



Circular 0034/2011

To: The Managerial Authorities of Recognised Primary, Secondary, Community and Comprehensive Schools and the Chief Executive Officers of Vocational Education Committees

Standardisation of the School Year in respect of Primary & Post-Primary Schools for the years 2011/12, 2012/13 and 2013/14

1 Introduction

The purpose of this circular is to advise managerial authorities of the agreement that has been reached between the parties to the Teachers' Conciliation Council in relation to the standardisation of the breaks at Christmas, Easter and mid-term in the first and second terms for the school years 2011/12, 2012/13 and 2013/14.

2 Factors taken into account

In reaching agreement the parties took account of a number of relevant factors:

- the objective of avoiding problems for families which can be caused by variation in closure arrangements where children are attending different schools
- the requirement for a school to be open for a minimum of 167 days at post-primary level and 183 days at primary level
- the date of the bank holiday in June and in consequence the effective end of the school year and commencement date of the Certificate Examinations
- the difference in the length of the school year at primary and post-primary level and the potential for a lengthy final term in the primary sector depending on when Easter falls
- the timing of the bank holiday in October

- the desirability of having a reasonable interval between the end of first term and Christmas
- the need to provide for contingency arrangements to deal with extensive or prolonged unforeseen school closures e.g. due to weather, etc.

3 General

The agreement reached covers the arrangements that will apply in all schools from the start of the 2011/12 school year and covers three school years. The parties will review the operation of the arrangements not later than spring of 2014 for the purpose of agreeing the arrangements that will apply subsequently and have agreed that in the event that any unforeseen difficulty arises in relation to the operation of the arrangements now agreed the matter can be raised at the Teachers' Conciliation Council.

Schools are required to be open to receive all pupils on the weekday immediately preceding and immediately following each break period covered by this agreement.

The arrangements for 2011/12 onwards are set out in [Appendix A](#) of this circular.

In this circular “**school authority**” refers to the relevant managerial authority for the school concerned i.e. the relevant VEC in the case of VEC schools and board of management/manager in the case of all other schools.

4 Contingency arrangements in the event of unforeseen school closures

The parties have recognised that there is a need to include greater flexibility and to provide for contingency arrangements within the standardised school year to deal with unforeseen school closures.

Guidance for schools in relation to making up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures is included at [Appendix B](#) of this circular. This guidance sets out a structured approach to determining the measures to be put in place to make up for time lost. The guidance provides that subject to consensus at local level, any changes to normal practice that can be made to address the shortfalls should be put in place. Examples of how this might be achieved include:

- prioritising tuition over other non-tuition activities
- reducing where possible the length of mock/house examinations
- consideration of whether learning in the classroom should be prioritised over school tours, etc
- in the case of second level schools ensuring examination classes attend all classes to the end of May.

If necessary, the school authority should then identify any available discretionary days that the school had planned to close that could be made available to make up for time lost.

Where the above measures are not considered adequate, contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to extensive or prolonged unforeseen school closures may now also include either or both of the following:

- The February mid-term break may be reduced by up to three days subject to the requirement that all schools must be closed on the Thursday and Friday of the week in which this break falls.
- The Easter break may be reduced by up to three days by the school remaining open up to and including the Wednesday immediately preceding the Easter weekend. All schools must be closed on the Thursday and Friday immediately preceding the Easter weekend and remain closed for the remainder of the Easter break as set out in [Appendix A](#) of this circular.

The school authority must also take into account the need to provide adequate notice of any changes to the school calendar to pupils, parents and staff. Each school authority shall also provide to parents, at the beginning of each year, a calendar which includes details of school closures. It should be made clear that the calendar could be subject to change as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures.

5 Religious observance and standardisation

The above arrangements are agreed without prejudice to closure on specific days, subject to the overall requirement of 167 days at post-primary level and 183 days at primary level, dictated by religious observance that is required in schools under the patronage of different denominations or faiths.

