

# White boys from low-income backgrounds: good practice in schools

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This is a report on a small survey of good practice in the education of white boys from low-income backgrounds. It does not cover all aspects of the subject or claim to be a full review of related reports and studies of these pupils.

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Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6SE  
T 08456 404040

[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

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## Introduction

1. In the autumn term of 2007, Ofsted undertook a survey in 20 schools across England where white British boys from low-income backgrounds performed better in public tests and examinations than their counterparts in other schools. The schools were identified from inspection evidence and discussion with local authorities. They included six primary schools, 10 secondary schools, three special schools and one pupil referral unit. The survey focused on white British boys whom the schools identified as being eligible for free schools meals or who came from households where the income was estimated to be well below the national average.
2. Ofsted's report *Narrowing the gap* showed that the biggest challenge in this country is to reduce the gap in opportunities and outcomes between relatively advantaged children and young people and those who have to cope with the highest levels of disadvantage.<sup>1</sup> *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector 2006/07* drew attention to 'recent data analyses and research studies which confirm the close association between poverty and low educational achievement, with pupils from low-income backgrounds continuing to perform less well than more advantaged pupils.'<sup>2</sup>
3. In 2007, 62% of the Year 6 pupils eligible for free school meals achieved the expected level in the national tests in English at the end of Key Stage 2, with 60% of pupils achieving this level in mathematics, and 75% in science. The white boys in this group, the majority of them white British, did slightly less well in English (55%) but performed at a similar level in mathematics (61%) and science (75%). For pupils not eligible for free school meals, the figures were 83%, 80% and 90%, respectively. In the 2007 GCSE examinations the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals gaining five or more A\*–C grades was 36%. Of the white boys in this group, only 27% gained these levels compared with 59% of the boys not entitled to free school meals. It is clear that the association between poverty and underachievement remains strong and that white British boys from low-income backgrounds continue to make less progress than most other groups.<sup>3</sup>
4. *Narrowing the gap* showed that 'disproportionate numbers of deprived pupils attend inadequate schools'. However, it also noted that 'there are many instances of highly successful schools in areas where pupils are from

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<sup>1</sup> *Narrowing the gap: the inspection of children's services* (070041), Ofsted, 2007; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070041](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070041).

<sup>2</sup> *The Annual Report of her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2006/07*, Ofsted, 2007; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/20070035](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/20070035).

<sup>3</sup> *National Curriculum assessment, GCSE and equivalent attainment and post-16 attainment by pupil characteristics, in England 2006/07*, DCSF, 2007; [www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000759/index.shtml](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000759/index.shtml).

communities with high levels of deprivation'. This report focuses mainly on schools such as these to identify and describe their good practice. However, some schools were in non-deprived areas where white British boys from low-income families were in a minority but still performed creditably.

5. The examples of good practice are grouped under the following questions that inspectors asked schools during the survey.
  - What teaching and learning strategies work best to raise standards?
  - How do schools promote the personal development and well-being of white boys from low-income backgrounds?
  - What do schools need to do to understand and meet the needs of white boys from low-income backgrounds?
  - How do schools support white boys from low-income backgrounds to become independent learners?
  - How should schools make use of increased flexibility in the curriculum to support white boys from low-income families?
  - How should schools seek to engage parents and carers?
  - How should institutions make the best use of resources?
  - What are the roles of others beyond the school in helping to personalise teaching and learning?
6. The examples illustrate some of the methods that the schools used to improve the educational experiences and achievements of white boys from low-income backgrounds.

## What we know

7. Schools that are successful in raising the attainment of white boys from low-income backgrounds have these features:
  - an ethos which demonstrates commitment to every individual and which treats staff and pupils with fairness, trust and respect
  - consistent support to develop boys' organisation skills and instill the importance of perseverance; any anti-school subculture 'left at the gates'
  - rigorous monitoring systems which track individual pupils' performance against expectations; realistic but challenging targets; tailored, flexible intervention programmes and frequent reviews of performance against targets
  - a highly structured step-by-step framework for teaching, starting with considerable guidance by the teacher and leading gradually to more independent work by the pupils when it is clear that this will enhance rather than detract from achievement
  - a curriculum which is tightly structured around individual needs and linked to support programmes that seek to raise aspirations

- creative and flexible strategies to engage parents and carers, make them feel valued, enable them to give greater support to their sons' education and help them make informed decisions about the future
- a strong emphasis on seeking and listening to the views of these pupils
- genuine engagement of boys in setting individual targets, reviewing progress, shaping curricular and extra-curricular activities and making choices about the future
- key adults, including support staff and learning mentors, who are flexible and committed, know the boys well and are sensitive to any difficulties which might arise in their home
- a good range of emotional support for boys to enable them to manage anxieties and develop the skills to express their feelings constructively
- strong partnership with a wide range of agencies to provide social, emotional, educational and practical support for boys and their families in order to raise their aspirations.

