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| Subject: | Assessing the impact of the school term date pilot initiative | | |
| Date of Meeting: | Children, Young People & Skills Committee 5 March 2018 | | |
| Report of: | Executive Director Families, Children & Learning | | |
| Contact Officer: | Name: | Richard Barker, Head of School Organisation | Tel: 01273 290732 |
| | Email: | Richard.barker@brighton-hove.gov.uk | |
| Ward(s) affected: | All | | |

FOR GENERAL RELEASE**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 The report provides the committee with an update on the recent survey undertaken to consider the impact of the school term date pilot initiative when the October half term holiday was extended by one week in the academic years 2017/18 and 2018/19 and subsequent adjustments made to the start and finish dates of the academic terms.
- 1.2 The report makes recommendations to the Executive Director Families, Children and Learning as to the pattern of school holidays in the academic year 2019/20.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 To note that the decision as to the pattern of school holidays is delegated to the Executive Director Families, Children and Learning.
- 2.2 To recommend that the Executive Director Families, Children and Learning notes the responses received to the survey monitoring the impact of the pilot initiative and sets term dates for community, voluntary controlled, community special schools and maintained nurseries in Brighton and Hove for the academic year 2019/20 which include only one week as a half term break in October.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Following a recommendation from the Children, Young People and Skills Committee in June 2016, the Executive Director Families, Children and Learning determined the introduction of a two week October half term as a pilot initiative in the academic years 2017/18 and 2018/19. The relevant term dates have been supplied in appendices 2 and 3.
- 3.2 The committee had considered the city council's strategic priority to ensure that the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children receive the council's support and recommended a new week's holiday in the academic year.

- 3.3 This additional week of holiday did not reduce the number of teaching and learning days that children receive, but sought to support families to have more flexibility about when they are able to spend time together without missing school. The expectation was that it would give families the chance to take excursions or holidays outside of the peak holiday period.
- 3.4 It was also intended that this measure would help address the issue of parents taking their children out of school during term time for an unauthorised holiday.
- 3.5 A two year pilot was required to ensure that the impact of the first year's pilot could be reviewed prior to a decision being taken as to future years. Term dates are generally set in the summer term of the year prior to taking effect.
- 3.6 Governing bodies set the dates for voluntary aided schools and Academy trusts for academies and free schools. Whilst all schools in Brighton and Hove followed the term dates set in 2017/18, for the academic year 2018/19 all but one of the Catholic Voluntary Aided schools have decided to set alternative term dates and revert to a one week half term in October. King's School has also set its own term dates for 2018/19.
- 3.7 Some of the reasons provided by these schools for the change of term dates in 2018/19 include: teachers feeling that younger children had only just settled in to school and got used to the routines of school, the loss of a week of prime learning time, parents being unsupportive of the change, and an unwelcome, additional, source of expense between a costly summer and a costly Christmas.
- 3.8 When the pilot was introduced the council undertook to monitor the impact after the first year. As a result a public survey was hosted on the council's consultation portal between 11 December 2017 and 31 January 2018. This received 4,490 responses and over 10,000 comments. In addition Headteachers were asked for their views between 22 January 2018 and 19 February 2018.
- 3.9 The council has also sought to consider the impact of the initiative using the data sources available to it.
- 3.10 Table 1 (below) shows that the significant majority of the 4,490 responses were from parents with children in a Brighton & Hove school. However there was a large span of respondents including from respite carers, nursery staff, lecturers, grandparents and representatives of voluntary sector groups and churches.

Table 1

| How are you responding to this consultation | | |
|---|--------------------|-------------------------|
| | Respondents (n) | % of all respondents |
| All respondents | 4,490 | 100.0% |
| Parent with child attending a Brighton & Hove school (Infant/junior, secondary or 6 form) | 3,402 | 75.8% |
| Parent with child attending a Brighton & Hove infant/junior school | 2,673 | 59.5% |
| Parent with child attending a Brighton & Hove infant/junior school (reception class) | 530 | 11.8% |
| Parent with child attending a Brighton & Hove infant/junior school (Year 3) | 551 | 12.3% |

