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Review of Strategies to Address Gender Inequalities in Scottish Schools

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Review of Strategies to Address Gender Inequalities in Scottish Schools

Final Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The *Review of Strategies to Address Gender Inequalities in Scottish Schools* had two main aims. The first was to analyse pertinent literature on gender-related inequalities in order to establish current views on underlying causes and to identify strategies put forward to address them. The second was to gather evidence from local authorities and schools across Scotland on policy and practice with regard to gender, in order that these might be evaluated against the findings of the literature review. As the literature on gender-related issues is very extensive, an abbreviated literature review has been included in this final report of the study, while a fuller version is available as a separate document from the Scottish Executive website (www.scotland.gov.uk) as well as the websites of the Universities of Strathclyde (www.strath.ac.uk) and Glasgow (www.gla.ac.uk).

This executive summary has been organised around the key themes identified in the literature and draws on both the messages from other studies and the findings of the case studies undertaken as part of this project.

1. Methodology
2. Equal Opportunities Policy
3. Stage-specific issues
4. Learning and teaching
5. Classroom organisation
6. Management and whole school perspectives
7. Vocational education
8. Conclusions and recommendations

1. Methodology

The study was carried out in three phases. Firstly, a review of the literature on gender issues in school education was undertaken. This provided the context for the field work which followed in the second stage. The second phase, and first step in the field work, involved key local authority personnel who completed questionnaires designed to gather information on policy and practice with regard to gender issues in the authorities' schools. In addition, they were asked to identify examples of good practice in pre-five, primary and secondary establishments within the authority. From the list of examples provided by the local authorities, a number of case study schools were identified and investigated further using qualitative methods (the third phase). Representatives of key groups of stakeholders were interviewed, including management teams, teachers, parents and children. The evidence gathered was then analysed, providing the basis for the conclusions drawn and the recommendations generated.

2. Equal Opportunities Policy

While most, if not all, authorities had an equal opportunities employment policy, this rarely seemed to extend to cover learning and teaching, although some of those received from authorities covered expectations of behaviour in relation to characteristics such as ethnicity, race, social class and gender. (It is difficult to be definitive about this due to the uneven responses from authorities.) Many of the responding local authorities expected that schools would have policies in place that made reference to gender, possibly as part of a wider inclusion policy. This was not, however, reflected in the responses from schools, where there were few instances of written, school-focused policies. Even in those schools identified by authorities as examples of good practice and who had adopted specific strategies to address gender inequalities, it was unusual to find a written policy in existence. Some schools reported the existence of 'informal' or implicit policies and an awareness of gender issues in relation to schooling. In the case study schools, where either implicit or explicit policies existed, there tended to be a whole staff commitment to it, and a sense that it was being worked out in professional practice.

An important element of change management is the provision of relevant, practical advice and support through programmes of staff development (Fullan, 2005). While most of the authorities contacted reported that staff development in respect of equal opportunities had taken place, few had undertaken staff development specifically to support the gender-related initiatives identified. However, there were some instances of good practice where school staff, on their own initiative, had accessed research and/or attended sessions by consultants and other experts which informed developments.

In several instances, the implementation of gender-related strategies was at the instigation of individual 'champions' or leaders within the school or authority. Where this is the sole driver of the strategies, it is unlikely that they can be embedded in the practice of the institution/authority or sustained long term.

3. Stage-specific issues

There was a clear recognition that gender-related differences were apparent in the pre-5 or early primary years, and the team encountered some good practice in addressing these. The literature highlights these differences as particularly marked in the areas of literacy and personal and social development and it was in these areas that the team saw the best practice. Here, there were several coherent and successful strategies to counteract gender inequalities, in particular the underachievement of boys. Schools that used these strategies, such as 'story sacks' or 'bags of books', and/or involved fathers in activities designed to tackle stereotyping or culturally imposed constraints on gender specific role models, seemed to be very successful in a number of ways. Successes included the raising of literacy levels, improved relationships and increased bonding within families, improvements in social skills and, finally, enhanced motivation to learn. Some of the tactics used were also fruitfully employed in nursery schools and classes.

The team was less aware of similar initiatives in secondary schools. In these schools there was little evidence of deliberate attempts to address gender stereotyping in option or career choices. The use of single gender classes was in evidence in several authorities, however. In the main, these had been introduced to address boys' underachievement, although issues of behaviour and choice were also identified by schools. Views on the success of this as a strategy were varied. In some instances boys-only classes exacerbated behaviour problems, heightening 'laddish' behaviour.

Staff and management in most schools visited in the course of the project were aware of gender differences, but considered that these were best addressed through policy statements aimed at the improvement of achievement for all pupils (boys and girls). The most effective practice recorded was that of a cluster of schools, a secondary and its associated primaries, who were working together to provide continuity throughout a pupil's school career. Even there, the secondary school showed less engagement with the adopted strategies than did the associated primary schools.

The findings from this case study are generally in line with the issues raised in the literature review (see Section 2.5, pp8 ff.).

4. Learning and teaching

The advice from the literature is that schools should accommodate gender differences through gender-sensitive teaching that provides tasks and activities to meet the needs of a wide range of learning styles and preferences, while avoiding the imposition of stereotypes. This was most in evidence in primary schools and pre-5 establishments, where the team observed several instances in which gender-related learning styles had been taken into consideration. In particular, 'boy-friendly' aspects of learning and teaching such as active learning, time-limited tasks and oral questioning had been adopted by some schools and gender-related preferences had been considered throughout the teaching cycle, from planning and preparation through resourcing to assessment. However, a note of caution requires to be sounded at this point. There is evidence, both from the literature and the case study schools, that not all boys have the same needs and that some of these needs may not be accommodated in 'boy-friendly' approaches. Quiet and reflective boys, for example, might well be disadvantaged by such tactics, as might some girls. In the fieldwork phase of the study, there were examples of the provision of a range of learning opportunities for both boys and girls. These were predicated on the basis of a spectrum of characteristics across children rather than a boy-girl dichotomous categorisation. Some of the best examples of teaching and learning were the result of attendance at courses or seminars on learning styles where gender differences were addressed, rather than on gender *per se*.

Interviews with pupils of all ages were very revealing. Many pupils, including boys themselves, thought that girls were better learners, more interested in school and better behaved than boys were. However, boys also demonstrated – at both primary and secondary stages – an interest in school and in learning. When children were asked about whether they thought their schools were good schools, the vast majority stated that they were, and that in general they enjoyed being there. There were few pupil perceptions that teachers favoured children of either gender, although some children felt that teachers were harder on boys, in terms of behaviour, than they were on girls.

Most of the parents who were interviewed were generally very supportive of their children's schools and satisfied with the quality of education that their children were receiving. Most parents stated that they were not aware of any gender bias in teaching and learning, although many were supportive of taking a harder line with boys. Parents often had firm views on how children should be treated, and felt that their views were generally considered and taken on board by the schools concerned.

5. Classroom organisation

In nursery and primary schools, there was no specific tactic of classroom organisation for addressing gender inequalities. However, the team did observe some strategies, such as those intended to develop and address issues of emotional literacy, which

tended to be targeted mainly at boys, in the groups that would benefit most from the strategy. Nevertheless, it has to be emphasised that this strategy was available for both genders and was not specifically confined to boys. Rather, teachers were aware of a significant group of boys which, it was felt, required greater support in this area.

However, it is perhaps worth noting that in pre-5 education, where children are allowed to choose their activities, there was a perception amongst teachers that boys (and girls) tended to choose along gender stereotypical lines. Accordingly, resources such as 'dressing-up' clothes and 'home corners' had been selected to appeal to both boys and girls and to encourage children away from stereotypical patterns of play.

In secondary schools, the most visible gender-related strategy was that of single gender classes (SGCs). It should be noted, however, that the practice of teaching in SGCs is not a commonly observed strategy in Scottish secondary schools but, rather, is by far the exception. Indeed, the team was obliged to seek out examples of single gender teaching to include in the study. In some case study schools, the rationale for the introduction of these classes was the improvement of achievement, while in others such approaches were felt to improve behaviour and to permit teachers to utilise classroom methods which were more suited to one gender or the other. However, it is important to note that SGCs were used in a limited way in each of the case study schools and that these had been in operation for a comparatively short period of time.

One school had, indeed, withdrawn from the practice and resumed mixed gender teaching and learning. There was limited change in the curriculum to meet the needs of boys and girls and the initiatives were not supported by a strong staff development input. Moreover, there were mixed views regarding the benefits, or otherwise, of SGCs in specific subject areas. For instance, it was felt that single gender classes in English provided opportunities for discussion about issues which would have been difficult to air in a mixed gender class, but there was less consensus on the benefits in mathematics. There were concerns about using SGCs with groups of higher or lower achieving pupils, and also a feeling that the strategy was perhaps most valuable in S3 and S4, where behavioural issues were thought to be more in the foreground.

Some respondents were concerned about managing behaviour in boy-only classes. On the other hand, there was a feeling that SGCs provided a structure for learning which increased motivation. Views amongst pupils were divided on the theme of SGCs. While some pupils thought that they were good, others expressed a clear dislike of the strategy. For both boys and girls, their relationship with the teacher and the ability of the teacher to motivate them was more important than the form of classroom organisation that was adopted.

In general, these findings tie in with those of the literature review. Specific findings that find echoes in the literature include, on the positive side, greater motivation and a more supportive context for the discussion of sensitive matters. On the negative side, initiatives lack impact where staff are not committed to them and there is a likelihood of increased behavioural problems amongst boys, especially where pupil motivation and interest in school is low.

Other classroom organisational techniques which were felt to have potential to influence gender matters were streaming and the use of an incentive-based strategy. Streaming was intended to improve achievement, but there was evidence of some gender imbalance along expected lines, e.g. a preponderance of girls in biology and English language classes. The incentive-based strategy was again targeted more generally at improving attainment and motivation, rather than being a gender-specific initiative. It was aimed also at the promotion of positive behaviour and was intended to benefit all pupils. However, the strategy, with its very structured and comprehensive approach, was felt to work well with boys and it was clear that it was valued by the pupils concerned.

6. Management and whole school perspectives

Where gender-related strategies were in place and were successful, three key characteristics were observed. Firstly, each initiative had a champion, someone who was committed to the strategy, to the concept of gender equality as a part of social justice and inclusion, and who worked hard to monitor the success of the strategy and to sustain it beyond the first surge of interest. That champion was often – but not always – someone who had a management interest within the school, and occasionally this extended to a small group of people who, together, championed the strategy. This seems to be a requirement if such strategies are to make an impact. Sustainability requires that innovation becomes embedded in the culture and practices of the institution.

Secondly, staff development had been undertaken in line with the initiative. Sometimes this preceded the introduction of the strategy, while at other times it followed from the initial introduction. Most interesting and effective were those cases where staff had, often of their own volition and in their own time, accessed research and/or engaged a consultant. This was sometimes supported financially and in other ways by the local authority. Where primary and secondary schools worked together on a common strategy, there were apparent benefits to both.

Thirdly, it was also clear that parental involvement in gender-related issues made these initiatives more successful in a number of ways. It was important that schools promoted the parental role: where projects were most successful (e.g. in the pre-5 and early years strategies in the study), parents were an integral part of the programmes and were often specifically targeted (e.g. fathers working with their sons on reading and literacy skills).

Once again, these findings are in line with the literature which argues that there is a fundamental need to raise awareness, to involve stakeholders and to monitor and sustain progress.

7. Vocational education

The team observed no instances of strategies to address gender inequalities in vocational issues. This was true at all levels – policy and practical – and in all sectors of public education.

8. Conclusions and recommendations

The following represent the principal findings of the study and the recommendations that follow:

- There are significant gender-related inequalities in Scottish schools. For example, nationally available statistics indicate that girls, at all levels, are out-performing boys.
- Local authority policies relating to gender equality in Scottish schools are, in the main, couched within a broader approach to social justice and social inclusion. However, there is a danger that gender becomes lost or fudged within the broader inclusion agenda. Schools and authorities should check that, where necessary, specific attention is given to issues of gender in relation to learning and teaching. Indeed, this may be essential in the light of the forthcoming legislation on equality¹. Part 3 of the Bill makes discrimination on the basis of gender illegal,

¹Equality Bill - <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200405/cmbills/072/2005072.pdf>

and authorities will have to take cognisance of this in their policies and procedures.

