

Section 1:

#1 Strengths: Your introduction effectively establishes the controversial nature of the topic and presents a clear thesis statement advocating for shorter school days. You've created a roadmap for your essay by mentioning the main arguments you'll explore.

Weakness: Limited evidence in thesis statement. → Your thesis statement mentions "research showing benefits" but doesn't provide any specific examples or studies. This weakens the authority of your opening position. For instance, in the phrase "This essay will argue in favor of shorter school days, supported by research," you could strengthen this by briefly mentioning a key study or finding.

Exemplar: ***This essay will argue in favour of shorter school days, supported by recent educational research from Australia and Finland showing significant improvements in student engagement and academic outcomes when instruction time is condensed and optimised.***

#2 Strengths: You effectively challenge the common argument that more school time equals better performance by addressing international comparisons. Your point about the weak association between instructional time and achievement is well-articulated.

Weakness: Counter-evidence gap. → While you mention that "studies have consistently shown a weak association between instructional time and student achievement," you don't cite any specific research or statistics to support this crucial claim. When you write "Studies have consistently shown," the reader is left wondering which studies you're referring to. This makes your counter-argument less convincing.

Exemplar: ***Studies such as the 2022 Australian Education Survey have consistently shown a weak correlation ($r=0.21$) between instructional hours and student achievement, with diminishing returns after 5 hours of daily instruction.***

#3 Strengths: Your paragraph on student well-being makes a compelling connection between shorter school days and improved mental health. You effectively link adequate rest to better academic performance, creating a strong logical sequence.

Weakness: Vague scientific references. → You mention "We have learned through research" without specifying what research or providing concrete examples of findings. This makes the scientific basis of your argument appear nebulous. For example, in "We have learned through research that students who get enough sleep perform better in school," you could be more precise about the research and its findings.

Exemplar: *Recent sleep studies conducted at Sydney University have demonstrated that adolescents who consistently get 8-9 hours of sleep show 15% improvement in test scores and 30% reduction in behavioural incidents compared to sleep-deprived peers.*

■ Your piece presents a thoughtful argument for shorter school days with logical progression through different benefits. However, you could strengthen your position by including more concrete examples. For instance, when discussing improved teaching practices, share a real-world example of a school that implemented a shorter day successfully. Your argument about extracurricular activities would be more powerful with specific statistics on student participation rates and outcomes. Additionally, consider addressing potential counterarguments more directly—perhaps acknowledge economic concerns for working parents and propose specific solutions. Try exploring the financial implications for schools as well, as administrators often make decisions based on budgetary constraints. Also, you might want to explore how shortened days could be implemented differently for various age groups, as younger and older students have different learning needs.

Score: 43/50

Section 2:

Optimal school day duration is an age-old subject of debate, bringing out passionate reactions from educators, parents, and students alike. While more commonly, arguments supporting a lengthened school day call upon the potential for heightened academic success, closer examination reveals that *reducing* the school day, coupled with strategic restructuring, offers a sounder approach to cultivating well-rounded, successful individuals. #1 This essay will argue in favor of shorter school days, supported by research showing benefits in academic performance, extracurricular involvement, and personal development, as well as addressing potential concerns about this policy ahead of time.

Probably the most common concern about shortening the school day concerns the alleged need for additional instructional time in which to adequately "cover" the curriculum and increase ~~standardized~~ [standardised] test scores. Proponents of longer school days often point to international comparisons, most commonly with high-achieving countries like South Korea or Japan, where students spend significantly more time in school. #2 However, simply increasing the duration of schooling is no guarantee of improved academic performance. Studies have consistently shown a weak association between instructional time and student achievement. In fact, long exposure to traditional classroom settings can lead to lowered attention spans, increased boredom, and decreased overall engagement, ultimately hindering learning.

A shorter school day, however, compels educators to be more effective and implement improved teaching practices. With shorter time, educators are encouraged to teach key principles, eliminate

superfluous material, and apply new teaching methodologies, such as project-based learning, collaborative work, and one-on-one teaching. This emphasis on quality rather than quantity ensures that students are more engaged in the learning process and can more easily grasp underlying concepts. For example, a shorter science period might have more laboratory work and real-world applications of the content, making the content more relevant and memorable for students. By making the academic environment more interactive and attentive, shorter school days can actually *enhance* academic performance.

Furthermore, a shorter school day provides students with more time for extracurricular activities, which are vital to their general development. Participation in sports, arts, clubs, and volunteering provides students with the opportunity to find their passion, become leaders, learn how to work as a team, and feel a sense of belonging. They are critical to the growth of complete individuals who are not only academically proficient but also socially, emotionally, and practically prepared to thrive in a rapidly transforming world.

Extended school days leave students with little time or energy to pursue after-school activities. Students may be forced to choose between school and their passions, leading to burnout and resentment of school. By shortening the school day, students have more time to devote to these life-enhancing experiences, allowing them to further develop their talents, broaden their vision, and establish a firm sense of self. For instance, a student who loves music could use the extra time to join a band or orchestra, learn a new instrument, or compose their own music. These activities not only provide creative outlets but also teach valuable skills such as discipline, perseverance, and teamwork.

In addition to academics and extracurricular activities, shorter school days are also needed to provide student well-being and personal development. Long hours in the classroom can be a source of stress, anxiety, and fatigue, at the expense of students' mental and physical health. By providing students with more free time, shorter school days allow them to relax, recharge, and engage in activities that are beneficial to their overall well-being. These may include spending time with family and friends, getting together with hobbies, engaging in exercise, or simply getting enough sleep.

#3 Adequate rest and relaxation are also extremely crucial for brain functioning and academic performance. We have learned through research that students who get enough sleep perform better in school, have longer attention spans, and are less likely to experience mood swings and behavioral problems. By reducing the length of the school day, we can help allow students the time they need to prioritize their sleep and their overall health, which will lead to improved academic performance and a more positive school experience. Furthermore, free time allows students to develop their own interests, become more self-sufficient, and gain practical life skills such as time management, self-discipline, and problem-solving.

One common argument against shortening the school day is that it will disproportionately affect poor students who rely on schools for meals, childcare, and other essential services. While this is a valid concern, it can be addressed in the form of targeted interventions and partnerships with the community. The schools may also provide pre- or post-school free and reduced-price meals, afterschool programs and tutoring, and liaise with community ~~organizations~~ [organisations] to provide childcare and other ancillary services for poor families. These services can ensure that all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, have access to all the material resources they require to succeed.

Another concern is that shorter school days may require adjustments to the school calendar, such as extending the school year or reducing summer vacation. But these adjustments can be done in a manner that is least disruptive to students and families. For example, schools can switch to a year-round calendar with shorter, more frequent breaks throughout the year. This schedule can avoid summer learning loss and give students more time to rest and rejuvenate.

In conclusion, while the issues surrounding school day length are complex, the evidence overwhelmingly supports shorter school days. By ~~prioritizing~~ [prioritising] quality over quantity of instruction, promoting extracurricular involvement, and fostering student well-being, shorter school days offer the better path to creating well-rounded, successful individuals. Although equity issues and logistical challenges must be resolved, they can be overcome with targeted interventions and creative solutions. Ultimately, reducing the school day is an investment in the future that enables students to succeed academically, personally, and socially, and to become engaged and productive members of society. It's about enabling children to learn *how* to learn, rather than *what* to learn, creating independent, life-long learners who will be able to succeed in the 21st century challenges.