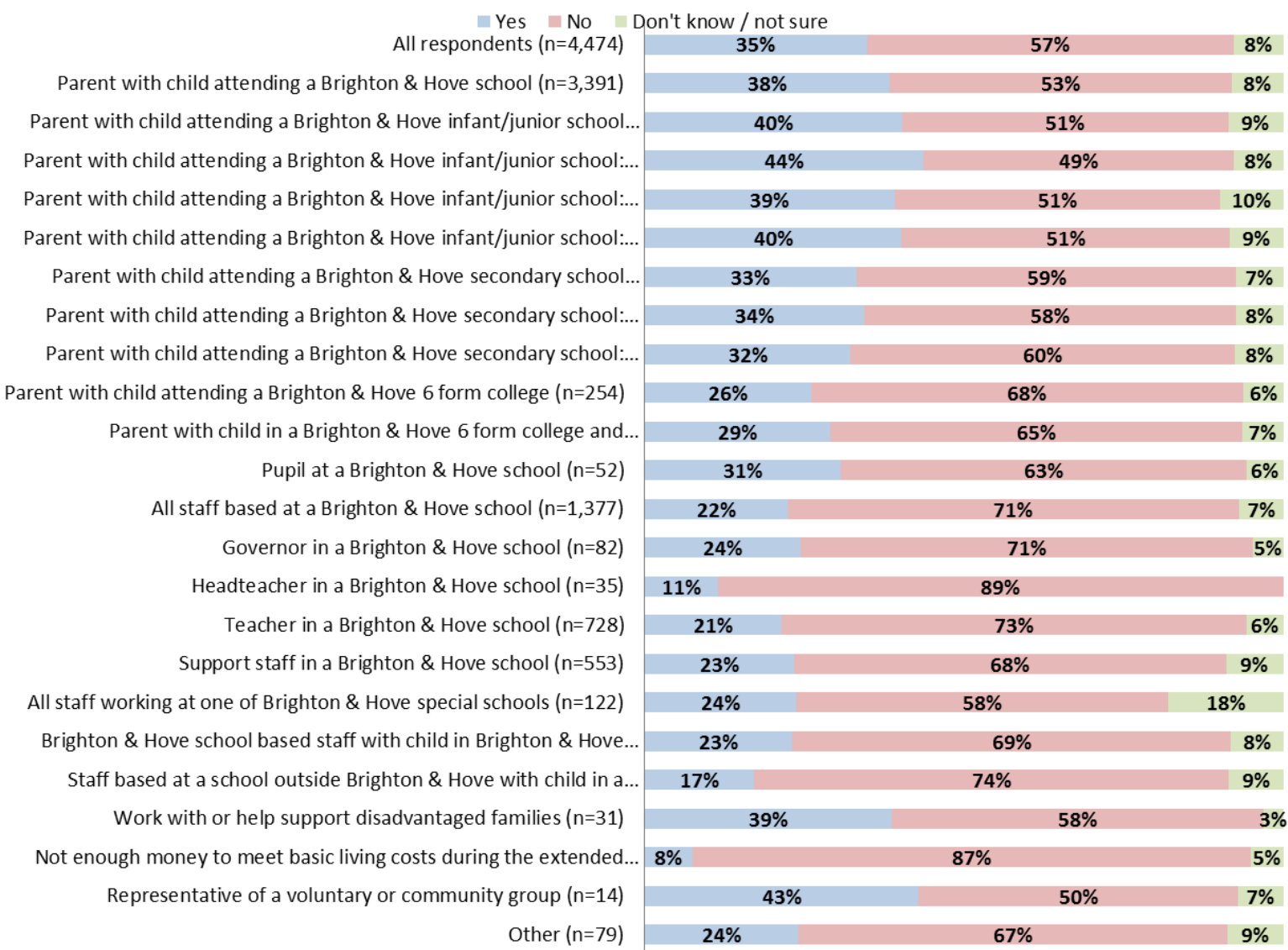
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|--|-------|-------|
| Parent with child attending a Brighton & Hove infant/junior school (Year 1 or Year 2) | 1,603 | 35.7% |
| Parent with child attending a Brighton & Hove secondary school | 1,351 | 30.1% |
| Parent with child attending a Brighton & Hove secondary school (Year 7) | 399 | 8.9% |
| Parent with child attending a Brighton & Hove secondary school (not in Year 7) | 916 | 20.4% |
| Parent with child attending a Brighton & Hove 6 form college | 259 | 5.8% |
| Parent with child in a Brighton & Hove 6 form college and a child either infant/junior or secondary school | 202 | 4.5% |
| Pupil at a Brighton & Hove school | 52 | 1.2% |
| All staff based at a Brighton & Hove school | 1,381 | 30.8% |
| Governor in a Brighton & Hove school | 83 | 1.8% |
| Headteacher in a Brighton & Hove school | 35 | .8% |
| Teacher in a Brighton & Hove school | 728 | 16.2% |
| Support staff in a Brighton & Hove school | 556 | 12.4% |
| All staff working at one of Brighton & Hove special schools | 123 | 2.7% |
| Brighton & Hove school based staff with child in Brighton & Hove school | 495 | 11.0% |
| Staff based at a school outside Brighton & Hove with child in a Brighton & Hove school | 106 | 2.4% |
| Work with or help support disadvantaged families | 31 | .7% |
| Not enough money to meet basic living costs during the extended October half term | 517 | 11.5% |
| Representative of a voluntary or community group, | 14 | .3% |
| Other | 79 | 1.8% |

3.11 The survey asked a range of questions relating to the impact of the initiative and asking if the pilot should continue. As Table 2 shows, in total 57% of all respondents did not wish the initiative to continue. A greater proportion of pupils attending a Brighton & Hove school, governors, headteachers and staff indicated that they did not wish to see the pilot continue.

