

# Dawn-till-dusk schools:

## has your working day just got longer?

The Government wants more schools to offer breakfast and after-school clubs. With teachers' workload already at breaking point, is the possibility of an 11-hour day the final straw?

The school day may seem long enough to many teachers as it is at the moment, but if new government plans come into action, it could be even longer. But what will be involved in the dawn-till-dusk schools, how will they affect teachers and schools, and what are the pros and cons of the approach?

The idea of more dawn-till-dusk schools was announced recently by the Government, as part of their Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners. The report stated that they'd like to see more primary schools develop an 8am to 6pm wrap-around childcare service, operating for 48 weeks per year. It's part of their extended services scheme and is aimed at making life easier for parents – in particular those who are working.

The plan is that more primary schools would offer breakfast clubs in the morning before school starts and after-school clubs at the end of the day. The Government believes it would have a positive impact on

children, setting them up for a good day at school, ensuring they're not left on their own before or after school when their parents are working and giving them the opportunity to learn new skills and socialise with all ages. By the year 2008, the Government would like to have at least 1000 primary schools offering an 8am-6pm wrap-around service.

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Jane Davidson, Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning in Wales (and a supporter of the scheme), said: 'Experience has shown that the most successful breakfast initiatives in schools have been responsible for positive changes. For example, they have resulted in an increase in attendance figures, improved behaviour,

fewer discipline problems and – most importantly – children enjoy being there.'

The concern amongst some teachers, however, is that longer school hours will mean more work and extra responsibilities. As one primary teacher pointed out: 'The time I have after school is spent marking and preparing work for the following day, and I'd be reluctant to lose that valuable time. Neither would I be happy having to come into school earlier to look after children as they have breakfast – it's hardly part of the job description, is it?'

### Dawn-till-dusk in action

Not all teachers share these views though, and in some schools the dawn-till-dusk style of day is already working successfully. Sandra Barnett, who until this term was head of Pilton Bluecoat CE Junior School in Devon and is now an early years lecturer at North Devon College, is an avid supporter of the scheme and was responsible for setting up clubs at her school. 'We were keen to provide opportunities for



► parents who wanted to work or extend their hours, so they could have their children looked after in appropriate settings with purposeful activities to do,' she said.

The breakfast club runs from 8am until school time, and the after-school club until 6pm, and both prove popular with children and their parents. As well as having a healthy breakfast (which some children might otherwise not have), there are lots of quiet indoor activities to do before school starts. 'It's brilliant for the social skills,' explained Sandra. 'They have to sit down and eat their food with other children and it's mixed-age ranges, so they

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get to know different people. After breakfast, there are all sorts of activities to do, such as drawing, tabletop games, board games, puzzles and so on.'

The after-school club is equally varied, with a sit-down tea and plenty of activities to choose from – outdoor games, crafts, puppet making, tabletop games, co-operative games, board games and themed activities (the latter often tie in with classroom work). 'We've

just done a big sea-based wall mural that went along with a theme we were doing in school,' explained Sandra.

The good news is that having a breakfast club doesn't necessarily mean more work for teachers. 'With the breakfast club, we employ other people to run it, as you couldn't expect teachers to do it,' said Sandra. Neither do breakfast or after-school clubs necessarily entail extra administrative costs, as it's possible to get government funding to set them up. For example, Sandra's school used an organisation called the Playlines Trust,

which provided set-up grants (see contact details under 'Further information' right). 'As a working parent who's had to use childcare, I know how difficult it is,' she commented. 'I personally think the dawn-till-dusk approach is a fantastic idea and better than other childcare options. You know where the children are, you know they're being cared for appropriately, that they're getting fed and that they're gaining social skills.'

### Effects of childcare on children

Some people worry that longer hours spent at school could be psychologically damaging for children, especially as they'd miss out on the time after school when they tend to play with their toys, watch TV or generally

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unwind after the busy day. Yet nurseries have been doing this successfully for years, and children don't suffer detrimental effects.

A spokesperson for the Daycare Trust, a national childcare charity, said: 'Nurseries nationwide have been offering dawn-till-dusk childcare for young children successfully for years. Where high quality childcare is given,

### Further information

- Visit the Breakfast Club UK network at [www.breakfast-club.co.uk](http://www.breakfast-club.co.uk) for useful resources, news and tips on funding.
- 'Breakfast Clubs: A How-To Guide' ([www.breakfast-club.co.uk/pdfs/HowToGuide.pdf](http://www.breakfast-club.co.uk/pdfs/HowToGuide.pdf)) is a detailed and informative 27-page document providing planning and funding advice, as well as tips on delivering a nutritious menu.
- The Playlines Trust has partnered the development of over 600 out-of-school clubs. For more information visit [www.playlines.org.uk](http://www.playlines.org.uk) or call 01392 385424.

children get the best start in life.'

This is backed up by research published in June showing a positive view of the benefits of childcare. The report by Professor Edward Melhuish from Birkbeck College, University of London, entitled *Child Benefits: The Importance of Investing in Quality Childcare*, found that young children who attend quality childcare centres gain a host of benefits, rather than lose out on them.

In fact, it showed that they tend to be happier, have better social interactions with their friends and peers, show greater maturity and be less likely to have behavioural problems. Plus, they had better concentration skills, are better

prepared for, and are more likely to do well at, school.

Another interesting aspect of dawn-till-dusk approaches is that the benefits may go beyond helping children and impact positively on schools too. John Bibby, head of Goetre Junior School in Merthyr Tydfil, Wales, where 50 to 60 children attend the daily breakfast club, says: 'Since the club began, there's been a steady improvement in levels of punctuality and attendance. We're now reaching attendance levels of between 92–93 per cent on an ongoing basis (an improvement of 5–6 per cent) and punctuality has improved significantly, with 98 per cent of pupils in school on time.'

As the move to more dawn-till-dusk schools gradually takes place, it will undoubtedly lead to changes for teachers and all those involved in the school day. It may be daunting and many people may remain apprehensive, but the outcome for children whose parents work long hours and schools who strive to maintain attendance and punctuality, could well be beneficial. ■

Rachel Newcombe is an education journalist.

## Benefits of dawn-till-dusk schemes

### Children gain:

- A healthy breakfast and good start to the day.
- Social skills.
- The chance to share meals, sitting down, with other ages.
- Fun activities and new skills.
- Company after school.

### Teachers gain:

- Children arriving on time.
- Better attendance rates.
- Children with better concentration, as a result of a proper breakfast.

### Parents gain:

- Peace of mind that their children are well looked after.
- The chance to work longer hours.
- Less hassle – school and childcare facilities are in one place.

## Tips for setting up breakfast/after-school clubs

- Assess interest from parents.
- Work out where you'll have the clubs.
- Decide what activities you'll have.
- Check legislation and insurance requirements.
- Prepare a budget.
- Start a pilot scheme to test out ideas.
- Obtain funding to set it up properly.
- Employ people to run your clubs.
- Get volunteers.
- Market your clubs.