

## Head Office

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Joint Committee on the Draft Deregulation Bill  
Houses of Parliament  
London

Friday 13 September 2013

Dear Sir/Madam,

4Children welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Joint Committee on the Draft Deregulation Bill's consultation.

4Children is the national charity all about children and families. We have spearheaded a joined-up, integrated approach to children's services and work with a wide range of partners around the country to ensure children and families have access to the services and support they need in their communities. We run Sure Start Children's Centres as well as family and youth services across Britain.

4Children develops, influences and shapes national policy on all aspects of the lives of children, young people and families. Consequently, we take a particular interest in those aspects of schools policy with implications for parents and children. In this light we are responding to the consultation in relation to a specific proposal found within clause 33 - *Schools: reduction of burden*.

Clause 33 proposes the addition of schedule 14, containing proposals aimed at 'reducing burdens' for schools. The key proposal of interest to 4Children is that relating to *Determining school terms* (Paragraph 3), which would, for England, move:

*"all responsibility for determining term dates in community, voluntary controlled and community special schools and maintained nursery schools from the local authority to the governing body. The governing body of all such maintained schools will be responsible for determining their school's term and holiday dates each year."*

4Children are concerned about the implications this change would have upon hard working families and children. School holidays are an essential time for children to rest, recharge their batteries and spend quality time with their family. First of all, we need to recognise the importance of the long break in childhood and child development.

Whilst many working parents would be happy to see the demise of the six week summer break, such as change would create an immense childcare challenge, and would add additional complications if different schools were to take different approaches.

This concern has been borne out by a recent survey undertaken by 4Children in partnership with Netmums (the UK's fastest-growing online parenting organisation with over 1.2 million members, with results showing:

- More than three quarters (77%) of parents are concerned that major changes to school holiday dates will make it harder for parents with children in more than one school
- 38% are happy with the way they are and do not want them to change.
- Though just over half of parents (62%) would want to see changes – ending the traditional 6 week summer break - there is no consensus between parents as to what the best way of changing the make-up of holidays would be: 34% of parents would prefer holidays to be split more evenly throughout the year, 14% wanting the Christmas break to be longer, and 11% wanting there to be less holiday taken as a whole.

If changes are instituted it will be essential that parents are properly and regularly consulted and have a say in how their children's holidays are organised. The default control needs to be with parents so with a strong requirement for headteachers to identify and follow the wishes of parents. This needs to be a thorough and meaningful consultation which involves all parents at the school with a clear default that nothing will change unless parents wish it to. If school holidays are changed there should also be a requirement for schools to co-ordinate their holidays with other local schools to prevent an unworkable situation developing.

Shortening the school summer holidays is often put forward as a solution to the problems many parents face with childcare during the period. Few families are able to take such a long time off work and research shows how little childcare is available during school holidays. Whilst some may welcome the practical help that a shortened holiday would bring, others would much prefer to have a longer break where they are able to mix and match their childcare with family care. Many families will also have children at different schools with potentially different holiday dates – in some cases extending rather than reducing the childcare complexities.

There therefore remains an urgent need to provide more childcare for parents during school holidays with a real need for schools to open their doors to local childcare providers to provide the childcare we know parents want. Instead of having schools closed during the summer months, they can instead be used to provide much needed childcare during the holidays. All of these are unintended consequences, and it is unclear whether these impacts have been calculated and factored in to the proposals as they stand.

If you would like to discuss any of the points raised in this response, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,



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