Can do better

Raising boys’ achievement in English
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In 1995 SCAA set up a working party to:

• consider the curriculum entitlement in English
• investigate boys’ under-achievement in the subject
• offer practical suggestions for what schools might do about the problem.

This booklet is based on the working party’s findings and suggestions.

The group included classroom teachers from both state and independent schools, advisers and heads, with representation from pre-school through to sixth form and universities. Its work centred on identifying the issues involved and setting up small-scale projects to explore ways of tackling them. The group also drew on existing work.

This publication focuses on important strands of these projects, illustrating key points with detailed descriptions of work done. The intention is to suggest ideas rather than provide blueprints for practice.

QCA is very grateful to the members of the working party for their time, effort and willingness to undertake both initial thinking and the projects, and for following this by writing up their work. We would also like to thank the teachers involved in the projects in schools, and all those to whom we have listened and talked over the past two years.

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USING THIS BOOKLET

This booklet is intended to stimulate debate and action about boys' work in English. It includes evidence about boys' performance, considers the nature of the subject and the curriculum on offer in schools, and gives examples of practical classroom approaches to raising achievement.

It is not necessary to read the booklet from start to finish, but rather to choose those parts that look more relevant to your current interests.

You may want to clarify issues or be looking for practical classroom approaches. You have already put ideas into practice; you may want to compare your experience with others' findings.

This booklet is divided into the following sections:

Chapter One: English for all draws the main threads of the document together and summarises the key points.

Chapter Two: What has been happening to boys? sets the issues in context and sketches in the wider picture. It includes background information and suggests, from evidence and experience, what boys do well and the areas in which they tend to underachieve.

Chapter Three: The English curriculum and its implementation looks at English as a subject, how the English Order is being implemented and the implications for boys.

Chapter Four: Finding out what's happening in school suggests practical ways to investigate the situation in school, with examples of what a number of schools have done. If you are well down the road of thinking and action, you may simply want to skim this chapter. If you are about to make a start you should find the examples useful, especially those which relate most closely to your own needs.

Chapters Five and Six: Taking immediate action and Taking longer-term action contain many ideas for classroom work from nursery to secondary schools, in both shorter and longer time frames.

The appendices suggest some other recent relevant publications and give statistical information about National Curriculum test and GCSE results.
CHAPTER 1

English for all

The aim of this booklet is to provoke thought and provide ideas for action which will help raise boys' achievement in English across the ages and stages of schooling. The main areas considered are:

• the curriculum as it is prescribed in the English Order and as it is experienced in classrooms
• changes to classroom practices which are likely to help raise both boys' and girls' achievement
• aspects of school life and teaching arrangements which have an impact on boys’ work and attitudes to English.

The work described in this booklet suggests a number of ways to start to tackle the issues. There are, of course, other areas to be investigated and acted upon. The following points are key to moving forward:

Curriculum Provision

• The voluntary reading boys do deserves greater recognition and they must be encouraged to extend and sustain their independent reading.
• A curriculum with a heavy bias towards literature, and fiction in particular, is unlikely to appeal to many boys.
• English teaching should include a greater number and range of non-fiction texts.
• The features of different kinds of texts, and strategies for reading and writing them, should be explicitly taught.
• There should be more use of drama, particularly at Key Stage 2.
• From the early years, reading and writing should be integrated into activities, so that they are associated with getting things done as well as expressing imagination and feeling.
• Assessment should be sufficiently detailed to identify patterns of strengths and weaknesses, and so enable targeted action and support.

Classroom Activities

• All pupils benefit from a clearer structure to activities, shorter-term goals, and feedback related to the criteria for success.
• Boys' strengths in oral work should be recognised but their range needs to be extended to taking different roles in groups and developing collaboration.
• The amount and nature of attention given to boys and girls in class should be monitored to ensure that they are all on task and that boys' and girls' contributions receive consistent responses.
The wider School context

- Speaking and listening, reading and writing should be highly valued for all sorts of purposes, through the way the whole curriculum is taught and through extra curricular activities.
- Identifying issues and focusing work on boys' achievement requires commitment from the headteacher and senior staff in terms of both time and resources.
- Expectations of progress and access for all must be seen to be valued by the schools. Good quality teaching should be identified and all teachers helped to achieve it.
- Planning should be directly influenced by assessment and clear targets for improvement set and monitored.
- Parents need to know how the school is tackling the issue and what they can do to help.
CHAPTER 2

What has been happening to boys?

The underlying causes of boys' underachievement have been widely debated. Powerful forces in our culture, largely beyond the control of teachers, shape attitudes towards learning, literacy and behaviour among boys and young men. These forces need to be acknowledged, but it is also important to concentrate on those factors that are within our control. Whatever happens outside, schools can make a difference. Teachers have a major influence on the attitudes, success or failure of their pupils. Any action must benefit all our pupils, and work to improve boys' achievements should not be at the expense of girls.

The historical perspective

In the 1970s and 1980s the main gender issue in education was the performance of girls. In particular, there was anxiety about girls' achievements in subjects like mathematics and science, since relatively few chose to study these subjects beyond the age of 16 and their attainment in O level and GCSE lagged behind that of boys. Considerable work was done on this, and the girls' performance in these subjects at GCSE now matches that of boys.

This clear improvement in the performance of girls shows what can be achieved when effort is carefully targeted. The causes of the original under-achievement were analysed and described. Specific actions were then piloted and monitored, and successful practice was disseminated. Pupils' perceptions of mathematics and science were examined, and negative attitudes challenged. All aspects of teaching and learning, from planning through to assessment, were rigorously analysed. The focus at every stage was on changing classroom practice.

As a result, the expectations of staff and pupils shifted and there was a significant improvement in achievement. The broad lines of approach to this success can be adapted to other groups of pupils and subjects, including boys and English at all key stages.
There are still major issues to be addressed relating to girls’ achievements and aspirations, and these must not be forgotten. However, more recently public attention has shifted to boys and their relative underachievement up to and including GCSE across wide areas of the curriculum. In some subjects, including English and English Literature, the difference in achievement is particularly pronounced. It is clear from the results of 1997 National Curriculum tests at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 that the problem emerges early.

• At Key Stage 1, 21% of girls achieved level 3 in the English tests compared with 14% of boys.

• At Key Stage 2, 69% of girls achieved level 4 and above, compared with 57% of boys.

• At Key Stage 3, 66% of girls achieved level 5 and above, compared with 47% of boys.

GCSE results in 1997 showed 65% of girls achieving grade C or above, whereas the figure for boys was 43%. The figures for 1996 and 1997 are given at the end of this booklet (see pages 60 to 64). Given the undoubted importance of literacy in achievement right across the curriculum, this evidence of an early gap is particularly disturbing. The results of later assessments and exams indicate that little is being done to close it. Systematic and rigorous action is clearly required.

In 1993 OFSTED published a report called Boys and English, which set out a disturbing picture of relatively poor achievement by many boys across wide areas of English work in secondary schools.

The overall picture from the survey was that:

• boys in all kinds of schools performed markedly less well than girls
• boys were more likely to have problems with basic literacy
• at GCSE more boys were entered for the examination than girls
• twice as many girls took A level English
• where there was setting, girls tended to dominate numerically in upper groups, and boys in lower groups.

In relation to English lessons, HMI found that:

• girls in all years read more fiction
• few teachers monitored differences in patterns of reading between boys and girls effectively
• girls wrote at greater length and got higher marks
• boys received more open and direct criticism for weaknesses in their writing than girls
• poetry was less popular with boys, and overall insufficient time was spent on poetry in English
• boys made less use of school libraries and participated less in extracurricular activities associated with English.
These findings also fit the patterns of boys' behaviour and achievement in primary schools. In the early years most teachers and classroom helpers are female, and at home mothers are more likely to read with their children than fathers. As a result boys tend to lack models of males who invest much time and energy in literacy. Attitudes to boys and girls often differ as they are expected to fulfil different roles and express their relationships in different ways. From a young age boys choose to spend more time on activities which do not involve adults, and this affects the nature of their relationships with teachers and helpers. In general, boys prefer active pursuits and may find it harder to acquire the more sedentary skills of reading and writing.

**How do boys perform well in English?**

Whilst acknowledging that there are problems with boys' achievement, it is important to note that there are things boys do well and that many boys are successful in English. When thinking about and taking action on boys' underachievement, it is important to recognise their strengths and build on them.

**Attitudes and working habits**

When their interest is engaged, boys can work with great efficiency. They often show skill in deciding which task should be given highest priority. Boys respond well to clearly set tasks with well-defined outcomes. The OFSTED report emphasised how much boys respond to strong and enthusiastic teaching.

**Speaking and listening**

Boys demonstrate a range of qualities as speakers and listeners. They are often articulate and confident. For example, in a primary school assembly the head-teacher asked pupils about the probe sent to Mars. Boys (and only boys) spoke with enthusiasm and knowledge about the subject in front of an audience of over 200 pupils and teachers.

By the time they reach secondary school, boys are likely to enjoy the element of performance, taking pleasure in displays of verbal wit and virtuosity. The competitive element that tends to restrict their capacity to engage in effective learning through conversation can give an edge to this performance. Boys are often prepared to be adventurous and take risks. This can lead to over-ambitious attempts at display, or adopting an outrageously extreme position in an argument, but it can also lead to exciting and highly charged language. Boys work best when given tightly structured tasks which channel their speaking and listening energies and skills in purposeful directions. When they are observed working in other subjects, for example mathematics, their talk is often highly focused on the task in hand and they share effective strategies for problem-solving very efficiently.
Reading
Boys often read extensively and regularly in relation to their interests and hobbies, but feel that this reading is not valued or even noted by school. The reading patterns and commitment of boys vary greatly from one school to another, indicating that schools can and do make an enormous difference. Boys can be encouraged to read more, and more widely.

