

Results of Inch Primary School Survey on Proposed Changes to the Curriculum

Background

Aberdeenshire Council have published proposals on how they are going to meet the national programme - Curriculum for Excellence. A meeting was arranged to tell parents about these proposed changes but due to the very poor turnout (10%), it was decided that a newsletter and questionnaire should be produced to inform the parents of Inch Primary School about the proposals and seek their views.

Inch Primary School has a high proportion on pupils who live out with Inch and are therefore bussed to school using minor country roads. Inch doesn't have a Secondary School but is dual zoned for Inverurie Academy and The Gordon Schools, with the majority attending The Gordon Schools. Therefore all Secondary Pupils who attended Inch Primary School are bussed to the Secondary Schools along the A96. The pupils who go to The Gordons Schools primarily go through "The Glens of Foundland" which is a notorious black spot in the winter. The Questionnaire was drawn up with this in mind so that parents could view their concerns or agreement with the proposals. Only views on the Architecture part of the Changes to the Curriculum were sought because most people felt that the other proposals regarding the Curriculum were a good idea and welcomed them. The only concern was what type of feedback would be given to parents when the National Testing A- F scheme was abolished.

Summary

- There were 101 replies giving a 53.72% response rate.
- The split of children attending each stage of school - Nursery = 2.97%, Nursery + Primary = 10.89%, Primary = 60.4% and Primary + Secondary = 25.74%
- 74.26% said the hours across Aberdeenshire should be the same, 18.81% said No, 2.97% didn't know and 3.96% didn't reply
- 55.77% said No to having 4 long days + 1 short one. 37.50% said yes, 4.81% said don't know and 1.92% didn't reply
- 47.52% said the short day should not be Friday, 45.54% said it should, 0.99% said don't know and 5.94% didn't reply
- 69.31% thought buses leaving too early and 66.34% thought the road conditions in winter were the main concerns with early starts. 14.85% said they liked the idea of and early start.
- 76.24% were concerned how the school would feed all of the children in 45 minutes and 61.39% were concerned about lack of play time. 12.87% said they liked the idea.
- 42.57% said Friday was a good day for a short day, 35.64% said that this would cause them child care issues and 37.62% said that they might struggle to get childcare. 28.71% said that 4 long days and a short day was a good idea.

Results

Out of the One hundred and eighty eight questionnaires sent to each family of children who attend either Inch Nursery or Primary School 101 replied giving a response rate of 53.72%. We are unable to tell how many pupils this represents as 25.74 % of parents have pupils at both Primary and Secondary schools. The split of families replying with children going to Nursery, Primary and Secondary is shown below.

Where children go to School	Number of Replies	Percentage
Nursery	3	2.97%
Nursery + Primary	11	10.89%
Primary	61	60.40%
Primary + Secondary	26	25.74%

The following tables show the results to whether all schools across Aberdeenshire should have the same hours, whether there should be 4 long days and a short day and if Friday should be that day.

Should school hours across Aberdeenshire be the same?	Number of Replies	Percentage
Don't know	3	2.97%
No	19	18.81%
Yes	75	74.26%
No reply	4	3.96%

From the table above you can see that 74.26% of the parents were in favour of schools across Aberdeenshire having the same hours.

Should there be 4 longer days and a short day?	Number of Replies	Percentage
Don't know	5	4.81%
No	58	55.77%
Yes	39	37.50%
No reply	2	1.92%

Even though parents agree that the hours should be the same the majority say that this should **not** be 4 longer days and a short day.

Should Friday be the short day?	Number of Replies	Percentage
Don't know	1	0.99%
No	48	47.52%
Yes	46	45.54%
No reply	6	5.94%

When asked whether Friday should be the short day 47.52% said that it should **not** be with 45.54% saying that it should.

