

Briefing for the Petitions Committee

Petition number: P-05-694

Petition title: School Times an Hour Later

Text of petition: am writing to ask you to consider my petition. As parents, teachers and students/pupils know, primary schools start at 08:45 and secondary schools start at 08:30. I would like schools to start an hour later in the mornings meaning primary schools would start at 09:45 and secondary schools at 09:30.

A test in England has shown that students get better exam results if school starts an hour later.

Background

Section 32 of the [Education Act 2002](#) states that in maintained schools, **governing bodies determine the times of school sessions**. Where a local authority considers that a change in any maintained school's session times is necessary or expedient to promote the use of sustainable modes of travel or to improve the efficiency or effectiveness of its travel arrangements, it can determine the time the school's first session begins and its second session ends (or if there is only one session, its start and end). [Regulations](#) set out procedures.

Research into the effects of sleep and academic achievement

There have been numerous research studies into the effects of sleep and academic achievement, [mostly from the USA](#), where many schools start earlier than 8.30 and many as early as 7am. Neuroscientists set out that the biology of human sleep timing changes as we age. As puberty begins, bedtimes and waking times get later. This trend continues until 19.5 years in women and 21 in men. Then it reverses. Studies suggest that this means that for a teenager, a 7am start is the equivalent of a 5am start for a person in their 50s.¹

Beginning in 2009, a small pilot study in Monkseaton School, Tyneside changed the school starting time from 08.50 to 10.00 found that there was an increase in the percentage of pupils getting five good GCSEs, from about 34 per cent to about 50 per cent. Among disadvantaged pupils, the increase was from about 19 per cent to about 43 per cent.² Early results showed that there was also a decrease in absenteeism; general absence dropped by 8 per cent and persistent absenteeism by 27 per cent³. The school starting times reverted to 8.50 when the headteacher who had introduced the pilot left the school.

¹ The New Scientist, [Why teenagers really do need an extra hour in bed](#), Professor Russell Foster, April 2013

² BBC News website, [Later school start time 'may boost GCSE results'](#), 9 October 2014

³ BBC News website, [Lie-in for teenagers has positive results](#), 22 March 2010

Teensleep research project

The [Teensleep research project](#) is part of a joint initiative between the Education Endowment Fund and the Wellcome Trust to explore how neuroscience can be used to improve education. Originally, it aimed to address problems relating to sleep by training teachers to deliver sleep education and assisting schools to move their start times to 10am based on a randomised controlled trial in schools. However, following practical concerns about schools being randomised to delay their start times, [the project will now just focus on sleep education](#) while exploring alternative methods to investigate the adolescent circadian delay. The evaluation will be published in September 2018.

Potential negative aspects

There are potential negative aspects to making changes to school starting times. These include issues relating to school transport arrangements, parents' work schedules and reduced time for after school activities.⁴

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

⁴ Sleeping Resources, [Pros and Cons of Later School Start Times](#)