Writing
Boys are often more concise than girls in their writing and what may be perceived as a lack of commitment may be a more efficient selection of key ideas and illustration. Boys' story-writing is sometimes marked by a willingness to move away from immediate experience. The fantasy and action characteristic of these stories could be used as a basis for developing boys' fiction, rather than simply being seen as evidence of poor skills in the construction of plot and delineation of character.

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**Boys doing high quality English work at Key Stages 3 and 4**

Boys at a secondary school enjoyed the creative side of English and read widely and avidly. They believed strongly that their school's commitment to creative arts was a positive strength and aided their interest in English. However, the boys also said how hard it was for them to establish networks of readers. They had to be cautious about admitting their pleasure in reading, because of negative peer group pressure. They often had to make links with girls, or rely on adults for recommendations and for opportunities to share their interest in books.

Their writing had all the strengths of the girls' writing, although they tended to give less priority than their female counterparts to length and presentation.

What these boys said very forcefully was how hard it was for them to show their enthusiasm openly. Boys and girls asserted that it was easier for girls to be known as hard workers and enthusiastic readers and still retain credibility with their peers. The successful boys felt that they were swimming against the current of opinion among their peers.

As a result of this work, the school has reinforced its commitment to the creative arts and has given a high profile to drama. It is looking to support boys who demonstrate an interest in English but might be vulnerable to peer pressure. The school is also trying to put enthusiastic readers in touch with others, helping to create networks of readers.
Attitude and working habits

Although boys recognise the importance of academic success, there is a culture which acts as a powerful deterrent to hard work or enthusiasm. Boys gain little credibility among their peers by working hard or being seen to be successful, particularly in English. The words used to describe hard workers are almost without exception aggressively negative. This culture, which effectively makes a virtue of underachievement, is a crucial factor in the issue of boys’ performance.

Boys are less likely to concentrate on a task at length. Overall, boys are observed to be more frequently off-task than girls. From pre-school onwards, boys are more reluctant to be quietly reflective and prefer to be highly active. This is manifested in the kind of play they engage in when young and the kinds of stories and role-plays they prefer later on. Not surprisingly at secondary level there appears to be a marked correlation between off-task behaviour and poor GCSE results.

Speaking and listening

There are differences in the performance and behaviour of boys and girls as speakers and listeners. The approach favoured by girls is often in tune with school-based teaching and learning, and successful boys tend to adopt similar styles and strategies to the girls.

Boys are generally more competitive in discussion. They value the element of performance in talk and delight in displaying their verbal skills. This makes it less likely that they will learn from the ideas of others in the group. When young boys engage in play their talk often relates to violent actions by the models or toys they are using. Girls tend to root their play in relationships, which are then developed in the course of the activity.

Boys find it difficult to talk about their own feelings, to discuss the expression of feelings in literature, and in particular to relate these to their own experiences. As a result they are at a disadvantage in comparison with girls, who tackle this kind of subject matter more readily.
Reading

The average boy reads less than the average girl and his range of reading is narrower, with more focus on non-fiction and reluctance to read both fiction and poetry. This position is seen across the range, but the gap widens with age, showing a marked decline in voluntary reading of good quality fiction at Key Stage 4. Pupils cite the increased demands of GCSE work and the attractions of other forms of amusement as reasons for this decline. Boys are less likely to belong to a network of readers, whereas girls often exchange books with friends which encourage and sustain wider reading.

Boys often have more problems with the initial attainment of fluency in reading; and more of them continue to have difficulties; more boys than girls have statement educational need based on problems with literacy. There are also far more boys then girls whose reading performance is below the level of expected of someone of their age and general ability. The overall learning of many boys is impeded by their level of reading.
**case study**

Reading habits in a middle school

In a middle school, library loan computer print-outs confirmed teachers' suspicions that the majority of boys were borrowing only non-fiction. When boys did borrow fiction they often gave up and returned it quickly. Staff observed that boys also displayed low levels of interest in fiction read in class. This led to an organised programme of work on selected short stories linked to a structured approach to imaginative writing.

**case study**

Attitudes to poetry in a 9 to 13 school

An investigation into attitudes to poetry at Key Stages 2 and 3 revealed interesting if depressing news. Boys in Year 4 thought that the stereotypical poet was male, but one they saw as effete eccentric not an attractive role model. One boy drew a picture of a poet receiving inspiration from the clouds while a cat looking on says 'Silly man'.

Boys reported negative experiences of poetry in the classroom and said that there had been lengthy periods without poetry in lessons. The teaching of poetry was inadequately planned and appeared at times to be tacked on to topic work as an afterthought. The range of poems studied was very limited, was too often restricted to light verse, and subject matter too close to pupils' own experiences. Many associated reading with the retrieval of information and found it difficult to see the point of poetry.

**case study**

Reading time at Key Stage 4

In an 11 to 16 comprehensive, evidence gathered from questionnaires, interviews and reading records showed that boys' and girls' independent reading decreased at Key Stage 4 and that this trend was more marked among boys than girls. Pupils cited the pressures of coursework and a more active social life as reasons. They also noted that at Key Stage 3 lesson time was regularly set aside for private reading, and that reading records were kept by pupils and monitored by teachers and this did not happen at Key Stage 4. If pupils give less time to reading out of school then regular reading time in class is more significant, particularly for boys whose commitment to reading is often weaker.
Writing

Many boys write less than girls and are less enthusiastic and committed writers. On average they become competent later than girls, and are more likely to have problems as writers. Boys write in a narrower range of genres and are more easily satisfied with what they produce. Ideas, plots and characters are less well developed, they are more reluctant to redraft, less likely to proofread and give less attention to accuracy and presentation. These patterns became apparent very early and are noticed by teachers at all key stages.

A group of early years teachers observed that more girls than boys used dedicated writing areas and for longer periods of time. The few boys who did use the writing table often remained standing, used the mark-making tools for a specific purpose such as putting their name on a model or making a sign for a road layout and then returned to a previous activity or moved on.

Since members of staff used the writing table for routine tasks, it was likely that girls experienced more adult support and encouragement in writing. Where writing was part of role play or linked to design and information technology, boys and girls were equally involved but adults valued the work less. The writing in children’s files or shared in group sessions was invariably produced at the writing table, not in other contexts. Girls ‘played’ at writing, experimenting with letter shapes and enjoying the act of writing, whereas boys were more likely to write for a purpose. The teachers agreed that there are major differences in how, when and for how long they write.
CHAPTER 3

The English curriculum and its implementation

For many years boys' achievements in English at age 16 have lagged behind girls', even when boys outstripped girls in other subjects. OFSTED (1996) reported that patterns of subject choice in the sixth form showed boys favouring physics, economics, mathematics, chemistry and geography, with girls favouring sociology, French, English literature, biology and art and design. From the early years, boys' attitudes to reading and writing are less positive than girls'. They favour active pursuits and construction, whereas girls are more successful in reflective aspects of work such as developing ideas for using technology or assessing results of projects. Observed patterns such as these do not, however, fully explain why there should be such noticeable boy/girl differences in English.

The National Curriculum has laid down an entitlement for all pupils in terms of both curriculum and assessment. It is important to establish whether this is a fair entitlement, given that success in speaking, listening, reading and writing are vital to full participation in society.

The programmes of study for Speaking and Listening at each key stage outline the range of activities to be undertaken, including speaking for different purposes, listening and responding, group discussion and drama.

This entitlement is equally relevant to boys and girls, but in different ways. Boys may well dominate in oral work. They enjoy the verbal cut and thrust of debate, sometimes at the expense of relevance to the task. In her book Gender and Classroom Interaction, Christine Howe suggests that:

- boys contribute more than girls to whole-class interaction and receive more feedback from teachers on their contributions
- in structured group work girls ask for more help than boys, particularly general strategy help
- both girls and boys prefer to ask boys for help. Since boys answer boys more often than girls, this can lead to girls' requests being ignored
- boys monopolise any equipment or computers, regardless of group composition.

It is likely that any narrowing of the range required in the English order will affect boys more than girls. If young boys tend to play together more and speak less to a range of adults, they are less likely to develop a repertoire of talk. If boys prefer to be active and doing, then their ability to listen and respond may be underdeveloped. In group discussion and interaction, where boys are often successful, it is important that they are taught skills which will enable them to participate in groups in different ways, taking a variety of roles.
This structuring of the opportunities to speak, listen and to interact in groups is vital to both boys and girls, so that they are able to adapt their tone, register and word choices according to different purposes and people. Being aware of different levels of formality and of how to support others in group discussion are skills which boys may take longer to learn than girls and teaching should take this into account.

Performance, improvisation and other drama activities are often favoured by boys, and this enthusiasm is a good basis for development. In Key Stage 2 drama is often a neglected aspect of the English curriculum. Teachers feel they lack confidence in teaching improvisation and writing stories is much more common than writing and performing plays. Similarly, reading and performing scripted drama occurs less often than reading and retelling stories. Given boys' lack of commitment to English, this neglect of drama may affect their motivation and achievement.