- It was rare to find schools with written policies on gender equality, even amongst those schools recommended to the team as worthy of study in terms of good practice. Schools should discuss this situation and move towards development of policies to address gender-sensitive matters.
- The most successful initiatives observed by the research team were in pre-5 and primary schools. This good practice could be more widely shared, and the implications worked into primary practice in general.
- Where development of a gender-related initiative was shared between schools, there was a greater chance of progression and continuity occurring. Primary and secondary schools should be encouraged to cooperate in the development of strategies to address gender inequalities with, ideally, national and local authority support through policy and staff development.
- The most successful practice engaged all stakeholders, particularly parents. Schools should discuss with their communities how parents and other stakeholders might be involved in the planning, development and implementation of strategies to address gender inequalities in Scottish schools.
- Where staff development was most effective, it was in situations where the staff had a degree of ownership and were supported by practical guidance and advice. Schools and authorities should encourage and facilitate staff development activities related to gender issues, and providers of staff development, such as authorities and universities, should be encouraged to enable this development to happen.

CHAPTER ONE THE STUDY

Recent research into gender inequalities in schools (see the Literature Review, pp13 ff.) has tended to focus on the underachievement of boys, particularly in the early years of secondary school. Prior to that, researchers were more concerned to understand girls' lack of involvement and underachievement in specific curricular areas, such as the sciences.

In 1996, the Equal Opportunities Commission published *Education Reform and Gender Equality in Schools* (Arnot *et al*, 1996). This was followed by a series of studies aimed at gaining greater understanding of the issues, the identification of contributory factors and the evaluation of strategies to address inequalities such as access, achievement and opportunities. The findings indicated that, amongst other things, the male underachievement phenomenon was not necessarily a class-related matter (Power *et al*, 1998). Other commentators have argued that gender identities intersect with other forms of identity and, in particular, with 'race' and class identities; creating a complex situation where some social and ethnic groups are multiply disadvantaged in school settings (Archer and Yamashita, 2003; Jackson, 2002; Reay, 2002). The complex ways in which they interact make it difficult to identify strategies that will address inequalities, and to determine which are effective in so doing.

This report presents the findings of a study designed to review the research into gender-related inequalities in schools. It also determines the extent to which Scottish schools have adopted strategies to address these, and how effective they have been.

The study was funded by the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) and involved researchers from both the Universities of Strathclyde and Glasgow. It was designed in three overlapping phases. The first consisted of a substantial review of the literature; the second involved a survey of the provision for tackling gender-related issues in local authority policy; and the third consisted of a series of case studies of Scottish schools where gender-related strategies were in use. The first phase provided a framework against which strategies could be analysed, while the third provided evidence of their impact.

The specific aims of the study were to:

- develop an understanding of the extent and causes of gender inequalities, particularly in attainment, school experiences and expectations in Scotland compared to elsewhere;
- document the current practices used by Scottish educational authorities and schools (publicly-funded primary and secondary schools) to address gender inequalities;
- identify the effect of these practices on gender attainment, self-esteem, perceptions of gender roles, subject choices, career aspirations, access to vocational training and so on, identifying 'which girls' and 'which boys' are affected; and
- highlight examples of good practice in addressing gender inequality issues through case studies (including publicly-funded schools at primary and secondary levels).

The methods used involved the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, as well as exploring the existing knowledge base through the review of the literature. The aim was to obtain both an overview of the national position and to get at the experiences, aspirations and perceptions of pupils, teachers and representatives of educational policy-

making and management across Scotland. Thus there were three key aspects to the study:

- a review of the literature, national and international, on the prevalence of, and reasons believed to underpin, observed differences, as well as strategies developed to address these;
- a survey of Scottish local authorities to identify strategies already introduced and/or developed; and
- a series of case studies on the strategies in action and their impact on teachers and pupils.

The data gathered has been analysed to report on:

- the extent of, and key factors in, gender inequalities in Scottish schools and how these relate to the international context;
- current policies and strategies to address inequalities in Scottish schools;
- the perceptions and views of pupils, teachers and managers in schools on the impact that inequalities have on self-esteem and confidence, aspirations and choice within and beyond the school system; and
- examples of where strategies have been effective in addressing gender inequality issues across the school sector.

Section 2 of this report gives a summary of the literature on gender inequality (which addressed, primarily, the first bullet point on key factors). The full literature review can be obtained from the project team at the universities of Strathclyde and Glasgow (www.strath.ac.uk and www.gla.ac.uk) or from the SEED website (www.scotland.gov.uk).

CHAPTER TWO REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

The fieldwork phase of the study was informed by research into the nature and causes of gender inequalities in schools. Some of the work reviewed (e.g. Riddell, 1996; Osler *et al*, 2002; Lloyd, 2005), considered gender and special educational needs; others discussed gender at particular stages of schooling (Wilkinson *et al*, 1999; Croxford, 1999; Biggart, 2000); whilst a number of recent projects in the UK and in Scotland (Powney, 1996; Sukhnandan, 1999; Tinklin *et al*, 2001) have considered gender, attainment and/or achievement across the population and the span of compulsory schooling.

The research has consistently revealed gender inequalities both in terms of participation in schooling and its outcomes. However, there is also general agreement that gender is not the only, nor even the main, source of inequality. A number of factors have been identified as contributing to gender inequalities and various strategies to address these have been identified, although not all researchers are in agreement as to which factors are the most significant nor as to which strategies should be adopted. For example, some commentators argue that some of the strategies adopted by schools can pathologise gender differences, reinforcing particular forms of masculinity at the risk of suppressing or marginalising other forms.

This review of the literature focuses on the evidence for inequality, explores possible causes and contributory factors and considers some of the strategies developed to address these within the context of schools and learning.

2.2 Inequalities in attainment

In the 1970s, concern focused on girls who, as a group, were perceived to be disadvantaged in school, as evidenced by attainment levels in general and by the low uptake of some subjects. This was, in part, a reflection of a wider political concern about inequality in the light of the gains made by the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. In the field of Women's Rights those advances were embodied in the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and the Equal Opportunities Act (1975). Scottish local authorities were somewhat sluggish in responding and, in general, did not introduce gender equality policies until the early 1990s (Riddell, 2000). Riddell also notes that while both national advice (SED, 1975) and local policy (Strathclyde Regional Council, 1988) identified gender as a factor in, for example, patterns of subject uptake, they did not perceive it to be a problem in terms of school practice. Rather it was the teachers' organisations, notably the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS, 1989, cited in Riddell, 2000) and the General Teaching Council (GTC, 1991), that attempted to address practice. In 1989 the EIS issued a 'positive assertion against sexism' criticising contemporary practice where, they reported, boys: demanded and received a generous share of teacher time; received a disproportionate share of hands-on experience (e.g. in science or computing); received apologies from teachers when asked to undertake non-traditional tasks; were rewarded for being assertive and advised not to act like girls; and received a disproportionate share of coveted class materials (EIS, 1989, cited in Riddell, 2000).

In Scotland, secondary analyses of a range of quantitative data from the Scottish Qualifications Agency, Assessment of Achievement Programme, Scottish School Leavers' Survey, Scottish Executive's Statistical Bulletins and Baseline Assessment Programmes have demonstrated that, whilst levels of attainment have increased overall since the 1970s, average levels of attainment for boys are lower than for girls at all stages and across almost all areas of the curriculum (Croxford, 1999; Wilkinson *et al*, 1999;

Tinklin *et al*, 2001; Tinklin, 2003; Stark and Gray, 1999). A similar picture can be observed in England and Wales (Younger *et al*, 2005) and internationally (Francis, 1999; Jackson, 2002).

Recent attainment statistics (SEED, 2003a) indicate that, for all subjects and stages, the percentages of pupils attaining the expected target levels was greater for females than for males, the difference being most noticeable in the later primary and early secondary stages. In particular, it was greater for reading and writing than for mathematics. Commentators in Scotland, as elsewhere, have pointed out that comparisons across broad areas of the curriculum using average performance measures often mask the wide variation in attainment within each group; simple, generalised conclusions about boys' and girls' attainment should not be drawn from the data (Tinklin *et al*, 2001).

Other factors identified as influencing attainment include ethnicity (Arnot *et al*, 1998) and social class (Plummer, 2000). Both ethnicity and social class are factors which, combined with, and interacting with gender, are seen as having a direct bearing on achievement. Tinklin (2003) also argues that any study of attainment must take account of these, and the ways in which they interact with gender.

Researchers have also linked academic achievement with patterns of behaviour (Murphy and Ellwood, 1999; Davies and Brember, 1995), noting that, even in the early stages, there are signs of boys being more vulnerable to becoming disaffected. In addition, boys tended to be less careful about rules and more indifferent to being reprimanded. On a cautionary note, Younger *et al* (2005) point out that there are many boys who continue to do well in school; only a minority become disaffected. Similarly cautious, Biggart (2000) found only limited evidence to support the view that low attainment amongst Scottish school leavers was attributable to negative attitudes to education or that disaffection was a principal cause of low attainment.

Patterns of behaviour in Scottish schools are highly gendered. The SEED annual statistics on school exclusions show that secondary-aged boys are four times more likely than girls to be excluded from school, with boys in primary school ten times more likely to be excluded (e.g. SEED, 2000: see also annual statistics at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/bulletins/00402-00.asp>). Boys are also more likely to be referred to Behavioural Support Services (Head *et al*, 2002).

The figures indicate that, while gender is a factor, other indicators can be more significant. Associated factors include the possession of a Record of Needs and/or Looked After status and various indices of poverty such as the receipt of free school meals. For example, Looked After Children are thirty times more likely to be excluded than children living with their immediate family (see <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/education/lacr-03.asp>).

2.3 Causes of gender inequality

A range of factors have been identified as contributing to gender inequality, both in and out of school.

i. In-school factors

Some of the explanations offered refer to in-school factors such as the management and ethos of the school, the content and organisation of the curriculum, assessment practices, and classroom pedagogies. Sukhnandan *et al* (2000), in reviewing the literature, identify two broad explanations for girls' and boys' differential performance in school. Firstly, girls and boys have different learning styles which, in turn, need different styles of teaching; and, secondly, girls and boys seem to relate differently to schooling and learning, with girls finding it easier to succeed.

In terms of attitudes to school and learning, Sukhnandan *et al* (2000) describe girls as being, in general, better disposed to the demands of classroom activity than boys. They place a high value on the presentation of their work; they spend more time trying to improve what they produce (MacDonald *et al*, 1999); they care more about the opinions of their teachers (Davies and Brember, 1995; Bray *et al*, 1997); they derive more enjoyment from school life (Arnot *et al*, 1998).

The peer group is a strong influence on boys' attitudes to school and to learning (Barber, 1994). Where the culture of the peer group is to devalue schoolwork, it is difficult for individual boys to seek and accept the public endorsement of the school. Girls, on the other hand, do not experience a conflict of loyalties between friends and school to the same degree (Barber, 1994; Macrae *et al*, 2000).

In contrast, there is a considerable body of literature which indicates that girls continue to be disadvantaged in school contexts. Echoing the EIS literature of 1989, Paechter (1998) argues that boys dominate time and space in classrooms, managing to attract to themselves much more teacher time and much greater 'hands-on' access to resources such as computers. Boys also dominate outdoors recreational space through activities such as football, taking up a lot of space and displacing other activities (Shilling, 1991, cited in Paechter, 1998). In addition, the effects of stereotyping subjects has been seen as impacting negatively on girls' choices by, for example, acting against their participation in those subjects perceived to be more abstract in the school context but valued by university admissions tutors (Riddell, 1992).

