



DEBATE PACK

Number CDP-0032, 7 February 2019

E-petition 229178 relating to secondary school opening hours

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Summary

On 11 February 2019, there will be a Westminster Hall debate on e-petition 229178 relating to secondary school opening hours. The debate will start at 4:30pm and will be led by Daniel Zeichner MP.

[The petition](#) stated that:

“School should start at 10am as teenagers are too tired.

Teenagers are so tired due to having to wake up very early to get to school. The Government should require secondary schools to start later, which will lead to increased productivity at school.”

The petition received over 179,000 signatures.

The Government responded to the petition:

“The decision on when to start the school day lies with individual schools. All schools have the autonomy to make decisions about the content, structure and duration of their school day.”

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1. Background

England

Setting the school day and term: Academies

Academies, including free schools, set their own school day and term dates. The legislative provisions on school sessions do not apply to them. The board will decide the length of the school day, including session times and breaks, taking into account the recommendation of the headteacher.

Setting the school day and term: Maintained schools

Maintained schools also decide for themselves the length of a school day, including session times and breaks.

Local authority maintained schools must open for at least 380 sessions (190 days) during a school year.¹ The school year must begin after July. If a school is prevented from meeting and it is not reasonably practicable for arrangements to be made for it to make up the lost session(s), it can be deemed to have been open for the required 380 sessions.²

Term dates are determined by school employers.³ The local authority is the employer for community, voluntary-controlled, community special or maintained nursery schools.⁴ For foundation, voluntary-aided and foundation special schools, the employer is the governing body.⁵

Schedule 16 of the [Deregulation Act 2015](#) amends section 32 of the *Education Act 2002* to give responsibility for determining term dates at community, voluntary controlled, community special schools and maintained nursery schools in England to school governing bodies. However, this provision is not yet in force.

Scotland

The *Schools General (Scotland) Regulations 1975*, as amended, require schools under education authority management in Scotland to be open for 190 days per year.

They do not define, however, the length of the school week for pupils, which is a matter for the discretion of education authorities within their responsibility for the day-to-day organisation of schools.

School holiday dates are set by local authorities. The [Scottish Government website](#) provides links to the website of local authorities detailing the term dates set in each region.

¹ *Education (School Day and School Year) (England) Regulations 1999*. Teacher training days are additional to this number; teachers in maintained schools must be

Wales

[The Changing of School Session Times \(Wales\) Regulations 2009](#) set out who is responsible for determining the dates of school terms and school holidays. It also sets out the rules on setting the times of school sessions. The Explanatory Note states:

For foundation, voluntary aided and foundation special schools, the governing body determines all these, and for community, voluntary controlled, community special schools and maintained nursery schools, the governing body determines the times of school sessions (with the local education authority determining the dates of the school terms and holidays). However where a local education 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).

The Welsh Assembly Government website provides available [term dates](#) for local authorities in Wales.

The [Education \(Wales\) Act 2014](#) made some alterations to the existing provisions. An [announcement](#) from the Welsh Assembly Government stated:

Local authorities and the governing bodies of voluntary aided and foundation schools must work together when setting term dates in an effort to harmonise those dates across Wales.

Where those term dates are not harmonised, or in rare cases where harmonised dates need to be altered, the Act gives Welsh Ministers to power to direct local authorities and the governing bodies of voluntary aided and foundation schools on what their term dates must be.⁶

Northern Ireland

School holiday dates are agreed annually by a group representing all school sectors. However, there can be variations between schools, as Principals and Boards of Governors can decide to use some of their optional closure days to extend agreed holidays.

Schools are open for 200 days per year, less five days when they are closed for staff training and five optional closure days.

The [NI Direct website](#) further notes:

Full-time teachers work 195 days in any year and should be teaching children in a classroom for no more than 190 days. This may be reduced to 185 days if a school uses all its School Development Days.

