



Department
for Education

Length of the School Week

Non-Statutory Guidance

July 2023

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Summary

This publication provides non-statutory guidance from the Department for Education. It has been produced to help schools in England that are currently delivering a school week below 32.5 hours to increase the length of their school week to the minimum expectation of 32.5 hours that was announced in the Schools White Paper in March 2022, and replaces the information note that was published at that time. Most schools already deliver a school week of 32.5 hours or more.

This guidance is based on good practice currently in use in many schools, as exemplified in the associated case studies.

This is non-statutory guidance, but also includes information on the legal requirements relating to the school day, school week and term dates.

Expiry or review date

This guidance will be reviewed before June 2025.

Who is this publication for?

This guidance is for:

- School leaders, school staff, trust leaders, trust boards and governing bodies in all maintained schools, academies, and non-maintained special schools in England
- Local authorities in England

Main points

In March 2022, the Government introduced a non-statutory expectation of a 32.5 hour minimum core school week by September 2023. In July 2023 the deadline to meet this expectation was deferred to September 2024 at the latest, in recognition of the pressures facing schools. This applies to all mainstream, state-funded schools in England. It does not include pupils in early years settings, 16-19 provision (including school sixth forms) or specialist settings, such as special schools and alternative provision, but specialist settings and alternative provision are also encouraged to consider extending their core week where appropriate.

A core school week is the time from morning registration to the official end of the school day for all pupils (including breaks). It does not include optional activities, or those that are only available for some pupils.

1. Minimum Length of School Week

The time pupils spend in school varies across the country¹. Over time this difference accumulates, increasing the disparity between pupils by the time they leave secondary school.

The Government is determined that all pupils have the opportunity to achieve their full academic potential. To support this, on 28 March 2022 the Government announced, through the White Paper [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#), a new minimum expectation on the length of the school week of 32.5 hours for all mainstream, state-funded schools.

Data from July 2021 showed that 80% of secondary schools and 78% of primary schools were delivering a school week of at least 32 hours, and 16% of secondary schools and 7% of primary schools were delivering 35 hours or more². Some schools will already have increased their hours in response to the expectation set in the White Paper. Any mainstream state-funded school that does not yet meet the minimum expectation of 32.5 hours should be working towards doing so by September 2024 at the latest.

The expectation does not apply to pupils in:

- early years (including in school settings) due to the age of pupils
- 16-19 education (including school sixth forms) due to the variation in their courses and having different guided learning hours
- specialist settings (special schools and alternative provision), due to the varying needs of their pupil cohorts and the particular operational challenges they may face.

The 32.5 hour minimum expectation includes the time in each day from the official start of the school day (i.e. morning registration) to the official end of the compulsory school day (i.e. official home time). The 32.5 hour minimum includes lunch times and other breaks as well as teaching time and any enrichment activities that all pupils are expected to attend. It does not include optional before or after school provision.

All schools should deliver a substantive high-quality morning and afternoon session in every school day. Some schools may wish to finish earlier on specific days, for example to allow pupils to attend religious observances. In those circumstances, these schools should offer longer hours on the remaining days so that they meet the minimum expectation over the course of the week.

¹ [Review of time in school and 16 to 19 settings - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

² [COVID-19 School Snapshot Panel Findings from the July 2021 survey \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Ofsted

The quality of education that schools provide is underpinned by a broad and balanced curriculum. Effective use of time is a crucial part of delivering this curriculum.

Ofsted already look to see that schools are providing a broad and balanced curriculum for their pupils, and will inspect all schools by the end of summer 2025. Where it is clear that increasing the overall time pupils spend in school to at least 32.5 hours per week would improve the quality of education, inspectors will reflect this in their evaluation of the school, and in the inspection report. If a school is not meeting the minimum expectation, and this impacts on the quality of education, inspectors will expect schools to set out a clear rationale for this and understand what impact it has on the quality of education. They will also want to understand what plans are in place to meet the minimum expectation. Ofsted are mindful that some schools will be transitioning towards meeting the minimum expectation over the period to September 2024.

The law relating to the school day, school year and term dates

The legislation regulating the school day and school year applies to schools maintained by a local authority and special schools not maintained by a local authority, but not to academies (other than special academies) or pupil referral units. It requires that:

- Every school must normally have two sessions divided by a break in the middle of the day. The length of each session, break and the school day is determined by the school's governing body
- Employers in maintained schools must set term dates. Maintained school employers are:
 - the local authority in community, voluntary controlled and community special schools and maintained nursery schools
 - the governing body in foundation and voluntary aided schools

Except in the very limited circumstances set out in the Education (School Day and School Year) (England) Regulations 1999, schools must meet for at least 380 sessions or 190 days in any school year. In academies, the length of the school day and year is the responsibility of the Academy Trust as per the Funding Agreement.