There is also some evidence that explanations have become gendered (Paechter, 1998; Cohen, 1998). Such explanations attribute girls' failings to factors within girls themselves, whereas boys' failings have been blamed on external circumstances. Conversely, girls' successes are seen as being due to external factors (e.g. the success of equal opportunities policies) whereas boys' achievements are credited to internal attributes (e.g. innate intelligence).

ii. The development of gendered identities

The literature in this area (for example, Connell, 1982; Arnot, 1991) tends to reject the notion that there are biological or pathological differences and also, in general, is critical of social learning theory which postulates that gender identities are fixed by early processes of socialisation. Although there is scepticism in the literature, these theories have had considerable impact on the development of strategies for boys and girls. Mac An Ghaill (1994) criticises earlier strategies intended to address perceived discrimination against girls, e.g. changing school texts and establishing gender-fair teaching styles, which he considers well-intentioned, if naïve. He cites Arnot (1991), who argues that such strategies were flawed by a simplistic portrayal of the issues and a perception of girls as victims. Similarly, Martino and Berrill (2003) critique New Right prescriptions for change to address the 'problems' of masculinity, particularly in schools, on the

grounds that they are based upon assumptions about the ‘natural’ predispositions of boys that emphasise their tendency to behave, think and learn in particular ways.

Jackson (2002) argues for a multi-dimensional conceptualisation of masculinity, more complex than typical stereotyping acknowledges, and discusses how boys protect their self-worth in school settings where academic achievement is the single most important criterion in judging the worth of pupils. Caught between two competing influences on their sense of themselves – the need to conform to hegemonic masculinities and the desire to value one’s own worth – Jackson identifies four strategies commonly employed by boys to protect their masculine identities: procrastination; withdrawal of effort and rejection of academic work; avoidance of the appearance of work; and disruptive behaviour.

He identifies four benefits to disruptive behaviour. In the first instance, it can increase a boy’s status with his peer group, who may see him as demonstrating ‘appropriate’ forms of masculinity. Second, it can deflect attention away from academic performance and on to behaviour. Third, failure to achieve can be attributed to poor behaviour rather than to lack of ability and, fourth, it may sabotage the academic efforts of classmates outwith the masculine hegemony. Such explanations go some way to explaining the disproportionate number of behaviour referrals and exclusions accorded to boys.

Theories of masculinity offer a better understanding of boys’ attitudes and experiences of school and facilitate a critical appraisal of the strategies used by schools to address gender inequalities. Where strategies are based on a simplistic, one-dimensional conceptualisation of masculinity, the actual effect may be to reinforce particular ways of being masculine and to ignore and undermine other ways:

Strategies ‘designed to motivate under-achieving boys through football study centres and ‘boy-friendly’ texts’ embrace the discourse of academic study as ‘non-masculine’ and ‘feminine’ and can only operate to make life more difficult for those who take up non-hegemonic identities.

(Renold, 2001)

Skelton (2001) criticises the widespread trend in schools and education authorities towards producing support materials designed to make classrooms more ‘boy friendly’ by endorsing one kind of masculinity – that which is aggressive, active and dominant. However, she acknowledges that research into masculinities has not been influential in developing the practical approaches so much demanded by schools.

Strategies intended to enhance the educational prospects of boys may limit the capacity of schools to value and support the growth of other, and different, forms of gendered identity. This is a significant challenge to implementing such strategies: gains made for one group may have a negative impact on the experience of others.

iii. Gender and wider social factors

A number of commentators (e.g. Archer and Yamashita, 2003) contend that gender interacts with other aspects of social being, such as class, culture, ethnicity and sexuality, to create multiple forms of identity and to ensure that within the whole group of boys (or girls) there is a range of quite different relationships to schools and schooling. Other researchers, e.g. Mac an Ghaill, (1988) and Blyth and Milner (1996) deal with race and racism and show how schools create alienation and disaffection in unintentional but potent ways. Arnot (2003) describes how working class boys’ engagement with the mental activity of schoolwork diminishes their sense of their own masculinity through the responses and views of their peer group, their family and their community. Not only is the pursuit of academic attainment an act of disloyalty, it is also a form of emasculation.

Archer and Yamashita (2003) argue that there is evidence of the ‘normalisation’ of particular, white, middle-class values within education which fail to recognise important aspects of working-class boys’ identities. For example, they argue that policies and strategies fail to grasp the extent to which some boys ‘*experience strong emotional attachment to identities grounded outside of the education context*’ (p129). That attachment manifests itself in the deliberate cultivation of particular kinds of embodied masculinities such as forms of speech and dress, which not only attract the disapproval of schools but, in the longer run, are likely to hinder the social mobility of the boys.

From another point of view, the ‘gender gap’ in attainment could be understood in terms of girls’ success rather than as indicative of boys’ failure (Sukhnandan, 1999). The introduction of comprehensive schooling (Epstein, 1998), the removal of gender-biased selection procedures for the secondary phase of schooling (Gipps and Murphy, 1994; Croxford, 2000) and the success of equal opportunities programmes are all credited with contributing to the relative rise in the attainment of girls.

Recent literature challenges a view of gender as pathologically determined and, instead, presents a more complex account of how boys and girls interact with schooling, developing and modifying their sense of themselves in response to particular circumstances, both in school and beyond school, shaped by a whole range of social factors – social class, culture, sexuality, ethnicity. Thus, schools have to acknowledge a diversity of masculinities and femininities and validate a range of pupil identities.

2.4 Stage-specific issues

i. Early education

Gender inequalities have been identified in baseline assessments in the first year of primary school (Wilkinson *et al*, 1999) and there have been concerns about boys’ slow start in two areas in particular: literacy and personal, emotional and social development. Literacy is seen as key to attainment across the curriculum, while boys’ attitudes to school and schooling are influenced by their personal development (Murphy and Ellwood, 1997). In reviewing Early Years research, BERA (2003) noted that the major influences on young children’s progress in the early years were prior attainment on entry to formal schooling and teacher expectations (Tizard *et al*, 1988).

ii. Subject choices

There have been many studies (Riddell, 1992; Sutherland, 1999; Croxford, 2000) detailing gendered patterns of subject uptake. Of particular concern has been the low level of female uptake of mathematics, science and engineering courses, female participation in craft and technology courses and low male uptake of modern languages. Explanations include the stereotyping of subjects by pupils, teachers and parents, perceptions of the usefulness of the subject to future lives and careers, wider social expectations and pupils’ own interests.

iii. Post-school experience

Changes in forms of participation in the labour market in a post-industrial economy have brought many more women into the labour force. It is possible for more girls to envision their future lives in work as well as, or instead of, at home. In their study of post-16 transitions, Macrae and Maguire (2000: 172) noted that girls tended to have ‘*clearer goals and firmer ideas about their futures, regardless of race, class or academic achievement*’.

2.5 Strategies in relation to learning, teaching and assessment

This section considers strategies from a range of sources including practical advice written for practitioners (Noble and Bradford, 2000; Pickering, 1995; Bleach, 1998a), research surveys of practice (Sukhnandan, 1999; Sukhnandan *et al*, 2000; Arnold, 1997) and articles from academic journals.

i. Teaching and learning processes

In the gender debate, a recurring question is whether boys and girls learn in different ways (Bray *et al*, 1997). One explanation suggests that there are different physiological patterns which lead to boys and girls learning in different ways (Gurian *et al*, 2001), while others express caution over simple categorisations such as ‘boys’ learning styles’ and ‘girls’ learning styles’ (Van Houtte, 2004; Head, 1997). It is questionable whether *all* boys and *all* girls have the same preferred learning styles, demanding different teaching approaches (Creese *et al*, 2004), and the wholesale adoption of such strategies may limit the learning opportunities of both girls and boys. Younger *et al* (2005: 11) reject the adoption of ‘boy-friendly pedagogies’, arguing that *‘pedagogies which appeal to and engage boys are equally girl-friendly. They characterise quality teaching and as such are just as suitable and desirable for girls as for boys’*.

Some broad patterns are evident in the way in which girls and boys prepare themselves for learning and engage in learning in the classroom that point to the importance of social experiences in shaping attitudes and approaches to learning. Girls’ approaches to the task of organising their learning, having the right materials (Ofsted and EOC, 1996) and completing homework (Bleach, 1998b) are different from the patterns of behaviour observed in boys. Different interests and pastimes, which provide girls and boys with different language opportunities, align them in different ways to schooling and learning (Murphy and Elwood, 1997).

Against this backdrop, a range of strategies has been used to tackle issues such as boys’ work habits, their need to be fully engaged in the classroom and their reported limited concentration. Key features include: activity-based and experiential tasks (Noble and Bradford, 2000; Bleach, 1998b); the development of specific skills such as reading and literacy (Bleach, 1998b) and revision and study skills (Arnold, 1997); clear, focused and time-bound tasks (Noble and Bradford, 2000; Arnold, 1997; Frater, 1998); less written and more oral work (Noble and Bradford, 2000); a competitive dimension, e.g. quizzes and games (Noble and Bradford, 2000); ICT and audio visual support and a variety of formats, e.g. diagrams and images to supplement text (Noble and Bradford, 2000; Frater, 1998). To support girls in their learning, Gipps (1996) advocates cooperative/interactive modes of learning and emphasises discussion and collaboration as well as time for quiet reflection. In addition, girls respond better to feedback that is challenging but gives precise guidance for improvement as well as praise.

Taken together, the advice given highlights the importance of varied and confident teaching which is gender-sensitive. Teachers are encouraged to adopt a repertoire of strategies, underpinned by an appreciation of different learning needs of both boys and girls.

Reports of school-based developments (Arnold, 1997; Bleach, 1998b; Frater, 1998; Noble, 1998; Penny, 1998) indicate that addressing gender inequalities encourages schools, departments and individual teachers to look closely at the teaching and learning processes for both boys and girls, with both benefiting (Sukhnandan, 1999; Penny, 1998; Noble, 1998). Though the gender gap may not be reduced, there are improved learning opportunities for both girls and boys. In further support of this approach, Younger *et al* (2005) found that the strategies which were most effective in addressing the achievement of boys were those developed within a holistic framework catering for the needs of all pupils.

ii. Assessment practices

National monitoring systems such as the Assessment of Performance Unit in England and Wales and the Assessment of Achievement Programme in Scotland have attempted to monitor performance by gender, but little has been made of the interaction between gender and the assessment process itself (Murphy, 2000). Some research has been undertaken, with the findings that girls tend to do less well on multiple choice type tests and better on longer written tasks (Stobart *et al*, 1992; Stark and Gray, 1999) and that continuous assessment, as part of the overall assessment process, may support girls in demonstrating achievement (Quinlan, 1991; Powney, 1996), particularly as they are more likely to complete it (Salisbury *et al*, 1999).

The nature of the assessment task is also important. Murphy (2000) questions the use of contextualised problems, arguing that efforts to make practical tasks and problems more 'real', i.e. more meaningful, are based on the premise that these would be gender neutral. Murphy found that girls and boys read tasks differently and attributed more or less relevance to a specific task or context. This has implications for the preparation of pupils for assessment and indicates that they should be exposed to a greater variety of response formats (Murphy and Elwood, 1997).

iii. Teacher expectations

The expectations of the teacher in shaping pupils' expectations and attitudes towards school and specific subjects is well charted (Arnot *et al*, 1998; MacDonald *et al*, 1999; Riddell, 1992; Stanworth, 1982; Archer, 1992). These concerns are more fully dealt with in the extended review of literature, to which reference has previously been made.

iv. Interaction patterns in the classroom

There has been an extensive range of studies internationally on gender and classroom interaction patterns (Howe, 1997). The key issues to emerge include: how the relative silence of boys and girls affects classroom dynamics; differences in the nature and quality of interaction, with teachers tending to have more negative interactions with boys; and teachers' reinforcement of gender stereotypes, both through the formal curriculum and informal interactions.

v. Pupil attitude and motivation

Boys' culture is seen as anti-intellectual, anti-educational and anti-learning, (Sukhnandan, 1999) and less study oriented than girls (Van Houtte, 2004). Bleach (1998c: 45) argues that '*...boys often appear more concerned with preserving an image of reluctant involvement or disengagement*'. Connell (2000) calls these 'protest masculinities'. However, not all boys share these negative attitudes towards learning, though for those boys who do engage with classroom learning there can be significant tensions (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, Reay, 2003; Younger *et al* (2005).

