

**EVALUATION REPORT ON
COUNTERING UNDERACHIEVEMENT,
ESPECIALLY IN BOYS**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Caerphilly CBC, 2010–2011

January 2012

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SECTION A: BACKGROUND TO THE EVALUATION STUDY

1 THE DIFFERENTIAL PERFORMANCE OF BOYS AND GIRLS

- 1.1 The differential performance of boys and girls has been a matter of concern for more than two decades. During that period, boys have fallen considerably behind girls in educational performance. In particular, National Curriculum assessments and other tests have consistently shown that by the age of seven, girls perform better than boys in reading, writing and spelling.
- 1.2 The tables set out in Appendix 1 illustrate the extent of the difference in Wales at Key Stages 3, 2 and 1, in the period 1998 to 2010. The gap between the performance of boys and girls has persisted in this period despite the improvement in the performance of both. By 2009/10 girls were moving further ahead of boys in both maths and science, subjects which, in the past, boys had traditionally done better in.
- 1.3 As illustrated above, the phenomenon of boys' relative underachievement at Key Stage 3 is reflected at Key Stages 1 and 2; it is also the case at GCSE and, to a lesser extent, at A level. In 2010 the difference between boys and girls achieving the level 2 threshold was 10.2%.¹
- 1.4 The underachievement of boys has also contributed to fewer boys remaining in full-time education post-16 at schools or FE colleges. The growing gap between the performance of boys and girls at A level has contributed to the declining percentage of boys entering university to such an extent that girls now constitute 56.6% of entrants.²
- 1.5 For more than two decades the relative underperformance of boys has been a feature of the educational system in Wales and many other countries. The gap between the performance of boys and girls in maths and science is relatively small but in the arts and humanities (i.e. English, Welsh, modern foreign languages, history, art and music) the gap is often double digit. This has serious consequences for boys and young men with respect to future opportunities in further and higher education, and indeed employment.
- 1.6 These issues and their implications have been documented in several reports and studies, including two reports by ESTYN in 1997³ and 2008⁴ and an action research report by the School of Education, Cardiff University, in 1998. The most recent consideration of the problem and how to tackle it was a report of the Equalities Task and Finish Group published in 2011.⁵ The report analyses the extent of the differential performance and its implications, and recommends strategies to the Welsh Government for countering underachievement in boys in schools throughout Wales.

¹ Equivalent to five or more GCSEs at A*–C but including all pre-16 approved qualifications

² See <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/1897/706/>

³ Survey on the relative performance of boys and girls

⁴ Closing the gap between boys' and girls' attainment in schools

⁵ Final Report to the Welsh Government, September 2011

2 CAERPHILLY CBC: A STRATEGY FOR SKILLS

2.1 In 2009/10 the local authority undertook considerable developmental and consultative work on the skills agenda and organised a series of awareness and skills acquisition courses and workshops. The local authority framed its approach as follows:

- a) *In order to make a significant impact on educational standards, and to enable all learners to succeed in their main learning programmes, Caerphilly CBC has identified the need for a broad and all-encompassing skills strategy. For this reason, rather than using the more limited terms of 'literacy' and 'numeracy', we have adopted a set of aims which relates more broadly to learners' competence in learning which encompasses thinking skills, language, number and ICT.*
- b) *Learners who experience difficulty in developing and using these skills often have a range of personal, social and emotional needs which can act as barriers to their progress in learning. As teachers and managers, we therefore also need to increase the emphasis given to the so-called 'softer skills' that enable learners to work independently, to relate to others and, above all, to find purpose and enjoyment in their learning.*
- c) *Consequently, alongside the implementation of the skills strategy, Caerphilly will be developing a definition of 'learner wellbeing' and implementing strategies across all phases to ensure that learners feel positive about their learning, are able to achieve their goals and progress successfully to higher levels of education, training and employment.*

3 CAERPHILLY CBC INITIATIVE ON COUNTERING UNDERACHIEVEMENT IN BOYS

3.1 When this skills development work was at an advanced stage, the Director of Education and Leisure, Sandra Aspinall, had discussions with Alan Evans, Senior Research Consultant to the School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University, on the need to further improve and extend literacy strategies, and the contribution that strategies concerned with countering underachievement in boys might make to an overall literacy improvement programme in schools in Caerphilly. It was recognised that the differential performance of boys and girls in Caerphilly followed a similar pattern to the Welsh average at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 and GCSE grades A*–C, but that in some schools the differential was considerably higher. This was acknowledged as a further cause for concern.

