



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION, DOCUMENT

School term dates 2026 to 2027: explanatory memorandum

Sets out direction to local authorities and school governing bodies of voluntary aided and foundation schools under section 32b of the education act 2002.

First published: 3 March 2025

Last updated: 3 March 2025

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Introduction and Background

1. The Welsh Ministers have powers of direction under section 32B(1) of the Education Act 2002 (“the 2002 Act”).

2. The purpose of this document is to provide a public and transparent statement on the decision of the Welsh Ministers to issue a direction and to outline how the Welsh Ministers have determined the school term dates for all maintained schools in Wales. It is also designed to set out for citizens, members, officers and partners of local authorities, and the governing bodies of voluntary aided and foundation schools (“relevant governing bodies”) the purpose and effect of the Direction.

3. Under sections 32A and 32B of the 2002 Act local authorities set term dates for community, voluntary controlled, community special and maintained nursery schools. Also, relevant governing bodies retain the right to set term dates for their schools. However, a local authority is under a duty to co-operate and co-ordinate with each relevant governing body in its area and every other local authority in Wales when setting term dates so that those dates are the same or as similar as can be. Similarly, a relevant governing body is under a duty to co-operate and co-ordinate with every other relevant governing body in its local authority area and the local authority in whose area it is situated when setting term dates so that those dates are the same or as similar as can be.

4. The term “maintained school” is defined in section 32A(9) of the 2002 Act and includes a school in Wales which is a community, foundation or voluntary school (including voluntary controlled and voluntary aided schools), a community special school or a maintained nursery school. That section further defines “term dates” to mean the dates on which school terms and holidays are to begin and end.

5. If, despite best efforts, term dates are not the same or as similar as can be

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then section 32B(1) of the 2002 Act allows the Welsh Ministers the power to direct local authorities and relevant governing bodies on what their term dates must be. The power in that section is not limited to solely achieving dates that are the same or as similar as can be but is wide enough to permit that use of it.

6. Section 32A(5) of the 2002 Act provides that local authorities must inform the Welsh Ministers of the term dates they have determined for all maintained schools within their respective areas. Regulations made under section 32A(6) of the 2002 Act set out the detail of how that notification is to be provided. The Education (Notification of School Term Dates) (Wales) Regulations 2014 (“the Notification Regulations”) provide that the term dates for 2026 to 2027 are to be provided by the final working day in August, in this case, 30 August 2024.

7. The Notification Regulations also provide that notifications can be completed and forwarded electronically to the Welsh Ministers. As the chair or vice chair of a relevant governing body should sign the notification for their school as well as the appropriate local authority director of education, the Notification Regulations also provide that partial notices containing term dates for one or more schools may be used.

8. The Welsh Government wrote to all local authorities and voluntary aided and foundation schools on 4 June 2024 requesting that they work with other local authorities and the voluntary aided and foundation schools to set term dates and to advise Welsh Ministers what their term dates would be for 2026 to 2027 by 30 August 2024.

9. Analysis of notifications received by the Welsh Ministers indicates that despite best efforts term dates were not the same (or as similar as can be) across Wales for the school year 2026 to 2027. Therefore, in order to harmonise term dates for all maintained schools in Wales, Welsh Ministers proposed to use their powers of Direction.

Analysis of term date notifications received

Notifications from local authorities in Wales:

10. All 22 local authorities returned notifications of the school term dates which had been determined for 2026 to 2027 for community, voluntary controlled, community special and maintained nursery schools (i.e. schools for which the local authority has the responsibility to determine term dates).

11. There was a deterioration in the level of harmonisation of term dates achieved between local authorities. In previous years there has been some variation (1 or 2 days) in Powys to allow for the Royal Welsh Show. On this occasion there is a week's difference for the spring half term and the end of spring term and start of summer term.

12. Two distinct groups emerged in the returned notifications. Local authority Group A comprised of dates agreed by Anglesey, Bridgend, Cardiff, Ceredigion, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Gwynedd, Merthyr Tydfil, Powys, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Vale of Glamorgan and Wrexham, covering north Wales, mid Wales and south central Wales. Little information was provided as to why particular dates were chosen. However, Ceredigion advised us that its reasoning was to ensure the Easter weekend falls in the middle of the spring break and to align as far as possible with Powys due to attendance at the Royal Welsh Show. Ceredigion directly adjoins Powys.

13. Further the Vale of Glamorgan stated that the dates set in Group A helpfully avoid any split weeks. The Welsh Ministers share the concern around split weeks. In that respect Group B has a split week for the end of the spring term but Group A does not (see paragraph 14 for the list of authorities in Group B). It is considered that split weeks have the potential to adversely affect pupil attendance if they fall at the end of the term. There might be a tendency for

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parent to take a child out of school for the last 1 or 2 days of a term if those days are at the start of the week rather than school finishing as normal on a Friday. The Welsh Ministers consider that is less likely to happen at the start of the school year as pupil fatigue will not be such a factor relative to at the end of the school year. It is noted that both Group A and Group B have a split week at the end of the summer term (end of the school year) but it is considered that is unavoidable in that case. It is also considered, that if there is a drop off in attendance or learning at that point a split week is less likely to be detrimental given it is at the very end of the school year and so the exams and school work would ordinarily have been completed.

