

Older starters gain an advantage that lasts a lifetime



Alice, 4, Tom, 5, and Ruby, 4, are excited about starting school next year.

Picture: DAVID

GAIRD

Late to school, get a headstart

CHILDREN who are held back and start school later than their peers gain an advantage that's felt up to six decades later, a new study shows.

They are more self-confident, resilient, competitive and trusting, which tends to be associated with economic success.

The analysis of 1007 adults aged between 24 and 60 illustrates the "potential adverse effect of school entry rules," lead author Lionel Page from the University of Technology, Sydney said.

"Our findings indicate that

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school entry rules influence the formation of behavioural traits, creating long-lasting disparities between individuals born on different sides of the cut-off date," he said.

Dr Page said relatively young students born before the cut-off date rather than after it suffered an unintended penalty.

School starting ages vary between Australian states.

In Victoria, children starting school must turn five by April 30 in the year they start

school, whereas in Queensland and WA the cut-off is June 30. In South Australia, they must be five by May 1 and in Tasmania they must be five by January 1.

Dr Page said the study's findings suggested the relative age at school had an impact on success in adulthood.

"We find that participants who were relatively old in school exhibit higher self-confidence about their performance at an effort task compared to those who were relatively young," he said.

"Moreover, they declare

being more tolerant to risk in a range of real-life situations and trusting of other people in social interactions. This set of results offers important insights on the long-term effects of relative age at school on behavioural traits."

The new study was published by the Life Course Centre, a joint research project between the federal government and the universities of Queensland, Sydney, Melbourne and Western Australia. It involved adults from Queensland, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia.

The findings come as a UNSW study found a quarter of students were held back so they started school when turning six, not five.

Kew mother of two Natalie Codling is sending her son Tom, 5, to school next year with his friends Alice, 4, and Ruby, 4. He turns six in June next year while Alice and Ruby will be five by the start of next year.

"They are telling us socially all the kids will be fine and he's very excited," Ms Codling said.

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