EARLY START TIMES

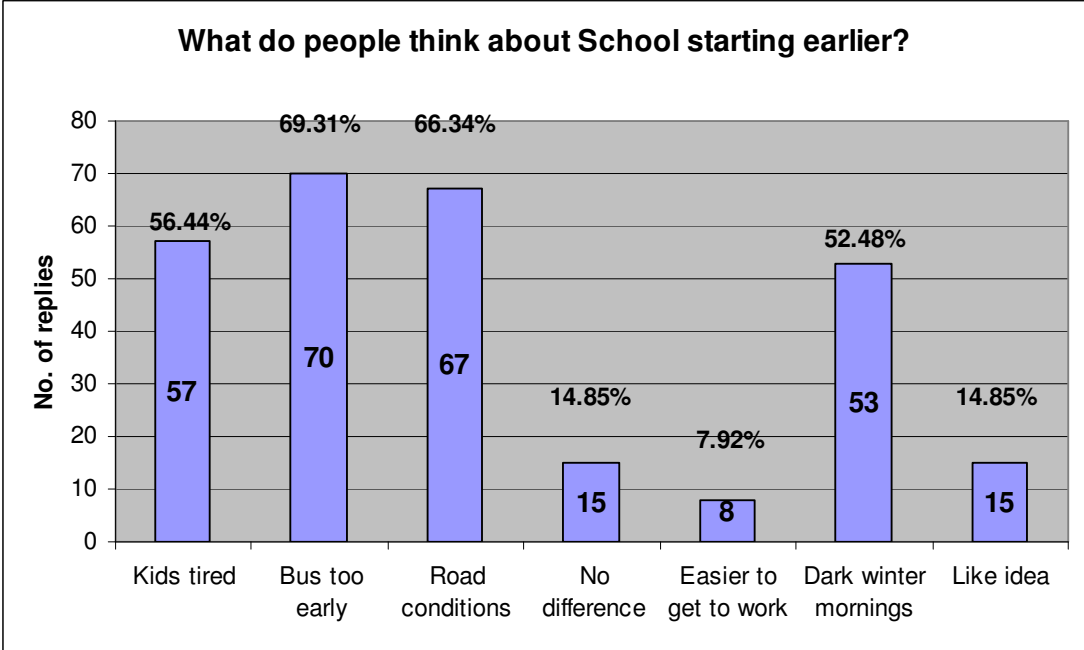
When you look at how the early start will affect people the following comments were made:-

6.30am alarm call? Safety issues in dark
A lot of childcare doesn't start that early
Daughter has to leave at 7.45am for school. Leaving 25 minutes earlier is too early in the winter
Earlier starts mean earlier bedtimes which will impact on extra curriculum activities held in the evenings
Finishing time for all kids at the same school should be the same
Lots of people are late for school at 9am start. This will make it worse.
Much harder with children with SFL needs in taxis.
School is for our child's education and not a child care service but I do see their views as would there be enough child care in the area?
Think safety
Totally inappropriate idea with working parents once again being inconvenienced
Why attempt to fix this present system when it is not broken
Are transport companies aware of these proposals?
In a rural area with so many miles to cover to get children to and from school, this cant work in the way it does in Lothian

When asked what the parents thought about early starts the follow replies were given:-

	Number of Replies	Percentage of possible 101 replies
Kids will be tired with longer days	57	56.44%
Buses would have to leave very early in the morning	70	69.31%
Road Conditions in winter will be worse with earlier start	67	66.34%
No difference	15	14.85%
Easier to get to work	8	7.92%
Early dark mornings in winter	53	52.48%
Like the idea of earlier starts	15	14.85%