14. Local authority Group B comprised of term dates agreed by Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Carmarthenshire, Monmouthshire, Neath Port Talbot, Newport, Pembrokeshire, Swansea and Torfaen. Newport advised that its reasoning was to end spring term the day before Good Friday. The other option is to end term the week before (as Group A has done), which was considered by it to be too early. Whilst it was considered to be too early the reason for that view was not provided. Further, Swansea, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire reported that they chose to align with one another and to have a longer first half of the spring term. There is evidence that Group B favoured a longer first half to the spring term albeit the reasoning for that was not explained.

Notifications from relevant governing bodies:

15. Voluntary aided and foundation school governing bodies are also required to advise Welsh Ministers of their proposed term dates. The notifications received all aligned their proposed term dates with their respective local authorities maintaining the schools.

16. In the past schools with a religious character have chosen different dates to their maintaining local authority and other schools without a religious character because their preference is for learners to be in school to take part in Easter observances during the week leading up to Good Friday. In terms of Holy week

for 2027 those voluntary aided or foundation schools which have a religious character in Group B have not cited Holy week as a reason for having the later spring (Easter) break. The same is true for those local authorities who are in Group B. It is simply the case that as noted above all voluntary aided and foundation schools have aligned with their respective local authorities.

Conclusion

17. The Welsh Ministers considered all the returned notifications very carefully and decided to propose that all maintained schools in Wales adopt the term dates set by the local authorities in Group A for the following reasons:

- The policy behind sections 32A and 32B of the 2002 Act was to eliminate differences in dates which pose challenges for parents and staff alike. We consider that those policy imperatives outweigh the desire to have different spring breaks taking into account the reasons that were given by the local authorities.
- The majority of local authorities set term dates in Group A - 13 compared to only 9 that set dates in Group B.
- Powys local authority has set dates which in the main align with Group A but there are 2 differences. One difference is that Powys has opted to end the summer term on 16 July 2027, before the start of the Royal Welsh Show which runs from Monday 19 to Thursday 22 July 2027. The rest of the local authorities in Group A end the summer term on 20 July whilst Group B local authorities end the summer term on 21 July. In terms of the authorities that directly border with Powys it is a mixed picture with 6 aligning with Group A and 5 with Group B. The dates proposed for the Direction would mean that Powys will be allowed to end the summer term on 16 July. That means that children and school staff will be free to attend the Royal Welsh Show for the full week from Monday 19 July 2027. This decision reflects the Welsh Ministers' very high regard for the significant cultural and economic value of

the Royal Welsh Show.

- The Welsh Ministers appreciate the efforts of local authorities and voluntary aided and foundation schools in working together to achieve harmonisation. To propose dates that go against a significant majority would devalue these efforts. In considering this and the other points stated above, Welsh Ministers considered it reasonable to propose the harmonised term dates as put forward by Group A as in paragraph 21 below.
- The proposed dates will avoid a split week at the end of the spring term.

Consultation on proposed term dates for 2026 to 27 and direction

18. Before using their powers of direction Welsh Ministers are under a duty to carry out an appropriate consultation in accordance with the Education (Consultation on School Term Dates) (Wales) Regulations 2014. Consequently a 12-week consultation on the term dates Welsh Ministers proposed to set ran from [to be inserted following consultation] 2025 to [to be inserted following consultation] 2025. The consultation asked whether consultees agreed with our proposals for term dates for the school year 2026 to 2027 and the proposed draft Direction. The proposed dates for the school year 2026 to 2027 on which Welsh Ministers consulted were:

Start of autumn term and first day of the school year Tuesday 1 September 2026

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Start of autumn half term Monday 26 October 2026

End of autumn half term Friday 30 October 2026

End of autumn term Friday 18 December 2026 for all schools except for those in Powys

Powys County Council schools alone will end the autumn term on Tuesday 22 December 2026

Start of spring term Monday 4 January 2027

Start of spring half term Monday 8 February 2027

End of spring half term Friday 12 February 2027

End of spring term Friday 19 March 2027

Start of summer term Monday 5 April 2027

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Start of summer half term Monday 31 May 2027

End of summer half term Friday 4 June 2027

End of summer term and last day of the school year Tuesday 20 July 2027 for all schools except for those in Powys

Powys County Council schools alone will end the summer term on Friday 16 July 2027

Summary of consultation responses

A full summary of consultation responses can be accessed at:

[Add link following consultation]]

19. The key points are as follows:

[summary to be added following completion of the consultation]

