consulted on three alternative timetabling models for secondary schools. The consultation would take place in September 2009; the results of the consultation would be reported to a future meeting of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee and any resultant changes would be implemented from August 2010.

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Appendices: Appendix 1 – possible 33 period week model
Appendix 2 – possible 31 period week model
Appendix 3 – possible 32 period week model

(preferred model of head teachers)

Background Papers: None

Wards Affected: All