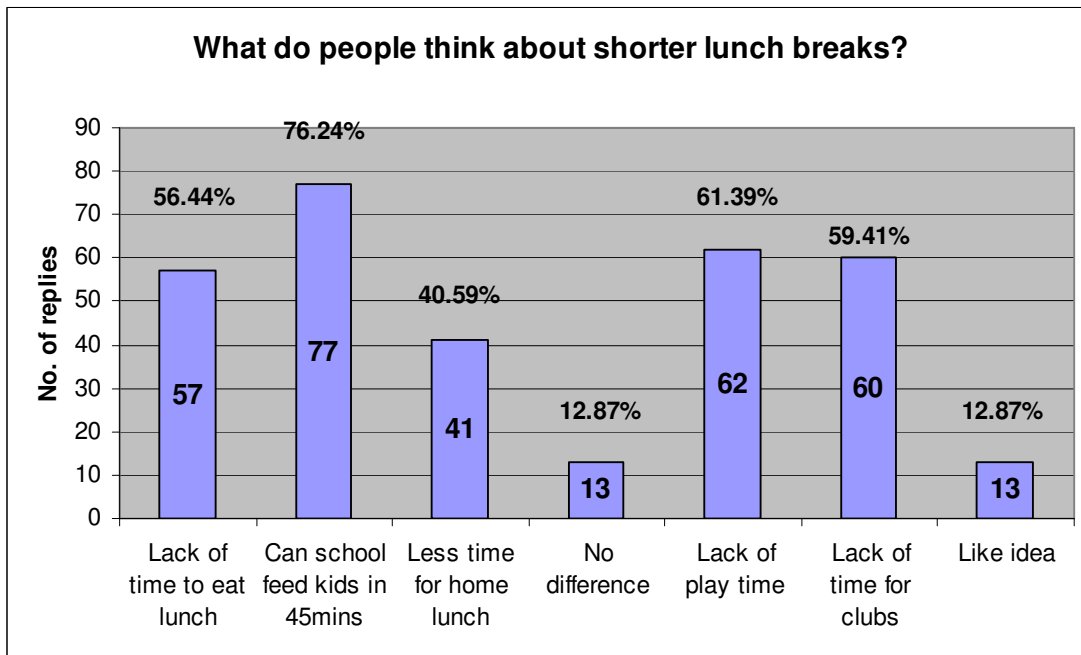
From the graph below you can see that most people are concerned that the buses will have to leave too early and this will impact not only on the tiredness of the children but on safety in the wintertime due to poor road conditions and longer hours in darkness. Only 14.85% said that this would cause them no change and liked the idea.



SHORTER LUNCH TIMES

It is proposed to reduce the lunch hour to 45minutes and the parents were asked record their views on this. A lot of lunch time clubs are held by the teachers, especially at The Gordon Schools and this would have a major impact on them. Another issue is that Insch Primary School already has two sittings at lunch time to feed all of the children and they would struggle to do this in 45 minutes. The results are given below.

	Number of Replies	Percentage of possible 101 replies
Lack of time to eat lunch	57	56.44%
Can school feed kids in 45mins	77	76.24%
Less time for home lunch	41	40.59%
No difference	13	12.87%
Lack of play time	62	61.39%
Lack of time for clubs	60	59.41%
Like the idea	13	12.87%



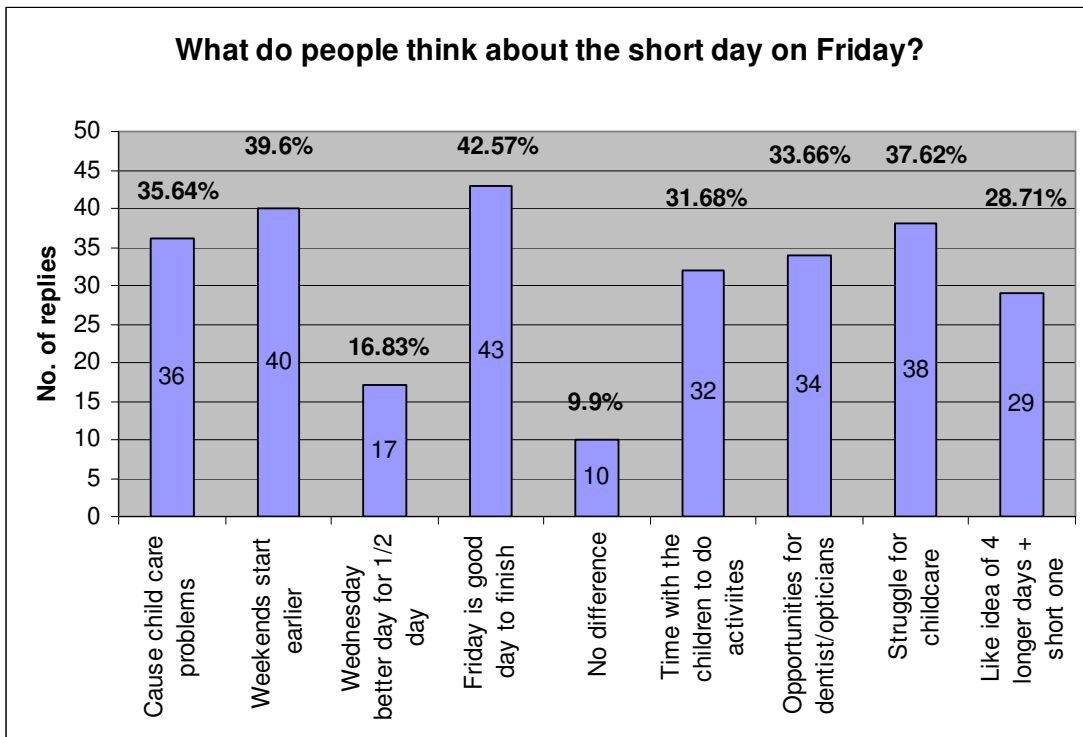
From the graph you can see that the biggest concerns are how the school are going to be able to do this, lack of play time for the children and lack of time for lunch time clubs. Comments that we received were:-