Regarding the length of the school day, the Department of Education Northern Ireland [Circular 2013/09](#) states that in both primary and post-primary schools, attendance shall mean an attendance on any day under instruction, other than in religious education, for a period of not less than

⁶ Welsh Assembly Government, [School term dates – regulations](#), 6 June 2014

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- 3 hours in the case of a pupil enrolled in a class composed mainly of pupils who, at the beginning of the school year, had not attained the age of 8 years;
- 4.5 hours in the case of any other pupil.

2. News

Start times

[Sleep-deprived pupils need extra hour in bed, schools warned](#),
Guardian, 13 January 2019

[Sleep may impact college grades more than drinking or drugs](#), Reuters,
11 September 2018

[Later school start times to make California top of class](#), Times, 11
September 2018

[Starting school at 10am halves student illness and improves academic performance, finds study](#), Independent, 27 November 2017

[Sleep scientists' wake-up call for later school starts](#), BBC News, 8
September 2015

[Later school start time 'may boost GCSE results'](#), BBC, 09 October 2014

[Starting school later? Give me a break](#), Telegraph, 9 October 2014

['Tired teenagers' at Surrey school to start lessons later](#), BBC, 10 May
2014

School hours and holidays

['The school summer holidays are non-negotiable'](#), TES, 20 July 2018

[Hunger and isolation: Cost of school holidays for low income families](#),
BBC News, 8 June 2018

- A summary of the publication, [The cost of school holidays for children from low income families](#) by the University of Glasgow, which looks at the schools holidays impact on children's educational attainment and well-being.

['Reduce teaching time to improve quality,' says headmaster](#), The
Telegraph, 07 July 2015

[School holidays around the world: do they affect pupil performance?](#)
Telegraph, 3 July 2015

[Lengthen school days and cut holidays, says former Tory adviser](#),
Guardian, 30 January 2014

3. Further reading

[Teenagers' health is better with later school start](#), Open University, [Accessed: 05 February 2019]

[Teens get more sleep with later school start time, researchers find](#), Science Daily, 12 December 2018

[Sleep and Health](#), Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, September 2018

Emma Plugge, [Later school start times: better for students' education, health and wellbeing?](#) Evidently Cochrane, 7 September 2017

[Mathematicians predict delaying school start times won't help sleep deprived teenagers](#), University of Surrey, 24 March 2017

- An article explaining a 2017 report on [The effects of self-selected light-dark cycles and social constraints on human sleep and circadian timing](#). As explained in the article

The mathematical model showed that delaying school start times in the UK would not help reduce sleep deprivation. Just as when clocks go back in the autumn, most teenagers' body clocks would drift even later in response to the later start time, and in a matter of weeks they would find it just as hard to get out of bed. The results did, however, lend some support to delaying school start in the US, where many schools start as early as 7am.

[...] The model suggests that an alternative remedy to moving school start times in the UK is exposure to bright light during the day, turning the lights down in the evening and off at night.

[Why both teens and teachers could benefit from later school start times](#), The Conversation, 23 February 2017

[Why teen brains need a later school start time](#), Conversation, 20 September 2016

[Why children who sleep more get better grades](#), Conversation, 23 December 2015

Academic resources

There have been many studies over the years, particularly in the US, that suggest a later start time may have a positive impact on pupils. Some reviews have, however, found more mixed results and there are some concerns about the quality of the evidence. Below are more recent additions to the literature.

June C Lo et al., [Sustained benefits of delaying school start time on adolescent sleep and well-being](#), *Sleep*, Volume 41, Issue 6, 1 June 2018

- Based in Singapore, this study finds a positive impact from a delayed school start time 9 months after the school start time was changed.

Marx R, Tanner-Smith, et al., [Later school start times for supporting the education, health, and well-being of high school students](#), Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2017, Issue 7. Art. No.: CD009467

- This review of literature finds some mixed results with several outcomes. The literature does suggest some positive outcomes but the quality of the evidence is 'weak.'