Galloway *et al* (1998) report that girls tend to have higher levels of task orientation (where the focus is on the achievement itself), particularly in English, than do boys. Boys have higher levels of ego orientation (the concern is their standing with other people) in both English and maths. As the authors remind us, ego orientation is not necessarily a barrier to success in education.

Recognition of the gender-differentiated patterns of both interaction in the classroom and motivation styles has implications for school behaviour policies. Davidson and Edwards (1998: 135) noted in their study of boys' achievement in their secondary school that '*...the school's reward system, involving merits for good work and effort, was favouring girls' approach to work*'.

2.6 Classroom organisation

Two contrasting classroom organisational strategies have been developed to tackle gender differences in achievement: the use of mixed gender groupings and single gender groupings/classes, with the latter sometimes used in a targeted way to tackle specific topics. Arnold's (1997) survey of initiatives aimed at raising boys' achievement identifies a range of strategies, with some schools using single gender settings and others adopting a variety of methods including mixing pupils in terms of ability as well as gender.

i. Mixed-gender groups

Noble and Bradford (2000) argue for a classroom seating arrangement that prevents pupils, particularly disengaged boys, gathering at the periphery of classrooms. The use of girls as a tactic in the control of boys is implicit in a range of strategies such as seating policies, mixed gender pairs and groups. Here, the function of girls is to exercise their 'civilising' influence in 'supporting' boys' learning (Raphael Reed, 1999) and '*...to police, teach, control and civilise boys*' (Epstein *et al*, 1998: 9). The expectation that at least some girls should play this role raises questions about their own opportunities. There is little systematic analysis into the effectiveness of this approach.

ii. Single gender groups and classes

The use of single gender groups has been used as an equal opportunities strategy to promote girls' participation and active engagement in areas where girls were under-represented, such as in science, technology and computing (Reay, 1990). The purpose was to create a space in which girls would actively engage in practical tasks rather than either be passive observers (Kenway *et al*, 1998) or take on roles such as organising and tidying up (Rennie and Parker, 1987).

The current use of single gender classes is largely a strategy to tackle boys' underachievement in secondary schools. One view popularly expressed is that during adolescence boys are distracted by the presence of girls (Woodhead, 1996) and engage in behaviours that detract from their learning. However, in some instances this strategy has been adopted to support the learning of both boys and girls. Warrington and Younger (2004) identified a number of reasons for adopting single gender teaching, including improving girls' opportunities, addressing boys' underachievement and behaviour problems and reducing 'laddish' behaviour. The impact depends to a certain extent on whether the focus is on pupils in the 'top' or 'bottom' sets.

A number of schools in Warrington and Younger's study talked about different teaching and learning strategies for boys' and girls' groups, with arguments very similar to those already discussed. Considerably fewer strategies were suggested for girls, most of which drew on perceptions of girls' strengths or preferences. One school used Gardner's framework of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993) to shape variation in experiences, rather than gender. In some schools there were modifications to curriculum materials to accommodate perceived differences in interest between boys and girls.

The issue of single gender classes is one of the most contested. Some studies have been inconclusive (Rowe *et al*, 1996; Rowe, 1998), while others found it difficult to unravel the impact from other factors such as teaching practices (Warrington and Younger, 2004). In the Warrington and Younger study, where schools reported improved results, all staff were involved, enthusiastic and committed to the strategy and considerable planning preceded implementation. In addition, pupils and parents were consulted and involved. They also identified some negative effects. For example, some boys' 'laddish' behaviour increased and in six schools the worsening or lack of improvement in boys' behaviour led to single gender teaching being abandoned. The researchers concluded that a system of single gender classes is '*no panacea for the problem of poor behaviour, disaffection and lack of achievement*' (Warrington and Younger, 2004, p348).

Further efforts to ensure 'effective' role models by providing male teachers teaching boys and female teachers teaching girls may only serve to reinforce gender stereotypes (Kenway *et al*, 1998), particularly reinforcing a 'laddish' culture in boys-only classes (Mills, 2000) and further disadvantaging girls. Jackson (2002: 44) discerned a number of differences between all-girls classes and all-boys classes: '*... girls are liberated by girls-only space*' and there was a more relaxed and supportive environment while, in contrast, '*...the climate of boys' groups was reported to be more competitive and aggressive*'.

While there is evidence that single-sex classes can be beneficial for both boys and girls, for some subjects (Younger *et al*, 2005), these need to be accompanied by a critical stance and to challenge practices that reinforce stereotypical gendered roles.

iii. Subject-specific single gender classes

There are examples of single gender classes used in relation to specific areas of the curriculum, e.g. personal development, sex education, physical education and, to a lesser degree, evidence of schools working on gender awareness as part of the development of gender equity.

The findings, however, are not always clear. In a recent survey on sexual health in Scotland, it was found that some children and young people would prefer single gender classes, while others felt they learned more from mixed classes, especially on relationship issues (Children in Scotland, 2003). In a case study conducted by Airnes (2001) on the use of single gender classes in biology, boys reported there was no difference in working in single gender classes, whereas girls reported that they found this a better working environment. Airnes concludes that it may be of benefit for pupils to work separately in certain circumstances, for instance on practical work or sensitive topics in the syllabus.

2.7 A whole school perspective

Addressing gender inequality is a whole school issue. A key question therefore is: how, within the organisational context of a school, can changes in practice be introduced and sustained to reduce inequality? Four specific areas for attention were identified in the literature: school effectiveness and improvement; school evaluation/inspection; policy development; and role models and mentoring.

i. Gender and school effectiveness and school improvement

School effectiveness and improvement has been a dominant theme in Scottish education for some years. The research in this area has, however, paid little attention to the issue of gender in relation to the features of effectiveness (Duffield, 2000). While issues of 'school mix' (or social class) have been considered in sampling procedures, they have not been used to investigate inequity across social groupings. Indeed, one of the criticisms of the school effectiveness and improvement movement has been the lack of attention to equality issues. For example, Rea and Weiner (1996) are critical of school effectiveness research upon which policies about school evaluation are based, because gender, along with other social factors, is rendered invisible.

ii. Managing change

Myers (1992), in reviewing the range of national and local gender-related initiatives since the passing of the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975, stresses the importance of understanding how change can be brought about if we wish to reduce gender inequalities. Myers identifies four basic aspects of managing change: leadership; staff development; policy making; and monitoring and evaluation.

Regarding leadership, Ofsted and the EOC (1996) found that schools successful in providing equal opportunities for both boys and girls were characterised by a headteacher with strong commitment to developing equal opportunities initiatives. Senior

management also had an important role to play in highlighting the importance of the issue and giving it legitimacy. Distributed forms of leadership in taking initiatives forward were also seen as effective; particularly when such initiatives have the clear public support of the headteacher.

In Rudduck's (1994) study of the development of gender policies in secondary schools, a critical aspect was the tenacity and willingness of gender leaders to sustain the change, and their readiness to think through established and accepted practices and patterns of behaviour in school. She noted that some colleagues might be 'disturbed' into change. This notion of 'disturbing' staff indicates that bringing about change in this area in a school setting can be problematic. In the first instance, it is necessary to acknowledge that gender is a problem. Secondly, schools and classrooms are places where routines exist partly for convenience and partly because this is the means of managing a very complex process; any real change will not be brought about by the simple substitution of one practice for another. Thirdly, the nature of the impact of gender and the conflicting views held by those involved in schools is undoubtedly controversial. The context and the potential for conflict were evident in Rudduck's (1994) study of how secondary schools develop policies.

iii. Monitoring and using data

The use of evidence can be critical in bringing about change. Davies (1990) advocates robust systems to gather and analyse data on gender performance. A similar approach is stressed in the report *The Gender Divide* (Ofsted and EOC, 1996), where the use of information technology to analyse the data collected within schools is advocated.

Initiatives developed in one school cannot be grafted readily on to another school without a close consideration of the situation as it exists within the school. Staff need to identify patterns of underachievement and other areas where gender inequalities occur, e.g. exclusions and/or attendance, to determine whether particular pupils are at risk and to identify the contributory factors (Sukhnandan, 1999; Arnold, 1997). Once specific strategies have been implemented, monitoring and evaluation is crucial to assess their impact in schools (Education Review Office, 2000).

It is on the basis of data gathered that school leaders begin to challenge established practices, both within classrooms and around the school, and to initiate change.

iv. Understandings of gender and policy making

The school is a social context and it contributes to the process of socialisation, including the formation of gender identity. This needs to be borne in mind when discussing the implications of specific strategies for the construction of gender in the school. There is a tension here. On the one hand there is a need to acknowledge the multiplicity of social factors in educational achievement while, at the same time, a need to recognise the importance of the issue of gender and a need to work towards gender equity practices that embrace the needs of both male and female pupils.

An important aspect of initiating and sustaining change is the development of a deep and more critical understanding of gender with staff and possibly pupils. Commentators point to the need for approaches which allow different forms of masculinities to be explored by boys and girls in relation to femininities (MacNaughton, 2000; Skelton, 2001; Frosh *et al*, 2003). A focus on gender relations, and, further, on the relationship of gender to class and ethnicity, will enable young people themselves to reflect upon the structures of power in their own classrooms. Those on the margins, through for example, sexuality or disability, may even be empowered to challenge the disparagement pervading their everyday experience of school (Renold, 2004).

Skelton (2001) argues that the basis upon which schools develop policies in relation to gender equity is crucial. She suggests that staff and pupils need to consider the images of masculinity and femininity that children bring to school, the dominant images reflected by the school itself, the role models that the school wants of its teachers and the kinds of initiatives, etc. that encourage staff and pupils to reflect upon issues of gender.

v. Policy making

The relationship between school policy and everyday practice in the classroom is a critical one in bringing about genuine change.

Rudduck (1994) highlights the importance, at policy level, of examining the values that underpin individual policies. Hill and Cole (1999) make a distinction between equal opportunities policies and egalitarian policies. Equal opportunities policies, they argue, are based on a meritocratic idea where 'able pupils' are allowed the opportunity to achieve and gain from this achievement in a stratified society. On the other hand, egalitarian policies are designed to challenge structured inequalities. This distinction is not necessarily clear in policies and there is a tension between enabling able pupils to overcome social barriers (such as gender, social class, poverty, ethnicity) in order to achieve through the school system and policies that emphasise achievement for all.

A critical step is the involvement of staff and other stakeholders in debate on the significance of gender, equality and inclusive education. Corson (1998: 17) argues for critical policy making and proposes a process of genuine participative policy development which includes not just staff (the predominant model in Rudduck's case studies), but also pupils, parents and members of the wider community.

To be effective, a policy has to be complemented by a range of strategies and initiatives, implemented in a coherent way. School leaders, alongside staff and other stakeholders such as pupils and parents, have to agree on goals, co-ordinate activities and resources in a focused way, and gather data to monitor and evaluate progress. (For an example of such an approach, see Traves [2000], quoted in Baxter [2001].)

An alternative approach is to adopt an inquiry-based model of managing change. Routinely gathered data can provide the starting point for such an approach and there are examples of where this has been effective, e.g. the small scale study by Wikely and Jamieson (1996). This approach can also highlight the complex range of environmental and other factors that come into play. Here the approach adopted inquiry-based methods similar to those advocated by Corson (1998), i.e. gathering views from both pupils and staff and using these to develop strategies to tackle issues.

vi. Role models

Over recent years, the teaching force in secondary schools has become increasingly female; women have always been in the majority in primary schools. This has raised the issue of a lack of male role models for boys at various levels in the education system. This is a reversal of earlier concerns over the lack of role models for girls in previously male-dominated areas such as management and science.