Child complains already that they don't get enough time to finish their lunch as have 2 sittings to accommodate all children.
Children need time to run around, play and socialise at lunch times
I worry about lack of eating, play, social time for the children and how are the school to feed so many children in such a short time
Lack of time to exercise, especially as children have been sitting for a longer morning.
Less time for children to develop social skills and less opportunity for exercise.
Lunch time is a crucial down time for kids and not to have time for lunch time clubs NO! NO!
Makes for a very long afternoon
Most of the clubs are in lunchtime. When will they do these if lunch is only 45mins?
No time to socialise or let off steam. High risk of not being fed + watered adequately
Not keen on longer days
Short break uncivilised. No time to relax, or absorb morning's exertions.
With the amount of homework that children get these days. Playtime + lunch break are essential as they are for children to unwind
I think that when the children are in secondary school they will miss out on lunch time clubs as they all go by bus and cant go after school

EARLIER FINISHING TIMES ON FRIDAY

Parents were asked for their views on the shorter day and the results are shown below.

	Number of Replies	Percentage of possible 101 replies
This will cause child care problems for me	36	35.64%
Weekend starts earlier so can go away at weekend/holiday earlier	40	39.60%
Wednesday would be a better option, to allow kids to get a break during the week	17	16.83%
Friday is a good day to finish early	43	42.57%
No difference	10	9.90%
Time with the children to do activities	32	31.68%
Opportunity to go to dentist/optician	34	33.66%
Might struggle to get childcare on Friday Afternoon	38	37.62%
Like idea of 4 longer days + one half day	29	28.71%



From the graph above you can see that 42.57% feel that Friday is a better day to finish early compared to 16.83% who prefer Wednesday. 35.64% say that this will cause child care problems and 37.62% say that they might struggle to get childcare.

28.71% like the idea of 4 longer day and a short day. The fact that most of the percentage results are similar shows that parents can identify with both the Pro's and Con's of this proposal.

Comments made about the 4 long days and 1 short day are shown below:-

Additional childcare payments will affect family incomes which could ultimately affect a family's ability to pay for essentials. Longer working hours may be needed to make up this shortfall which would impact on Parental development.
Assumption made that parents are available to spend Friday afternoon with their kids when they are in actual fact working
Children enjoy their golden time on Fridays. It is a time to socialise with classmates doing non playground activities i.e. board games, chatting or listening to music.
Children will just crash with tiredness.
Got a job to suit school hours with early finish time on Friday this will cause big childcare problems for me. Childcare in Inch is already difficult to come by.
I am utterly opposed to a change to the school day. It works just fine as it is.
I don't agree with early finish on a Friday or any other day
I don't think school should finish early on either Friday or Wednesday
Really not keen on longer 4 days + 1/2 day option especially for the smaller children. I would back any idea to make all the days shorter but realise this will not happen.
Think Friday is a good day to stop early from a family point of view but Wednesday would be better from a kid's point of view - less tired.
Time would be better balanced on Friday afternoons than in mornings
Will After school club change to accommodate pupils on Friday afternoons
Children who attend private after school lessons with struggle to find places and the professional private practitioners will struggle to adapt their times around their personal life.
If there has to be a half day, don't see why it has to be a Friday.
Working parents may have difficulty with work to arrange Fridays off/early regularly.
Once or twice this would be an advantage the rest of the year it would be an inconvenience

When parents were asked to make any other comments that they felt were relevant the following comments were given:-