## Teaching and learning strategies

8. It was clear from their policies that the schools in the survey were committed to ensuring that all learners, not just boys, made good progress. Headteachers and senior managers set high expectations for pupils and staff. Relationships were very positive, with all pupils and staff showing high levels of respect and regard for each other. The following were typical comments made to inspectors:

'The teachers never give up on you.' (Year 11 pupil)

'We get on well... they give us time... it's easy to talk through things.'  
(Year 10 pupil)

9. The schools had thorough systems for monitoring individual pupils' progress and identifying achievement or underachievement. They used information about pupils' past performance effectively to set targets which they reviewed regularly. Senior teachers monitored the quality of teaching and learning in each subject carefully and were quick to tackle underperformance. Teachers regularly talked about pupils' targets in lessons and pupils had electronic access to data on their own progress.
10. The most successful schools visited tackled underperformance as soon as it was identified, employed additional staff to give extra support to pupils where necessary and regularly evaluated the impact of the intervention strategies used. These included:

- one school involving small groups of Year 7 pupils in the 'Opening minds' course and placing the same teacher with the same group for 19 out of 25 lessons to ensure continuity of experience and to help gain pupils' trust and respect<sup>4</sup>
  - another school changing the way that pupils were grouped from lesson to lesson and regularly ensuring the classroom was arranged most appropriately for the learning activities to be undertaken
  - a third school using trained teaching assistants to provide additional support for pupils with literacy problems from the beginning of their time at the school, so that they quickly improved their reading and general literacy skills.
11. Boys from low-income backgrounds made better progress when teachers took account of their individual interests and preferred ways of learning. In one school a group of boys receiving free school meals identified what aspects of lessons they liked best. These included 'active' involvement in the lesson; explicit individual learning targets to aim for; tightly controlled lessons which led to clear improvement and progress; 'well-managed discussions'; and 'approachable teachers who showed they cared'.
12. In the most successful literacy activities, teachers took great care to choose texts that interested the boys. These tended to focus on action-packed narratives which emphasised sporting prowess, courageous activities in the face of danger, and situations – often historical – where the main characters had to overcome challenges of one sort or another. It is recognised that such strategies, though successful in these cases, are not a panacea for teaching white boys and could easily lead to stereotyping. These schools based their lessons on highly effective monitoring, tracking and assessment procedures which indicated clearly how different approaches were likely to succeed in individual cases. Teachers also made good use of drama and art to promote writing skills.

In a Year 8 lesson, boys discussed the novel *Stone Cold* by Robert Swindells to explore what they would want to take with them if they were leaving home for good. Among the items they identified were medication, money, family photographs, sleeping bags and mobile phones. Each group noted its ideas on a laptop before sharing them with the whole class. The boys showed high levels of motivation throughout the lesson and some were inspired to go back to the text to read it in more detail.

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<sup>4</sup> The Royal Society of Arts' 'Opening minds' programme focuses on developing a range of skills for life, including skills for learning, the ability to manage people and situations well and good citizenship. It is based on a competence framework that 'aims to meet the individuals' needs in the personal, social and employment worlds'. For further information, see [www.thersa.org/projects/education/opening-minds](http://www.thersa.org/projects/education/opening-minds).

A teacher used a freeze-framing technique to stimulate discussion. She asked a group of boys to set up a scenario and then stay very still, concentrating on making sure that their expressions did not change. The rest of the class then suggested words to describe those expressions. This led to a considerable expansion in the pupils' vocabulary which they were able to exploit in further written work.

13. Boys were encouraged by being involved in government initiatives such as Aimhigher and courses and groups for gifted and talented pupils.<sup>5,6</sup> Where suitable, the schools entered boys early for GCSE or equivalent examinations to reinforce the message that they could achieve. In the most successful cases, schools were careful to ensure that their gifted and talented cohort was representative of the whole school population by gender, ethnic and socio-economic background. In this way, appropriately gifted and talented white boys from low-income families were included.