Geneviève Gariépy et al., [School start time and sleep in Canadian adolescents](#), J Sleep Res. (2017) 26, 195–201

- The authors wrote that “Students from schools that started later slept longer, were more likely to meet sleep recommendations and were less likely to report feeling tired in the morning. The study adds weight to the mounting evidence that delaying school start time benefits adolescent sleep.”

Paul Kelley et al., Is 8:30 a.m. [Still Too Early to Start School? A 10:00 a.m. School Start Time Improves Health and Performance of Students Aged 13–16](#), Front Hum Neurosci. 2017; 11: 588.

- An England-based study, [summarised in an article by the Independent](#).

Timothy I. Morgenthaler et al., [High School Start Times and the Impact on High School Students: What We Know, and What We Hope to Learn](#), J Clin Sleep Med 2016;12(12):1681–1689.

- This literature review acknowledged the majority of findings suggesting a positive impact on school start time delays, but the authors argued that “often the evidence is indirect, imprecise, or derived from cohorts of convenience, making the overall quality of evidence weak or very weak.”

Karl E. Mingos and Nancy S. Redeker, [Delayed School Start Times and Adolescent Sleep: A Systematic Review of the Experimental Evidence](#), Sleep Med Rev. 2016 Aug; 28: 86–95.

- The findings of this report are that,
School start times were delayed 25 to 60 minutes, and correspondingly, total sleep time increased from 25 to 77 minutes per weeknight. Some studies revealed reduced daytime sleepiness, depression, caffeine use, tardiness to class, and trouble staying awake. Overall, the evidence supports recent non-experimental study findings and calls for policy that advocates for delayed school start time to improve sleep. This presents a potential long-term solution to chronic sleep restriction during adolescence. However, there is a need for rigorous randomized study designs and reporting of consistent outcomes, including objective sleep

measures and consistent measures of health and academic performance.

Anne G. Wheaton, Daniel P. Chapman and Janet B. Croft, [School Start Times, Sleep, Behavioral, Health, and Academic Outcomes: a Review of the Literature](#), J Sch Health. 2016 May; 86(5): 363–381.

- Although they suggest that more research is required, this review suggests that there is a link between delayed school start times and the numbers of hours slept, and consequently, improved academic performance, behaviours and health.

Teny Maghakian Shapiro, [The educational effects of school start times](#), IZA World of Labor 2015: 181

- The author of this paper compiled a pro and con list regarding later school start times:

Pros:

- Hours of sleep are positively correlated with academic achievement, yet traditional secondary school schedules lead to sleep deprivation among adolescent students.
- Starting classes later in the morning improves grades in classes throughout the day and boosts standardized test scores.
- Even small adjustments in start time can have beneficial effects.
- Lower-ability students gain the most from delayed start times.
- Delaying start times can be a very cost-effective measure for raising student achievement.

Cons:

- An optimal start time for secondary schools has not been determined.
- Starting school later will require ending school later, reducing the amount of time available for homework, jobs, and extracurricular activities.
- School districts that rely on one set of buses to serve all different levels of schools—e.g. elementary, middle, and high schools—may need to purchase additional buses or change the start time for the other school levels.
- Reduced time for extracurricular activities may require scheduling adjustments or additional expenses.

Diana Paksarian et al., [School Start Time and Adolescent Sleep Patterns: Results From the US National Comorbidity Survey—Adolescent Supplement](#), Am J Public Health. 2015;105:1351–1357.

- The authors wrote the following in their conclusion:

Using data from a large survey of adolescents across the United States, we found shorter weekday sleep duration among adolescents with earlier school start times. This association differed according to adolescent and contextual characteristics and was strongest among boys in major metropolitan counties.