When assessing speaking and listening, it is vital to take into account the range of skills that are needed. At times it is easy either to favour or undervalue boys' strengths in talk. Where they are asked to argue and persuade it is important not to place too much weight on the rhetorical appeal of what they say, or to ignore them when they may make brief, direct comment without elaboration. If boys are often more successful than girls in areas of speaking and listening, it is important to recognise these strengths and build on them in the classroom, particularly to support their reading and writing.
The programmes of study for Reading include requirements to cover a range of texts. This range, in literary texts, specifies fiction, poetry and drama. In non-fiction the range spans reference texts such as dictionaries, databases, and textbook; other texts such as letters, articles, and instructions with a focus on information; and texts where the intention is to argue or persuade. Given the place of English within the broader curriculum, where reference texts are commonly used, it is proper that much of the focus of the English curriculum is literary texts. However, as many boys, seem to prefer non-fiction from an early age the range of reading offered by teachers may not be adequate. It is only recently that reading schemes have begun to include non-fiction, and many children learn to read largely on a diet of stories. If boys read magazines, newspapers and other such publications they must do so out of school, since provision in school rarely includes such reading matter. There are similar issues related to boys' interest in computers and their experience of texts on screen. Many boys are also knowledgeable about, and interested in, facts on computer screens, but this expertise is not always used and developed in the English classroom. The differences between reading paper-based texts and those on screen need to be explored and exploited. The breadth presented in the programmes of study should enable teachers to build on both boys' and girls' interests when providing reading material.

The predominance of story in reading in schools has other implications. Stories are often studied in order to consider characters, their feelings and relationships; areas which girls tend to find appealing. Boys' interests may well centre more on action and fantasy, and they may find discussing emotion difficult. If narrative were treated less as though it were about real people and more about how meaning is constructed and understood by different readers, then boys may join in more readily. This is not to suggest that boys should be exempt from reading narrative or talking about characters, but if these are the areas of the reading curriculum which have the highest status, and the reading boys enjoy is marginal to school English, then boys' progress in reading and writing may be affected from the early stages. Given that more boys predominate in lower sets for English and are diagnosed as having literacy problems in secondary schools, it is possible that the reading offered in English lessons does not help reluctant readers to become more committed.

It is vital that salient features of texts are made explicit as often as possible. The skills needed for reading fiction and non-fiction are not the same. Fiction is often carried along by the plot, the characters and the resolution of a 'problem'. The sentence structures in non-fiction are often different, and the subjects are ideas or abstractions rather than people. There may be more passive verbs and greater use of non-lexical verbs in information texts. The main verb is often later in the sentence, so the reader has to read further before the sense becomes clear. In addition, the relationship between sentences may well be more abstract than in narrative, with links based on logic, reason, cause and effect or complication. This also places different demands on a reader, and children need help with reading such texts efficiently and effectively.
If non-fiction was the focus of more teaching, it is possible that boys' efficiency as readers, as well as their enthusiasm, could be improved.

Study skills - including the use of reference systems, skimming and scanning, formulating hypotheses, and distinguishing fact and opinion - are vital ingredients of the Reading programmes of study, particularly at Key Stage 2. These underpin success in many subjects, not just English, and if boys felt more confident in using such skills this could contribute to their success across the curriculum. The English Order specifies these skills, and it is important that they are explicitly taught.

Assessment techniques commonly in use may reinforce messages that are unhelpful, particularly to boys. At Key Stage 1 the most common mechanism for assessing reading is probably to ask children to read aloud to the teacher (usually female) from a storybook. However, boys may be more confident reading in a group of their peers and may prefer non-fiction texts. Therefore it is important to collect a range of assessment information before making confident judgements about children's reading abilities. If boys are reluctant to write, oral evidence of their reading may yield more detailed information. Standardised tests of reading can give useful indications of where children are in relation to national norms, but the reading skills tested often involve reading isolated words or sentences. Information from a wider range of sources, particularly boys' out of school reading, will help with the planning of an equitable curriculum in English.
There are related issues in the programmes of study for Writing. The writing diet offered to most children is predominantly narrative and literary. This emphasis may be appropriate, but at all key stages pupils’ writing of non-narrative is comparatively less successful. Given the significance of writing to inform and persuade in the world of work, this predominance of narrative and personal writing may leave pupils poorly equipped to cope with later demands. If this is an area of the curriculum towards which boys are inclined, then a lack of attention to non-fiction writing may disadvantage them more. In teaching non-fiction writing it is important to be clear about the key features of such texts, such as the use of imperatives in instructions, layout in advertisements, and connectives denoting cause and effect in argument.

In responding to children's writing, some teachers may be more kindly disposed to work which is neatly presented and lacks spelling errors. This is often characteristic of girls’ rather than boys' work, as is the tendency to write at greater length and use more description. In contrast, teachers may undervalue structure and action in boys’ stories, and appear to give greater emphasis to handwriting and spelling. The significance and usefulness of drafting and redrafting writing is often lost on boys, since they fail to see the purpose for which the writing was set. Giving a clear focus to writing tasks and responding to the writing on that focus is likely to help both boys and girls, ensures that the criteria for judgement are explicit and that other criteria are not used by default.

The range of activities, experiences and skills required by the English Order emphasises the literary dimension and the affective domain, but maintains a balance in terms of other areas of speaking, listening, reading and writing. If teachers’ implementation of the Order further reinforces the significance of the literary curriculum, other aspects which arouse boys' enthusiasm and commitment may be marginalised. The curriculum coverage and the continuing pattern of girls' success in English can lead boys to see it as a girls' subject, and the prevailing ethos among boys may be to reject it. Peer group pressure may then make it hard for boys to be seen to succeed in the subject.

The ways English is taught may reinforce these patterns. If boys prefer active participation, then the sedentary nature of reading and writing may reduce their interest. Similarly, if boys are less tolerant than girls of ambiguity and longer-term aims, and are less willing to use their intuition about what is required, then they need clear, short-term targets and a structure within which to work. The provision for the curriculum in the programmes of study for speaking, listening, reading and writing emphasises that they should be taught in an integrated way, linking activities together. Building reading and writing into other activities, and using active approaches, particularly to reading, are likely to help both boys and girls to higher achievement.

This chapter has considered the curriculum as prescribed in the English Order and how it may be implemented in classrooms, since it is important to re-examine both the intended curriculum and how that changes as it is shaped into lessons. The next three chapters look at how this then becomes the curriculum as experienced by the pupils.
CHAPTER 4

Finding out what's happening in school

The previous chapter suggested some of the patterns of achievement and behaviour which are often seen by teachers of English. These patterns may vary from school to school, and even from class to class for example, in a school with a strong arts and publishing tradition boys may be less reluctant to be seen achieving in these areas. By contrast, boys in another school may resist a literary focus to their work and opt for active pursuits. Clearly, the starting points for these two schools are different.

In order to identify priorities and set targets, schools need precise information. If this is collected in a systematic way, realistic ways forward can be planned.

The following questions may provide a focus for early discussion of these issues.

1. What are your perceptions of the differences in achievement in English between boys and girls in your school?
2. Do you base these perceptions on:
   • research?
   • commonsense?
   • analysis of results?
   • anecdotes?
   • observation - casual or systematic?
3. What action has been taken in response to these perceptions?
4. What further action do you think might be worth considering:
   • in the short term immediately, without significant implications for resources, training, planning etc.
   • in the medium term within the next academic year, with some implications for resources, training, planning etc. Could you outline the nature of some of these implications?
   • in the long-term for the more distant future, needing preparation and possibly with significant implications for resources, training, planning etc. Could you outline the nature of some of these implications?
Initial discussion of these questions should lead to decisions about what further, detailed information is needed. This information could come from:

- pupil interviews
- pupil questionnaires
- consideration of teachers' assumptions and expectations
- analysis of samples of work
- classroom observation
- a range of evidence on a single issue
- analysis of pupil performance data.

The rest of this chapter suggests approaches to each of these areas and includes examples of what some schools have already tried.

Pupil interviews

Selected groups of pupils can be interviewed in depth, focusing on, for example:

- their attitudes to the subject and their achievement in it
- what they enjoy or dislike
- their reading habits
- the kinds of teaching and assessment they find most useful.

Pupil interviews can be extremely effective in raising questions and issues to be followed up by schools or departments. If a sample is carefully chosen it need only be small, but in order to be effective the interviews must be carefully planned and structured.

It is helpful to ask the same questions of boys and girls, so that their responses can be contrasted.

Boys in a small primary school were reading less fiction than girls, and had more negative attitudes towards it. Key Stage 2 test results showed that boys were achieving levels below girls and were also performing below expectations. Ten pupils were interviewed in depth, including four boys who were reluctant readers of fiction and found less pleasure from such reading than others. Two of these boys were in Year 4, one in Year 5 and one in Year 6. The other pupils interviewed were four girls and two boys who were confident and competent readers and enjoyed reading fiction. Following these interviews teachers developed a targeted programme of fiction reading, including structured responses to what had been read.
Carefully designed questionnaires can help to establish the attitudes and working practices of staff and pupils, such as:

- pupils' reading habits
- the kinds of writing pupils prefer
- areas of strength and weakness
- pupil or teacher perceptions of the differences in ability between boys and girls
- pupil or teacher perceptions of behaviour patterns of boys and girls.

Given the pressures of time, it is important to make the questionnaire focused and not to attempt too large a sample. The answers usually suggest issues to be explored further, rather than providing answers.

The following questionnaire was used with a large sample of pupils. The questions could be adapted to meet the needs of younger or older pupils.