## Supporting white boys from low-income backgrounds to become independent learners

14. The schools which were effective in raising the achievement of white boys put a great deal of emphasis on ensuring that pupils' basic skills and concepts were secure as a strong foundation for further learning. They adopted a step-by-step approach, starting with considerable input from the teacher and leading gradually to longer periods where pupils worked on their own. The teaching of writing, for example, often started with highly structured templates to help the pupils organise their ideas. These were gradually withdrawn as pupils learned how to plan and do the work on their own initiative. However, many pupils required quite tightly structured frameworks right up to GCSE examinations. Group work or individual research tasks were closely monitored to ensure standards did not slip.

'My son's weak point was maths. In each class, the teacher coaxed and coaxed him, gave him the best way that worked for him and broke it down so that he could understand. Now he loves it!' (Mother of a Year 7 boy)

15. Teachers monitored their classes carefully to ensure that more loosely structured individual or group tasks did not lead to a decline in standards, and constantly involved pupils in setting and reviewing their own targets. They expected their pupils to complete all homework and ensured that time and

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<sup>5</sup> Aimhigher is a programme designed to widen participation in higher education by raising the awareness, aspirations and attainment of young people from under-represented groups. For further details, see [www.direct.gov.uk/uni](http://www.direct.gov.uk/uni).

<sup>6</sup> For further details of initiatives for gifted and talented pupils, see [www.ygt.dcsf.gov.uk](http://www.ygt.dcsf.gov.uk).

accommodation were provided at school if home circumstances were difficult. The teachers demonstrated what constituted 'really good work' and how this could be achieved and reminded their pupils that sometimes they had to be brave to try to overcome difficulties on their own.

'Take the "t" out of "I can't" and what are you left with? "I can". Clever, eh?'  
(Year 8 boy)

16. Subject diaries were a particularly useful tool to help boys improve their work. These included advice on how to approach key topics, guidance on how to extend ideas further, tips on how to construct essays, and explanations, in simple language, of the technical terminology used in particular subjects. They also included guidance to help every pupil identify how well he was progressing in each subject and what he needed to do next in order to reach his personal targets. The pupils compiled these diaries and reviewed them each fortnight or every three weeks with their tutors, who passed on information to the class teachers. In the best instances, parents also contributed to the subject diary reviews. Such regular monitoring enabled the schools to give additional help where it was required and to pre-empt underperformance.

The review of assessment information in December showed that 12 Year 6 pupils, 10 of them boys on free school meals, were likely to be on the border of Levels 3 and 4 at the end of key stage English tests. The headteacher arranged for them to do additional writing tasks for one and a half hours each week and gave them very clear indications of 'what I am looking for'. At the end of each session, the pupils wrote a paragraph evaluating their own work and discussed this with a partner. At the end of the year, all the pupils gained Level 4 in English.

17. The schools visited used a range of initiatives to provide additional support for pupils. In one school, a trained counsellor worked with the boys to identify any additional support they needed to deal with problems they encountered in their daily lives. Another had created the post of an academic support supervisor through the Aimhigher initiative. This person focused on improving the learning techniques of the boys on the borders between Levels 4 and 5 at Key Stage 3 and grades C and D at Key Stage 4. This support consisted of one-to-one sessions away from the distractions of peers. One school offered coursework catch-up programmes on Saturday mornings.
18. Imaginative use of information and communications technology increased the attraction of the support programmes. In one particularly striking instance, a technician had used the school's intranet site to develop a virtual learning environment. This allowed for the setting, submitting and marking of assignments online. Hyperlinks to study and revision sites for each subject were included. The site also provided new pupils with an introduction to each teacher, a virtual tour of the site, a Year 7 chat room and a 'frequently asked questions' podcast.

19. The most effective support programmes gave regular, positive feedback to the pupils involved.

Every month the headteacher provided soft drinks and cakes for students who had achieved well. During the inspection, the headteacher asked the group, predominantly girls, why it was that more boys were not represented. One girl said: 'It's not that boys are not clever. They mostly are but they need quick results. You just have to be showing them the cakes!' The boys present agreed.