6 Extent of flexibility outside of the standardised breaks

It is not a requirement of this agreement that the commencement or end of the school year either at primary or post-primary level should be standardised. However while schools may use their discretionary days, where available, to determine the precise start and end of the school year, it is recognised the commencement of Certificate Examinations will mean that post-primary schools will not be open for tuition beyond the Friday preceding the June bank holiday in any year. The expectation is that the school year will normally commence during the week in which 1st September falls. However, the school year may commence in the week prior to that in which 1st September falls where this is necessary in order to meet the overall requirement of a minimum of 167 at post-primary level or 183 days at primary level.

The arrangements may provide some limited flexibility to schools on certain other days outside of the defined periods. The scheduling of such days must not be used to extend or modify the periods set out in this circular in respect of mid-term, Christmas or Easter breaks save where religious observance requirements of a school under a particular patronage make this necessary.

7 Public Service Agreement 2010 – 2014

The Public Service Agreement 2010 – 2014 makes provision for additional time of one hour per week. Any aggregation of these hours (subject to consensus among the school staff) into full school days will necessitate attendance by teaching staff on days outside of the 183 and 167 tuition days required at primary and post-primary respectively. [Circular 08/2011](#) provides that at primary level aggregation into full days is subject to a maximum aggregation of the equivalent of two full days.

The contingency arrangements for the February mid-term and Easter breaks do not preclude a school from identifying any of these days for the purposes of aggregation of hours. However, schools should ensure that an alternative arrangement for the use of the aggregated hours can be activated if changes are subsequently required as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures.

8. Queries in relation to this circular

Queries in relation to this circular should be emailed to:

schoolgovernance@education.gov.ie

9. Dissemination of circular

A copy of this circular should be provided to members of the board of management and the staff of the school. A copy should also be provided to the parents association. This circular may be accessed on the Department of Education and Skills website at www.education.ie. An Irish version of this circular is also available on the Department's website.

Hubert Loftus
Principal Officer
School Governance Section

May 2011

Appendix A: Standardised school years 2011/12 onwards

The following are the agreed arrangements in respect of the standardisation of the breaks at Christmas, Easter and mid-term in the first and second terms for the school years 2011/12, 2012/13 and 2013/14:

School Year 2011/12

October 2011 mid-term break

All schools will close from **Monday 31st October 2011 to Friday 4th November 2011** inclusive.

Christmas 2011

All schools will close on **Thursday 22nd December 2011**, which will be the final day of the school term.

All schools will re-open on **Monday 9th January 2012**.

February 2012 mid-term break

All primary schools will close on **Thursday 16th February 2012 and Friday 17th February 2012**. (Primary schools may use 3 discretionary days to extend this break to an alternative option of a 5 day break for the period from **Monday 13th February 2012 to Friday 17th February 2012** inclusive unless changes are required as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures.)

Post-primary schools will close from **Monday 13th February 2012 to Friday 17th February 2012** inclusive unless changes are required as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures.

Where contingency arrangements are required a school authority may reduce the length of the February mid-term break by remaining open up to and including **Wednesday 15th February 2012**.

Easter 2012

All schools will close on **Friday 30th March 2012**, which will be the final day of the school term, unless changes are required as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures. Where contingency arrangements are required a school authority may reduce the length of the Easter break by remaining open up to and including **Wednesday 4th April 2012**.

All schools will re-open on **Monday 16th April 2012**.

School Year 2012/13

October 2012 mid-term break

All schools will close from **Monday 29th October 2012 to Friday 2nd November 2012** inclusive.

Christmas 2012

All schools will close on **Friday 21st December 2012**, which will be the final day of the school term.

All schools will re-open on **Monday 7th January 2013**.

February 2013 mid-term break

All primary schools will close on **Thursday 14th February 2013 and Friday 15th February 2013**. (Primary schools may use 3 discretionary days to extend this break to an alternative option of a 5 day break for the period from **Monday 11th February 2013 to Friday 15th February 2013** inclusive unless changes are required as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures.)