### Speaking and listening

1. I most like taking part in discussion as part of:
   - (a) the whole class
   - (b) a small group
   - (c) a pair

2. If I am in a group or pair I prefer to work with:
   - (a) someone of the same sex
   - (b) a mixed group
   - (c) no preference

3. I prefer discussion that is related to:
   - (a) a task which has a very clear outcome – perhaps a right or wrong answer
   - (b) a task that allows me lots of room for personal thought and opinion

4. I like discussion that allows me to express my feelings
   - Agree
   - Disagree

5. I like discussion that is related to a book or poem we have read –
   - Agree
   - Disagree

### Reading

6. I read:
   - (a) at least one book every week
   - (b) at least one book every month
   - (c) an occasional book
   - (d) hardly any books

7. I prefer to read:
   - (a) magazines related to my personal interests
   - (b) poetry
   - (c) popular fiction
   - (d) non-fiction books (books about facts)
   - (e) other
8. I least like reading:
   (a) magazines related to my personal interests
   (b) poetry
   (c) popular fiction
   (d) non-fiction books
   (e) romance
   (f) other

9. The kind of stories I most enjoy are:
   (a) classic
   (b) horror
   (c) thriller/detective

10. The kind of stories I least enjoy are:
    (a) classic
    (b) horror
    (c) thriller/detective
    (d) romance
    (e) other

Writing

11. The kind of writing I most enjoy is:
    (a) imaginative (e.g., stories, poetry)
    (b) personal
    (c) factual (e.g., notes, essays)
    (d) writing about books, poems, stories
    (e) other

12. The kind of writing I least enjoy is:
    (a) imaginative (e.g., stories, poetry)
    (b) personal
    (c) factual (e.g., notes, essays)
    (d) writing about books, poems, stories
    (e) other

13. The longest piece of writing I completed last term for English was:
    (a) more than 1 side long
    (b) more than 2 sides long
    (c) more than 5 sides long
    (d) more than 10 sides long

14. (a) I redraft most pieces of writing
    (b) I only redraft important pieces of writing
    (c) I rarely redraft pieces of writing

15. (a) I check most pieces of writing for mistakes
    (b) I only check important pieces of writing
    (c) I rarely check pieces of writing

16. (a) I always hand work in on time
    (b) I sometimes hand work in late
    (c) I often hand work in late
Boys' views of poetry in the middle years

Pupils in Years 6, 7 and 8 in a mixed independent 9 to 13 school were surveyed about their views of poetry after their teacher had identified that some of the boys had negative attitudes. Among the reasons identified for this were:

- poetry was a neglected part of the curriculum
- poems were part of topic work, with an emphasis on content rather than form or author
- poetry had been used as a filler, and pupils realised it did not warrant 'prime time'
- photocopies of poems from anthologies were used and boys had little awareness of individual poets
- boys had enjoyed the fun, bounce, rhythm and sound of nursery rhymes, but this pleasure had been lost since poems used in class often included archaic language and subject matter which they saw as irrelevant
- copying out in neat handwriting and then illustrating poems was unpopular and was regarded as a girls' activity.

This and subsequent work revealed that:

- boys' interest in poetry is improved by making it a 'doing' subject rather than a 'receiving' subject
- the teaching and learning strategies used influence children's responses to poetry
- boys disliked listening to poems. They preferred to read poems themselves in small groups and then be involved in quick-fire question and answer sessions, discussion, drama and performance
- the use of texts as models for writing, and the teaching of specific techniques for generating ideas and improving poems, proved helpful for all pupils.
### Case Study

**Pupils' views of activities in English at Key Stage 4**

The teacher identified 19 activities in his GCSE course, and used a proforma to find out what his pupils liked or disliked, and which they would have liked to spend more or less time on. He found:

- watching videos (of plays and novels) was most popular with both boys and girls
- many boys liked writing about their own experience, class discussions, group discussions and creative writing
- no boys liked reading poetry, writing poetry or drafting, and few liked oral presentations, information writing, 'unseen' reading or reading plays
- many girls liked creative writing and structured class discussions
- girls preferred to write imaginative stories
- girls did not favour information writing, note-taking, 'unseen' reading and oral presentations.

The survey was small, but it suggested that the GCSE course, linked to the national curriculum, the examination and the department's literature-based approach, naturally favoured girls.

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**Teachers' and students' preferences in A level English Literature**

In a study of four single-sex independent schools with broadly selective intakes, students of A level English Literature and their teachers were interviewed about a number of aspects of the course. Among the findings which have implications for boys' attitudes and achievement were:

- one school offering a modular course weighted the course towards drama as it "reduces the amount of lengthy novel reading required" and "many pupils find poetry very difficult"
- other schools chose to offer Chaucer 'as a matter of principle' without regard to the experiences and preferences of students
- while a small number of students said they enjoyed all genres of literature, most named a preference which reflected the emphasis of genre offered on their course. Boys preferred drama and then prose, reflecting the small amount of poetry studied. Although few girls chose poetry as their preference, in the school where most poetry was studied more girls placed it first on their list.

The students' choices reflected their classroom experience, and teachers' preferred genres affected students' views. This is likely to influence recruitment and success in A level English Literature.
Much can be gleaned by looking at samples of pupils’ work, especially when focusing on specific aspects of performance. Two main types of information can be gleaned from samples of writing:

- the breadth and depth of the curriculum experienced by pupils
- the nature and quality of the writing by different pupils.

To assess the balance in writing, a sample can be drawn from a relatively short period of time. For example, it might be based on all the writing done by boys and girls in a three-week period or over half a term. Questions could include:

- What range of writing has been set in terms of purposes, forms, intended readership? Does it offer equal interest and challenge to both boys and girls?
- Why has the writing been set? What is the intended learning? Has this been achieved?
- Where pupils have been given choices, what have they opted for? Do these options relate to gender?

Answers to these questions will reflect the curriculum on offer to pupils and how far it may be a fair entitlement for boys and girls.
To assess the quality in the writing, a number of possible lines of inquiry may be used, including:

In narrative
• What are the stories about?
• Do boys give greater emphasis to action and plot?

In non-narrative
• How are ideas presented or arguments made?
• How is supporting evidence used?
• Do boys write more knowledgeably and succinctly?

Use of words and sentences
• Is there a range of sentence constructions, including co-ordination and subordination? Are some constructions more evident in boys’ work?
• Do girls use more adjectives and boys more active verbs?

Technical accuracy and presentation
• Are there differences in the accuracy of spelling and punctuation in narrative and non-narrative, and do these relate to gender?
• Is boys’ work generally more untidy?
• Is girls’ work usually longer?

Overall quality
• What are the strengths of the writing of particular pupils, and what are their areas of weakness?
• Does the boys’ writing have typical characteristics and are these different from the girls’?

Similar analyses can be done using samples of pupils’ work on reading. Here the focus is on evidence of breadth and balance in the reading diet, and of particular reading skills, such as inference, questioning the text, and commenting on use of language. Evidence for speaking and listening is less easy to collect, but teacher and pupil records could be considered to identify any gender-related patterns.

This is a very valuable means of establishing the picture, since it enables teacher/pupil interaction to be examined closely. It enables good practice to be observed, analysed and disseminated, and ineffective practice to be identified and avoided.

A great deal goes on in any one lesson, and therefore it is important to go into the class knowing the focus of the observation. Areas on which to focus include:

The amount of time spent on-and off-task
• For example, do particular groups spend a greater proportion of time doing what they have been asked to do? Are there particular teacher strategies that appear to be more successful at keeping pupils engaged in work? How do successful teachers get pupils back on-task?
Patterns of grouping in the class
• For example, which methods of grouping appear most successful, and for what kinds of work? When pupils make their own choices of grouping, what kinds of patterns emerge and what are the consequences for the amount and quality of work done?

Behaviour and performance in discussion
• For example, are there differences between the topics favoured by boys and girls? Do boys and girls show different strengths and weaknesses in discussion? Are there patterns in boys' and girls' talk?

The pattern and nature of teacher intervention
• For example, how are new ideas or tasks introduced? How does the teacher intervene to improve the quality of group discussion? Do some interventions appear more effective with boys or girls? How does the teacher help pupils with planning, drafting and editing written work? How does this affect boys' and girls' performance?

case study

Boys’ and girls’ approaches to the writing process in a primary school

In one primary school, boys and girls of similar ability were paired and asked to complete three writing tasks: a narrative, some instructions and a piece on the relative merits of wearing school uniform. These tasks were set without models, and the teachers wanted to discover whether boys, as ‘risk-takers’, would respond more confidently to writing instructional and discursive material for which they had no model.

The girls seemed comfortable with the paired writing process, readily discussing and redrafting all three pieces. The boys, on the other hand, were not so keen to discuss their ideas for narrative, although they were more at ease with the other two tasks. The boys used their partners as technical advisers, commenting on spelling, punctuation and characters’ names. The girls applied similar processes to planning and structuring their instructional and discursive pieces (i.e. devising characters, setting and sequence), but the boys were aware of the need for a different structure. They did not, however, see the need to plan this type of writing, seeing ‘the writing process’ as something reserved for story.

The teacher speculated that as narrative was the central focus of reading in class this could have contributed to their assumption that it was the most important genre, and therefore the only one which required planning. A wider range of texts is now read aloud.
**Case Study**  
Boys' classroom behaviour observed in a secondary school

In an 11 to 18 comprehensive school, following an OFSTED report which highlighted differences between boys' and girls' achievements overall, a teacher investigated differences in classroom behaviour between boys and girls in a range of subjects. Results showed that:

- overall, boys were more frequently off-task than girls
- the incidence of boys' off-task behaviour was high
- there appeared to be a correlation between off-task behaviour and GCSE results; in five out of six subjects boys were more off-task than girls and performed less well in examinations
- the frequency of staff praise or criticism was low
- there was less off-task behaviour when pupils worked in mixed groups.

**Case Study**  
Skilled reading for learning in an 11 to 16 school

In an 11 to 16 comprehensive school, teachers investigated how learners used their reading. They found that effective learners analysed and used texts in different ways, using a range of reading techniques, whereas poorer learners simply started at the beginning of the text and read it through to the end. Further investigation showed that weaker learners (mostly boys) did not know when they had failed to grasp an important aspect of the learning. Teachers then began to include explicit work on reading skills and to support pupils in their use of different learning strategies.

The school's Learning Resource Centre provided data on the ways in which pupils tended to use the centre. Despite regular lessons on how to use the Dewey and cataloguing systems, it soon became apparent that both boys and girls searched for texts in a random fashion and did not employ useful search strategies.