The first round of workshops

3.2 In the summer term of 2010 the local authority decided to complement its work on skill acquisition and development by establishing an initiative on Countering Underachievement Especially in Boys. The local authority had at the same time agreed to participate in a programme organised under the auspices of Basic Skills Cymru called 'Continuing Professional Development in Basic Skills Teaching', and agreed that in the case of Caerphilly the

workshops envisaged would focus on the module entitled 'Boys' literacy – closing the attainment gap'.

- 3.3 In the light of this decision and subsequent discussions with Martin Williams, former Secondary Adviser, it was decided to organise three training workshops to be held at the ESIS Centre, Nantgarw, in the latter part of the autumn term 2010 and the spring term 2011. From the feedback received from the participants involved in the programme, the workshops were successful in meeting the module aims, including identifying a range of strategies and resources for improving the learning of boys.

The second round of workshops

- 3.4 In the second half of the summer term 2011, the local authority organised three more initial training workshops on countering underachievement in boys for a new cohort of 41 schools (see Appendix 2). The workshops involved 33 primary and 8 secondary schools, with an average of over 20 practitioners attending each workshop. The workshops included sessions on awareness raising and whole-school strategies, as well as sessions led by practitioners drawn from schools which had already implemented strategies to counter underachievement in boys. Following the initial training workshops, the headteachers and their staffs established the initiative within their respective schools, using a range of strategies as set out in 6.14 below.
- 3.5 In November 2011 the local authority arranged two dissemination workshops for schools to report progress on implementing strategies over the past three to four months. The progress reports involved inputs to a plenary session by three practitioners from different primary and secondary schools. The practitioners reported on the impact of the strategies on the learning of pupils; on the professional skills and repertoires of the teachers and TAs directly involved; on school organisation, including planning and resource allocation, and on the overall impact of the initiative on the literacy strategies of schools. In addition, there was a dissemination session in which teachers and senior managers from each school attending the workshop organised a display of their curriculum materials, as well as tables, bar charts and graphs to illustrate the gains in pupil learning which had been achieved over the past three to four months.
- 3.6 The workshops sought in particular to highlight the language and communication skills that might play a crucial role in helping to counter underachievement in boys, as well as the classroom and whole-school strategies that might help in implementing an effective intervention in the participants' schools.

SECTION B: THE EVALUATION STUDY

4 INTRODUCTION

- 4.1 Early in the spring term of 2011, the local authority decided that it would be beneficial to school managers, literacy coordinators, teachers, and the school system as a whole, to establish an Evaluation Study to assess the impact of the workshops scheduled for the summer and autumn terms. The local authority advisers (Martin Williams and Keri Cole) suggested that this form of professional accountability would contribute data which would facilitate deeper understanding of the intervention and would play a profound part in influencing future strategies for learning and in particular improved literacy programmes in schools throughout Caerphilly. The local authority advisers discussed the remit of the evaluation study, the key instruments to be used by the evaluators, the timetable for the study and the scope and content of the final evaluation report.
- 4.2 This evaluation report seeks to describe and clarify the impact of the strategies, and to assess the qualitative and quantitative impact of the intervention on pupils' learning, on the effectiveness of the programmes and activities, and how they in turn impacted on TAs, teachers, literacy coordinators, SENCOs, other senior managers and headteachers within the schools.
- 4.3 The evaluators were required to analyse data from interviews, questionnaires and PowerPoint presentations, as well as materials developed by practitioners in the schools involved in the intervention. The remainder of this report seeks to analyse, understand and synthesise the wide-ranging findings arising from the data.

5 METHODOLOGY

- 5.1 The following methods were used to collect data for the evaluation report:
- One-to-one and group interviews were conducted with the key players involved, including the local authority's secondary adviser and the primary senior adviser, headteachers, deputy headteachers, literacy coordinators, teachers and TAs in the participating schools. The interviews were conducted in November and early December 2011.
 - Two questionnaires were designed and sent electronically in early November to all schools involved in the intervention: one for headteachers and one for teachers. The completed questionnaires were returned electronically to the local authority at the end of November.
 - Observation of participants' inputs during five training events at the ESIS centre in Nantgarw.
 - Analysis of documents relating to the project, including training materials, resource packs and school-produced materials (e.g. posters, games, quizzes, jokes, etc.)
 - Analysis of the quantitative data (including reading test results) gathered by the schools involved in the intervention.

5.2 The evaluation study has focused on the impact of the intervention on the pupils, the TAs, the teachers, the literacy coordinators and the senior school managers directly involved in implementation of the strategies in the participating schools. The evaluation study has also considered, in so far as data allowed, the indirect impact on headteachers and the staff as a whole (including TAs and volunteers).

