

Extending school time

Low impact for moderate cost, based on moderate evidence.

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Research has focused on three main approaches to extending school time:

1. Extending the length of the school year;
2. Extending the length of the school day;
3. Providing additional time for targeted groups of pupils either before or after school. There are examples of the school year being extended by up to five additional weeks or the school day being extended to 12 hours long. This summary focuses on extending core school time and the use of targeted before and after school programmes, particularly to support disadvantaged or low attaining pupils. Other approaches to increasing learning time are included in other sections of the Toolkit, such as Homework, Early Years Intervention and Summer Schools.

How effective is it?

Overall, the evidence indicates that, on average, pupils make two additional months' progress per year from extended school time or the targeted use of before and after school programmes. There is some evidence that disadvantaged pupils benefit disproportionately, making approximately two and a half months' additional progress. There are also often wider benefits for low-income students in terms of attendance at school, behaviour and relationships with peers.

After school programmes that support and encourage children academically while providing stimulating environments and activities are more likely to have an impact on attainment. To be successful, any increases in school time should be supported by both parents and staff, and extreme increases (e.g. more than nine hours of schooling per day) do not appear to be as effective. The research also indicates that attracting and retaining pupils in before and after school programmes is harder at secondary level than at primary level.

How secure is the evidence?

The evidence is moderately secure. Decisions to lengthen the school year or school day are often one component of wider approaches to school reform. This makes attributing any learning gains to additional time difficult. Gains are not consistent across studies, indicating that additional time may be used ineffectively. Discrete or targeted programmes are more likely to have been evaluated robustly, though even here there is substantial variation in impact.

Most of the evaluations of extended school time come from the USA, where enthusiasm for extended school time has outpaced the research base, indicating the need for more rigorous evaluations with outcome measures that demonstrate impact on learning. Evidence from the UK is relatively scarce.

What are the costs?

Overall, costs are estimated as moderate. The average cost of teaching a pupil is about £2,500 a year (£13 per day) in primary school and about £3,500 a year (£18 per day) in secondary. Extending the school year by two weeks would therefore require about £260 per pupil per year for primary schools and about £360 per pupil per year for secondary. Estimates suggest after school clubs cost, on average, £7 per session per pupil. A weekly session would therefore cost £273 per pupil over the course of a 39-week school year. The use of well-qualified and trained staff may increase these cost estimates.

What should I consider?

Before you implement this strategy in your learning environment, consider the following:

1. Planning to get the most from the extra time is important. It should meet pupils' needs and build on their capabilities.
2. After school programmes with a clear structure, a strong link to the curriculum, and well-qualified and well-trained staff are more clearly linked to academic benefits.
3. After school programmes could give the opportunity to carry out some more intensive tuition (see entries for one to one or small group tuition).
4. Enrichment activities can have an impact on attainment, but the link is not well-established and the impact of different interventions can vary a great deal (see entries for sports or arts participation).
5. Have you explored how the quality of teaching and learning during school time can be improved? It might be cheaper and more efficient to attempt to use existing time more effectively before considering extending the school day.