



Minimum expectation on length of the school week: information note

Introduction

This document provides details on the expectation that state-funded mainstream schools should deliver a school week of at least 32.5 hours by September 2023. The white paper [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#) sets out this expectation, and state-funded mainstream schools currently offering a school week of below 32.5 hours should work towards increasing their hours to provide at least 32.5 hours by September 2023 at the latest. Specialist settings, including alternative provision providers, should share the ambition to extend and enrich the school week.

This follows the publication in November 2021 of DfE's [Review of time in school and 16 to 19 settings](#) which showed that extending time in schools can benefit pupils' outcomes if used well.

More detailed guidance and case studies to support schools in delivering this policy will be published in summer 2022.

Who is this document for?

This document is for:

- leaders of schools and trusts
- school staff
- trust boards and governing bodies in all maintained schools, academies and free schools, special schools and alternative provision

Summary of legal requirements and expectations

All schools maintained by the local authority and special schools not maintained by the local authority are **required** to:

- Meet for at least 380 sessions or 190 days during any school year to educate their pupils
- Operate two sessions on every school day divided by a break in the middle of the day

From September 2022, all state-funded schools are **expected** to publish their opening times on their school website.

From spring 2023, all state-funded schools are **expected** to submit the length of their school week via the spring collection of the school census.

By September 2023 at the latest, all state-funded, mainstream schools will be **expected** to provide a compulsory school week of at least 32.5 hours.

Minimum expectations on length of school week

Length of the school week

The white paper [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#) sets an expectation that all state-funded mainstream schools will deliver a minimum length of school week of 32.5 hours as soon as they can, and from September 2023 at the latest. This will bring those schools that are under the current average up to the minimum expectation of 32.5 hours, which most schools already deliver.

The expectation does not apply to pupils in:

- early years and 16-19 education¹ (including school sixth forms) as they do not have timetabled weeks for all students within the same setting
- 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 to the compulsory school day (i.e. official home time). The 32.5 hour minimum includes breaks and lunch times as well as teaching time and any extra-curricular activities that all pupils are expected to attend. It does not include optional before or after school provision.

Most schools already deliver a 32.5 hour week, or offer a longer school week, within their existing budgets. Schools that need to increase their hours to meet the minimum expectation will therefore be expected to do so from within their existing budget. There should be no additional cost to parents or pupils.

We strongly encourage all schools to deliver a substantive high-quality morning and afternoon session in every school day. Where schools wish to finish earlier on specific days, for example to allow pupils to attend religious observances, we encourage these schools to offer longer hours on the remaining days so that they meet the minimum expectation over the course of the week.

¹ Government has provided additional funding for time in 16-19 settings: [16 to 19 funding: Additional hours in study programmes](#).

When school and trust leaders are considering how to use additional time in their schools, this should be guided by their priorities for improvement and learning outcomes for pupils.

Schools should organise the school day and school week in the best interests of their pupils, to provide them with a full-time education suitable to their age, background and ability. They should ensure they are delivering a broad and balanced curriculum within the school week for all their pupils.

Specialist settings and pupils with SEND

We do not think it is appropriate to set an expectation for a minimum school week in specialist settings, including special schools, pupil referral units and other forms of alternative provision, as they support a wide range of pupils with diverse needs. However, specialist settings should share an 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 special schools and alternative provision should assess what is most appropriate for the primary needs of their pupils and should take into account operational and financial considerations.

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

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

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.

Where inspectors have concerns about the quality of education provided in a state-funded mainstream school, they will look at whether the minimum expectation on length of the school week is being met. Where the school is not meeting the minimum expectation, inspectors will want to understand how they have come to that decision, and what impact it has on the quality of education provided. Where it is clear that increasing the overall time pupils spend in school would improve the quality of education, inspectors may reflect this in the inspection report and will also want to understand the plans that are in place to meet the minimum expectation. When considering this, Ofsted will be mindful that some schools will be transitioning towards meeting the minimum expectation over the coming academic year, ahead of September 2023.

Information requirements

Publication of hours on school websites

Many schools already publish their opening and closing times on their website. From September 2022, we expect all schools to do so, and also to publish a total weekly figure for the compulsory time pupils spend in school.

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 to parents and others when comparing the opening times of different schools.

Data collection

DfE will collect data on the total compulsory time pupils spend in school in a week, as part of the school census. From 2023 schools will be 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 targeted support.

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