4 long + 1 short day works well in other parts of Scotland and would bring Aberdeenshire into line with what is common practice throughout Europe. A splendid idea which is years overdue. At last an opportunity for greater flexibility in achieving a good family friendly balance between home/school/work.
As long as children (particularly secondary) are not missing out on times to get through syllabus. Also if time was lost due to poor weather i.e. school closure- could this time be "clawed back" on Friday afternoons. Although not directly related to this, the issue of public holidays between Aberdeen city/Aberdeenshire presents HUGE problems. Can the councils be made aware of this?
At the moment a child attending secondary schools by bus needs to get up in the morning around 6:50 starting school at 8:30 would result in children having to get up ridiculously early, traveling longer in the darkness and generally feeling tired in the evenings. Reducing the lunch break will result in children queuing for lunch, eating then returning to classes straight away- exercise after lunch, such as walking, and social interaction are good for a child's health and development and the reduction in lunch break durations would have an adverse affect on this quality time.
Bus has to make 2 trips to school as there aren't enough seats for all the children to travel together. School dinner hall is too small for all the children if lunchtime is split as it is now children don't have enough time to eat their meal. Shorter lunch times means not time for lunch time clubs.
Can we be given more notice of any meetings in future? We work -come home- run our homes and sometimes find it hard to also attend meetings.
Children who travel by bus already have to leave very early. If the buses have to leave even earlier it would be a very long day for the younger children and may be more dangerous in the dark, icy conditions in winter.
Children will adapt well to change so it won't be long before these hours become the norm for them.

Don't agree with the proposed change of times. My son is picked up at 7.35am and not home till 4.30/4.35pm. It is an early morning. Would new start time mean a 7am pick up? FAR TOO EARLY. Come Friday they would be too tired to do anything.
Early finish will lead to idleness. Older children will be left unsupervised, to mess around for hours at a time. Likely consequences: crime, dull wittedness lack of ambition, litter, threat to pensioners going about their day to day lives. Inconsistent routine is unsettling and will make difficulties for parents and employers. WHY?
Feel strongly that to shorten Friday fundamentally changes the week inappropriately. Lengthening the school day is not a problem and synchronising all school hours is good. In England infants are in school till 3.15, juniors 3:30 and secondary till 4pm. A half day off for extra curricular activities begs the question "who pays" + supervises. The whole change of the school working week is just change for change sake
Finishing early one day a week is a good idea but maybe 1.15/1.30. The early starts and shortened lunch hours however - we do not agree with. Tired children, not enough fresh air and exercise, to stretch their legs would not help with concentration in class.
Four long days + 1 short is fine if you live near the school but when kids are travelling for a hour already to get to school this makes it a very long day, especially in winter. Don't think it's a good idea to have buses travelling that early in winter time. They would need to leave 25 minutes earlier. Can children finish at 1oclock on Friday and have 1 hour for their lunch during the rest of the week. Can secondary start and finish 10 minutes later so not such a big change to morning start.
How would children benefit from longer days?
I do feel that Nursery children should start and finish the same time to make it easier for parents who have children in both.
I don't see any real benefit to children of a shorter day. Do not think this is being proposed in their best interests but rather in the interests of council employees
I fully support the changes to secondary school, as all the school days will be shorter than they are at present. However I worry that Mon-Thurs will be very long days + tiring for the younger stages of Primary School. I think P1 should finish earlier than the rest on Mon - Thurs even if Friday will be a short day for all.
I know in France they do 4 long days + 1/2 day but they fill the half day with activities. Is there enough resources to allow children to do that sort of thing so that parents don't have to pay for extra childcare?
I really don't feel my children would benefit from these changes, both of my children have to get buses to school. They start early and some days it is a struggle to get them up and they are in bed early. I also work Fridays so this would create problems for me.
I think for full time working parents this is a very bad idea. Its hard enough having no holiday club at the school without having to find child care for every Friday afternoon.
I think the idea sounds good in theory but I also worry how the children, especially younger ones will cope with the longer hours. As far as I'm aware the kids have 2 sittings already at lunch- will they be forced to eat quicker? There seems to be fors & againts for each point above and like most parents (I would assume) the kids are my priority so a trial period would be best if this the way the council are determined to go
I would like to see four long + 1 short day for primary school children only. For Secondary school the children would have to leave early in the morning and the road conditions in the winter morning and dark mornings. Therefore don't agree for secondary children
I would not like to see the short day being a Wednesday. If it is not Friday, I would prefer the days to remain as they are.
If it were to come about I would hope that homework could be structured around the early finish day so that it could be done then allowing free time to play after school on the other days. I worry that the days are too long for the early stages. Why can't they leave Mon - Thur as it is and have a shorter day on Friday anyway- even just an hour less or everyone finishing together after lunch? 8.30 am start for secondary pupils who bus to school from the outlying country areas is far too early. Agree strongly with no more national testing - but what is to replace it?
The proposed early start would mean ridiculously early pick up for pupils travelling in from outlying areas. The more that school hours differ from normal working hours the more difficulty, disruption and expense will be caused with respect to childcare. The only explanation for the proposed changes to school hours is that "schools can work more closely together". This benefit seems nebulous and has not been explained. The first priority should be to provide the best possible education to the children and not to make things easier for the education authority. The changes to the curriculum are not well explained. The emphasis should be firmly on literacy and numeracy. The other aspects are subsidiary and open to political interpretation.
It will cause severe traffic problems at school entrance at school finishing time. Don't see any advantage in changing existing hours.
Leave school as it is
Longer days -some out of the school activities are at 15:30/16:00 i.e. dancing lessons, swimming. Secondary schools should have longer hours than Primary
The earlier start will cause problems for many rural children. At present some children have to leave their house just after 7am to catch buses for secondary school. This proposal would mean kids leaving around 6.30.

