

Teensleep

How do delayed school start times and sleep education affect pupil performance?



Delayed school start times

The evaluation will assess whether starting school at 10:00am rather than 09:00am improves academic performance at GCSE. It is anticipated that allowing teenagers to engage in learning when their biological systems are optimised to do so will improve academic performance. In adolescence biological rhythms change in such a way that it makes it difficult for adolescents to go to sleep early, and difficult to get up early. Therefore, asking an adolescent to get up at 7.00am to start school at 9.00am is akin to asking a 55-year-old to get up at 5.00am: this leads to a significant amount of sleep deprivation. This sleep deprivation interacts with biological rhythms, creating a period of low energy and tiredness which lasts into mid-morning.

This project builds on promising pilot work in the UK showing that a delay in the school start time does indeed lead to an improvement in GCSE grades.

Sleep education

Adolescents have a natural biological predisposition to stay up late. Many adolescents now have devices in their bedrooms (tablets, phones) which emit a low-level light which may interfere with the process of going to sleep. Pupils are also dealing with the stress of exams and the pressure to perform well. The evaluation will assess whether sleep education (teaching about good bedtime routines, the science behind good sleep-related behaviours, as well as stress-management techniques and how to maintain good sleep during periods of stress) improves academic performance at GCSE, and sleep quality.

How the study will work

The study will recruit approximately 100 schools across the UK. Schools will be randomised to one of four groups:

- To implement delayed school start-times
- To provide sleep education (training provided)
- To implement delayed school start-times and provide sleep education (training provided)
- To continue as usual

This will allow the effects of delaying school start times and sleep education to be investigated, both separately and together, on academic outcome and well-being.

Researchers will also be monitoring sleep patterns in a sub-sample of pupils in each school. This will be done via a device worn on the wrist. These 'watches' give an accurate measure of sleep, allowing the team to investigate whether sleep length improves as a result of the intervention/s. This will allow the evaluation to explore how the interventions affect achievement: via aligning teaching with the adolescent rhythm or via a decrease in sleep deprivation or both.

Researchers will survey all pupils involved to assess physical and psychological well-being. This will reveal any secondary benefits of the interventions as it is well-established that sleep has a crucial role to play in mood regulation, physical health and perceived quality of life.

GET INVOLVED

If you know any secondary schools in England or Wales that might be interested in taking part, please contact teensleep@ndcn.ox.ac.uk (01865 618666) and visit www.teensleep.org.uk to find out more.

This project is funded by:



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