

**Anthea Lipsett**  
**Thursday July 26, 2007**  
[EducationGuardian.co.uk](http://EducationGuardian.co.uk)

Teenagers should be forced to stay after school to take part in activities such as sports and drama clubs, the Institute for Public Policy Research said today.

The leftwing thinktank wants to see a legal extension to the school day so that every child is required to do at least an hour a week of after-school activities, rather than simply being offered the chance to do them.

This would prevent the disaffected teenagers most in need of constructive after school activities from missing out, said the IPPR study.

The government announced a £1bn injection to extend schools yesterday. But IPPR says teenagers could miss out if they are not compelled to take part.

According to its research, regular participation in at least one extracurricular activity each week can radically improve life chances of young people.

IPPR said that the best way - outside the family - for children to learn the behavioural and emotional skills they need was to engage in purposeful activities - in particular if these are mentored by adults and involve working towards specific goals through clubs such as drama and sports.

The most disadvantaged children are the least likely to take part in such activities - largely because local culture and peers discourage them.

Julia Margo, IPPR senior research fellow, said: "British teenagers are more likely to get into fights, hang out with other teenagers, binge drink, take drugs and have underage and unprotected sex than teenagers in most other European countries.

"But it isn't their fault. British teenagers spend more time 'hanging out' with their mates, and less time with adults, while British adults are less likely to intervene to stop teenagers committing vandalism and other antisocial behaviour. Today's announcement is an admission that successive governments have left British youth to its own devices," she said.

"The worry is that, if the government is too touchy-feely and just offers teenagers the kinds of activities they say they want, we will fail another generation," Ms Margo added. "Every child should be expected to do at least an hour a week of constructive after-school activities. They might not like it, but the evidence shows that the ones who don't want to do it are the ones who would benefit the most."

A spokesperson for the Department of Children, Schools and Families said: "As Ed Balls made clear recently, as we expand our extended schools programme of out-of-hours provision in sport, music and drama to every school by 2010, we are ensuring that children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their parents have a chance to benefit from extra out-of-school tuition and after-school clubs.

"Over the next three years, we will provide an additional £265m to enable extended schools to do more to support disadvantaged children and young people. By year three, the funding will enable all schools to offer those children two hours per week of group activities in term time, plus 30 hours of additional activities over the holidays."