SECTION C: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

12 CONCLUSIONS

- 12.1 The major conclusion arising from the data collected for the evaluation study is that the training workshops and the subsequent implementation of strategies, programmes and activities in the primary and secondary schools extended considerably the pedagogic repertoire of the staff involved. They engaged in innovative activities and programmes which, in turn, led to improvements in pupils' standard of literacy (particularly in respect to boys). The headteachers, deputy headteachers, SENCOs, literacy coordinators and teachers directly involved in the intervention strongly believed that considerable strides had been taken to counter underachievement in boys in the three to four-month period between the initial workshops and the dissemination workshops.
- 12.2 The schools attending the May and the two July workshops in 2011 also expressed the view that the strategies had contributed considerably to raising the self-esteem and self-worth of the boys directly involved.
- 12.3 The senior managers and teachers affirmed that imaginative use of IT resources improved motivation, confidence and the capacity of the boys to use language, and to be more comfortable about their involvement in literacy programmes and activities.
- Enhancing pedagogic techniques**
- 12.4 Selecting, designing and implementing new strategies into the curricular, extra-curricular and assessment regimes of their schools posed several challenges to senior managers and teachers alike. The skills repertoire of the teachers concerned and the use of pedagogic techniques have been extended through the planning and implementation of the new strategies. Many schools chose to emphasise how the improvement in teaching had made lessons more interactive and more engaging, and this has been particularly so in respect to boys.
- 12.5 Improved planning and the use of different teaching techniques were cited by many headteachers and deputy headteachers as a salient feature of the initiative. The improved planning led to more pupil-centred lessons, which in turn led to better use of IT. There was also a growing shared perception amongst practitioners that boys and girls learn differently, and that there was a need for this difference to be reflected in teaching techniques and curricular arrangements in the classroom. It was also recognised that addressing these differing styles of learning had implications for extra-curricular activities in which pupils engage.
- Changing the culture**
- 12.6 In many schools there was clear evidence that there has been a change in culture, which has manifested itself in several ways, including the fact that reading and writing is no longer considered to be a girl-related activity.

- 12.7 In one secondary school all the teachers have become teachers of English, and new standards of punctuation, spelling, syntax and grammar have become accepted as the norm. The written work in all subjects within the school is now monitored on a regular basis and the standard of writing has improved across the curriculum.
- 12.8 The strategies have given many schools a new direction and the building blocks of a different culture. In a majority of schools the boys have become much more positive and more enthusiastic about reading. They have extended their relationships in the school so that they no longer relate only to the class teacher but also to the TAs, the SENCO and the literacy coordinator. A larger professional literacy team has therefore come within the ambit of the boys' learning.

Structural issues

- 12.9 Changes in structural organisation within classrooms (innovative seating plans designed to augment learning) and within libraries (boys' zones) have been made in order to influence the commitment and participation of boys. In addition, pupils are acting as assistant librarians, particularly the boys. New mixed classes have been formed of pupils who are one or two years behind their chronological age in order to follow an enriched literacy programme involving one-to-one, small-group and whole-class strategies.

Not just another initiative

- 12.10 The majority of the schools involved recognise that countering underachievement, especially in boys, is not just another initiative but is a core activity concerned with improving the literacy of boys (and to an extent girls), as well as improving learning in general. The development and successful implementation of the strategies can fundamentally improve and extend the professional skills of teachers and thereby enhance the capacity of schools to promote high standards of literacy.

Professional development of teachers and teaching assistants

- 12.11 Senior managers and teachers alike believed that their professional skills and confidence had been enhanced through involvement in the initial training workshops, the subsequent feedback in their respective schools, and the implementation of new strategies within their classrooms, across key stages and subject departments. The shared goal of raising standards in literacy and making lessons more interesting and engaging was a challenge which evoked a ready response from teachers and TAs. Meeting these challenges has led to significant opportunities for professional growth and development which practitioners have taken full advantage of. This approach to teaching and learning has been a major factor in helping teachers involved in implementing the strategies become reflective practitioners.
- 12.12 Fashioning, developing and implementing the strategies has added to the innovative capacity of the teachers involved in the intervention in many schools. Teachers are more willing to look at and experiment with different styles of teaching: they have developed a more adventurous approach and are more willing to take risks, particularly in the use of drama.

Whole-school approaches

- 12.13 In almost all primary schools and to a lesser extent secondary schools, the outcomes and expectations from the initial workshops were reported to the whole staff, often led by the headteacher, or the deputy head, or the head of literacy. In several schools there is now a commitment to roll out to the whole school successful strategies which have been trialled, in particular key stages or within particular departments, over the past three to four months.
- 12.14 The sharing of good practice and dissemination from an external training event such as the initial workshop was cited by many as an important factor in improving teachers' pedagogic techniques and extending their pedagogic repertoire.