3.12 It was noted that 87% of those who had identified themselves as not having enough money to meet basic living costs during the extended October half term did not wish to see the continuation of a two week October half term.

Table 2

Would you wish to see the two week autumn half term pilot initiative continue in 2019/20?



3.13 Table 3 below asked respondents whether their view of the two week holiday had changed having experienced it in October 2017. Whilst approximately 20% of respondents had become more in favour of the two week October half term over 30% were less in favour and this proportion rose to over 40% from respondents linked to working in schools.

3.14 Reasons given as to why school staff were now less in favour included: the break was considered too early after the summer holiday, it was not needed at that time in the year, it was now the longest break until the following summer and it was having an impact on the length of the Easter and Christmas holidays. Staff also commented on the impact on their classes saying that it felt harder for children to progress, and that pupils returned unmotivated and unsettled following the break.

3.15 They also commented upon holidays being out of synchronisation with other local authorities which meant that they had less time to spend with family and also

incurred extra child care costs. There was also a perception that the extended break had had no effect on unauthorised absence.

3.16 The reasons given by parents for now being more in favour of the extended autumn half term were almost all related to the taking of holidays. Some of these parents also mentioned the positive benefits this had on their children’s wellbeing, the importance of family time and how surprised they were that holidays could be so cheap.

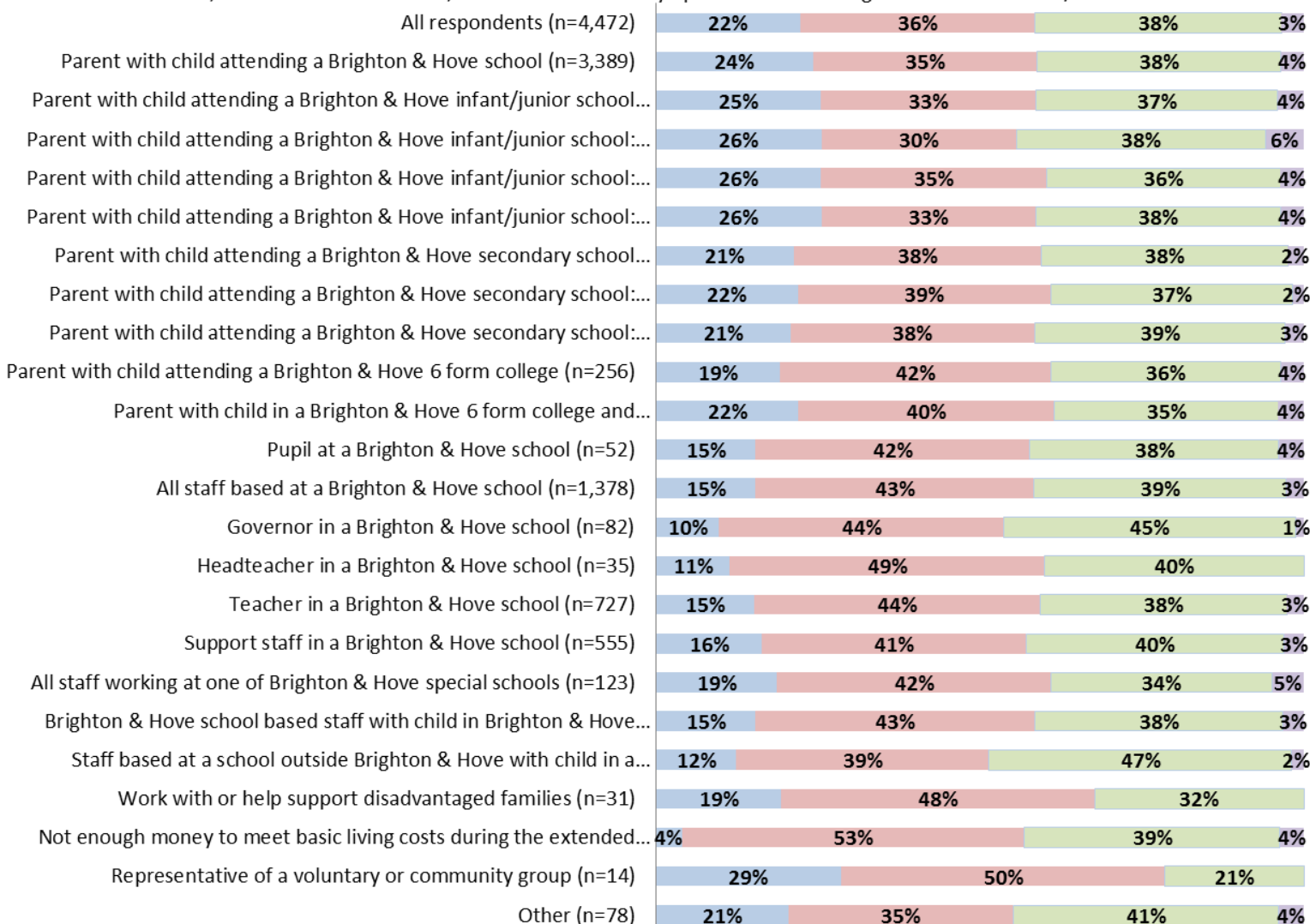
3.17 The biggest drawback for parents who had become less in favour centred on timing. The extra week was considered to be too close to the summer holiday and therefore not needed. Working parents found it difficult to get time off or balance childcare and work and they felt it was more difficult and more expensive to entertain children when the weather was poor.