The Head of English commented: 'Although this situation could be quite easily remedied in terms of the selection of fiction texts, it raised questions for other subject areas where pupils may need to draw upon research skills they do not really possess.'
If there is general agreement about an area of concern about boys’ performance in school, it is helpful to collect information from different sources to identify the exact nature of the issue. For example, secondary schools have identified underachievement of boys in literacy in Years 7 and 8 as a problem, and some primary schools find it difficult to move boys’ reading skills on from a basic level and notice a plateau in Year 4.

Relevant information includes aspects of the curriculum offered and experienced, the pattern of behaviour in class, the groups in which pupils work, any assessments of their ability in English, and their commitment to the work. The following are possible areas for investigation:

- Does the range of reading offered include the kinds of material which boys enjoy?
- How are boys encouraged to gain satisfaction from reading and writing?
- How are more challenging texts successfully tackled by boys?
- Do boys miss opportunities to take active, problem-solving approaches to reading and writing?
- Which texts, in a range of subjects, seem to present most problems?
- Are boys taught explicitly to transfer skills in reading and writing to new contexts and all subjects?
- Are these boys receiving less attention in class?
- How are their oral contributions to lessons handled?
- How do they feel about their achievements in English?
- Are they working in groups which both encourage and challenge them?
- What are the patterns of results in any assessments of literacy/reading?
Schools have access to far richer data on pupil achievement than ever before. They can now make detailed analyses over time and compare patterns of achievement with those in schools with similar or different profiles of intake. In many cases, the data also allows detailed analysis of the relative performance of boys and girls, including comparisons of overall achievement and patterns within it. If properly examined, good data may highlight whether boys in general underachieve; whether this underachievement is spread across all ability groups or focused at certain points along the spectrum; and whether boys from particular social or ethnic groups perform particularly well or poorly. This kind of data can then provide the impetus for action.
CHAPTER 5

Taking immediate action

Having established the picture, priorities for action should be agreed. It is important to focus most intensively on those aspects of performance that appear to be critical in holding boys back.

The OFSTED report suggested some clues as to what might be significant ways to tackle the issues:

- a key factor in the attitude of boys was the relationship with, and performance of, the teacher
- where reading was well taught and private reading encouraged, the gap in interest in reading between boys and girls narrowed
- the choice of topics for writing tended to reflect stereotypical differences, but this was less marked where work was directed by the teacher to a clear purpose
- boys improved when they had a clear understanding of what to do in order to make progress
- boys benefited from well managed oral work
- no differences were detected in the quality of boys’ and girls’ speaking and listening. Boys, particularly in lower ability groups, tended to dominated discussion
- boys rarely discussed or wrote about affective aspects of experience or about their feelings
- drama was popular with boys
- boys and girls tended to work separately in classes, and opportunities for mixing groups were often missed. Pupils of both sexes accepted mixing when the reasons were explained and where the tasks set were well organised and purposeful.

Action should focus on a particular language mode or on aspects of boys’ attitude and approach to learning, such as:

- raising levels of reading fluency, together with the profile and prestige of reading as an activity in school
- planning classroom work which builds systematically on the strengths of boys and remedies their weaknesses
- ensuring that assessment systems are fair, accurate and recognise a full range of achievement rather than, for example, only narrative reading and writing
- changing boys’ attitudes so that they work with greater vigour and effectiveness.

There are many possible areas for immediate action and it is important to choose for maximum effect, bearing in mind that some aspects take longer to change than others.
Straight away teachers can change the nature and balance of activities in the classroom, set clearer targets for pupils, change groupings and seating arrangements or set up out of class activities which aim to tackle specific issues. Planning should include targets, a timetable for action and criteria for evaluation such as:

- specific improvements in the ability to write in particular forms or for particular purposes e.g. persuasive writing, as assessed by the detailed analysis of written work
- an increase in the levels of fiction borrowed from the library
- improvement in time spent on-task by boys as observed in lessons.

To achieve these targets changes may involve:

- the balance of classroom activities
- how activities are set up
- tackling boys’ attitudes and commitment
- the status of reading and writing in school
- assessment procedures and target setting.

The rest of this chapter makes suggestions under each of these headings and gives examples of approaches schools have already tried.

The case studies here illustrate how patterns of boys’ work can be changed after looking hard at the real balance of classroom activities and patterns of interaction or reading habits. The teachers in these schools thought again about the diet their lessons offered and adjusted it within the existing planned curriculum, rather than re-planning major parts of their provision.

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**Varying classroom talk in 3 mixed comprehensive schools**

Work with Year 10 pupils explored some of the perceived differences between the talk of boys and girls. Initial questionnaires revealed that the pupils themselves were well aware of these differences. They were then given a series of contrasting group tasks intended to encourage the exchange of personal anecdotes, taking on of roles, answering questions about a text and completing a challenging writing task. Pupils worked in both single-sex and mixed groups, and clear differences emerged in the ways boys and girls responded with each other and to the differing tasks.

The work confirmed that there are advantages for both boys and girls in experiencing a variety of grouping and a broad and varied diet of speaking and listening activities structured to offer support. Boys benefit from more opportunities to talk about themselves in a serious way and from being explicitly taught effective strategies for collaborative, reflective and useful discussion. Girls could benefit from working with people who take more risks in their use of language and ideas.
Changing activities on texts in a middle school

Computer printouts of library borrowing in a middle school showed that the majority of boys were borrowing only non-fiction. The librarian reported that when boys had borrowed fiction, they returned it quickly because they had 'given up'. During lessons, most of the set texts were read aloud to the class by the teacher and followed by the pupils. This gave access to texts for some, but allowed others to switch off because they were not actively involved with the reading. Reluctant boys showed greater interest when pupils worked collaboratively in groups on a range of structured tasks related to short stories which had been selected to appeal to boys in particular. There was no reduction in interest from girls.

Group reading in a primary school

In a small rural primary school with mixed age classes, boys at Key Stage 2 were doing less well than girls in standardised tests, were reading less fiction than girls and were expressing some negative feelings about reading fiction. The teacher introduced group reading sessions where pupils worked in mixed groups which each contained some boys who were reluctant readers of fiction and others who were more enthusiastic. A high quality story likely to appeal to both boys and girls was chosen, and a series of activities was set up to encourage the pupils to develop critical reading before, during and after working with the text.

The teacher still noted differences in boys' and girls' expectations of the story and approach to the tasks, but felt that some of the boys developed a more positive attitude towards fiction and some new reading approaches and strategies.
The booklet Boys and English, published by Wiltshire Education Support and Training, makes the following suggestions for changes to reading activities:

- extend the range of activities which your pupils are asked to perform with texts, to incorporate the critical and analytical as well as the personal and empathetic. Develop a problem-solving approach to 'the way that texts work'
- plan for a wide range of outcomes to reading charts, graphs, other visual representations, oral presentations
- recognise and validate the range of private reading texts that the school cannot provide
- devise short reading lists which are focused on different genres, to encourage boys to extend their reading within clear guidelines
- establish a system of targets and a way of recognising achievement in independent reading
- build in time to discuss reading preferences, guide choices and set targets.

Encourage boys to interview girls
- teach reading strategies systematically and explicitly. Review how your department teaches pupils to:
  - read backwards and forwards, to get a sense of the whole passage
  - make notes and jottings while reading
  - highlight or underline key words
- ask questions about what they don't understand relate what they are reading to similar texts
- scan the text for key sections or words draw together key points and summarise ideas
- ask `what sort of text is this?' `what effect is the text aiming to have on me as a reader?'
- sequence or represent information or ideas in another format pause periodically to review meaning and check understanding decide what to accept, and what to query or modify

- establish group reading as a regular activity at Key Stage 3. Boys respond positively to the extra responsibility and group target setting, will offer more tentative and exploratory ideas in a small group, and are more likely to sustain their reading.

Some teachers felt that they needed to tackle how boys could be helped by altering approaches to tasks in the classroom rather than overall balance or diet. In line with this they changed how some aspects of English were taught to ensure that boys had better access to the learning aims and participated fully.

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**Case study**

**Different approaches to comprehension in Year 2**

One Year 2 teacher found that the boys in his class performed as well as, and in some cases better than, the girls when he changed his habitual 'comprehension' activities by:

- providing individual copies of more interesting or intriguing non-fiction texts, some in visual form
- setting tasks based on the texts which involved pupils in cutting, sticking, drawing and assembling pictorial cues
- structuring tasks to provide a sequential way of dealing with information in the text.

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**Case study**

**Structuring activities in nursery classes**

One teacher felt that boys seemed less aware of what was expected of them. Boys 'need to be told what to do', 'you have to give them rules', 'it's better if they know procedures, or else they don't seem to know how to behave or what is expected'. For example, in hospital role play, patients don't walk into hospital and get straight into bed, so the teacher insisted that the boys checked in at reception and took turns at being receptionists and clerks. Incorporating the computer into this added realism and made the activity more attractive.
A group of Key Stage 2 teachers met to discuss the different ways in which boys and girls approach extended writing activities. They felt that boys were much less willing than girls to apply themselves to drafting and re-drafting so some of them paired boys and girls to work together on planning, supporting each other’s writing and giving feedback. They also gave the pairs clear structures and time constraints within which to complete specific writing tasks. They found that girls benefited from the boys’ adventurous use of language and focus on technical aspects of writing, while boys gained from the structured approach to planning and attention to detail which girls brought to the task.