## Promoting personal development and well-being

20. Schools that were successful in promoting the personal development and well-being of these boys had a good understanding of the factors which might contribute to their underachievement.<sup>7</sup> They monitored them systematically and held half-termly meetings to discuss their conduct, behaviour and any possible child-protection issues. Support staff as well as teaching staff had been trained in this area and were aware of possible indicators of concern. Staff were sensitive to individual home contexts and trained teaching assistants followed up any indications of unease, whilst at the same time being firm that home circumstances should not be used as an excuse for failure. The schools recognised that repeated or prolonged absences are often symptomatic of other failings and problems outside school. Therefore they monitored pupils' attendance carefully. Boys entering school at times in the year other than the usual admission dates took part in a special induction programme and their subsequent progress was tracked carefully.
21. An important feature of the most successful schools surveyed was the close attention they paid to supporting the emotional development of the boys and helping them understand the impact of their behaviour on their learning. They made good use of programmes such as the 'Social and emotional aspects of learning' (SEAL) and 'Behaviour for learning' programmes.<sup>8</sup>

'A listening ear is provided for pupils so they can vent their anger, calm down and think about their actions.' (Deputy headteacher)

'Fantastic! They make you want to do good for them.' (Year 10 pupil)

<sup>7</sup> For instance, as identified in: S Strand, *Minority ethnic pupils in the longitudinal study of young people in England: extension report on performance in public examinations at age 16* (RR029), DCSF, 2008; G Evans, *Education failure and working class white children in Britain*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006; and *Boys' achievement in secondary schools* (HMI 1659), Ofsted, 2003; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/1659](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/1659).

<sup>8</sup> For further information on the SEAL programme, see *Developing social, emotional and behavioural skills in secondary schools* (070048), Ofsted, 2007; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070048](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070048). For primary SEAL see [www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/socialandpastoral/sebs1/seal](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/socialandpastoral/sebs1/seal). For further information on Behaviour for Learning, see [www.behaviour4learning.ac.uk](http://www.behaviour4learning.ac.uk).

22. One school had devised ‘think books’ in which boys could write anything they wished. Within the bounds of safeguarding requirements, the contents remained confidential to the writer and his tutor. To help them transfer to secondary school, Year 6 boys received additional support from independent mentors or secondary pupils acting as ‘buddies’.

‘We enable young people in primary schools to identify with our secondary school well before they start.’ (Senior teacher)

23. The most effective schools extended such activities by developing pupils’ skills in interviews, so that they could participate fully in one-to-one discussions at the point at which they were making choices about courses.
24. The schools surveyed placed considerable emphasis on developing all aspects of the Every Child Matters agenda for these boys across curricular and extra-curricular activities.<sup>9</sup> One school devised a SHAPE programme – safety, health, achievement, positive contribution, economic well-being – to develop their leadership skills.
25. The views of pupils were influential in shaping curricular and extra-curricular activities. On the basis of suggestions made by the boys, one school had devised an annual conference for pupils in Years 7–10. This included a rich menu of fitness activities, such as martial arts, ball sports, outward-bound activities and workshops on male health. It was supported by contributions from the emergency services and local prisoners who presented a play on ‘choosing life, not prison’. Pupils’ ideas also led to improvements in daily life at school.

In a discussion with the school council about aggression at break-time, several boys identified that trouble usually started with a verbal challenge from one pupil to another. This led to all classes drawing up ‘good talk/bad talk’ lists to encourage acceptable ways of speaking. A Year 4 boy came up with the idea of awarding coloured rubber bracelets to those voted by their peers as providing the best examples of how to behave at break-time and when moving around the school. This proved a popular development and awards were made regularly.

26. A key factor in engaging boys from low-income backgrounds was a strong emphasis on establishing a clear sense of community where everyone felt ‘accepted’, with something of value to add to the life of the school and the neighbourhood. They were encouraged to take part in school performances, sports teams and other activities and to become involved in local community projects, such as youth clubs and summer schools. Strong ties with other schools locally and with a range of outreach organisations provided further support. In several cases, strong partnerships with the police, through the

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<sup>9</sup> For further information, see [www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/aims](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/aims).

'safer schools' partnership, helped promote better behaviour and increased attendance, particularly amongst those young people at risk of offending. The schools were clear that, whilst these activities involved a number of boys from low-income backgrounds, they were not intended to focus entirely on them.

'Whatever we do with the boys who need our support, we must always pass on the message that we will never give up on them.' (Head of house in a large secondary school)

## **Understanding and meeting the needs of white boys from low-income backgrounds**

27. The more effective schools in the survey demonstrated a clear commitment to dealing with pupils 'justly and fairly' and all staff had reviewed their way of managing relationships with boys in the light of this. This was seen across all phases.

'Many of these boys are from single-parent families, mainly living with mum. Many start school ignoring what adults say. We have to spend time teaching them why it is important to respond to adults more positively. For some older boys, there can be a particular problem with their attitude to female staff. We try to overcome this by treating each other with respect and providing good male role models where possible.'

