

Closing the education attainment gap for boys at secondary school

CCoT June 2024

Mike Bell

Lead researcher, all-party group inquiry 2023

About me

- Former teacher (secondary science)
- Training sessions and book on evidence-based methods
- Men&Boys issues
- APPG

What's an APPG?

- Voluntary group. MPs and Peers
- Advantage: Chair speaking to minister has more weight than individual MP or external group.
 - Triggered Select Committee to do it's own inquiry.
 - Experts invited. Minister willing.
 - Election cancels everything!

This inquiry

- Boys' Educational Underachievement
- Data: every age, ability, demographic
- UK, US, Canada, Australia
- Not just education: prison, drug abuse, NEETs

The research

Disappointing:

- Graphs and data
- Some: no contact with boys
- Some: small intervention, pre and post tests by researcher
- No large-scale trials
- Blaming 'harmful stereotypes of masculinity'.

Ministers' responses

- Parliamentary questions about boys:
- replies are gender-neutral.
- (problem of boys not acknowledged)

Teachers are the experts

- Mailed 18,000
- 4 positive responses from secondary (3 more since)
- They gave presentations
- We compiled lists of their interventions
- Cross-checked with them.
- They agree!
- (They hadn't read the same research/book)

EEF criteria for good evidence

- In a school
- Representative sample of schools and pupils
- Control groups for comparison
- Evaluation:
 - Standardised tests
 - Meaningful time period (eg KS2 to KS4)
- Reproducible

Most of the research did not meet these criteria. The work of these schools, when compared to other schools or their past results, does give us reliable data.

Myths:

- **Make it 'boy friendly'**. finding adventure books or having more competition.
- **Focus on 'masculinity'**. telling boys they are 'toxic'
- **Find the 'silver bullet'**. there isn't one thing
- **More male teachers.** more male teachers is a good thing in itself, there is neither evidence that boys learn better with a male teacher nor that female teachers cannot provide discipline.
- **Smaller classes.** When the cultural change outlined by the school leaders was implemented the successful schools found they did not need to use smaller classes to deal with disaffected students or poor behaviour.

Guidance summary

- <https://equi-law.uk/guidance-for-schools/>
- Equi-law.uk and choose 'Boy's education' tab.

Good news

- There is a solution

What they did

- 16.10 Culture and Ethos: Diane Henson
- 16.20 Building Relationships and Home-School Links: Caroline Barlow
- 16.30 Building Literacy: Deneen Kenchington & Oliver McVeigh
- 16.40 Behaviour and Consequences: Andy Eadie
- 16.50 Q&A

- ends