3.18 The other main drawback was the shortening of the Christmas and Easter holidays. Parents felt this were a more important time for families and a time when a break was needed more.

Table 3

Has your opinion of the two week holiday changed having experienced it for the first time?

■ Yes, more in favour ■ Yes, less in favour ■ My opinion has not changed ■ Don't know / not sure



3.19 In virtually all cases the majority of all respondents were unhappy with the reduction in the break between the spring and summer terms (Table 4).

Table 4

Are you happy or unhappy with the reduction in the Easter holidays to allow for the extended half term break?

Very happy Fairly happy Neither happy or unhappy Fairly unhappy Very unhappy



3.20 It can be seen from Table 5 below that the majority of staff in schools indicated a negative impact on their working life. Table 6 shows that whilst 52% of staff

working in Brighton and Hove schools either noted no difference or a positive impact on their home life, 69% of the 103 staff at schools outside Brighton & Hove with child at a Brighton & Hove school reported a negative impact on their home life.

- 3.21 School staff who thought the extended half term had been positive for their work and family life most frequently mentioned the term being more manageable and feeling better able to teach because they were fresher. They also commented upon being able to spend more time with their family, go on holiday, have time for both marking / preparing course work.
- 3.22 The negative effect on staff's working life centred on staff feeling that the autumn term is a busy term and losing a week made it more difficult to fit in work commitments. Planning and delivery had to be revised and although there was one week less in the term the same amount of work still needed to be done. There were also concerns that the second half of the term was very long for both staff and children and that children returned after the extended break having forgotten routines and focus.
- 3.23 Many staff felt they did not need two week at half term but did need it at Christmas and Easter. Some respondents reported that children returned after Christmas not rested and not ready for learning.

Table 5

Has the increased length of half term had a negative or positive impact on your working life?

■ A positive impact ■ Made no difference ■ A negative impact ■ Don't know / not sure