There have been efforts to attract more men into teaching, especially into primary schools, but these have been criticised for reinforcing gender stereotypes (Burn, 2001; Pepperell and Smedley, 1998). While there is good reason for increasing male recruitment on the grounds of wider societal equality, claims that the recruitment of minority groups, whether on the grounds of gender or ethnicity, will improve performance are challenged. There are dangers in adopting crude ideas of 'boy friendly' schooling such as the proportion of male teachers and the use of boys' culture (Carrington and Skelton, 2003; Ashley, 2002). Ashley's study demonstrated that the qualities of the teacher were more important than the gender.

vii. Mentoring

At school level, there is some evidence that mentoring is effective in dealing with boys' underachievement. Mentoring comes in different forms, such as the use of peer counselling (Ryder, 1998), reading buddies (Noble, 1998) and subject-specific support (Penny, 1998). Sukhnandan *et al* (2000) found that schools adopted mentoring for a range of reasons. They targeted specific pupils, frequently underachieving boys, to tackle motivation and confidence and to support pupils on the borderline in terms of predicted examination results. Mentoring schemes resulted in a number of positive outcomes for both boys and girls. However, there were constraints, most notably time and a lack of sufficient numbers of trained mentors. In some schools this meant that participation was limited and available largely to boys, thus excluding girls from what could be a valuable source of support. Approaches that focused on the individual pupil and were supported by coherent systems involving target setting and mentoring were found to be most effective in transforming and sustaining improvements in achievement.

viii. School ethos and participation in development

School culture and ethos is an important factor. In Scotland, the School Ethos Network has been active in promoting the development of whole school strategies to establish and enhance a positive ethos, strategies to promote positive behaviour and to create greater pupil participation in the community life and decision-making processes of school. While a significant number of case studies have been reported (e.g. Munn, 1999; Murray and Closs, 2000; Murray, 2002), limited attention has been given to gender.

Arnold's (1997) survey of English initiatives emphasises the need to involve pupils and their parents in both data gathering and discussing policy development. Parents were also seen as having an important role to play both in supporting boys' learning and in contributing to public activities to raise the profile of gender.

2.8 Vocational education

There is a very limited literature on gender and vocational education within school education. Early initiatives tended to focus on encouraging more girls to enter traditional male areas (e.g. Girls into Science and Technology, Women into Science and Engineering) and equal opportunities were a key aspect of the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (Howieson, 1990). The literature discussed children's perceptions of occupational role and gender. The intention was to widen aspirations, particularly those of girls into what were regarded as traditionally male areas, but also to a lesser degree opening the possibilities for boys for entry into caring occupations.

Early studies identified gender-related patterns of post-school careers in the UK as well as other countries such as Australia and the United States (Powers and Wojtkiewicz, 2004). Evidence indicated that the limited nature of girls' aspirations was a key problem and that low aspirations were linked to low educational attainment.

A pattern of gender division in the take-up of occupations is evident in Scotland. The EOC (1998) noted clear patterns of gender stereotyping in entry into different types of training schemes. A more recent Scottish study by Howieson (2003) revealed similar findings. Gender differences were evident in the post-school experiences of early leavers, with male leavers achieving better outcomes despite having lower average attainment.

The most comprehensive discussion of vocational education is a paper from the Equal Opportunities Commission (1999), '*Gender issues in vocational education and training and workplace achievement of 14-18 year olds: an EOC perspective*'. Though girls' attainment has risen, there still seems to be a gender pattern in relation to the choice of options, entry into training and employment. They concluded that changes within schools had made little impact on choices of career and post-school destinations, which

were still highly gendered. Further, the EOC (1999) argue that mainstream systems reinforce rather than challenge traditional patterns of gender stereotyping and segregation. Croxford and Raffe (2005) found gender-differentiated patterns in science and technology from S3 in secondary education in Scotland.

The EOC identified a range of factors as contributing to the continuation of gender differentiated patterns. These included: careers guidance; school options guidance; peer pressure; societal stereotyping; 'washback' into schools and colleges of employment patterns; parent views; and students' own predilections. They advocate an open focus on gender alongside changes such as opening up option choices in schools.

One related area in school-based vocational education is that of work experience. Mackenzie (1997) noted the impact of gender on work placements, with boys more likely to have placements in engineering, mechanics and construction and girls in clerical and caring occupations. Some girls seeking non-traditional placements in e.g. mechanics were not taken seriously. Differences in the source of influence were found, with girls more influenced by parents and boys by their peers, particularly in circumstances where caring placements were regarded as 'women's work'. In a more recent study, Hamilton (2003) notes that parental influence in choice of work placements often reinforces traditional choice, although he did note that more boys were now involved in placements in primary and pre-five establishments.

2.9 Conclusion

Discussions of gender issues in the 1970s perceived girls as disadvantaged, while more recently the focus has been on boys' underachievement relative to girls. Similarly, 'solutions' to gender-related disadvantage have developed from straightforward prescriptions for organisational change through timetabling, subject choice and the way in which the curriculum is presented, e.g. 'girl-friendly' science approaches, to more complex theories about the nature of masculinities, in particular, and their relationship to other forms of social identity. The issues are more complex than was first considered and more strategies for addressing gender-related disadvantage are becoming available.

Developing gender policies and practice requires that gender issues are considered in all aspects of school development, as well as being a specific focus pursued through discrete strategies. Such permeating approaches might be mirrored in local authority and national education initiatives. The invisibility of gender in many policy documents has been surprising, given the highly gendered patterns of pupil experience.

Also noted here has been the influence of the broader social and economic context of schooling. Schools are sites where gender identities and relationships are formed, but these are also shaped by other factors such as social class, 'race' and ethnicity. Young people will have a sense of their futures and a view of the kind of men and the kind of women they will (and can) become, related to their wider experience in the family and in the community.

Having discussed how gender inequalities are made manifest and some of the strategies that have been advocated for addressing them in schools, we turn to consider how some schools have tried to implement such strategies and the impact that they have made.

The review of the literature relating to gender inequalities was intended to provide the basis for analysing strategies in use in Scottish schools. The key elements that form the basis of the analysis are:

- i. Background of the school(s) involved
- ii. Initial impetus and funding
- iii. The implementation of the strategy/ies

iv. The impact

In the case studies section of this report, each is discussed in relation to these elements and the issues raised in the literature.

CHAPTER THREE SURVEY OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The case study schools and authorities were identified through a brief survey, using a questionnaire approach. Questionnaires were issued to 31 of the 32 local authorities (Appendix 1); only one authority declined the invitation to participate. While addressed to Directors of Education, or their equivalent, the covering letter asked that the questionnaire be completed by whoever held responsibility for equity issues within the directorate. (The term 'gender (in)equality' was used for the sake of brevity, although it was acknowledged that other terms might be used by authorities to reflect similar concepts.)

In the event, 25 of the original 32 were completed and returned (78%), most of which were completed by advisers or education officers whose remit included equity issues. As the numbers are relatively small, the actual figures are reported here.

The purpose of the questionnaires was to determine the local authority's approach to gender inequalities issues and to identify potential case study schools, i.e. examples of good practice of specific gender-related strategies in operation. Authorities were also asked, where appropriate, to provide relevant documentation, such as policy statements, to the project team. Several respondents appeared to have had difficulty completing some of the questions on the grounds that 'gender' has become part of a more general inclusion policy and therefore difficult to separate out from other initiatives. A total of 18 local authorities identified examples of where strategies had been developed (Appendix 2).

3.1 Policy and planning

Nine of the respondents indicated that their authority had a written policy statement on gender (in)equality, 13 said it did not and 2 reported that a draft policy statement existed. Of the 9 with policy statements, 1 covered education establishments only, while 8 covered all aspects of policy provision. Fourteen of the 25 reported that the authority's Improvement Plan made reference to gender issues in schools.

One question asked whether the authority would expect schools to have a written policy on gender (in)equality, regardless of whether a policy statement existed at authority level. Seven said that they would, while another 7 indicated they would not; the remainder did not answer. They were then asked to estimate the percentages of educational establishments in each sector (pre-5, primary, secondary and special) that they thought had a policy, whether it was a requirement or not. Expectations varied from none to 100% of all establishments. For example, 5 authorities expected 100% of establishments in all 4 sectors to have policies in place. Another authority expected 100% of all establishments other than pre-5 to have a policy in place, while 2 other authorities expected 100% of pre-5 establishments and between 50% and 80% of the others to have one in place. It should be noted, however, that the documentation supplied by authorities did not normally match the reported incidence of policies and practices (see Section 3.2).

Authorities were asked to indicate, broadly, the nature of the policy for gender in schools within their authority. Twenty authorities replied, all indicating that it was either an integral part of the inclusion policy, permeated other policies or was a combination of these. No authority indicated that they had a stand-alone policy for gender. Comments included:

- *Not necessarily a stand-alone policy on gender but all schools have an equality policy.*

- *Most policies relate to equal opportunities, including gender, race, religion, disability etc.*
- *Policies on gender will also be part of policies on all equality issues.*

Twenty authorities expected that, where schools had policies, they would refer to the National Priorities², and 6 expected them to acknowledge the General Teaching Council (Scotland) Guidelines (GTC, 1991). Sixteen authorities expected to see gender issues on school development plans, where this was relevant to the context of the school. Others indicated that this would be the case only if an issue had been identified within the school itself.

- *Gender issues would only appear as a stand-alone priority if through self evaluation a particular issue was identified.*
- *Some schools will have specific strategies to tackle boys' underachievement, but this would be part of a whole school policy on raising attainment.*
- *Schools would be expected to include aspects of inclusion and equality in [their] development plans and gender equality would be monitored in all aspects of school life.*

A total of 18 authorities responded to a request for documentation on equal opportunity policies in relation to the topics addressed in the questionnaire. The responses were analysed to provide further contextual information.

3.2 Policy documentation

Of the 18 who responded to the request for policy documents, 1 stated that there was no specific equal opportunities policy in relation to children, while a further 11 provided copies of equal opportunities policies that were concerned with employment. Most of these were general local authority or 'corporate' policies where a range of factors leading to possible inequality were identified. They ranged significantly in scope and detail.

Six authorities provided documentation that referred specifically to schools. (Two were supplied in addition to conditions of service.) One provided a generic policy statement that schools were required to adopt and customise with their own name, etc. It focused on access to the curriculum and encouraged positive attitudes and the countering of stereotypes and prejudice. Gender equality was explicitly mentioned. Two other authorities provided policy statements that set expectations for staff in schools, both of which specifically referred to gender as a factor in discrimination and inequality.

The final 3 focused on gender as an issue in achievement in particular and, in one case, provided further detail on one of the strategies investigated as a case study in the fieldwork phase of the project. One authority had published a support pack for schools. The pack provided a review of the literature and offered practical guidance on catering for the needs of boys and girls in order to raise achievement. It also stated that while the issue of boys' underachievement was important, the issue of equal opportunity for girls remained very relevant. Another provided no overall policy statement but sent documentation relating to the implementation of single gender classes, including a brief review of the strategy by external consultants and achievement data from one secondary school that had implemented it. (This contributed to the case study report in Section 4.)

Three pieces of documentation were received from the final authority – a general equal opportunities policy, a learning and teaching policy and a learning and teaching toolkit designed to provide practical advice to teachers. The learning and teaching policy talked about inclusion, meeting the needs of the whole learner, multiple intelligences, flexible

² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/education/nationalpriorities/default.asp>

curriculum structures and lifelong learners, although gender was not specifically mentioned. The statements were supported by references to expert views and research reports (e.g. Black *et al*, 2002). The toolkit expanded on the policy statements and contained a significant section on gender, particularly boys' underachievement. Teachers were directed to a number of websites where they could find further information and advice, should they choose.

In general, there was little documentation received from authorities regarding an overall policy for schools which included gender as either part of an inclusion agenda or as a stand-alone issue. It is possible that authorities misunderstood the request, sending general equal opportunities policies instead of school-specific ones, but as they were sent by the same people who completed the questionnaire and who provided examples of gender-related strategies, this is a difficult argument to sustain.

A very small number had produced detailed guidance for teachers in schools, most of which was concerned with raising achievement.

3.3 Staff development and research

One section of the questionnaire asked for information on any staff development activities that might have been undertaken in relation to gender (in)equality, relevant to any strategies that might have been adopted by schools.

