



Change and the school community – the six term year

Your school is a community of people with a common aim – to provide you with an education that will enable you to make the fullest use of your talents and that will prepare you for life as an adult citizen.

The school community is made up of lots of different groups of people: students, teachers, classroom assistants, administrative staff, caretaking and cleaning staff, parents and governors. Whenever a major change is made – for example, to the size of the school, the hours of the school day or the number of terms in the school year – it will affect all these groups.



A new school year?

Traditionally, the pattern of the school year in England has been three terms:

- a long winter term with a week's half-term in the middle, followed by a break of about a fortnight at Christmas.
- a spring term, varying in length according to the date of Easter, with a week for half-term, followed by a break of about a fortnight over Easter.
- a summer term with the first half varying in length because of the date of Easter, with a week's half-term, followed by a long summer holiday, often of seven or eight weeks.

A government enquiry recommended in 2001 that local education authorities, which decide the pattern of the school year, should introduce a standard school year of six terms. The six-term year would consist of:

- two terms before Christmas
- no term longer than 38 days (seven weeks and three days)

- a two-week October break between terms 1 and 2
- a break of two weeks over Christmas between terms 2 and 3
- four terms after Christmas of no longer than six weeks each
- a week's break between terms 3 and 4 and terms 5 and 6 (traditional spring and summer half-term)
- the break between terms 4 and 5 being fixed each year, instead of varying according to the date of Easter
- a summer break of always more than five weeks.

However the government believes that decisions on term dates and holidays should be made locally, so while schools in some local authorities have adopted the six-term year, others still have the traditional three-term pattern.

the school as a community

In groups

List what you think to be the advantages and disadvantages of having a six-term school year, taking into consideration how it would affect all members of the school community.

Organise a debate on the motion: 'This house believes that a six-term school year is better than a three-term school year.'

A change for the better?

Here are some reactions to the proposal to change to a six-term year.

“How would everyone manage to fit in their holidays during a shorter summer break? It's hard enough as it is trying to get time off when everyone else wants it.”
– Parent

“It would increase the pressure on teachers, who would lose the advantage of having a long block of time in the summer in which to do detailed planning.”
– Teacher

“It might ease the frantic scramble there is at the beginning of the autumn term to sort everything out, by spreading things over the year a bit more.”
– School secretary

“You don't want to be in school in the summer when it's hot. I'd much rather have a long summer holiday than lots of short breaks throughout the year.”
– Student

“I'm all for it. Children get out of the habit of studying during the summer holiday. It's always a fight to get them to do their homework when they go back in the autumn.”
– Parent

“We do a lot of maintenance work in the summer holidays at present. But we should be able to fit it in whatever the pattern of the school year.”
– Caretaker

“Research shows that many children have forgotten what they have learned when they return to school after a six-week break. I think it would help us to improve the school's academic results.”
– Governor

The school day

In groups

Talk about how your school day is organised. Imagine you have been asked to inquire into ways of changing it. What are the arguments for and against:

- a an earlier start or a later start;
- b longer or shorter morning/afternoon breaks;
- c a longer lunch hour;
- d an earlier or a later finishing time?

Consider other ideas, such as reorganising the lesson timetable so that all the lessons take place on four and a half days – activities could then be organised on the other half-day to allow students to pursue their own interests. In your discussions, take into consideration how your suggestions would affect the various different members of the school's community.

Decide whether or not you recommend any changes to the school day. Appoint a spokesperson to report your conclusions to the rest of the class in a class discussion.

Participating in the school community

School councils

Most schools have a school council which exists to let the teachers and headteacher know what students' opinions are on a range of school issues. The school council usually consists of two or three elected representatives from each year group.

Year councils

Because school councils are sometimes dominated by older students, some schools have introduced year councils. The aim of a year council is to give students the opportunity to express opinions on matters of importance to that particular year group.



Our school council meets once every three weeks. It discusses issues such as the dress code, the use of social areas, charity fundraising and bullying.