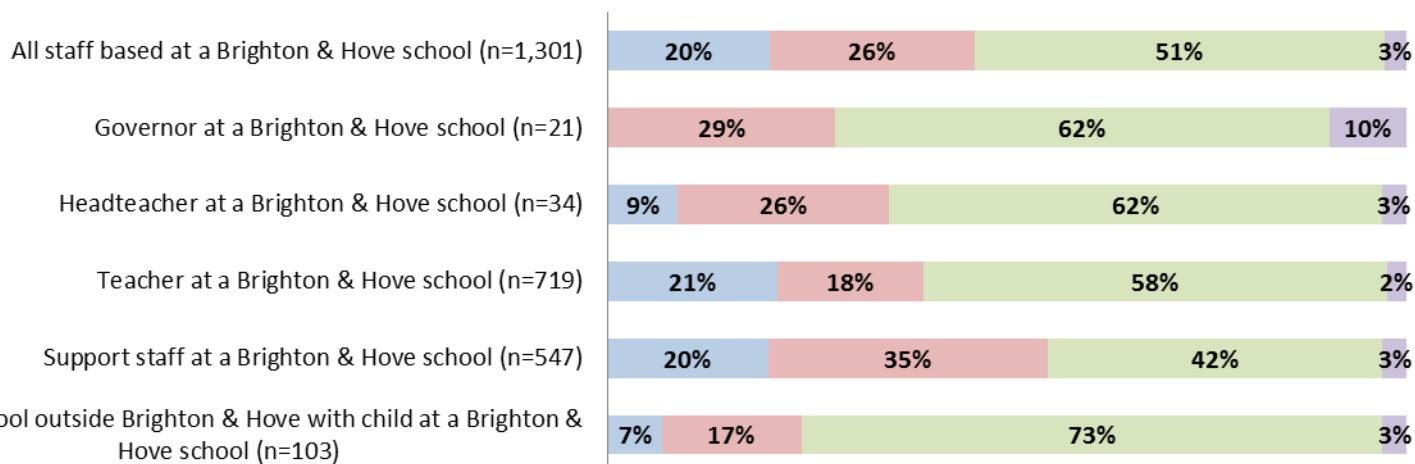
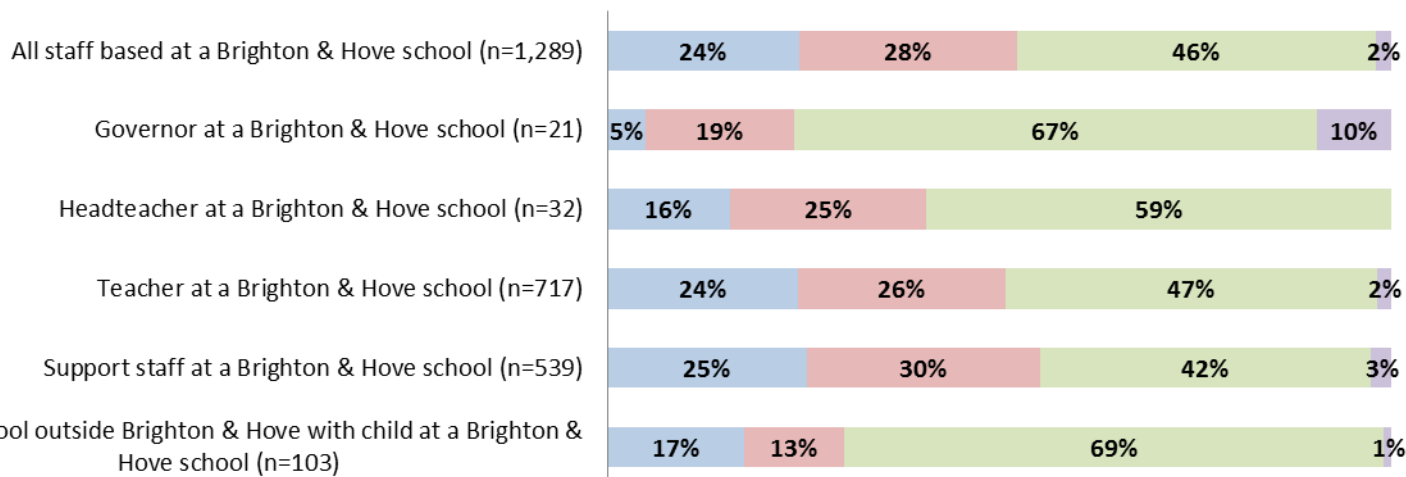


Table 6

Has the increased length of half term had a negative or positive impact on your home life?

■ A positive impact ■ Made no difference ■ A negative impact ■ Don't know / not sure