The legislation relevant to this section is:

- The Education Act 2002 - section 32
- The Education Act 1996 - section 551(1)
- The Education (School Day and School Year) (England) Regulations 1999

2. Delivering additional time

The length and structure of the school day and week is the responsibility of the governing body for maintained schools and of trustees for academies. In a multi-academy trust this may be delegated to a local governing body in accordance with the trust's scheme of delegation. Any final decisions about changes to the length of the school week should be taken in conjunction with the school's senior leadership team.

Schools that are delivering below a 32.5 hour week

Schools that are not yet meeting the minimum expectation of a 32.5 hour week will want to think about how extra time is used in the context of their school improvement priorities and in ways that allow practical considerations to be addressed.

Schools planning to increase their hours substantially to reach a 32.5 hour week (i.e. by 30 minutes or more per day) should first consider prioritising an increase to lesson time. Where schools only need to add a short amount of time (less than 30 minutes per day), they may want to consider incorporating short activities which meet school priorities into their timetable, for example daily reading practice. These considerations will be different for primary and secondary schools, given that primary school timetables may have more flexibility to add daily blocks of additional time (without affecting the overall timetable). Secondary schools may want to consider consolidating the additional time needed to meet a 32.5 hour week into a block of additional time on one or two days of the week. This approach has the benefit of being able to deliver more substantive additional time in school, e.g. adding an extra timetabled lesson per week.

Case Studies

- **Monega Primary School** – Extended the school week to 32.5 hours by having an earlier start time of 8:30am. This provides pupils with access to 20 minutes a day of intensive reading development. On a weekly basis, this equates to 1 hour 40 minutes extra reading time for pupils.
- **Endike Primary School** - Extended the school week from 30 hours to 32.5 hours, which enabled the school to increase teaching time and spend more time focusing on specific subjects. This was one of the ways in which the school supported pupils to fill gaps in their education, or in many cases re-learn certain parts of the curriculum, in response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Going beyond the minimum 32.5 hour core week

Schools that already meet the 32.5 hours a week minimum may wish to consider increasing their school week further to provide additional opportunities for pupils, either as part of the core week or by providing activities that are optional for pupils. This can be done in a variety of ways including an increase to the core school day, increased provision of optional enrichment opportunities at lunch break or after school, tutoring and targeted support, breakfast clubs or wraparound provision.

Evidence suggests that extending time in school can have a positive impact on pupil outcomes, so long as the time is used effectively. Studies have focused on using additional time for academic tasks and found that more time can have significant impact on pupil attainment³. The Education Endowment Foundation has shown that using additional time for targeted support and well-structured before and after school programmes, delivered by trained staff, can also have a positive impact on attainment⁴. High quality extra-curricular provision can complement and reinforce curriculum teaching, for instance by providing further opportunities to take part in sport and cultural activities. Personal development opportunities, such as the cadet forces and Duke of Edinburgh Award, can bring benefits to young people's mental and physical health and wellbeing and social engagement, supporting efforts to improve attendance, attainment and behaviour.

When considering extending time beyond the minimum 32.5 hours, schools should look at how additional time can be used to support school priorities, as well as taking into account practical considerations, such as funding implications.

Case Study

Cromer Academy - As part of the strategy to reduce the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils, Cromer Academy runs a school day from 8:25am to 3:30pm, equating to just over 35.5 hours per week. It has a focus on providing as much teacher contact time with pupils as possible, running 6 lessons, each 55 minutes long, and 30 minutes of form time every day.

³ Lavy 2020; Kikuchi 2014; Bellei 2009

⁴ [Extending school time | EEF \(educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk\)](https://www.eef.org.uk/what-we-do/our-research/evaluating-extended-school-time)

Specialist settings

Specialist settings, including special schools and alternative provision, support a wide range of pupils with diverse needs and therefore currently structure their school week in more varied ways than mainstream schools. Therefore, the expectation for a minimum school week of 32.5 hours does not apply to these settings. However, specialist settings should share the overall ambition to increase the length of the school week, where it is beneficial for their pupils to do so.

When considering any increase in the length of their school week, leaders of specialist settings should make an assessment of what is most appropriate for the needs of their pupils and should take into account operational and financial considerations. For example, they should consider what can be achieved within the existing budget, transport considerations given the larger catchment areas, and staffing arrangements (recognising that these settings tend to utilise higher numbers of staff compared to mainstream schools).

Special units within mainstream schools, and pupils with SEND in mainstream settings, should continue to follow the same length of school week as set by the mainstream school.

Case Study

Mountjoy School - has a school week of almost 33 hours, which allows for additional activities every day alongside curriculum delivery, e.g. personalised learning activities, ring-fenced time for pupils to attend to personal care, reflection time and 10-minute PSHE sessions.

3. Practical considerations

This section brings together common practical considerations that school leaders report that they need to consider when making any change to school time.

The Government recognises the diversity of schools and the unique challenges they face and that a one-size fits all approach is not appropriate. The case studies supplementary to this guidance provide examples of how different schools have approached some of these considerations.