School collaboration

- 12.15 Those involved in the intervention shared the view that senior managers and teachers gained from learning about the experiences of other schools in implementing the strategies and seeking to improve learning. They found mixing with teachers from other schools to be professionally and institutionally enriching. Several schools maintained that they would collaborate for the remainder of the year to strengthen the professional development of their respective staff's and to help ensure improved outcomes for their pupils.

Planning

- 12.16 In many schools, planning to improve the literacy of boys and to develop and refine a range of strategies has taken on a new dimension, with leadership from the headteacher, the deputy head, the literacy coordinator or other staff with specific roles in the school. Improved lesson planning includes the better use of AfL and AoL. Teachers are asked to reflect on how engaging their lessons are, and have developed a good sense of training design and how to move from innovation to implementation in institutions.

Pupil voice

- 12.17 Several schools highlighted the importance of asking the pupils for their views on activities, including buying and selecting books, acting as reading buddies in the lower part of the school, undertaking facilitation and other activities outside the classroom, and helping to define what constitutes success in particular activities or programmes. The pupil voice has influenced the approach of many schools and has contributed to improved learning.

Quantitative gains

- 12.18 Most of the schools considered that the strategies which they have implemented improved the learning of boys and girls, the benefits including heightened motivation, improved self-esteem, greater confidence, and a greater interest in and enjoyment from reading on the part of boys. In most schools it was too early to provide quantitative evidence of the impact of the strategies, but in one primary school which established a reading club for boys there were gains of 21 months, 15 months and 3 months for individual pupils who had only been involved in the club for three months.

- 12.19 In another primary school a reading enrichment programme has resulted in a cohort of 13 pupils making gains of up to 24 months in eight weeks. This intervention led to boys showing an enthusiasm for reading, which was certainly not the case beforehand.
- 12.20 In another primary school, the intervention was so successful that boys were now outperforming girls in all but one class at Key Stage 2.
- 12.21 In a secondary school with one particular cohort there was an average gain of 13 months in six months, using the Catch Up programme.

Implementation of strategies

- 12.22 The range of strategies to counter underachievement in boys which have been developed and implemented in various schools were derived from the following sources:
- activities, programmes and other interventions already in use in some form in the school before the initial training workshops were organised
 - pedagogic, structural and cultural strategies set out during the initial workshops
 - strategies being used in other schools involved in the workshops and then adopted (or adapted) by schools seeking appropriate and productive strategies.

The strategies are fully listed in Appendix 3.

13 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 13.1 That the Caerphilly CBC should consider disseminating a suitably contextualised list of the successful strategies to all primary and secondary schools within the Authority.
- 13.2 That all schools which have not participated in the first or second round of workshops should be invited to a third round of initial training workshops, spearheaded by a lead trainer and practitioners from the previous round of workshops.
- 13.3 That the local authority should collect a bank of materials (hard copy and electronic) to support schools in implementing or further developing strategies to counter underachievement in boys, particularly in literacy.
- 13.4 That the local authority should establish a small team of advisers and practitioners who would offer consultancy (including training) to schools in Caerphilly who might be considering a 'roll out' of pilot strategies (KS1, KS2, department, lower school, etc.) for countering underachievement in boys to enable them to implement them in the school as a whole.
- 13.5 That the Director of Education and Leisure should consider organising a major conference for headteachers and other experienced practitioners from schools in Caerphilly on Innovative and Effective Strategies in Countering Underachievement, Especially in Boys. National and international experts

should be invited to the conference to offer keynote presentations and lead some of the workshop sessions, with a view to publishing a report on significant initiatives and successful interventions throughout the world.

Appendix 1: Comparison of achievement by gender at Key Stages 3,2 and 1

Source: National Assembly Statistical Release 126/2009 and 122/2010

Key: E: English W: Welsh M: Maths S: Science

Table 1: Relative percentages of boys and girls in Wales achieving level 5 or higher at Key Stage 3

	1998/1999			2007/2008			2008/2009			2009/2010		
	E/W	M	S	E/W	M	S	E/W	M	S	E/W	M	S
Boys	54/63	61	58	62/64	71	72	63/67	72	74	65/68	74	74
Girls	71/79	64	60	77/80	74	76	78/83	75	78	80/85	77	80
% diff	17/16	3	2	15/16	3	4	15/16	3	4	15/17	3	6

Table 2: Relative percentages of boys and girls in Wales achieving level 4 or higher in teacher assessment at Key Stage 2