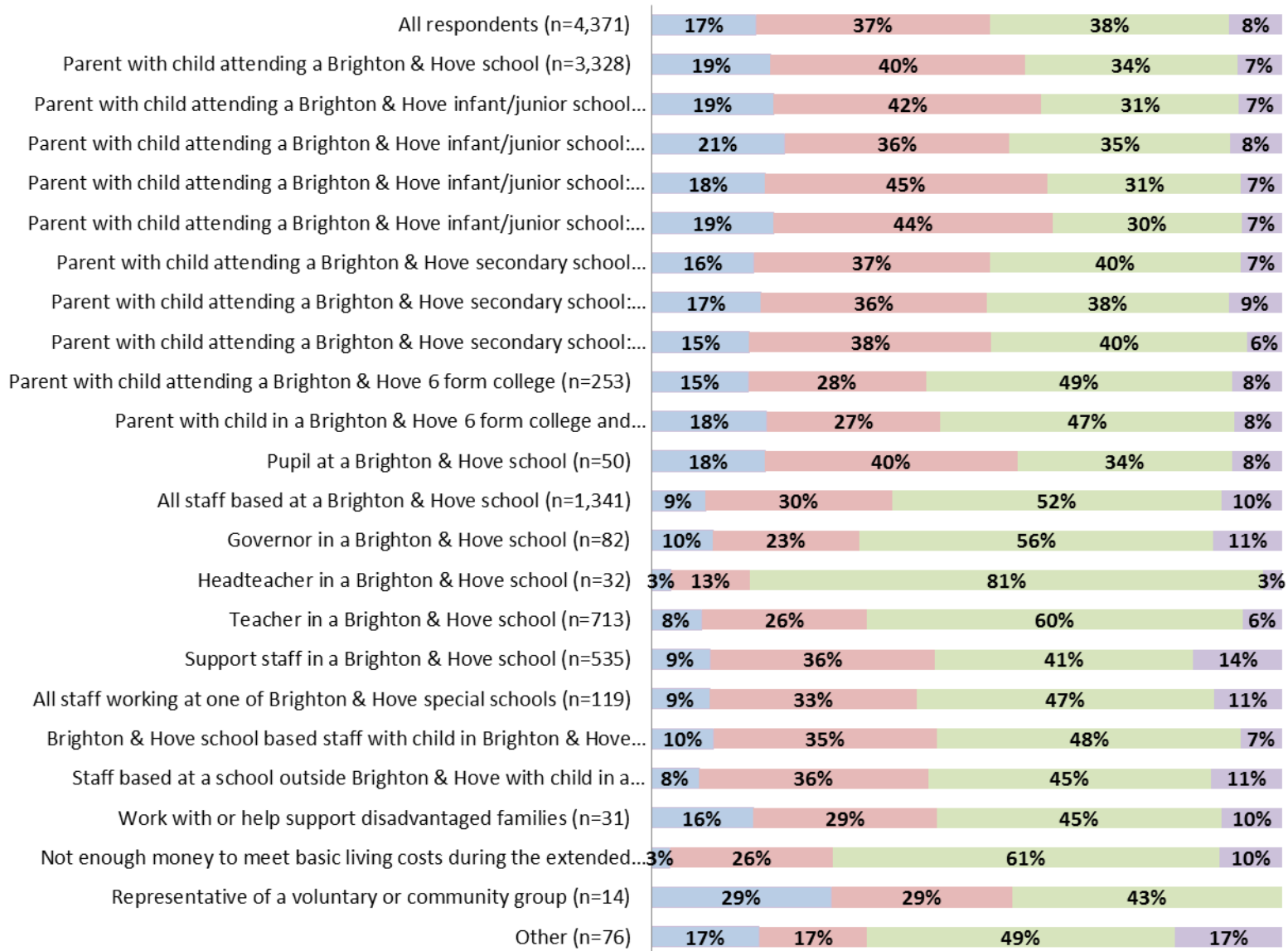


3.24 There was a mixed response to the survey's question relating to the impact on pupil's progress in the autumn term as a result of the two week break (Table 7). The majority of staff in school reported a negative impact but the majority of parents and respondents overall stated it made no difference or had had a positive impact.

Table 7

Do you think the increased length of the half term had a positive or negative impact on the progress your child (or pupils) have made during the autumn term?

■ A positive impact ■ Made no difference ■ A negative impact ■ Don't know / not sure