(Headteacher of a primary school)

28. The adults in these schools knew that pupils arriving late and unfed or not having done their homework required well-planned support to raise their self-confidence, strengthen their emotional well-being and secure improved standards of achievement. The better schools in the survey had established breakfast clubs where teaching assistants and trained volunteers spent time with the pupils before the start of school, talking to them, listening to them read and playing board games with them. This enabled staff to provide advice and support to the pupils and also to deal with unacceptable behaviour directly when it occurred.
29. If a boy had been out of class for some days or weeks on a separate programme, usually in an on-site unit or classroom, every effort was made to ensure continuity. For example, when he returned to the class, the learning mentor or teaching assistant from the unit would remain with him for some lessons in the mainstream class.
30. Teaching assistants maintained a 'mood watch' of the most vulnerable boys, checking with them regularly during the day to see how they were getting on and how they were feeling. Good communication systems ensured that teaching staff were alerted to any problems they needed to take into account.

31. All the schools made sure that pupils and their families had access to expert advice from their own staff and from outside agencies. The latter included child and family guidance services, the police, parent partnerships, hospital services, child and adolescent mental health services, educational psychologists and a range of health and welfare agencies.

'We're trying to put in place what isn't done at home. If there's anything we can try, we'll have a go at it.' (Headteacher of a primary school)

'The school makes him feel as if he exists.' (Parent of a Year 8 boy)

## Using increased flexibility in the curriculum

32. The schools visited had found that boys worked best when teachers were genuinely keen to find out what interested them and planned activities around those interests. In one primary school, this led to the setting up of a museum. The pupils decided on the exhibits and conducted research on the ones that interested them most. They also visited a range of museums to gather ideas. Three schools used themed days for such activities and to introduce more variety into the curriculum. The pupils responded well to this.

'It was good during "Robin Hood week" because we didn't have to sit in the classroom the whole time.' (Year 5 boy)

33. However, all the schools were clear about the need to balance curriculum change with sustaining and improving achievement and standards.
34. A number of the secondary schools adapted the curriculum to ease the transfer from Key Stage 2. One school had introduced a 'specific competence curriculum' for Year 7 boys where they spent half their week on improving their basic skills and developing their personal capabilities, including teamwork and managing conflict. These initiatives helped them feel safe, reduced opportunities for friction and improved pupils' involvement in lessons.
35. The schools which offered pupils a variety of curricular pathways made sure that pupils and their families understood what the pathways were and the underlying rationale for each one. When pupils came to choose their GCSE or vocational options, individual interviews were a central part of this, with a focus on ensuring curriculum balance and avoiding early specialisation. In one of the schools visited, the majority of pupils had to take at least one vocational element in the curriculum.
36. Three of the secondary schools had reduced the length of their Key Stage 3 curriculum from three years to two, with the additional year being used to develop personal, social and leadership skills as well as to pursue work in other subjects. Teachers reported that this helped to keep boys motivated and engaged, made them more confident and also improved attendance in lessons.

The schools were aware that condensing the curriculum had to be undertaken carefully with the particular needs of learners in mind.

## Engaging parents and carers

37. The schools in the survey all recognised the critical importance of involving parents and carers in their children's education, whilst acknowledging that, for some, this was very difficult because of their own negative experience of school. The schools that were most successful in involving families:
- ensured that communication was open, clear and honest, and went beyond canvassing opinions and advertising school activities to collaborating with parents and carers on aspects of school life
  - involved parents and carers in setting targets and monitoring homework, and provided them with advice, through workshops and other activities, on how to provide better support at home
  - provided specific advice on how best to support boys with particular educational needs
  - supported and encouraged positive parenting through specially designed classes and courses and relevant published materials
  - provided facilities in the school for parents and carers to meet each other and have access to relevant information
  - enabled parents and carers to come to school at times that fitted in with their own, often complicated, daily activities
  - provided a range of opportunities for parents and carers to volunteer their assistance
  - drew on the wide range of skills and perspectives of parents and carers by involving them in policy and planning groups
  - provided training, where necessary, to enable parents and carers to fulfil such representative roles effectively.
38. Most of the schools had staff, such as heads of year, whose main responsibility was to maintain close contact with families. They also had a dedicated centre for managing parental contacts and interviews. Feedback from such activities often led schools to review and improve their practice.

A Year 8 boy had difficulty when he went home with reports about his work. His father would not take account of the positive points but always homed in on the negative ones. To improve the situation, the school changed the wording in reports so that negative points were called 'what I am working on next'.