The teachers considered the influence of both the mixed pairings and the tight structure. They also identified a need to develop the teaching of writing, planning frameworks, links between pupils’ reading and writing, and a broader range of types of writing task. They saw that a more coherent approach gives a better experience of writing to both boys and girls.
Tackling boys’ attitudes and commitment

Demonstrating the significance and usefulness of skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing is important for boys. This can be done, as in the first case study, by showing how relevant and important reading and writing skills are in the world about us. Another approach is to challenge explicitly the roles and expectations boys adopt and to consider how stereotypical behaviour can inhibit success. Praise and reward for tasks completed and valuing their distinctive contributions are also important in improving boys’ attitudes. Reinforcement of the importance of these skills across the curriculum is also likely to improve boys’ motivation.
Involving boys in literacy in Reception

A Reception class teacher was aware that children in her group had begun to develop an interest in environmental print, often drawing parallels between letters in their names and notices in the classroom. She wanted to build on this development, and at the same time strengthen links between ‘school’ reading and reading in the home. A collection was made, with the children’s help, of packets and wrappers with which most of them were familiar, such as Kit-Kat, Walker’s Crisps, Wispa and Hula Hoops. The teacher made them into an alphabetic wall display, covered in plastic and mounted within the children’s reach. Discussion about ‘difficult’ letters helped the children to recognise that some letters are used frequently and others more rarely.

Children quickly began to talk about buying the products in shops with their parents. They recognised that this classroom reading experience could be repeated outside it. They compared the letters in their names with the letters in the alphabet. They asked for the display to be taken down so that they could play with it, mixing the alphabetic order and rearranging it correctly, and playing a ‘who’s got what’ game. Converting the role play area to a shop fed the interest. Boys were eager to participate, and their use of language associated with print noticeably increased.
Pupils' reading and writing can be valued in many ways, including displays, writing in the school magazines, performances, awards and other events. One school organised a day a term when pupils opted for different activities including the option to visit interesting places with a local writer. In this case reading or writing was seen as something to be positively chosen, rather than a chore associated with lessons. Since boys like to see direct reasons for reading and writing, this can be reinforced in how a school communicates internally. Pupils learn that they need to act on what they read or write in order to obtain something, and this reinforces the usefulness of these skills.

case study
Swap Day in Key Stage 1

One teacher of a mixed Years 1 and 2 class wanted to encourage boys to do more drawing and writing in the classroom, and girls to gain a wider experience of construction materials. One day a week for a limited period she put up notices before the children arrived. ‘Girls’ Construction Day’ and ‘Boys’ Writing and Drawing Day’.

In their choice time the boys grumbled quietly and the girls made no comment. However, in spite of the grumbling, it was immediately apparent that each ‘swap’ day her directions were observed. Girls did complex work with the construction materials, with much talk and mutual learning, and boys did likewise in writing and drawing. They proudly shared their work at the end of the day.

The teacher felt uncomfortable that she was drawing attention to the stereotypes, but she felt the benefits outweighed the disadvantages. Swap Day enabled her to discuss the stereotypes with the children and later they began to use the classroom equipment more flexibly.

The status of reading and writing in schools
A Reception class teacher identified that boys were much more reluctant to write than girls, showing little interest in writing as a free choice activity and having generally lower levels of attainment from school entry onwards. Investigations revealed that pupils had opportunities to write in a very limited range of forms, with the teacher as reader. This writing usually consisted of one-off pieces which were not looked at again by either teacher or pupil, and there were no opportunities to use writing in the context of imaginative play.

The role play area in the classroom was developed as a pet shop, to tie in with the current topic. Boys worked in small groups with an adult on writing tasks associated with the shop, including making labels, posters, pet care leaflets and price tickets. Models of each text type were provided and discussed, and the pupils were encouraged to write independently, making connections between their existing knowledge of written language and the task in hand.

The boys were motivated by this activity and performed well, showing that they had a good understanding of the nature and purpose of some types of writing which they had acquired from experiences outside school.
Where assessment procedures are detailed, they are likely to be more helpful in terms of identifying specific targets and informing curriculum planning. It is important that they are detailed enough to be able to see patterns of achievement within English, so that there is recognition of what boys do well and areas for improvement. Boys respond more positively when they are involved in setting specific targets, rather than being given a general injunction to `do better'.

**Case Study**

**Detailed assessment and specific targets**

In developing their teacher assessment systems, one group of teachers felt that it had become important to value and comment on pupils' progress across a wider range of attainment. Their reports are now based on assessment of written work, classroom observation and interviews with pupils. They cover a wide range of factors including pupils' thinking skills, their ability to compose writing in a range of forms and styles, the accuracy of their writing, their skills and behaviour as speakers and listeners, their reading habits and their attitude to work. Examples from teachers' notes include:

- ‘Reading pattern now established – beginning to read a little every day.’
- ‘Reading journal – likes writing comments on books read. Feels he has chosen books well.’
- ‘Enjoyed writing up brochure entry because he was able to write in short paragraphs straightaway.’

In the light of these observations, teachers were able to set individual and specific targets that were accepted and understood by pupils. These included:

- **Write shorter pieces that are carefully researched and drafted.**
- **Build up private reading to 20 minutes a day.**
- **Improve handwriting – with help from learning support team.**
- **Ask more questions in class.**
- **Change working groups with the aim of increasing concentration in lessons.**
CHAPTER 6

Taking longer-term action

As well as making changes in the short term, it is necessary to consider more structural or longer-term arrangements. For example, it might be helpful to re-examine how sets or groups are formed, to plan a sequence of activities and units of work which will cater more explicitly for boys' interests and develop specific skills, to arrange for parents to be involved in an initiative related to reading, or to ensure that all subjects implement a consistent approach and demand.

Each stage of the initiative should be monitored against agreed criteria for improvement. For example:

- specific improvements over a set period of time in measured levels of reading or spelling
- improving and maintaining the involvement of boys in activities such as the school play or magazine
- involving fathers in home-school reading and writing agreements, and checking their involvement at regular intervals.
- improvements in GCSE or test results. This could be targeted more closely on particular grades - more A*, move pupils from E to D, or ensure pupils at the top of one level progress to the next one

The initiative should have a clear time-scale, and responsibility for its implementation should be assigned to named individuals. The role of the head teacher, other teachers, governors, parents and outside agencies should be carefully considered, negotiated and agreed.

Finally, the success of the initiative is likely to rest on the amount and quality of time that can be given to it. The purpose of setting priorities is not to add to the existing burden. It is to decide what will be concentrated on now, what may have to wait until later and, perhaps most difficult but important of all, what may need to be dropped as a priority in order to make the time available.

In the rest of this chapter there are examples of initiatives undertaken which have been planned and evaluated over the medium to long term.
Offering support to pupils who are vulnerable or have identified needs is clearly necessary and important. Boys of all ages are more likely to be identified as in need of help with literacy than girls. Similarly, boys’ attitudes and commitment to academic work more often give cause for concern. It is important to be clear about the focus for support and what it is expected to achieve. For example, withdrawing pupils for more help with basic skills may not be successful if the pupils do not see any point in reading and writing. Arrangements for mentoring pupils so that they have better role models and more individual attention may be more useful in these circumstances, but will do little to help a pupil who still has difficulty extracting meaningful information from a text.

The ways in which pupils are identified for additional support is important. If the only measures used are standardised test scores, this may lead to neglect of abilities which boys show in reading non-fiction texts. If presentation of work rather than content is a significant factor in assessment, this may lead to discounting what boys can do and focusing on unhelpful ways of trying to improve their work.

Where boys are identified as in need of extra support or at risk of failing, then the nature of the support offered should be carefully considered. If the general classroom work becomes more structured, with smaller steps and shorter-term targets, then support staff to help boys get into routines and succeed with them may be of greater long-term benefit than withdrawal for separate activities. There is evidence that some pupils regress in aspects of literacy at the transfer from primary to secondary. Support should be targeted at these aspects. For example, if increased demands on pupils for lengthy, continuous writing means they struggle to keep up their standards of spelling and punctuation, then they need help to ensure that they have strategies to cope with the new demands, rather than repetitive spelling exercises which do not reinforce the correct use of words in their own writing.
One teacher observed Michael, a six-and-a-half-year-old who has had difficulty in beginning to learn to read and write. He is one of the youngest children in his Year 2 group. Last year his Year 1 teacher was sufficiently worried about him to initiate SEN monitoring. His main problem seemed to be a reluctance to engage with print, and he frequently became distressed when asked to read or write. His parents were anxious to support him, but were uncertain how to do so.

In the morning his teacher asked him to draw and label that day's weather. Michael worked in a group of six children with support. In spite of being in this small group and talking about what the teacher had asked him to do, he found it impossible to comply, becoming increasingly anxious and upset.

Later in the day he drew a ship, and asked if he could move to the technology area and make a model. When his model was finished he painted a picture of it, of which he was very proud. When he showed it to his teacher she asked if he would write a story about his ship. He found a piece of pink paper and sat down beside a friendly visitor whom he knew. He wrote very quickly, and in a concentrated, almost fierce way, sounding out letters and sometimes checking with the adult.

'The bot and the myc'
The myc waz sildn The BOT uv The woT on a sunc oj a The myc puT The ac (up)'

The boat and the monkey
The monkey was sailing the boat over the water on a sunny day and the monkey put the anchor up.

Twice during the writing of this story the teacher announced that it was time to go out to play. Michael continued to write. He could read back his story without hesitation. It has a title, and the episodes are arranged in strict order of time. He was able to discuss his story and talk about what might have happened next. He had been given room to motivate himself and experience success. The contrast with his efforts earlier in the day is marked: the difference between the two writing experiences is striking.
Recently there have been a number of mentoring schemes, which can be particularly helpful to combat the lack of value placed on academic success in boys' culture. Mentoring by older pupils of younger ones, by teachers or by members of the wider community is an important way of providing role models. In choosing mentors, boys' particular needs should be considered carefully.

