



8 June 2020

Dear Parent/Carer,

Times of the School Day: September 2020

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions, we spent a considerable amount of time working as a staff group, with input from a many parents, to consider the timings of our school day. Despite the recent uncertainty and partial school closure, we have continued these discussions with staff, many parents and lots of our students, and now is the time to inform you of our plans. Whilst we fully appreciate that there may well still need to be amendments to our school day and how we operate in September as a result of Covid-19, these changes need to be communicated with plenty of notice to everyone involved.

We have made the decision to amend the times of our school day from September 2020. The new times are outlined below and have been communicated to Somerset County Council Transport. As such, all buses and taxi provision will fit our new timings and revised transport schedules will be published in due course. This transport information will, of course, be linked to the national Covid-19 situation. This change will also mean a move to a two-week timetable, which has considerable benefits for teaching and learning such as less classes with two teachers, more flexibility when organising a student's timetable and benefits for GCSE and BTEC courses.

Our New Times of the Day

8.45-9.45am: Period 1

9.45am-10.45am: Period 2

10.45am-11.05am: Breaktime

11.05-12.05pm: Period 3

12.05-1.05pm: Period 4

1.05-1.40pm: Lunchtime

1.40-2.00pm: Tutor time/Assembly

2.00-3.00pm: Period 5

The Research and Our Thinking

There are a number of reasons why we have decided to make these changes, which have been based on research into children and education. I have outlined some of these reasons below for you

- We currently have one of the earliest start times of any school in Somerset. There is considerable research which shows that children, especially teenagers, learn better later in the day. A 15 minute later start each day but with the same finish time will allow a better beginning to each day for each student.
- Hour lessons allow greater time for teachers to develop student knowledge and skills. The new GCSE and BTEC courses require more content to be remembered and more difficult knowledge to be retained. Longer lessons allow for the deeper learning that is required. The education research points to the benefits of children having hour long lessons as opposed to 50 minute ones. The move to 5 one hour lessons instead of 6 fifty minute lessons increases the time students have with each teacher to really develop knowledge, improve the retention of knowledge and help students make rapid progress.
- 5 lessons each day reduces the movement time around school and increases learning time. This is particularly important given the current health and safety precautions. The new model has less transitions into lessons than the previous one. The time saved, added up over the course of a 5 year journey at Whitstone School is huge and can be measured in weeks (and possibly months). This time can be put back into learning and will, hopefully, impact positively on student outcomes.
- The new model means that no year group has two lessons in the afternoon. This would have a positive impact on the learning of all students after lunch, often the time students are most tired.
- It is likely that there will be less split classes where two teachers work with the same class as a result of the two-week timetable. The new model would remove the Year 7 split lesson which is not conducive to excellent teaching and learning as the two mini-lessons of 25 minutes are challenging in really developing a piece of work or getting really engaged in a topic.
- We may be able to consider some new lunchtime clubs which include different year groups and start inter-House sports competitions due to PE staff all having the same lunchtime.
- Year 8 and 9 students would be able to eat 35 minutes earlier than currently. A 1.35pm lunch for 12, 13 and 14 year old students is very late. An earlier lunch may have a positive impact on student health and wellbeing.
- Informing students that they do not have to sit down for 15 minutes may be beneficial for those students who find the whole year group atmosphere difficult. Flexibility and freedom to enjoy the outside spaces we have at school is a positive for student welfare.

I am really excited about this change as I believe that it really promotes excellent learning in lessons and has strong benefits for children's wellbeing, including a later start to each day, an earlier lunch for all students, less movement around the school site during the day and the removal of needing to remain seated in the canteen for the first 15 minutes of each lunchtime.

As is always the case, should you have any questions or queries regarding this change, please do not hesitate to contact me, a member of our Senior Team or your child's House Leader via Epraise, by calling school or by email.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Guy Swallow', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mr Guy Swallow

Headteacher