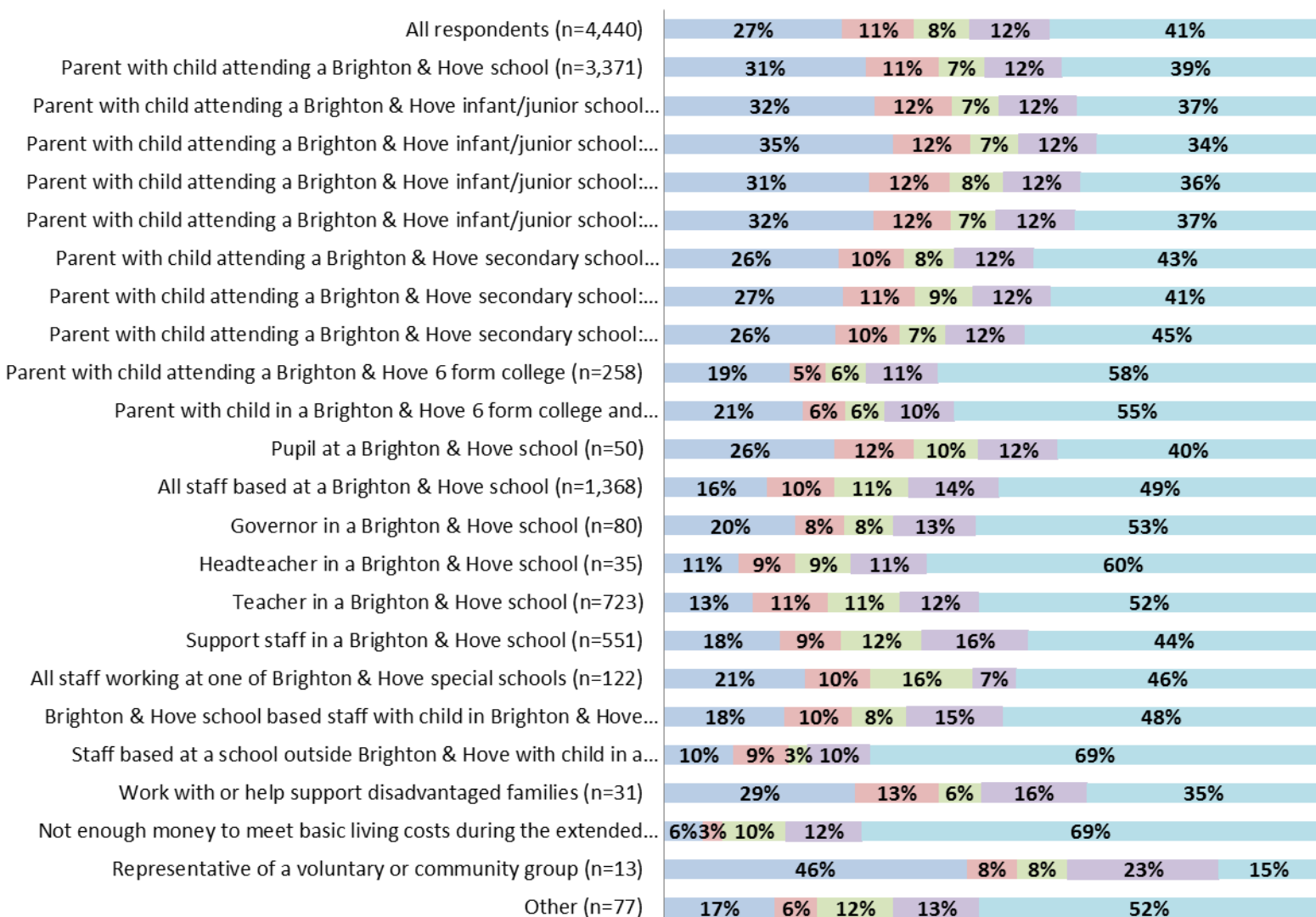


3.25 It can be seen from Table 8 below that of the 511 respondents who identified as not having enough money to meet basic living costs during the extended October half term, 81% disagreed that the two week holiday had given them more flexibility about when their family was able to spend time together without missing school/college.

Table 8

Do you agree or disagree that the two week holiday has given you more flexibility about when your family is able to spend time together without missing school/college?

■ Strongly agree ■ Tend to agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Tend to disagree ■ Strongly disagree



- 3.26 Among parents with children in a Brighton & Hove schools who agreed that the extended autumn half term had given them more flexibility, the over whelming reason given was the ability to take an affordable holiday abroad, either as a family or to visit family living abroad. Often mentioned was the inability to have a family holiday in the summer due to work commitments and or the unaffordable prices.
- 3.27 Others welcomed the shortening of the summer holidays and felt that the two week autumn half term had broken up what is otherwise a long autumn term.
- 3.28 Among parents who disagreed that the extended autumn half term had given them more flexibility the reasons given were more varied but can be summarised as feeling that the break was at the wrong time of year, that it was expensive and

difficult to obtain childcare, that children had only just settled into school routines following the summer break and that they had a preference for school holidays at other times. The fact that schools in neighbouring areas did not have synchronised term dates was identified as a reason why it was felt there was not more flexibility, resulting in more expensive child care and/or less time with the whole family together.

- 3.29 The call for evidence from schools produced a mixed picture of responses. Some schools reported deterioration in attendance levels compared with previous years and a higher numbers of families taking a holiday during the Autumn term during term time. Others stated they did not believe it had had any impact on either overall attendance or the number of requests for holidays in term time.
- 3.30 Some schools reported that there had been an increase in staff absence when compared to the previous year whereas others reported staff absence had shown an improvement on previous years. One secondary school reported an 8% increase in staff absence in that time which was having a significant financial impact on the school and on student progress, by way of increased supply costs and the absence of specialist classroom teachers.
- 3.31 Many schools commented on the need to reshape the pupil assessment calendar including the reporting to parents and planning of parents evening. It was also noted that it would continue to have an impact in the spring term with more frequent reporting deadlines and parent evenings. Responses indicated that pupil progress meetings noted dips and not as much progress as schools would have expected. Schools noted that whilst they would address this the shorter spring term would make it harder to achieve. Some schools reported that the change meant that progress meetings were held later than they would have liked, thus allowing less time to put into place specific actions for certain children at risk of not attaining age related expectations or making the progress they needed to.
- 3.32 Some secondary schools reported that mock exams were harder to schedule as were the prospective parents events held prior to the closing of the 2018 secondary school admission round.
- 3.33 Some schools reported that some of the foundation subjects were not fully covered in the Autumn term. One school reported a hike in behaviour incidents after the half term that had not been anticipated and surmised that children were tired and out of routine having been in child care for long hours during the half term and some were hearing from friends who had been away. One school also noted that they chose not to celebrate Black History Month (month of October) because of the split across the two half terms and with two weeks missing due to the half term.
- 3.34 The council has noted from its own data that the average number of days lost due to staff sickness (in schools) fell in the period September – December from 4.31 days per head in 2016 to 3.77 days per head in 2017.
- 3.35 The unvalidated data on overall absence in Brighton and Hove primary schools shows a slight fall from 4.05% in Autumn 2016 to 4.03% in Autumn 2017.