**Case Study: Mentoring in Key Stage 3**

In an 11 to 16 comprehensive school, where achievement at GCSE is markedly above the national average, staff identified that the low status of achievement and commitment to work was a key factor in boys' relative underachievement. It was decided to set up a mentoring scheme to tackle the issue.

Twenty Year 7 boys (four from each class) were identified at the end of the first half term. They were chosen by their English teachers as boys who showed interest and potential against a number of indicators, but who may be vulnerable to peer pressure. The project was then run jointly by English, mathematics and science teachers. Extensive information on the attainment and working habits of the boys was recorded, and evidence included Key Stage 2 assessments, an LEA-wide 10+ test score and teacher assessments against agreed criteria. Two boys from each class were chosen at random as the focus group and the other two became the control group. The eight pupils chosen were monitored closely in terms of attainment and attitude. They were interviewed in depth each half term and new and specific targets for improvement were set.

The mentored pupils have remained firmly committed to English and there has been no decline in their attitude or progress in comparison with mathematics or science. They have considerably exceeded the expectations of teachers based on previous years' evidence. The project provides a model for a targeted and selective approach to mentoring which could be extended more widely through the school.
Grouping or setting policies can have a significant impact on achievement and to be fully effective they must be based on sound and clearly thought-out criteria. Arrangements should be related to detailed assessment procedures, be regularly reviewed and their impact scrutinised. Both intended and unintended consequences of the groupings should be taken into account.

**case study**

**Changing groups in a middle school**

In one 9 to 13 middle school, pupils experienced literary texts as a whole class activity where the teacher read aloud to the class, and some pupils were less involved than others. The pupils were placed initially in single-sex groups of about four, mostly by attainment but some by friendship, with the purpose of creating a group entity. Later, mixed-sex groups were introduced. The groups were given autonomy by being given self-sufficient packs of tasks and choice as to the order in which they would read the stories and whether the group would read aloud or silently. Each group was also encouraged to ‘network’ their favourite story, choosing how to do so.

In Years 7 and 8, all the boys previously identified as reluctant readers of fiction showed that they were absorbed by the reading. The teachers felt that these boys were well supported by their groups when they had difficulties, and this increased their confidence as readers. There was no decline in the motivation of the girls and they also benefited from the structured nature of the tasks, which helped them to condense and focus their answers.

In Years 5 and 6, mixed-sex groups worked better for both boys and girls than single sex-ones, in which some pupils found it difficult to abide by group decisions. Some of the boys, particularly in Year 5, found it hard to cope with the self-discipline required for the group to achieve the set objectives. In mixed-sex groups, the reluctant boys were helped by the group to pace their work and keep on-task.

The deliberate grouping of pupils according to different criteria continued to be part of classroom planning, and the staff regularly reviewed the impact of the grouping arrangements.

**case study**

**Flexible groupings in secondary English**

One secondary English department agreed to adopt a more flexible setting policy which would allow for variations from one year to another. In some years, for example, two equal top sets were created in Year 10, two middle and one lower. The following year there were two top sets, one middle and two lower groups. These setting arrangements were felt to be more responsive to pupils’ perceived ability and potential. The blocking of English lessons on the timetable also enabled the department to experiment with more flexible arrangements. At times during the year, classes were re-divided to meet differences in interest, focus or more specifically identified needs.
Given how early the issues of boys' achievement in English become apparent, it is vital to take action as soon as possible. The involvement of parents, particularly fathers, in their children's development is important. The predominance of female staff in early year's classrooms means that boys have few models, and building in high expectations of boys' learning in literacy should be a priority. These case studies suggest some ways this can be done.

An 11 to 16 comprehensive school found that its top English sets were populated by diligent girls, while the bottom sets contained large numbers of boys. In order to change this pattern, the way in which teaching groups were arrived at was altered. Year 7 was arranged in mixed-ability classes, but in the other years a list of pupils was drawn up using assessments and test scores to establish a rank order from the most to the least able. This list was then divided into notional teaching groups of about 28, producing two sets of four classes. Using the computer, groups one and two, three and four were blended. This resulted in each group having a spread of ability and a better gender balance. Minor adaptations were then made to the composition of each class in terms of social groupings and so on.

Once the composition of teaching groups had been altered in this way, it was agreed that all register lists would be alphabetical, thus avoiding separate groupings of boys and girls. Observation of classroom activity showed that pupils tended to arrange themselves by gender and that, for the most part, two separate populations existed within each class. Teachers sought to alter this pattern by insisting that boys and girls sat in mixed clusters rather than large, single-sex groups.

Starting in the early years

A group of five nursery teachers from different schools planned to carry out observations of children during activities which involved making up stories. Before the observation they discussed their perceptions about the differences between the story content of boys' and girls' play. They thought that:

- boys were less likely to develop stories through play
- boys' play involved more action, with characters falling, jumping, knocking and banging. The actions were often repetitive and the mainly female staff viewed this type of play as dangerous and stopped it
- boys used fewer words in their play and rarely described what was happening. They often used imitative noises and single words, e.g. 'fight', 'jump'
• boys seemed to be influenced by television more than girls, with play often based on television characters and series. Their understanding of the characters appeared to be limited to one characteristic, e.g. Superman flies, Turtles fight.

The teachers felt that nursery staff generally disapproved of television characters and series and they reacted to related play based on it by stopping it, diverting it or ignoring it.

Close observations of both boys and girls, in single and mixed-sex groups and at different ages, led the teachers to think again about their earlier perceptions. They found that:

• boys and girls both used elements of story in their role play, small world play, send, water and construction, but that these elements were not always developed into stories
• boys' stories were indeed more action-packed and less verbal than girls', but the boys seemed to have a clearer picture in their own minds of what the characters were doing than teachers originally thought
• when boys and girls of older and younger children played together, there was likely to be more development of the play or story
• the quality and range of resources (such as play people, cars, animals and objects from familiar stories) were influential in encouraging story-making
• the mix of children's abilities and personalities was important – groups which included an obvious leader or a popular 'ideas' person developed stories and sustained play
• younger children and those who were unable or unwilling to communicate their play were observed developing stories through their actions
• there was rarely a conclusion to the stories. Children just moved to another activity or were distracted. When an activity was available for several days, children tended to return, repeating parts of the story and introducing new characters or actions.

The teachers decided to start intervening in the children's play in order to extend it. One teacher commented: 'I am beginning to realise they need the opportunity to develop stories, to understand how to make a story and to know that they have done so.'

One teacher joined in two four-year-old boys' play with toy animals, then asked them to tell a story which she wrote down. The written story was about the same characters but was a different story. Later the boys incorporated elements of the written story into their play.

Another teacher observed one four-and-a-half-year-old boy drawing a map, then he and another boy the same age flew round the room dressed as Superman, falling about and making noises. Nothing more seemed to be happening, so she asked about the map and its purpose. This elicited the telling of quite a complex story which hadn't been obvious in the physical
play. The next day the teacher was ready with folded paper to make that day's play into a book with a beginning, middle and end, which the boys were able to identify. They drew pictures and decided on a title. The teacher talked to them about the characters and told them they were the authors and illustrators. The book was then shown to the other children at group time and read as that day's story.

The teachers also encouraged children to:

- make up new stories about well known characters in picture books and to turn them into books
- add more to stories read aloud
- use 'props' to illustrate the re-telling of a story
- take turns in making up a story using the 'props'
- use toy animals and puppets to tell a story (successful with children for whom English is an additional language)
- share books they have made with other children
- tape-record stories made up in play activities and play them back at group time
- act out well known stories, sometimes using the words of the written version.
When they talked about their work later, the teachers felt that they needed to:

- allow time for children to develop stories and return to familiar activities over several days
- observe, monitor and evaluate children and their activities in order to inform their interventions and planning
- build children’s confidence as story-tellers and story-makers by letting them know they are making up stories and, when appropriate, taking them further
- consider if they were missing out important stages if they asked children to recount stories from their play – was it more helpful to scribe or record them and give them back first?
- find ways to draw children’s attention to the elements and structure of stories
- develop their own use of story-telling, including the use of a wider variety of characters and subjects
- develop their intervention by providing appropriate resources, introducing children to a wide range of resources and recognising and valuing the story in a variety of situations
- think about the messages they give, in particular to boys, about their choice of characters and subjects – does it matter who or what the story is about? Are only certain types of character and story acceptable to teachers?
- think about when and how they intervened in children’s imaginative play – do teachers assume too soon that boys’ play is aggressive?
- allow children to choose the story and bring stories from home more often than they had done
- include stories of television characters in their own story-telling and making.

The initial questions these teachers asked led them to try out a variety of interventions. They learned that it was necessary to incorporate this new repertoire into their normal teaching activities and to change some of their assumptions about boys’ play.
One nursery teacher observed that when children were given a choice of activities, the boys tended to choose sand and water and construction activities. The girls dominated the recording and mark-making activities, though sometimes in a passive fashion, with an emphasis on copying writing. By contrast, the boys who did join in literacy activities were eager to talk, participate and ask questions.

Among many new initiatives designed to extend the literacy experience of both boys and girls, including the linking of reading and writing, the teacher:

- provided writing materials with clipboards in each area and outdoors, so that writing was integral to riding bikes (MOT tests) and supermarket shopping (writing cheques), as well as in the existing ‘Office’ area

- encouraged the writing of ‘messages’ which required an answer by providing a display board at children’s height where messages and answers might be left

- modelled writing for the children by responding to children’s messages and talking to them about her paperwork, explaining its purpose

- provided parents of children who had no writing materials at home (mainly boys who had had them withdrawn after writing on wallpaper and furnishings) with crayons and computer printout paper from school.