In groups

Imagine that elections are about to be held for class representatives to the Year 8 council. Choose one of the group to stand as a candidate. Together draft a statement of the issues you think the Year 8 council should take up for your candidate to present to the rest of the class to explain why she or he should be elected. Then listen to the various candidates' statements and hold a mock election to elect two representatives.

For your file

Write a letter to the school council on a Year 8 issue (for example, the lack of a social area for Year 8 students at break times; the need to improve the provision of lockers and locker space for Year 8 students; the amount of bullying of Year 8s by older students), asking the school council to discuss the issue and take it up with the teaching staff.

Beach Lane School Year 8 Council – Constitution

- The council's purpose is to act as a forum for discussion of school issues relevant to Year 8, and to let the teachers and headteacher know what student opinion is on these issues. The council will also take responsibility for co-operating with year staff in the organisation of one social event per term for Year 8.
- Membership of the council will consist of three representatives from each class, elected on a termly basis.
- Meetings will be held once a fortnight. The council members will elect a chair to control the meetings and a secretary who will be responsible for circulating the agenda for each meeting and taking and circulating minutes of meetings.
- The class representatives will be responsible for giving a report of the council's meetings to their class. Agenda and minutes of meetings will be put up in each classroom.
- The Year 8 council will elect two of its members to be members of the school council, with responsibility for raising issues on behalf of Year 8 students at school council meetings.
- The chair, secretary and school council representatives will be responsible for taking up matters raised at council meetings with the year head and other teachers, and for reporting back on such matters to the Year 8 council.
- The head of year will attend all council meetings as an observer and both they and the other year staff will be available as required to offer support and advice to council members and to assist in the settlement of disputes.

The Henry Box School – School Uniform

It is the policy of the school that all students in Years 7-11 wear the agreed uniform. Our school uniform helps to create a smart appearance, a sense of belonging from a common identity and a feeling of pride in The Henry Box School. The full uniform must be worn to and from school.

THE MAIN SCHOOL UNIFORM

School sweatshirt – this is central to our uniform and all students will wear these.

Trousers and skirts – black (skirts around the knee; trousers should be no longer than shoes to avoid danger of tripping and should not be of excessive width) and traditional style (not denim or cord)

Shirt – white formal “school shirt” (vests or T-shirts must not show at the neck, and shirts must be tucked in unless it is a fitted formal shirt with collar for girls)

Socks – plain dark or white

Tights – plain black

Shoes – black, plain, low heeled (no higher than 6cm) of a sensible design.

ADDITIONAL ITEMS

Outside coats – It is important that students have a coat which is warm and weatherproof and which is of a normal style. The school reserves the right not to accept a coat if it would give a poor impression of The Henry Box School. Unacceptable coats include leather, simulated leather, suede, denim, track suit tops and coats with offensive logos. Unacceptable coats will be confiscated and the student provided with a suitable coat for the day.

Scarves – these may be worn in poor weather conditions outdoors.

Hats – in the summer in sunny weather only, plain navy blue hats (non-woollen) are permitted. During the winter in cold weather only, woollen hats are allowed. Hats/caps may be worn outdoors only. A small designer logo is allowed but football hats or those with large logos are not permitted. If hats are worn inappropriately or are of an unacceptable design or colour, they will be confiscated.

Trainers – these may be worn during sporting activities or on the tennis courts or field during break and lunchtime or curricular activities that require them. They should not be worn around school or on the way to and from school.

Jewellery – students may wear a wristwatch, a flat ring, a crucifix or similar. One small ear stud per ear is allowed but studs in other parts of the body are not permitted. It is not permitted to have illegal items of jewellery covered by a plaster.

Hair Dye – only hair dyed a natural colour is permitted. If a student dyes their hair an unnatural/bright colour, they will be isolated from lessons or sent home until the hair is returned to a natural colour. The school reserves the right not to accept a hair style which may give a poor impression of the school.

Make-up – not allowed in Key Stage 3. In Key Stage 4 discreet make-up is allowed. Coloured nail varnish is not allowed.

In groups

Imagine that your school is currently revising its dress code. Compare your school's dress code with The Henry Box School's dress code. Suggest how you would like to alter your current Year 8 uniform requirements. Make notes of your views, then share your ideas in a class discussion.