The bullet points below set out the steps that are recommended for schools to take when extending their school week:

- Explore practical considerations, including financial implications, and propose changes to the length of the school week and the use of additional time
- Consult key stakeholders on the proposed changes (including internal and external staff, parents, carers, pupils, feeder schools and childcare providers)
- Discuss proposed changes to transport with relevant local authorities (ensure adequate notice so changes can be implemented)
- Consider responses from the consultation and make decisions on any changes needed to school timetable
- Inform all key stakeholders of intended changes to the school timetable, with adequate notice
- Publish a new timetable on the school website and implement new timetable

Consultation

When a school decides to make changes to its school week, it is expected that the school will act reasonably, giving sufficient notice, and consider the impact on those affected, including pupils, staff, and parents and carers. It is a school's responsibility to ensure any consultation is fair. For more information on how to run a consultation, please see: [Consultation principles: guidance](#).

Transport

Local authorities have a statutory duty to make travel arrangements for eligible children in their area to enable them to travel to school for the beginning of the school day and to return home at the end of the school day.

Where schools propose changes to the school day or week which may affect existing school transport arrangements, they should consult any relevant local authorities in advance of any proposed change, and work with them to minimise any unintended consequences or costs for school transport. Any changes to transport arrangements may require the local authority to re-negotiate existing contracts with transport operators, or tender for new ones. The local authority may also wish to discuss alternative

arrangements that minimise additional costs but still ensure that a school can meet its objectives, so engaging with them as early as possible will allow for changes to be made in time for the implementation of the new school timetable.

Staffing

When making changes to the length of the core school week, schools should consult and inform staff with adequate notice. This includes all staff who will be affected by any change, for example sport coaches, wraparound care providers and peripatetic music teachers. Schools may need to review and amend the contracts of some staff, especially those paid on an hourly basis.

Maintained schools must have regard to the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document. In particular, teachers in maintained schools can only be directed by the head teacher for a maximum of 1,265 hours per year. Any additional teacher time needed to deliver a longer school week will need to be incorporated into a school's directed time allocations. The limit on directed hours does not apply to academies and free schools, but these schools will also want to take account of teacher contracts and the impact on teacher workload.

Wraparound provision

Before-school and after-school clubs (wraparound childcare) play an integral role in supporting the enrichment and wellbeing of children and young people and meeting the childcare needs of parents and carers.

We advise schools that are considering increasing their hours to engage with any external wraparound providers before doing so, to consider how this provision may be used to complement additional hours, and to ensure that sufficient wraparound provision remains available to parents who need childcare.

Breaks

The 32.5 hour minimum core school week is inclusive of breaks as these form an important part of time in school for pupils, allowing opportunities for social interaction, physical activity, and enrichment activities. However, when schools increase their hours to meet the minimum 32.5 hour week, they should first consider prioritising lesson time above breaks. Any increases to breaks should be proportionate and bring value to the school week, for example by providing opportunities for sport and other enrichment activities.

Funding

The minimum expected school week of 32.5 hours is the weekly average (as at July 2021) for mainstream schools and most schools already deliver a school week of at least

this length. We therefore expect mainstream primary and secondary schools that are not currently delivering this minimum, to do so by September 2024 at the latest from within their existing budgets.

We do not expect mainstream schools or special schools to propose changes to their pupils' education, health, and care (EHC) plans, or to seek extra high needs funding from the relevant local authority, as a means to enhance their hours of operation.

Annex A lists links to the school resource management collection and to further support available.

4. Information requirements

Publication of hours on school websites

Most schools already publish their opening and closing times on their website. All schools should do this and they should also publish the total weekly hours. Publication of school hours should present the compulsory time a school is open from the official start of the school day (i.e. morning registration) to the official end to the compulsory school day (i.e. official home time) including breaks, but not optional before or after school activities. This consistent definition will be helpful, particularly to parents and carers when comparing the opening times of different schools.

Data collection

DfE now collects data on the total compulsory time pupils spend in school in a week, as part of the school census. Schools are expected, as part of the spring census collection, to enter their typical total, compulsory school week for pupils. This data will be used to identify schools that are not yet meeting the minimum weekly expectation so that they can be offered support. More information and guidance can be found here: [Complete the school census - Guidance.](#)

Annex A – Further Support

Support	Notes
School resource management - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)	This collection includes ways of saving money on procurement, estates, recruitment, training.
Integrated curriculum and financial planning (ICFP) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)	Encourages schools to integrate their curriculum and financial planning to inform decision making on the deployment of teaching staff.
Education Endowment Foundation EEF	An independent charity and What Works Centre dedicated to breaking the link between educational achievement and family income, supporting schools and other settings to use evidence to improve teaching and learning.
School Resource Management Advisers (SRMAs) .	These sector experts work with schools and trusts to provide tailored advice on how to make best use of their revenue and capital resources to deliver educational outcomes.
The financial benchmarking service	Allows schools to compare their performance and use of resources with other, similar schools.
Buying for schools - Guidance - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) Get help buying for schools - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)	Resources for buying goods and services, and finding DfE-recommended suppliers
School workload reduction toolkit - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) Education staff wellbeing charter - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)	Resources for reducing school workload and improving well-being



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