Drawing and writing materials were increasingly used in the classroom. The teacher began to demand recording in the construction area in either drawing or writing. Role play proved a rich source of inspiration by providing a range of purposes for writing, such as notes for the milkman, tickets for the bus and notices for the house.
The teacher of a Year 2 class in a first school had noticed that boys seemed to prefer non-fiction and to read from a restricted range of genres both at home and at school. He tried to extend the range of both boys and girls by:

- adding a wide range of good quality books to the existing classroom book stock
- modelling the reading of a short novel, including using a bookmark, between reading sessions
- encouraging each child to use their woodworking skills to divide an existing bookcase and form an individual book storage space for themselves (this also enabled him to monitor their choices more easily)
- asking children to choose a maximum of three books from the classroom to place in their space, then talking to the class about their choices
- after two weeks, encouraging children to bring in reading material from home, which did not have to be a book, and talking about it
- allowing children to change the material whenever they wanted, but stipulating that they should have three books at a time, of which only one should be from home.

He also explored the children's choices in more depth by creating a 'focus group' of three boys and three girls representing the range of reading ability in the class, with whom he talked about book choices, home reading habits, and a collection of new non-fiction books borrowed from the Schools Library Service. Two of the boys chose books from this collection which were too hard for them to read independently, but were of great interest to them because they related to their out of school experience. The teacher made sure that books on these and the boys' other interests were included in the next collection he borrowed, and the boys duly selected them for their individual collections.

Monitoring book choices by 2 classes, revealed that:

- modelling the reading of a short novel initially influenced children's choices – they chose short novels even when they were too difficult to read independently, and spontaneously made their own bookmarks
- boys selected more non-fiction books than girls
- when boys had a choice of more than one book, they selected books from a wider range of categories than girls
- boys, especially the less able readers, used non-fiction books in a co-operative manner
- the subject matter of the non-fiction books that boys chose gave insights into their personal interests and experiences which the teacher felt could be built upon to sustain interest in reading
- the narrow range from which some girls selected their reading was a cause for concern.
Many of the initiatives discussed in this chapter have implications for permanent and ongoing curriculum and assessment provision. There is also a place for specific projects which provide stimulating and motivating contexts for pupils and contribute to positive recognition of success. These projects can be fitted in at appropriate times of the year, perhaps when additional adults are available. The case study described here involved a member of staff working from the local university working alongside the class teacher. Taking advantage of temporary arrangements does not obviate the need for targeting and planning the project, and if it is repeated adjustments can be made in the light of experience.

The range of reading at Key Stage 1

One member of the group explored the reading habits of boys nearing the end of Key Stage 1 who were regarded as successful readers and writers. She found that, contrary to popular wisdom, they did not have a marked preference for non-fiction, and enjoyed a wide range of types of reading material. They all read fiction, both at home and at school, and they all also read comics and books based on television cartoons and series, but only at home. These pupils read eagerly, but only what was available to them. Their teachers were reluctant to encourage the reading of comics and materials based on popular culture, and so these items were unavailable in school.

She comments: 'It must be remembered that the buying of texts is controlled by teachers, and that to establish sales, publishers of children's books must give attention to this audience. Provision obviously influences choice, and provision is controlled by female adults.'

The teacher in the nursery later reviewed the classroom book stock and began introducing comics, newspapers, football magazines and materials with TV connections. Books were divided with some care and placed in science, role play and construction areas as appropriate, and adult readers circulated round all of these areas when pupils were using them. She also introduced other initiatives designed to broaden all pupils' experiences of literacy.

The rate of book borrowing increased generally and children began to use non-fiction books as a basis for planning work in the construction area. Both boys and girls enjoyed the more varied materials the teacher was able to provide. The children recognised hobby magazines from home and were very pleased to see Barbie, Sonic the Hedgehog and others. Boys who had never before given book materials a glance tried to solve the puzzles with their friends. Boys were to be seen carrying a favourite story around for a whole session.
Six Year 8 boys in a comprehensive school who were disaffected readers took part in a project in which the class was asked to choose books suitable for pupils two years younger than themselves. These boys had very different characteristics, including one who was a very reluctant reader, another with reading problems, a statemented pupil with severe learning difficulties, a restless boy who showed both learning problems and attention-seeking behaviour, a newcomer to the school, and potentially the most able boy in the class who often underachieved in lessons.

Voluntary reading is not unquestioningly accepted by all pupils, and when reading development depends solely on independent, sustained silent reading, those most disadvantaged are the pupils whose need for reading practice is greatest.

This project had a number of aims, including, for the Year 8 pupils, to:
- create a purpose for reading, encouraging concentration by emphasising a shared performance element
- allow them to read a range of books a little below their chronological age, thus supporting the group of boys whose reading was less than fluent
- give an opportunity to read aloud in a safe environment, enabling both good and weak readers to evaluate their own abilities
- give pupils the opportunity to put themselves in another reader’s shoes
- offer tangible ‘rewards’ both in an off-site visit and from the obvious interest and pleasure expressed by the younger pupils

The aims for the Year 6 pupils were to:
- increase their knowledge of books and how to choose them
- provide positive role models for reading and reading aloud
- create purposes for sharing and talking about books
- create a purpose for writing to the older pupil
- give them contact with the school and pupils they were to join the following year
- help to create conditions for a continuity of focus in reading.

The majority of the project work took place during four afternoons, with some additional lessons which gave flexibility to the activities and allowed enough time to visit the local primary school.

In the first session the Y8 pupils were asked to evaluate the appropriateness of a range of books for Y6 primary pupils. At first they were asked to assess the appropriateness of a book assigned to them at random from a selection of teenage fiction, light poetry and books for readers beginning to gain fluency, such as *Jets and Boomerangs*. The emphasis was on accessible, popular fiction, rather than on the more demanding books that were being studied as readers in class. A range of information books was provided for those who preferred non-fiction and...
Extra curricular activities

As part of improving boys' achievement and attitudes, it is important that they experience some high-profile success in relevant activities. These activities need to be accorded a similar status to, for example, sporting success, as the school takes trouble to create an ethos in which creativity and self-expression are overtly encouraged. There are numerous ways in which this can be encouraged, including:

• arts festivals, including verbal and visual arts
• book weeks
• poetry readings
• projects where pupils use speaking, listening, reading and writing to communicate to others beyond the school gates
• drama, dance and musical performances
• involvement in community groups and services
• writers-in-residence.

These activities can play a major role in creating audiences and purposes for pupils' speaking and listening, reading and writing. They are likely to extend the range of language needed and used by pupils, and create contexts for exploring ideas and emotions.

In the second session the Y8 pupils tested the suitability of their selection by taking a book to the primary school. They showed a younger pupil how they had made their choice using the cover, bibliographic details and the blurb. They recorded their discussions with the younger pupils on a questionnaire.

The details of the Y6 choices were brought back to the Y8 classroom and discussed. Some Y8 pupils had chosen inappropriate books for their younger reader. New books were carefully chosen and in some cases had to be ordered to meet a particular need. Homework time was used for reading more books and making better choices. The Y8 pupils were very eager to take the new books home, and the teacher reported that they had spent concentrated periods reading them.

Before the third session, the Y8 pupils discussed how skilful readers could make their reading sound more interesting and drew up a set of criteria for improving their own reading aloud. They then read aloud in pairs, considering each other's performance and offering advice. Again they followed up the reading in school with homework in which they took books home to practice their reading.

The third afternoon was spent video-recording each pupil reading, which proved a turning point in motivating the reluctant boy readers by adding an element of performance. The recording was used with agreed criteria to judge each pupil's performance constructively and to analyse readings that had been particularly successful. Pupils wrote their analyses in their English work books.

The Year 8 pupils returned to the primary school the following week to read aloud to the younger pupils for thirty to forty minutes. The books were then left with the Y6 pupils to finish for themselves and they were asked to write a letter commenting on the books chosen. Back in the comprehensive school, the Year 8s spent another session discussing their experience of the project with the researcher and their teacher.

The Year 6 pupils sent their partners a letter commenting on the suitability of the books and the reading performance. These were very well produced and gave the Year 8 pupils constructive feedback.

The project was popular with girls as well as boys. One girl remarked at the end of the project: ‘Perhaps we could choose books for the nursery class next time – if we started them off that young we could give them an even better start.’
Extra curricular activities

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Appendix 1

Recent publications

These are some of the most recent relevant publications:

Boys and English Pack, QCA, 1997; obtainable by telephoning the English team 0171 229 1234

National Literacy Trust Database; available on Website
www.literacytrust.org.uk, for details contact the Trust at 0171 828 2435

Reading the Difference  Myra Barrs, 1993. ISBN 18722 6705X.


Boys and English - Wiltshire Education Support and Training, 1997. £7.00 ISBN 0 86080 3287. Available from WEST Publications, County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge BA14 81B.


Raising Levels of Achievement in Boys - R. Arnold, Education Management Information Exchange/NFER, 1997. Available from EMIE, The Mere, Upton Park, Slough SL1 2DQ, £2.75 (includes p&p), cheques only payable to NFER.


The Relative Performance of Boys and Girls - OHMCI, 1 997. Available from OHMCI, Phase 1, Government Buildings, Ty Glas Road, Llanishen, Cardiff CF4 SFQ.
Appendix 2

National Curriculum tests and GCSE results

KS1 teacher assessment 1997 and 1996 - percentage at each level per attainment target

Percentage for level 4+ for years 1997 and 1996 was 0.
KS1 tests 1997 and 1996 - percentage at each level per attainment target

Percentage for level 4+ for years 1997 and 1996 was 0.
KS2 tests and teacher assessment 1997 and 1996 - percentage at each level
KS3 tests and teacher assessment 1997 and 1996   Percentage at each level

Please note that level B4 in teacher assessment is the combined sum of level 3 and below.
GCSE English Literature 1997 - Percentage of boys and girls at each grade

Please note that all 1997 data are provisional.
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