	1998/1999			2007/2008			2008/2009			2009/2010		
	E/W	M	S	E/W	M	S	E/W	M	S	E/W	M	S
Boys	61/57	68	74	75/72	80	84	76/73	80	84	77/76	82	84
Girls	73/70	70	76	85/82	83	88	87/86	85	89	87/86	85	89
% diff	12/13	2	2	10/10	3	4	11/13	5	5	10/10	3	5

Table 3: Relative percentages of boys and girls in Wales achieving level 2 or higher in teacher assessment at Key Stage 1

	1998/1999			2007/2008			2008/2009			2009/2010		
	E/W	M	S	E/W	M	S	E/W	M	S	E/W	M	S
Boys	76/83	83	84	78/85	85	88	78/87	85	88	78/87	85	89
Girls	86/91	88	88	87/92	89	92	88/93	89	92	88/93	90	92
% diff	10/8	5	4	9/7	4	4	10/6	4	4	10/6	5	3

Appendix 2 : Primary And Secondary Schools Involved In The Project

Primary

Abertysswg Primary School
Bedwas Junior School
Cefn Fforest Primary School
Coed y Brain Primary School
Crumlin High Level Primary School
Cwmcarn Primary School
Cwmfelinfach Primary School
Derwendeg Primary School
Gilfach Fargoed Primary School
Glyn Gaer Primary School
Graig-y-Rhacca Primary School
Hengoed Primary School
Libanus Primary School
Maesycwmmmer Primary School
Markham Primary School
Park Primary School
Penllwyn Primary School
Plas-y-Felin Primary School
Pontllanfraith Primary School
Rhiw-Syr-Dafydd Junior School
Rhydri Primary School
St Gwladys Bargoed Primary School
St James Primary School
The Twyn Primary School
Tyn-y-Wern Primary School
Upper Rhymney Primary School
Ysgol Bro Sannan Primary School
Ysgol Gymraeg Cwm Derwen School
Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Allta School
Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Caerffili School
Ysgol Ifor Bach School
Ysgol Penalltau Primary School
Ysgol Gymraeg Trelyn

Secondary

Bedwas Comprehensive School
Lewis School Pengam
Newbridge School
Oakdale Comprehensive School
Pontllanfraith Comprehensive School
Risca Comprehensive School
St Martin's Comprehensive School
Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni

Appendix 3: Strategies deployed by the schools involved in the project

Pedagogic

- Catch Up – reading recovery programmes
- Comic clubs
- Drama (e.g. Macbeth Kills the King, The Highway Man)
- Extracurricular activities, e.g. visits to the Millennium Stadium, St Fagan's Folk Museum, and the promotion of boys' participation in choirs
- Focus on individual pupils to secure improved learning outcomes
- Mentoring by teachers and TAs as well as by individuals external to the school
- More emphasis being placed on boy-friendly topics, such as the Olympics, World War II
- Poetry competitions between boys and girls
- Quizzes, word games, debates involving competitions between boys and girls
- Reading buddies and paired reading
- Reading clubs (Clybiau Darllen), including Kindle Reading Clubs
- Speaking and listening – development of interpersonal skills
- Storytelling, role play, conscious corridor, babble gabble
- Study support and homework clubs
- The Big Write
- Using IT resources to review pupils' work
- Writing clubs
- Writing improvement classes

Structural

- Creation of reading corners, boxes and themed areas
- Extracurricular activities, e.g. visits to the millennium stadium, St Fagan's Folk Museum, and the promotion of boys participation in choirs
- Improving library facilities and involving pupils in the management and organisation of libraries
- Innovative seating plans – mixed gender, mixed ability, etc.
- Investment in ICT, e.g. Apple Macs, iPods, iPads and visualisers
- 'Bore Da', 'Cip' and other materials developed by the Urdd
- Magazine Monday
- Organised visits to public libraries
- Visits to bookshops and newsagents by pupils (accompanied by their teachers), to purchase books and magazines
- Reading carousel
- Reading clubs (Clybiau Darllen), including Kindle Reading Clubs
- Study support and homework clubs
- Subscription to weekly newspapers and magazines for children

Cultural

- Comic clubs
- Creating opportunities for practical elements of the curriculum to be delivered outside of the classroom

- Mentoring by teachers and TAs as well as by individuals external to the school
- Reading buddies and paired reading
- Reading clubs (Clybiau Darllen), including Kindle Reading Clubs
- Role models – brothers, fathers, uncles and grandfathers (and also male teachers and learning support assistants)

Some of the strategies set out above are repeated under more than one heading as they straddle the three domains of teaching and learning.