- 3.36 The unvalidated data on overall absence in Brighton and Hove secondary schools shows a slight rise from 5.65% in Autumn 2016 to 5.70% in Autumn 2017.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 The purpose of a pilot initiative was to inform a future decision about how term dates might be determined in future years. Whilst the pilot has only run for one of its two years it is clear that the overall responses are not supportive of the proposal continuing.
- 4.2 There will be more fragmentation of school term dates in the academic year 2018/19 as a significant number of voluntary aided and free schools have chosen to determine different term dates to those set by the Local Authority.
- 4.3 A longer pilot initiative is not required following the significant number of responses received to this public survey and a clear view from respondents has also been provided.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 A public survey was open for responses between 11 December 2017 and 31 January 2018. This was publicised via the council's communication channels and schools were asked to make parents aware of the survey.
- 5.2 Schools were specifically asked to provide their own evidence between 22 January 2018 and 19 February 2018.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The initial public consultations on proposals to make changes to school term dates did not produce a consensus on the matter and therefore it was considered appropriate to trial a change and to then monitor the impact.
- 6.2 The recent survey and call for evidence has provided a significant number of responses with which to evaluate the impact of the first year of the pilot initiative.
- 6.3 The responses received have provided evidence that the majority of respondents do not wish to see the continuation of the extended half term break. Crucially there is evidence to suggest that those who are disadvantaged or work with those families that experience disadvantage do not support the continuation of the change.
- 6.4 Whilst there will be a number of factors that impact upon the data that can be used to determine the success of the initiative, such as the impact of winter illnesses on attendance, there has not been a significant improvement in attendance levels as a result of this pilot.
- 6.5 It is clear that the continuation of the extended half term holiday would continue to bring greater fragmentation for parents, as schools who are able to set their

own term dates have set different term dates to those determined for community, voluntary controlled, community special schools and maintained nurseries.

- 6.6 Therefore it is recommended that the 2019/20 term dates do not include the continuation of an extended October half term.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 The Local Authority is responsible for setting the Term and INSET dates for schools. There are no financial Implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Finance Officer Consulted: Andy Moore

Date: 20/02/18

Legal Implications:

- 7.2 Under Section 32 of the Education Act 2002 the Council has a duty to set school terms and holiday dates for community, voluntary controlled, community special schools and maintained nurseries in its area. Governing bodies set dates for voluntary aided schools and Academy trusts for academies and free schools.
- 7.3 Local Authority maintained schools must open for at least 380 sessions (190 days) during a school year. (Education (School Day and School Year) (England) Regulations 1999).
- 7.4 Under the Council's constitution the Executive Director Families, Children and Learning has delegated authority to fix school term dates and holidays (Part 6 (V)(4)(2) of the Constitution).

Lawyer Consulted: Serena Kynaston

Date: 20/02/18

Equalities Implications:

- 7.5 The recommendation of the report is to return to a more traditional model of term dates that does not include a two week break at the October half term.
- 7.6 An Equality Impact Assessment has not been carried out, Local Authority maintained schools must open for at least 380 sessions (190 days) during a school year.
- 7.7 The responses to the survey indicated the impact on disadvantaged families and as such whilst the responses of those with protected characteristics have not been specifically captured these give an indication as to how other groups may feel about the pilot initiative.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.8 There are no sustainability implications arising from this report.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Various Implications
2. Term dates 2017/18
3. Term dates 2018/19

Documents in Members' Rooms

1. Public survey responses from online consultation portal

Crime & Disorder Implications:

1.1 It is possible that crime levels may vary in the school holidays. The number of schools days in the academic year will remain constant at 190 days and therefore it could be considered unlikely that crime levels will vary as a result.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

1.2 There are no risk and opportunity management implications.

Public Health Implications:

1.3 There is no change to the number of term dates that pupils are required to attend school. Whilst the creation of a two week half term break in the autumn term was designed to provide families with the opportunity to spend more time together it is not clear from the responses that this was achieved by a large number of families in the city.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

1.4 There are no corporate or city wide implications.