The most frequent themes for staff development were *'attainment differences'* and *'learning and teaching styles'* (17 authorities each). *'Access to specific curricular areas such as literacy'*, *'class organisation'* and *'pupil support'* were identified by 12, 11 and 10 authorities respectively. Five or fewer authorities reported that staff development events had been undertaken on *'exclusion'*, *'access to the curriculum through e.g. option choices'* and *'access to equipment e.g. computers'*.

More authorities reported that strategies to address gender inequalities had been adopted across these themes than had held staff development sessions on them. (Eighty responses were received to the staff development question and 111 to the question on strategies, indicating that, in some instances, strategies had been introduced without the support of staff development.) The most frequently cited strategies were in relation to *'attainment differences'* and *'learning and teaching strategies'*, with 16 and 17 mentions respectively. Thirteen authorities reported strategies to deal with *'access to specific curricular areas e.g. literacy'* and *'pupil support'*, while 11 identified *'class organisation'* as a theme being addressed. Ten reported strategies for *'access to the curriculum e.g. through option choices'* and 7 authorities were addressing *'access to equipment such as computers'*. Seven authorities also indicated that *'exclusion'* was being addressed in schools within their area.

Authorities were asked whether the strategies that had been adopted were based on any research findings or publications, and 19 authorities responded. Several reported that analyses of attainment data, including the Scottish Qualification Agency (SQA) statistics, had influenced the decision to address specific issues. Analysis of reading data in particular had led to a number of literacy initiatives with the focus on boys: *'influenced by 5-14 attainment data ... has identified a focus on reading and has led to initiatives such as 'Blokes and books' and 'Bags of books'*.

Some mentioned specific publications or support packs, e.g. Insight 4 (SEED, 2003b) and the South Lanarkshire support pack, *'Taking Account of Gender'*. Two authorities identified research undertaken by staff – in one case, an Assistant Head Teacher, and in the other an Educational Psychologist – as influential.

The project team were interested in the extent to which authorities had brought in 'experts' or researchers to assist with policy, practice or staff development. Most

mentioned external staff development activities that were subsequently developed within the authority and/or school, e.g. *'Key people have attended Geoff Hannan courses and taken issues forward in own school'*. Overall, a range of different agencies were identified in responses, including:

- private consultancies, e.g. Learning Unlimited, the Learning Game and/or individual educational consultants;
- academics from the higher education sector; and
- local authority advisers.

The final question in this section asked respondents to identify what they considered to be the **two** priorities in relation to gender (in)equality in education today. Twenty-two of the 25 completed forms identified two priorities. The key themes were:

i. attainment/achievement

15 respondents referred to attainment/achievement, 6 specifying attainment of boys and 1 referring to girls, eg

'difference in attainment by gender'

'continuing underachievement of boys up to S4/5'

'achievement of girls (especially in relation to SQA results)'.

ii. learning and teaching strategies, including learning styles

7 respondents referred to the need to develop effective teaching and learning styles for both groups of pupils, eg

'to raise awareness of the impact of differing learning styles'

'different learning styles between boys/girls'.

iii. career options

a total of 5 respondents cited career-related issues, eg

'career stereotyping'

'ensuring career option choices are not gender stereotyped'.

A number of other issues were identified by 1, or at the most 2, individual respondents, including: disaffected boys; exclusion; subject uptake; boys' literacy; lack of male role models; girls' reluctance to take risks/be speculative; active schools; and substance abuse (and its impact on attainment, attendance, etc). Two respondents stressed the need to maintain awareness of gender issues, while 1 asked for *'clear understanding of, and evaluation of, strategies adopted to address inequality'*.

3.4 Strategies to address gender inequalities

The final section of the questionnaire asked schools to identify up to 3 examples of strategies adopted within the authority that might serve as examples for the project. The questionnaire specifically asked for examples across the sectors – pre-5, primary, secondary and special schools.

A considerable range of examples was supplied by 18 authorities (Appendix 2). Achievement, particularly boys' underachievement, accounted for 9 of the examples given, while 8 examples relating to literacy were provided, 4 of which focused on boys. Learning and teaching strategies were mentioned 4 times, while single gender classes and the involvement of fathers were each mentioned twice. The remaining strategies covered specific areas of the curriculum, e.g. science, or referred to general themes such as

'Getting the best out of Boys' and the *'Alternative curriculum'*. Active learning, promoting health improvement and Handle techniques for addressing developmental disorders were also mentioned by individual authorities.

The examples identified by authorities were supplemented by instances gathered from other sources such the internet. The project team then identified a number of strategies for further investigation (see Table 1). Overall, the case studies were selected to provide a range of strategies across a number of authorities.

Table 1: Schools and strategies included in case studies

Theme	No of schools involved	Pupil emphasis*
Early literacy	5: 4 primary and 1 pre-5	Boys – achievement and motivation
Progression and continuity	cluster of 3: 2 primary and 1 secondary	Boys – achievement, motivation, attitudes
Gender inclusive strategies	2: both pre-5	Boys – self esteem, self image, role models
Single gender classes	3: all secondary	Boys – achievement and behaviour
Curriculum flexibility	1 secondary	Boys – raising attainment
Developing emotional literacy	1 primary	Boys – addressing challenging behaviour
'Reach for the stars'	1 secondary	Both – motivation and self-esteem
Streaming by ability	1 secondary	Both – motivation and self esteem for 'able' pupils

* It should be noted that most strategies were intended to improve attainment for both boys and girls, but there tended to be an emphasis, whether in the original plan or subsequently, on boys.

Although interview schedules were developed, the strategies varied significantly, as did the groups involved (parents, pupils, school and/or authority staff). Therefore schedules were developed which contained common themes but allowed the interviewer to adapt the specific questions in line with the particular strategy being investigated (Appendix 3).

CHAPTER FOUR SCHOOLS AND STRATEGIES: THE CASE STUDIES

4.1 Case study methodology

The local authority questionnaires indicated where examples of good practice could be identified with regard to the implementation of strategies to address gender inequalities, or perceptions of gender inequalities. The research team then developed a methodology which was common as far as possible for each study visit, while allowing for different contexts and strategies.

Schools were contacted by telephone and the researcher spoke to either the person responsible for gender related issues, or to the relevant school manager. At this point, arrangements were made for a preliminary visit. This preliminary visit was designed to clarify the nature of the strategies in operation within the school, to provide reassurance where necessary, and to make the appropriate arrangements for the case study visit itself. This included distribution of consent forms where these were called for in terms of the project's ethical approval.³

During the case study visit, where possible, the researcher met with school managers, class teachers, parents and pupils. It was not always relevant to include all of these. Evidence was gathered through one-to-one interviews with school staff and through focus groups of pupils and parents. Where observation of classroom practice was considered relevant, researchers tried to include this in the visit. They also tried to experience the life of the school and gain an impression of the general ethos that pertained. Case study visits generally took no more than one day, with the proviso that the researcher could return for an additional visit where this was felt to be necessary. This happened on a few occasions. During the visits themselves, researchers noted the responses by participants and stakeholders, and appropriate consents were logged.

Following the visits, reports were drawn up by each researcher in a common format. The protocol for this format is shown in Appendix 4. This enabled researchers to reach a common understanding of the purpose and nature of the visits, and to record findings in a consistent manner. A longer, narrative report was also compiled.

The case studies have been analysed by theme. It is readily acknowledged that many strategies adopted by schools are intended to have multiple outcomes, such as impacting on **both** behaviour and attainment. We have sought to identify the dominant theme in the reported strategies and grouped them accordingly. Those seeking to address achievement fell into two main groups: pre-5 and primary schools tackling literacy skills; and secondary schools that have adopted single-sex classes as a strategy. These have been presented separately. In addition, on occasion, the evidence from one case study has contributed to the discussion of more than one theme.

The evidence from the case studies is presented under the following subheadings:

- 4.2 Early literacy
- 4.3 Self concept and esteem
- 4.4 Progression and continuity
- 4.5 Achievement – single gender classes
- 4.6 Other reported initiatives.

³ Granted by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education of the University of Glasgow and compliant with all relevant legislation, including the Children Act 1995.

4.2 Early literacy

Literacy, or, more specifically, reading, was a major theme in the questionnaires returned by local authorities. In order to look more closely at the impact within schools, 5 schools across 3 local authorities were included in the case study phase of the project (1 nursery and 4 primaries). In most instances, the emphasis was on improving boys' reading, although the activities were intended to engender positive attitudes towards books and literacy in general for both boys and girls.

i. Background of the school(s) involved

Two of the schools from one local authority were small, relatively remote, rural schools with 2-3 teachers, including the headteacher, which served a number of small villages within farming communities. One school was in an affluent area where the pupils had stable, two-parent homes, while the second was more mixed in its catchment area, although without serious disadvantage or deprivation: this was confirmed by reference to the Scottish Area Deprivation Index.

The other 2 primary schools were slightly larger and, again, served more rural areas. Both catchment areas included both private and rented housing. The nursery school, in a third local authority, was situated in an affluent urban environment with significant numbers of children from ethnic minority backgrounds.

ii. Initial impetus and funding

In almost all instances, the strategy had been developed in response to the Scottish Executive's Home Reading campaign, originally launched in 2002. The initiative – Read Together – had the key aim of encouraging more parents and carers to read to their children⁴. There were several aspects to the initiative, including a leaflet and advertising campaign for parents, the appointment of reading champions to encourage parents, carers and children, a website, a Home Reading Coordinator and, most importantly for schools, a small grants scheme that provided them with additional resources to spend on materials and activities.

In launching the initiative, the then Scottish Education Minister, Cathy Jamieson, reported that most reading at home was undertaken by mothers, which gave the impression that reading is something that women do rather than men. The Minister emphasised the role of fathers and male role models in general and, more specifically, encouraged them to read with their sons. This, it was stated, would help to capture the imagination of boys. The Minister specifically suggested Harry Potter books or reading football programmes – reflecting the 'boy-friendly' fiction perspective.

iii. The implementation of the strategy

Some authorities encouraged all schools to bid for resources and to develop 'reading together' initiatives involving parents, while in other authorities individual schools had responded independently. In the case study schools visited during the study, the grant received from SEED was spent on books for the pupils. Some schools used the funding to expand their existing stocks of books, deliberately selecting ones that they thought would appeal to boys, e.g. non-fiction and stories about football or adventure stories. They also bought books that would appeal to both boys and girls, such as those featuring favourite television or film characters. In other schools, they used the funding to buy 'story sacks' or 'bags of books'. Each 'sack' contained a book, related games, additional reading and sometimes a soft toy or props. The intention was to encourage parents and children to read together, to play the games and engage in various activities related to the book.

⁴ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2002/08/2031>

In the schools visited, including the nursery, the literacy initiative was part of a whole-school policy to improve language skills for all pupils, although in each case the emphasis tended to be on the early years. The evidence indicates that differences in attainment between boys and girls are small in the early years but increase as they progress through the school, and the argument is that investing in the development of positive attitudes towards literacy in the early years can help to avoid later underachievement. The extent to which these books were intended to improve achievement levels amongst boys or were seen as simply ‘a good thing’ for all pupils varied. None of the schools experienced serious underachievement amongst boys and, in one primary, over 90% of boys achieved the reading targets for their (st)age. The schools tended to be taking advantage of resources offered to improve the position for all pupils.

In 2 schools, books were grouped according to which stage(s) they were intended for and pupils selected a book or story sack to take home, usually for 1-2 weeks at a time. These were brought back and exchanged for new sacks. In a third school, a rota was established such that each child took only one ‘sack’ home per term, whereas in other schools it was more often, e.g. every 2-3 weeks. The older pupils normally had to write some form of book review once they had finished, providing a record of their engagement with books.

