

## Response to complaints regarding the timings of the school day – 26<sup>th</sup> March 2021

Thank you for expressing your concerns about the timings of the school day. I am listening and will continue to reflect and discuss with the Governors, what I believe is best for the school, as the country slowly releases from lockdown in April. I have outlined below my reasons for doing this, as previously explained in my weekly newsletters. I believe my response addresses the concerns you have raised.

### What has been at the heart of all our decision-making?

In all decisions, the school is balancing the risks. I believe the greatest risk to students is their well-being. We are all aware that the Science tells us that if they catch Covid-19 it is likely to result in minor symptoms for children. However, from our well-being surveys and well-being curriculum, communication with parents, students missing school for such long periods of time had an impact in November and December. Sending students home to self-isolate as positive cases increased within our community, I witnessed the trauma that it caused students, who had only just returned from lockdown. Reducing the risk of year group and or school self-isolation is the key motive behind the structure and timings of the school day, alongside supporting well-being and ensuring a good quality of education. The timetable that has been set up, is designed to specifically reduce the mix between students and in the event of a positive case, less students need to be sent home.

### How has the day changed?

Edwinstree has been open from the beginning of lockdown in March 2020 for key workers and vulnerable students. Our Risk Assessments and observations in the early days highlighted that break and lunch times were the most difficult times for students to stay 'covid' safe. In order to address this, we reduced the risk by keeping students in class bubbles for breaks and lunch and reduced the time allocated to these periods. This is the main reason for the reduction to the timings of the day that have existed.

We worked closely with Freman College who also made the decision to shorten the school day. The shorter day is created from a reduced break and lunchtime, no tutor time and a significant reduction in the movement time that students make moving around the school as they are based in one classroom.

### Where are the 5 hours of learning within the school day?

Our curriculum purpose has also been adapted to reflect COVID and the need for support around maintaining well-being which is based on the Hertfordshire Educational Psychologists Well-being advice. We also identified that students respond well and benefit from a calm reflective extended Collective Worship, so our 5 hours of learning involves 3 x 90 minute subject specific sessions, a 15 minute well-being session and a 20 minutes of Collective Worship.

### Why not extend breaks and lunchtimes?

In mirroring the Governments approach, I want a staggered return to a more "normal" school. Each change we make, increases the number of students that will need to self-isolate in the event of a positive Covid-19 case. We consulted all stakeholders after half term and the resounding feedback was if we have to stagger the changes then students, staff and parents wanted the curriculum returned and this is what we have focused on first.

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In consulting parents about the changes to breaks and lunch times and increasing the mix of students to year groups not classes, there is still significant hesitancy with only 50% of those answering the survey in agreement.

We are also aware that just as in September, we are seeing children return who have become de-socialised, they have forgotten how to play and live alongside each other and this is where our most heightened behaviours are occurring. If we follow the same pattern, we should begin to see a reduction in these behaviours as we did in October and November last year. Despite all staff committed to duty breaks and lunch, the students are not ready for a longer play yet.

### **Why are we different in what we are doing from other schools?**

As a middle school, we do not fit the system; we have to straddle both primary and secondary guidelines and considerations. We also have larger intakes than most primary schools in Hertfordshire, with a four-class intake. Solutions for secondary school or primary do not fit our model, so we will always be different. Please note, that despite lower cases in Hertfordshire, two local schools have had to close due to COVID.

### **Will these arrangements remain until the end of the year?**

Subject to COVID, we plan for students to adjust to their new timetable, and then review with all stakeholders again. As the lockdown eases, we will consider moving to a year group break, lunch times, and extend their play. However, I will need to see the impact of our well-being programme on student behaviour and the continued programme of release. Please may I encourage you to take part in the questionnaires that the school conducts, so that we hear your voice in our decision-making? We envisage, all being well, that we will return to a normal day by half term at the latest.

### **How can we support you?**

Throughout the pandemic, we have supported individual families and are happy to discuss how to help you, please do not hesitate to contact us. As a working parent, I understand completely the pressures we have all been facing and will help where we can.

**Jo Gant**  
**Headteacher**