Kyla L. Wahlstrom et al., [Examining the Impact of Later High School Start Times on the Health and Academic Performance of High School Students: A Multi-Site Study](#), Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement. St Paul, MN: University of Minnesota, 2014

- The authors wrote that “high schools that start at 8:30 AM or later allow for more than 60% of students to obtain at least eight hours of sleep per school night. Teens getting less than eight hours of sleep reported significantly higher depression symptoms, greater use of caffeine, and are at greater risk for making poor choices for substance use. Academic performance outcomes, including grades earned in core subject areas of math, English, science and social studies, plus performance on state and national achievement tests, attendance rates and reduced tardiness show significantly positive improvement with the later start times of 8:35 AM or later.”
- Summarised in [Why both teens and teachers could benefit from later school start times](#), The Conversation, 23 February 2017

Brigid Jane Borlase, Philippa Helen Gander and Rosemary Helen Gibson, [Effects of school start times and technology use on teenagers’ sleep: 1999–2008](#), *Sleep and Biological Rhythms* 2013; 11: 46–54

- Based in New Zealand, the authors concluded that “delaying school start time had beneficial effects for Year 12 students, reducing sleep loss on school nights and daytime sleepiness. However, increased presence of technologies is associated with later sleep times and daytime sleepiness among Year 9 students.”

Scott E. Carrell, Teny Maghakian, and James E. West, [A’s from Zzzz’s? The Causal Effect of School Start Time on the Academic Achievement of Adolescents](#), *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 3 (August 2011): 62–81

- The authors found a “significant positive effect on student achievement” correlated to a later start time.

Matthew Kirby, Stefania Maggi, and Amedeo D’Angiulli, [School Start Times and the Sleep–Wake Cycle of Adolescents: A Review and Critical Evaluation of Available Evidence](#), *Educational Researcher*, March 2011

- The authors of this review concluded that there is ‘sufficient evidence’ of improved academic performance if the school day started later.

4. Parliamentary material

[Schools: Academic Year](#), PQ 122904, 25 Jan 2018

Asked by: Tomlinson, Justin | **Party:** Conservative Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will write to schools to remind them of their power to vary the dates of school terms.

Answering member: Nadhim Zahawi | **Party:** Conservative Party
| **Department:** Department for Education

Head teachers, school governors and local authorities are best placed to set school term and holiday dates, in the best interests of the pupils and parents in their local area. As such, term dates are determined locally by schools and local authorities. The Department for Education does not collect data on schools' term-dates.

For maintained schools, community schools, community special schools, voluntary controlled schools, pupil referral units and maintained nursery schools, the governing body or local authority are responsible for setting term dates. This must be done in line with the requirements of the length of the school year, as set out in the Education (School Day and School Year) (England) Regulations 1999.

Academies, free schools, and other schools where the governing body is the employer of staff, such as foundation or voluntary-aided (church) schools, are free to set their own term and holiday dates. Some of these schools have already made innovative changes in the interests of pupils and parents.

Schools and local authorities can find guidance on the responsibilities for setting school term dates in the published School Attendance Guidance, which can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-attendance>.

[Academic Year](#), PQ 110644, 03 Nov 2017

Asked by: Tomlinson, Justin | **Party:** Conservative Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the German model for varying school term dates by region.

Answering member: Mr Robert Goodwill | **Party:** Conservative Party
| **Department:** Department for Education

We agree that school term dates should not be determined at a national level. We believe that head teachers, school governors and local councils are best placed to set school term and holiday dates in the interests of the pupils and parents at their school. As such, term dates are currently determined locally by schools and local councils.

Governing bodies and councils must set dates in line with the requirements of the length of the school year as set out in the Education (School Day and School Year) (England) Regulations 1999. Academy trusts (of academies and free schools) are free to make changes to term and holiday dates.

We expect term dates to be arranged in a way that helps pupils to learn and gives them time away from school. While there is no formal process for coordination of term dates, in practice many schools and local councils work together, and with other areas. They do this because of practical constraints such as the timing of examinations and local areas' desire to minimise any disruption to parents.

If schools do decide to change their term dates, they are required to act reasonably; giving parents notice and considering the impact on those affected – including pupils, teachers, the local community and parents' work commitments and childcare options for both parents and teachers.

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