39. One school moved from traditional parents' evenings to 'open days' with 20-minute sessions in which the pupil and parent or carer met a member of staff. This greatly increased attendance. Other successful strategies included consultation sessions before, during and after the school day; in-school

workshops about curriculum and teaching methods; and the provision of a self-funding community coffee bar on the premises, to encourage parents and carers to come into school and begin to break down barriers. As a result of such contact, parents and carers were able to have a direct and positive impact on their children's performance.

The test results of a Year 3 boy indicated that he had only a 78% chance of achieving the expected level at the end of Key Stage 2. The school explained the situation to his mother, advised her on what she could do to help her son and provided continuing support over the next three years. At the end of Year 6, the boy achieved Level 4.

- 40. In another school, the nurse had established strong links with families that needed particular support. She ensured that they kept medical appointments; helped them cope with specific crises; made sure that they knew what financial support was available and how to apply for it; and advised them on other useful services.
- 41. To help boys and their families make informed decisions about further or higher education the schools provided good advice and guidance on the funding aspects of higher education and the educational maintenance allowance available.

## Using resources efficiently

- 42. The schools visited used their resources flexibly and were creative in attracting and directing additional funding and materials to activities which would improve outcomes for boys, such as extra coaching in sports, drama or music.
- 43. They often used any additional staffing to reduce class sizes in the core subjects and to provide additional help for specific groups of pupils. One school, for example, focused on eight Year 10 pupils whose forecast grade in GCSE mathematics was D. As a result of the additional support, all eventually achieved grade C without adverse consequences for the performance of other pupils in the school. Some of the schools used additional resources to create time for staff to meet and share ideas. Others increased the number of adult supervisors, so that they could provide pupils with a wider range of organised games at break and lunchtime.
- 44. All the schools focused on improving relationships between pupils and building their self-esteem, through involving them in adventurous activities and outdoor pursuits. One boy receiving free school meals had challenging behaviour. His teachers realised that he had considerable acting ability and encouraged him to take part in weekly workshops to develop his drama skills. When they realised that he had difficulty getting home after these sessions, they arranged transport for him. By the time of the inspection, he was taking part in a range of stage work and had auditioned successfully for a regional television company.

45. Joint funding arrangements between networks of schools enabled them to draw on a wider range of services, including a literacy recovery team and a lead professional for behaviour. These initiatives clearly benefited specific groups of vulnerable pupils in the schools involved.

'If I'm going to do something silly, I now know I've got to stop and think if it's the right time to do it.' (Year 6 boy)

46. The majority of the schools visited had formed good links with organisations that had long and successful experience of working with disaffected or vulnerable young people. Some had appointed their own health professionals, such as a full-time adviser who worked closely with families, young people and outside agencies. Others provided parents with financial support, where necessary, for services such as Relate and Time for You or helped them spread payments for special trips over a period of time. The knowledge which staff held about the local community was an important element in ensuring the success of such work.

One school had difficulty recruiting midday assistants of suitable calibre to extend the range of activities for pupils. The secretary suggested that increasing the hours and using those appointed as teaching assistants might make the job more attractive to a wider range of people. This resulted in 108 good-quality applications.

## The roles of others beyond the school in helping to personalise teaching and learning

47. The schools surveyed had developed effective partnerships with a wide range of external agencies. One school coordinated its work in English and mathematics with a local training provider who set tasks which built well on school work and helped to boost standards in the Key Stage 3 national tests. Others had worked with neighbouring schools to establish strong primary–secondary mentoring links or to enhance their programmes of education outside the classroom. In one case, boys said that they had increased their confidence and had a better self-image from taking part in the additional sporting and physical activities that the school had been able to provide through its collaboration with the local authority and other partners. Their academic performance had also improved.
48. As a result of links with local employers, including the local council and the chamber of commerce, boys were choosing a wider range of further training or employment opportunities. Residential experiences for gifted and talented boys and 'taster days' at universities were also raising their awareness of the higher education opportunities open to them. Through these activities, the schools were making a clear effort to raise the aspirations of those in danger of underachieving or not aiming high enough.

49. Other examples of good practice included using professionally trained youth and social workers to help boys tackle problems in and outside school and inviting past pupils who had been successful in their careers to give presentations and advice on how to make the best use of the opportunities at school. The work of on-site police officers in developing good relationships with pupils and their families, and in helping to divert them away from offending, also played an important part in helping to improve the life chances of these vulnerable young people.

## Further information

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