In most schools, the reading initiative was linked to other literacy activities and/or ways of catering for differences in learning styles, some of which were perceived as related to gender. For example, teachers in one school had attended a staff development course that had emphasised gender differences in learning styles and preferences for activities. They had experimented with, for example, subdued lighting (they had been told that boys prefer this) and Baroque music (which was reported to enhance concentration). A particular focus was on literacy, where boys, it was said, needed additional help. What became evident to the headteacher was the way in which these tactics worked for some, but not all, boys. Interviews with staff indicated that they were sensitive to gender inequalities and tried to treat all pupils as individuals, rather than as girls or boys:

‘What works for some boys doesn’t work for others – you need to focus on the individual.’

iv. The impact

In all of the schools involved, it was felt that the boys’ attitudes to books had changed, becoming more positive over time, although this was difficult to gauge in some cases as the boys were already good and enthusiastic readers. In some instances boys were performing at slightly higher levels than previously, but that could not be traced directly to the introduction of the strategy. Boys and girls expressed enthusiasm for the strategy and almost all were keen readers. They looked forward to their ‘turn’ with the story sacks and had suggestions for other books that could be added to the stocks available. The pupils were aware that this was a strategy to get them to read more but they were unaware of any gender dimension. In 3 schools, they were aware that part of the strategy was to involve fathers to a greater extent.

Children in all schools were aware of gender differences, however, and expressed some of the expected stereotypes during the interviews. For example, in one school the children thought that boys tended to be noisy and girls liked flowers. Sometimes, the girls challenged the stereotypes: *‘girls can be firemen, they just need to be very strong’* (nursery girl).

In one of the small primary schools, all pupils across the stages were unanimous in their view that it did not make any difference if you were a boy or a girl in the school: *‘it doesn’t matter’*; *‘everyone gets equal attention’*; *‘you never feel left out’*.

A key feature was the involvement of parents. It was not possible to interview parents in all of the schools but where it was, they tended to be very positive in their comments about the school. Although aware of the literacy strategy, they were not always aware

that it was concerned, at least in part, with gender inequality. The schools had run sessions to introduce parents to the story sacks and, in some cases, had run workshops for them. These were appreciated by all. Some fathers were making the effort to read with their children in the evenings as a result of the initiatives. One mother commented on the extent to which the reading sessions had improved the relationship between her husband and son. Similar sentiments were echoed by other parents. The lack of male role models in schools was raised by a small number of parents and one father thought that girls got a better deal out of the education system, overall, than did boys.

Four of the 5 schools had been working with the literacy initiative for 3-5 years and it was becoming integrated into the day-to-day experiences of pupils. It was generally regarded by staff as one element of a wider drive to improve literacy standards for both boys and girls, although some admitted to focusing more explicitly on boys.

Most teachers did not see themselves as addressing gender inequalities, but rather as supporting all pupils to develop and achieve as individuals. Teachers encouraged pupils to become responsible for their own behaviour and their own actions/choices, and to develop greater independence in, and awareness of, their own learning. Most teachers were confident in their understandings of gender differences and styles of learning: ability was seen to be a characteristic of individuals rather than boys or girls *per se*. (In one school, the pupils themselves reported that boys tend to deal with ability either by trying not to show it or by bragging about it, whereas able girls were more comfortable with it.) Although no specific piece of research was cited during visits, many referred to findings that they had learned about at inservice or staff development sessions, e.g. that boys like non-fiction and to be active.

Individual schools had developed procedures and practices that enhanced the experiences of both boys and girls, but there was very little sharing of ideas across schools in any systematic way. Although these schools were working on similar strategies and priorities, they were unaware of each other. In the nursery, there was no reference to any communication with the associated primary schools.

Local authority involvement varied considerably. In one authority, the strategy had been developed across all schools and an evaluation of the impact had been undertaken and reported to SEED. In another authority a coordinator provided support and worked with the staff team to develop practice.

The major limitation identified by staff in schools was their inability to reach the pupils and parents that teachers would most have wanted to take part. There was some disappointment at the small numbers of parents who attended meetings and regret that the parents of children who might have benefited most did not turn up at all.

Example of evaluation completed by parents in one school using story sacks

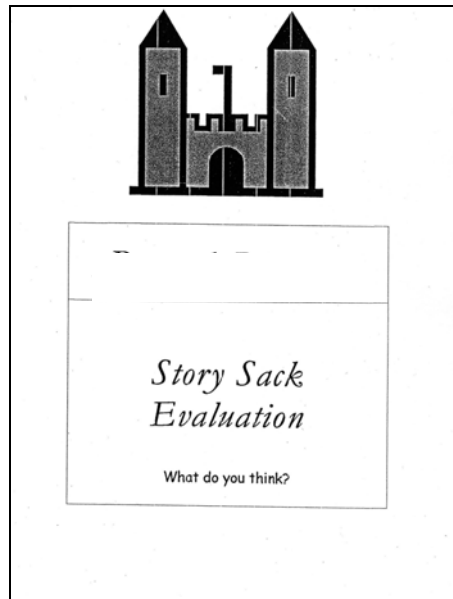


Figure 4. 1: Cover of the evaluation leaflet

Please tick or fill in.

1. Did you find the information meeting helpful in introducing the Story Sacks?
Very helpful Ok Not helpful

2. Were there enough sessions for changing the sacks?
Enough Ok Not enough

3. The choice in the Sack was:
Very good Ok Poor

Have you any ideas for improving the Sacks?

4. Did you get enough time to use the Story Sacks at home?
Enough Ok Not enough

5. Using the Diary was:
Helpful Ok Not helpful

6. My child enjoyed using the Diary each week:
A lot Ok Very little

7. How did your child benefit from taking part in Story Sacks?
The story sacks contained a lot of information.

8. Would you be willing to help run the Story Sack project in the future?
Not able to help.

Please make any comments about Story Sacks which you feel would improve it for future parents and children.

Figure 4.2: Inside of the evaluation leaflet

4.3 Self-concept and esteem

A number of initiatives designed to tackle self concept and break down gender stereotypes, in parents as well as children, were identified in the pre-5 sector. Most involved parents and were intended to tackle, gently, gender stereotypes within the community. One local authority and one of its nurseries were included in the case study phase.

i. Background

One city, with a history of deprivation and relative poverty concentrated in housing schemes and estates, had developed a general inclusion strategy which included initiatives to address parenting skills. Initially aimed at young parents and those living in deprived areas, the parenting initiative had progressively focused on the role of fathers. The key aims were to develop parenting skills and improve parent-child relationships, with issues of self esteem and confidence important, particularly regarding men. This programme, the Parents Services Initiative (PSI), is not linked directly to the school system, but operates on Saturday mornings and early evenings and tries to involve parents and pre-school children working on shared activities. It began in one, particularly deprived, estate and was then extended city-wide.

One nursery school within the same local authority was visited. In addition to involvement in the PSI, staff had developed a number of small strategies intended to open up choices and experiences to the pupils, particularly boys. It was in a council housing estate with high unemployment rates amongst fathers and a degree of deprivation.

ii. Initial impetus and funding

With a history of deprivation and disadvantage, the city established an Early Years and Child Care Team (EYCCT) to address aspects of the inclusion agenda and set up the PSI in 2000. The Initiative involves the education and social work services as well as the voluntary and private sectors. There is a partnership steering group, chaired by the Director of Education and with representation from all of the partners. Two Development Workers have been seconded from their posts in school and social work to support the Initiative. They plan, consult, generate ideas and carry plans through, often running the sessions and workshops themselves. They have begun to take on an advisory role, helping others to develop similar programmes of their own. It is funded by the city.

While schools and nurseries made attempts to involve fathers in events such as induction days, few got involved. This was causing concern. At the same time, a male social work student was placed with the team and he was interested in working with the fathers in ways that would support the development of parent-child relationships.

The headteacher in the nursery school was aware of the PSI but described the initiatives that she had taken within the school as being triggered by her observations of the children and how they played and inter-related. She noticed that they tended to play along traditional lines with, for example, girls rarely choosing to play with the construction toys. In role play and dressing up, they tended to conform to stereotypical heroes and role models. She had been further prompted to consider gender differences after she attended a national seminar where the speaker had 'touched on gender', raising issues such as right and left side brain dominance.

This had made her, and subsequently the rest of the staff in the nursery, more conscious of the criteria used in selecting and buying resources. They avoided buying toys and other resources which could be categorised as 'women's work', e.g. ironing boards, and tried to be 'gender neutral' in their selections.

Funding for the PSI came from a variety of sources, including the Scottish Executive, the local authority, churches and charities. They have also 'begged and borrowed' to get initiatives off the ground, including asking suppliers for surplus stock.

iii. The implementation of the strategy

Through a consultation process, the EYCCT found that fathers did want to be involved, but not through the kinds of groups run for women. They wanted to be more active, more hands-on, and were looking for physical, practical activities. The team started running Saturday morning sessions in neighbourhood centres that would appeal equally to mothers, fathers and their children. Sessions included making books, constructing puppets and kites, storytelling and preparing food, and some were also run in the evenings. They developed a series of parent and child workshops on popular themes such as Monsters Inc, and fathers did turn up with their children. They became much more involved and the team reported that they grew in confidence and their relationships with their children improved. They enjoyed the fact that their children saw them making things and the children were impressed by their fathers' skills. However, they still tended to make comments such as '*see the wife, that's her job*' when asked to give a view on children and their schooling.

The workshops were intended to involve fathers in the kinds of activities they could do at home and to give them skills, ideas and suggestions for following up the workshops. Either parent, or both, could attend any workshop, as they chose, and they attracted a broad range of parents of both genders. In addition, grandmothers frequently attended, and when young mothers came, they often brought someone else such as a parent, partner or friend.

The team took the deliberate decision to demand nothing of parents in terms of commitment to the initiative. Experience indicated that it was difficult to engage some parents in discussing their children and their progress, and many parents did not really want to be more involved than just attending individual workshops. It was also felt that parents would not want to be involved in our focus groups, and attempts to achieve this were unsuccessful.

Some nurseries are now running early evening sessions along similar lines and, although they were initially concerned that this was not a good time of day for fathers, these had been very well attended, with some fathers coming on their own.

In the nursery school, the headteacher targeted three areas of activity for action: sorting activities; role playing/dressing up; and indoor/outdoor play.

a. Sorting activities

Previously the objects used for sorting had tended to be plastic and of familiar content, e.g. farm animals, transport, etc. The nursery has introduced a broader range of types of objects, e.g. minibeasts, leaves, artificial flowers, with a greater emphasis on varying colour and texture. Where possible, these are tied into topic work, e.g. the seasons, the jungle. Around St Valentine's Day children were provided with hearts in different materials, e.g. wood, plastic, velvet. They have also introduced objects such as nuts, bolts and screws to be sorted, compared, sequenced, etc., '*to address the interests of boys*'.

b. Dressing up/role playing

According to staff, both boys and girls were happy to dress up using the existing stock of outfits (usually parents' cast-offs), but it was felt that both groups needed greater stimulus for imaginative play. To encourage this, staff introduced new outfits such as magical ones (witch/wizard) in interesting fabrics and, specifically to appeal

to the boys, animal print designs and a wider range of character outfits. Both boys and girls appear to have increased their interest in these activities, with boys enjoying dressing up as lions, tigers, etc. While not perhaps as immediately stereotypical as previous costumes, the children tended to use them in gender-specific ways.