Post-primary schools will close from **Monday 11th February 2013 to Friday 15th February 2013** inclusive unless changes are required as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures.

Where contingency arrangements are required a school authority may reduce the length of the February mid-term break by remaining open up to and including **Wednesday 13th February 2013**.

Easter 2013

All schools will close on **Friday 22nd March 2013**, which will be the final day of the school term, unless changes are required as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures. Where contingency arrangements are required a school authority may reduce the length of the Easter break by remaining open up to and including **Wednesday 27th March 2013**.

All schools will re-open on **Monday 8th April 2013**.

School Year 2013/14

October 2013 mid-term break

All schools will close from **Monday 28th October 2013 to Friday 1st November 2013** inclusive.

Christmas 2013

All schools will close on **Friday 20th December 2013**, which will be the final day of the school term.

All schools will re-open on **Monday 6th January 2014**.

February 2014 mid-term break

All primary schools will close on **Thursday 20th February 2014 and Friday 21st February 2014**. (Primary schools may use 3 discretionary days to extend this break to an alternative option of a 5 day break for the period from **Monday 17th February 2014 to Friday 21st February 2014** inclusive unless changes are required as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures.)

Post-primary schools will close from **Monday 17th February 2014 to Friday 21st February 2014** inclusive unless changes are required as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures.

Where contingency arrangements are required a school authority may reduce the length of the February mid-term break by remaining open up to and including **Wednesday 19th February 2014**.

Easter 2014

All schools will close on **Friday 11th April 2014**, which will be the final day of the school term, unless changes are required as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures. Where contingency arrangements are required a school authority may reduce the length of the Easter break by remaining open up to and including **Wednesday 16th April 2014**.

All schools will re-open on **Monday 28th April 2014**.

Appendix B: Guidance for schools in relation to making up for time lost due to unforeseen closures

1. The school authority should, in the first instance, quantify the number of school closures that have occurred.
2. The school authority should, in consultation with the Principal and teachers, assess the effect of the loss of tuition and identify any shortfalls that have occurred as a result of the unforeseen closures.
3. The school authority should consult with the Principal and teachers with a view to ensuring that the curriculum for each class/year group can be completed before year end. Subject to consensus at local level, any changes to normal practice that can be made to facilitate such work should be put in place. A non-exhaustive list of possible examples of how this might be achieved include:
 - prioritising tuition over other non-tuition activities
 - reducing where possible the length of mock/house examinations
 - consideration of whether learning in the classroom should be prioritised over school tours, etc.
 - in the case of second level schools ensuring examination classes attend all classes to the end of May.
4. If necessary, the school authority should review the school calendar with a view to identifying any available discretionary days that the school had planned to close that could be made available to make up the loss. In this regard, the school authority should take into account the need to provide adequate notice of any changes to the school calendar to pupils, parents and staff.

5. In cases where a school has been affected by extensive or prolonged school closures (e.g. due to weather, etc.) and where the school authority considers that the above measures will not adequately address the loss in tuition involved, the school authority may, having established what arrangements for school transport may or may not be feasible if other schools are remaining closed, decide to implement either or both of the following contingency arrangements:
 - the February mid-term break may be reduced by up to three days subject to the requirement that all schools must be closed on the Thursday and Friday of the week in which this break falls
 - the Easter break may be reduced by up to three days by the school remaining open up to and including the Wednesday immediately preceding the Easter weekend. All schools must be closed on the Thursday and Friday immediately preceding the Easter weekend and remain closed for the remainder of the Easter break as set out in [Appendix A](#) of this circular.
6. The school authority should consider the implications of any measures identified for pupils, teachers, parents and other staff and also other parties such as school transport, bus escorts, traffic wardens, visitors to the school, etc.
7. The school authority should consult and communicate with the school community as early as possible on this matter.