Approach

20. In deciding whether and how to intervene, the Welsh Ministers have taken into account the following principles:

a. The Welsh Ministers recognise that this Direction is a serious step and have

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not taken the decision to issue it lightly. The Welsh Ministers are satisfied that it is reasonable to determine term dates so that they are the same for all maintained schools in Wales save for those in Powys County Council where a variation is allowed to accommodate the Royal Welsh Show which is an important cultural event. The Welsh Ministers have allowed adequate time for local authorities and relevant governing bodies to agree dates between themselves. They have also undertaken an appropriate consultation of 12 weeks to seek views on the proposed dates and the Direction. They are therefore satisfied that this Direction is justified.

b. Intervention should be proportionate. The term dates set out by the Welsh Ministers in the Direction apply for the 2026 to 2027 school year. This gives everybody affected by those dates adequate opportunity to plan accordingly. The Welsh Ministers have not set term dates in this Direction for any other school years and local authorities and governing bodies will still be expected to seek to agree term dates that are the same (or as similar as possible) for future years. The Welsh Ministers also take into account the responses received to a 12-week consultation on the proposed dates.

Ongoing Review of the Direction

21. The Welsh Ministers may revoke or amend the Direction at any time and its effectiveness will be reviewed by the Welsh Ministers from time to time.

Effect of the Direction

22. The effect of the Direction is to oblige each local authority and each relevant governing body to set the term dates as set out in the Direction.

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Direction

1. The Welsh Ministers having considered all the information set out in the Explanatory Memorandum are satisfied that the term dates determined by local authorities in Wales and the governing bodies of voluntary aided or foundation schools (“relevant governing bodies”) should be those dates set out in the Schedule for the reason set out in paragraph 2. They have also undertaken an appropriate consultation on the term dates in the Schedule and taken into account the consultation responses.

2. The Welsh Ministers consider that it is reasonable that the term dates should be the same save that a variation is allowed for those maintained schools maintained by Powys County Council. Accordingly, the Welsh Ministers direct the local authorities in Wales and the relevant governing bodies in Wales to determine the term dates for the school year 2026 to 27 as set out in the Schedule to this Direction.

3. In this Direction “foundation schools” and “voluntary aided schools” have the meaning given to them in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 by virtue of section 212(5) of the Education Act 2002.

4. This Direction is made without prejudice to any future directions by the Welsh Ministers.

5. This Direction comes into effect at 9.00am on the day after it is signed.

Schedule

Term dates directed by the Welsh ministers for the school year 2026 to 2027:

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Start of autumn term and first day of the school year Tuesday 1 September 2026

Start of autumn half term Monday 26 October 2026

End of autumn half term Friday 30 October 2026

End of autumn term Friday 18 December 2026 for all schools except for those in Powys

Powys County Council schools alone will end the autumn term on Tuesday 22 December 2026

Start of spring term Monday 4 January 2027

Start of spring half term Monday 8 February 2027

End of spring half term Friday 12 February 2027

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End of spring term Friday 19 March 2027

Start of summer term Monday 5 April 2027

Start of summer half term Monday 31 May 2027

End of summer term Friday 4 June 2027

End of summer term and last day of the school year Tuesday 20 July 2027 for all schools except for those in Powys

Powys County Council schools alone will end the summer term on Friday 16 July 2027

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Annex A

Notifications of term dates agreed

Local Authority Groupings

Local Authority Group A	Local Authority Group B
Anglesey	Blaenau Gwent
Bridgend	Caerphilly
Cardiff	Carmarthenshire
Ceredigion	Monmouthshire
Conwy	Neath Port Talbot
Denbighshire	Newport
Flintshire	Pembrokeshire
Gwynedd	Swansea
Merthyr Tydfil	Torfaen

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Local Authority Group A**Local Authority Group B**

Powys

-

Rhondda Cynon Taf

-

Vale of Glamorgan

-

Wrexham

-

Annex B

Groupings of local authorities

Local Authority Groupings

**School term/holiday
dates****Local authority group A****Local authority group B**

**Start of autumn term and
first day of school year** Tuesday 1 September 2026Tuesday 1 September
2026

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School term/holiday dates	Local authority group A	Local authority group B
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Autumn half term	Monday 26 October 2026 to Friday 30 October 2026	Monday 26 October 2026 to Friday 30 October 2026
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End of autumn term	Friday 18 December 2026 Powys alone chose to end the autumn term on 22 December 2026.	Friday 18 December 2026
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Start of spring term	Monday 4 January 2027	Monday 4 January 2027
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Spring half term	Monday 8 February 2027 to Friday 12 February 2027	Monday 15 February 2027 to Friday 19 February 2027
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End of spring term	Friday 19 March 2027	Thursday 25 March 2027
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School term/holiday dates	Local authority group A	Local authority group B
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Start of summer term	Monday 5 April 2027	Monday 12 April 2027
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Summer half term	Monday 31 May 2027 to Friday 4 June 2027	Monday 31 May 2027 to Friday 4 June 2027
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End of summer term and last day of the school year	Tuesday 20 July 2027 Powys alone chose to end the summer term on 16 July 2027	Wednesday 21 July 2027
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