<p>Mid week 1/2 day would be better to give the kids a break, especially P1-3. We have been promised the same start + Finish time throughout Aberdeenshire for how long! Thought the transport was a problem but this can not be resolved! If lunch time is shorter this will cause major problems + stress for children, i.e. volume to be fed, space, confusion for younger ones + staffing issues.</p>
<p>My daughters already have to leave home before 8 in the morning & would have to leave extremely early if school started earlier - During the winter they would barely see home in daylight. This would be worse if they had to be at school earlier.</p>
<p>Not much time between pick ups and drop offs if you have children at primary and secondary. Longer days for the first stages of primary - Can they cope? Secondary should be encouraging pupils into a work routine i.e. 9 - 5. How many companies would allow employees to work 4 long + 1 short day? This should set them up for working so that there is not too much change for them.</p>
<p>Paying for and finding childcare is already a problem. I have a job which works within school times. If this proposal comes into being I would most likely have to stop working. It would mean my children getting up at 6:30 am in order to be ready for the bus.</p>
<p>School is already a tiring experience; lengthening 4 days would exacerbate this situation. P1-3 would have an extremely long four days. Squeezing the same amount of learning into a condensed amount of time doesn't seem workable to me. Some children could conceivably be at after school clubs for 6 hours on Friday. I cant see how the change in school hours will benefit or improve the curriculum, teaching or learning</p>
<p>Should be up to the headmistress/master to run the school as they feel is most suitable/practical to their requirements and requirements of their staff</p>
<p>The changes for school week are ideal for secondary schools apart from the half day on a Friday, better midweek. For primary schools it would not benefit pupils any, especially the earlier stage (p1-3). They would be too tired by the end of the day and would struggle to do homework. I also doubt if larger primaries could cope with the short lunch break which could risk the children not being fed + watered adequately. The longer days far outweighs the benefit of the half one.</p>
<p>The early mornings would be very difficult for children going by bus who will have to be picked up even earlier than now. The afternoon sessions will be very long in comparison to other morning sessions. This will certainly be a problem with younger children. Presently an session is 1hr 15mins for P1-3. This will be extended to 2 hours and 20 mins. It will be very difficult to do meaningful teaching in afternoons.. Problematic if you have a child at pm nursery with a school age child finishing at lunch time. I would expect attendances to fall on Fridays. What the point going to school for just a few hours, if you are disillusioned at secondary school.</p>
<p>The rural schools that are larger can't afford to collaborate face to face with other schools. So that factor will prevent that part of the very exciting curriculum for excellence taking place. Therefore the change to school hours will cause chaos for transport/childcare/weather/light safety/parent work commitments. These changes can't take place smoothly. The curriculum could work just as well in the present school hours. - Conclusion:- money saver for the council = Mcrone time on a Friday - minimising supply staff needs. Curriculum excellent, school hours – ill thought out, unworkable. Staff too tired Friday pm for McCrone time.</p>
<p>The times of the school at present are fine and there is no need to change them. This would cause me a great problem with childcare. Is the after school club willing to work a longer session on Friday!!</p>
<p>There are pros + cons to earlier finish but I feel that the children would have a very early start especially the ones travelling by school transport as a result they will be tired.</p>
<p>These changes would be more positive & beneficial in the summer months, I feel in the winter it maybe very early mornings meaning safety may come into it with darkness in the morning and snowy wintry conditions always being worse first thing in the morning.</p>
<p>Think this is a good idea. The 2.30 + 3.15 pick up times are 2 big chunks of the day to be sitting waiting for school to end when you have children finishing at different times. Can't wait for next year.</p>
<p>This is going to create havoc for folks who work in town and need extra childcare. Our eldest gets up at 6.15 to give herself plenty of time to go out to the bus for the secondary at 7.45am. It arrives anytime between 7.45 and 8am and does not wait if you are not there.</p>
<p>We like the idea of children being able to sit secondary school exams earlier. We need to remember that a lot of our children have an early start and late finish on a school day because they have to travel by bus. If we lived in a town things might be different. Also the roads aren't gritted early enough to make early starts safe for travelling.</p>
<p>With more parents having to work who is really going to benefit, will this just cause more divide. With kids school is mandatory however after school clubs are a necessity for working parents and kids can make you feel bad that you can't be at home for them like their friends are. What is the use of the half day when their parents are at work? AS for the proposed curriculum changes I am not well enough informed to comment. Had I known about the parent council meeting and how the agenda would affect my family I would have attended the meeting. Are Aberdeenshire Council even going to listen to our views or is this process just to "look Good" and they will plough on ahead with the changes regardless? After school clubs only for up to P7/ 12yr olds, we currently have a society of "latch key kids" of which my secondary children are and what is being proposed will only give them more time on their own. How can this possibly be a good idea? As a working parent I strongly disagree with a 4.5 day week and hope that the council come to their senses. Yes have all schools working to the same hours but be sensible about it.</p>

Why the changes? Is there something wrong for the children with the current situation. Is this change for change sake?
Will be very hard to solve childcare with an early finish on a Friday as my husband works full time + I work every Friday afternoon until 5pm. No need to change & have half days! I think it all runs pretty well as it is & should not change. Would prefer all the children to get out from school P1-7 and Nursery children at the same time but no half days.
Will children get school lunches on Friday. Friday is the best day compared with Wednesday to finish early because they are less able to concentrate on Friday afternoon, and it might be useful for going away early for holidays or weekends away.
15minutes difference in the start time would not really be affected by light + weather in morning. 45minutes still pretty long time for lunch. Activities on Friday afternoon - is their staff for that? Not all workers able to take advantage of "poet" day - collecting kids + arranging care for kids on Friday pm may be problematic
Children would have to wear reflective clothing for the darker mornings and dark afternoons. If they are walking or biking home.
Don't like the idea of school finishing at 12:00 with lunch after that time. Will buses leave at 12, 12:45 or both? Will there be playground supervision beyond 12? Would be VERY long day for new P1s. Reduced time for play = reduced social interaction + time to develop social skills + "burn off energy" before returning to the classroom. May make life simpler for some if all schools operate same hours but then it may disadvantage others? Surely they can be brought closer in line with each other without this drastic change.
Finishing 2.30 or 3.15 still leaves time to attend dentist/opticians etc any day. This plan would make this more difficult as everyone would compete for Friday. Part time activity leaders/visiting staff can't necessarily fit into this if they have second or more jobs. Children and staff will be tired towards the end of their long days- this would make learning less effective and weaken motivation for homework in evening.
I think that in Primary school it is a good idea and I know friends in Lothian where the hours work very well. I feel that in Secondary the usual hours should remain as a lot of the children go by bus and therefore would have a very early start. Also the excellent lunch time clubs would perhaps have to stop.
Not keen on lack of assessment in primary school
Would not like to see the standard of education to be affected due to the changes. Also what collaborative activities are the council proposing and who will be footing the cost of these? Will the pupils actually be more involved or just have an extra half day off school. Who would be supervising the children if teachers having planning meetings?
In this era of healthy lifestyle promotion less time in the playground in not a good thing. Transport in rural areas is a big issue. No lollypop person in Inch, nearly double the number of children crossing the roads in the dark with extra school traffic around. A large number of secondary school pupils out and about with nothing to do on a Friday afternoon! Childcare cost + places a huge issue with working parents. Extra activities/family time not possible for children with working parents who will be at childcare in the dark winter afternoons.

Janette Taylor
24.09.08