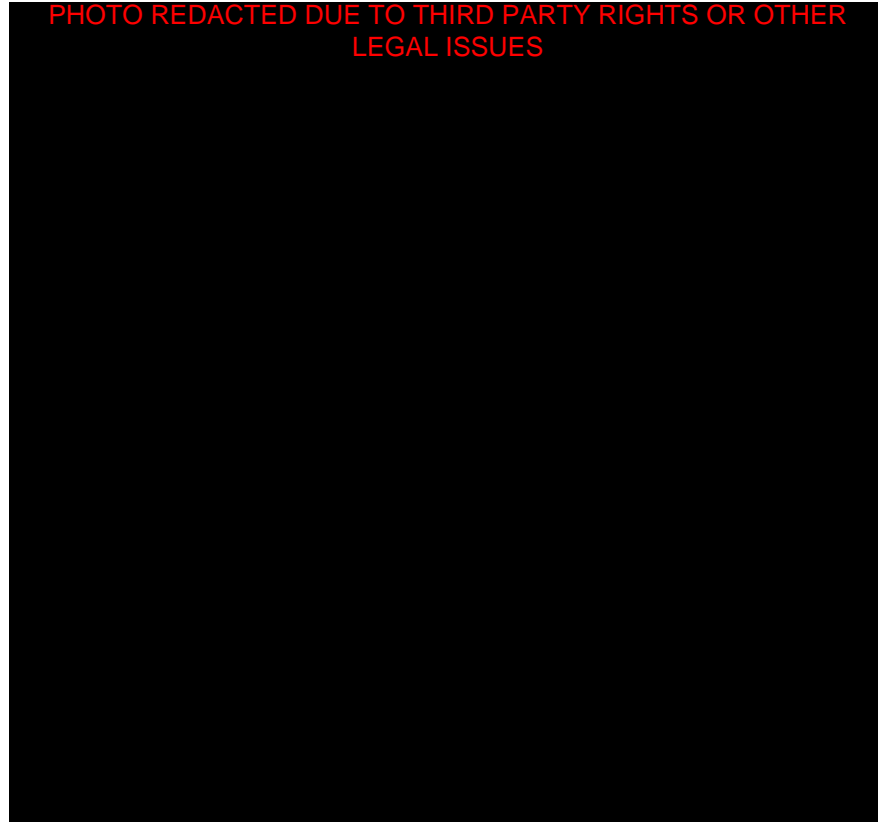


Figure 4. 3: Dressing up clothes that stimulate the imagination: greater variety, including gender-neutral outfits

c. Indoor and outdoor play

Traditionally, pre-5 and some infant classrooms have provided a ‘home corner’ where pupils can act out the kinds of activities that they see happening in their own homes. It was felt that such activities encouraged stereotypical roles and that other contexts should be provided. At the time of the visit, the nursery had set up a ‘Rainforest Hut’, with all the facilities that a home corner might have – food preparation, seating, table, etc. In the garden, staff introduced large rubber mats and large toy mice in addition to the usual outdoor toys, to stimulate active play and the children’s imaginations.

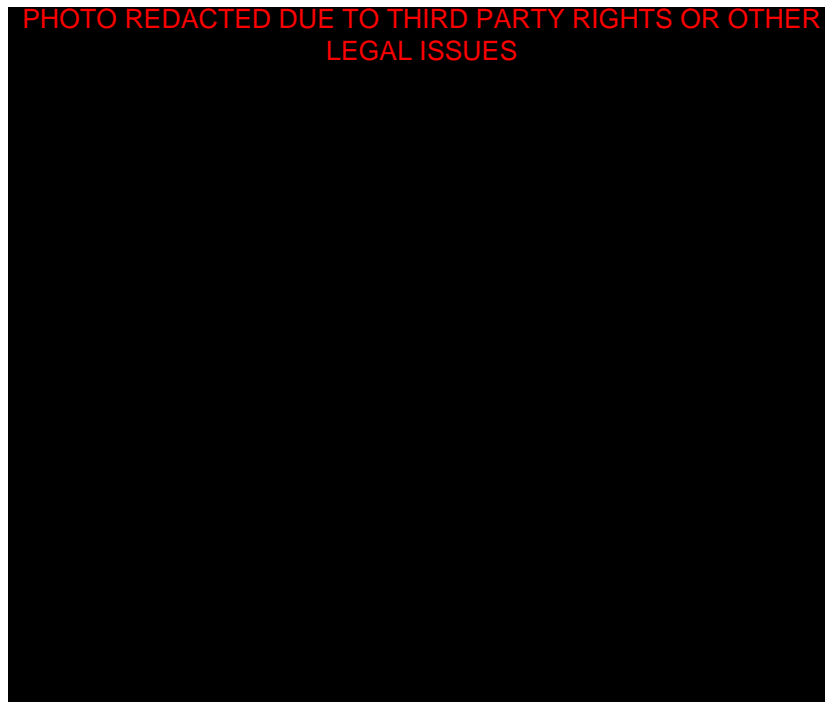


Figure 4. 4: The Rainforest Hut – replacing the usual ‘home corner’

iv. The impact

The city had not evaluated the initiative at the time of the visit, but it was acknowledged that this would be necessary. As many of the parents and children are linked to other projects concerned with alleviating disadvantage, it might be difficult determining the impact of the PSI in isolation. However, those interviewed identified a number of practical and ethical difficulties in monitoring impact. More specifically, they do not want to give out questionnaires/paperwork to parents as they have concerns about the literacy levels of some potential respondents and, consequently, the need to be sensitive to this. To date they have depended on informal feedback, such as comments after sessions or workshops. There is a suggestion that they will compile a sort of ‘video book’, using cameras to record parents’ views. They have also noted the numbers of those attending sessions but, out of a concern to respect privacy, have deliberately avoided keeping tabs on individuals. They have discovered, however, that many parents do tend to let the team know if they will not be attending a session or will give an explanation for missing one.

In discussing obstacles to further development, the interviewees pointed to a culture barrier between the team and the people they are working to support, as well as a power differential. Although they have tried to hand over more of the activity to the parents and involve them more, they feel that there are limits to how much the parents can take on.

There was also concern that, occasionally, such initiatives raised parents’ expectations of their future interactions with their children’s school, only for them to discover later that the school tried to keep parents out. The team members who were interviewed were of the opinion that this did happen and argued that such schools did not understand that ‘*if you involve parents early, you make life easier in the long run – if you get them on your side earlier – especially if there are problems*’. On the positive side, they noticed how fathers were able to appreciate their own child’s abilities and skills – often they were surprised at what they saw their son or daughter do.

For one of the team, the key was the **process** rather than the events themselves. The process was based on consultation, with a lot of time spent planning and listening to the

parents and what they wanted. Overall they aimed to be effective, regardless of whether the parent was male or female.

The team ran staff development sessions for pre-5 staff and contributed to the preservice initial teacher programmes at the local university, as well as providing advice and guidance on request. They had noticed that it tended to be the same, interested people who came to the inservice sessions they ran.

There are plans for further projects, including one that focuses on the role of men as fathers and which will culminate in a photographic exhibition of the fathers they are working with in a range of ‘father’ contexts. Another idea is to give men the opportunity to network and meet others in similar situations and to share with them the research on the impact of fathers on children’s lives, e.g. on achievement and delinquency.

4.4 Progression and continuity

In the initial survey of local authorities in Scotland, one authority indicated that, while it had a policy on gender-related matters in place, this could be mediated in different ways by the schools themselves. It indicated that good practice could be observed in a cluster of schools working together to address this matter, and accordingly all 3 schools were visited as part of the case study process. Meetings were held with management, staff, pupils and parents and teaching was observed in all 3 institutions.

i. Background of schools involved

The 3 schools, all serving rural communities, consist of a secondary and two associated primary schools. The area is designated as one of high socio-economic deprivation with attendant difficulties of long-term chronic structural unemployment and social exclusion.

ii. Initial impetus and funding

The issue being addressed was that of perceived under-achievement amongst boys, particularly in the area of reading. Further, there was seen to be a need to involve and engage parents and the community as much as possible with the future of the pupils’ education in the area. Consequently, a number of actions had been taken by the schools, working together with the support of the local authority. Firstly, a consultant had been engaged to provide an inservice day which was attended by staff from all 3 schools. Secondly, funding had been provided to support initiatives in which fathers and sons worked and learned together. A constant theme amongst respondents in this cluster group was that the dislocation of the male population was considerable: the majority of jobs available were for women, and often of a part-time nature. This had resulted in a situation where women were often the breadwinners and where the role of men in bringing up children was greater, but where families were also often dysfunctional and relationships strained. In this context, the authority and schools saw a role in providing positive leadership for families through a scheme entitled MATCH – Men And Their Children.

The specific policy shared by the 3 schools in the cluster was entitled ‘Getting the Best out of Boys’. It was clear that the focus was on the raising of horizons, giving children hope and therefore addressing a perception of hopelessness in the local culture. There were shared objectives: raising attainment (specifically of boys, but also of girls); social justice; and the promotion of sound learning through raised teacher awareness of learning styles. These objectives were clearly understood by staff from all 3 schools.

iii. The implementation of the strategy

Within the 2 primary schools, management responsibility was invested in the respective head teachers and their deputies, with a clear sense that there was a positive engagement with the policy and a determination to drive it onwards. Both primary schools

commented upon the sharing of responsibility for the initiative with all members of staff, including non-teaching staff and classroom assistants. This engagement was seen as crucial by both schools. However, while the secondary school management saw gender as an important issue, they addressed it in a more 'informal' manner, with the expectations that gender equality issues would be 'embedded' in professional practice. There was no effective coordinating agency for strategies to address gender inequality in place in the secondary school, in direct contrast to the situation in the two associated primaries, although the four Faculty Heads were expected to be involved. There was a strong culture of liaison and collaboration between the primary and secondary schools, and this was facilitated by the Depute Head of the secondary school working closely with her primary colleagues.

In both primary schools, the staff had attended staff development sessions, often organised by consultancies such as Tapestry (a consortium of Strathclyde and Glasgow Universities which offers expertise on learning), and often at their own expense. There was evident commitment to the initiative and a sense that it was worthwhile. Staff in both primary and secondary schools had awareness of relevant research, but this was focused on learning, and learning theories, as much as it was on issues of gender inequalities.

iv. The impact

The strengths of the policy were seen in the 2 primary schools as team-working; the importance of clear learning strategies, including active learning; innovative pedagogy; and the involvement of parents. In the secondary, the strengths were seen as ownership by the staff and a sense that the policy had 'percolated into learning and teaching'.

The scheme was favourably commented upon by the parents interviewed. The initiatives were conceptualised by the community as giving hope to children and families and providing a sense that learning is a useful activity.

In one primary school, there was unequivocal support from parents for what was being done and a high regard for the school in the community. Parents in the other school were more ambivalent: some saw the treatment of boys as uneven and they wanted a return to the 'tougher' methods that had been in place when they were pupils themselves. This was a perception clearly related to gender and to the behaviour of boys. In the secondary school, there was no dissent from the high regard in which the school was held.

Awareness of gender issues in education was uneven amongst parents. Some were aware of recent changes but others articulated their views along traditional, gendered lines. In one primary school there was considerable awareness of the strategies that were in use and of their effectiveness, but in the other there was little of this. Indeed, a view was articulated that the school should return to more traditional teaching methods rather than the strategies aimed at active learning. Parents in the secondary school felt that it was working well and that it was doing a good job for their children in difficult social circumstances. There was concern about the lack of good male role models in the schools and this was seen as a potential cause of tension; parents in one primary school also commented upon this.

Parents generally were very happy with what the schools were doing for their children. They felt that the initiative was helping to raise children's cultural and social horizons and were glad of opportunities to be engaged in their children's learning. There was no support for single gender classes in any of the groups of parents interviewed. Indeed, open hostility towards the idea was clearly articulated in 2 of the schools.

In both primary schools, the pupils interviewed felt strongly that both boys and girls had a fair deal. They articulated clear perceptions of gender differences. Pupils in both schools felt strongly that girls were smarter than boys, a view shared by both genders, and thought that girls 'got away' with more misbehaviour than boys did. Although there

was a thrust in the policy towards the promotion of reading and book selections to cater for the preferences of boys, the children themselves felt that it was reasonable to assume that both girls and boys shared the same interests. In neither primary school were the pupils aware of gender-specific initiatives being in place. However, they were very aware of initiatives to promote active learning and to address wider experiences of learning and teaching in their schools and were vocal in their support for what their schools were doing for them.

In the secondary school, there was equally a perception that the school was a good one with good, caring teachers. While there was some resentment amongst the boys that they were made to do 'female' things, there was equally a clear sense that pupils got a very fair deal. S2 boys commented on the active learning styles which were sensed as being widely available in the secondary school. They also felt that girls received preferential treatment; a view that was not shared by their S5 colleagues. While both groups felt that girls were better behaved than boys, there was no agreement that they were better learners. All the pupils interviewed had high aspirations, regardless of their gender. Again, pupils were unaware of a gender strategy being in place in their school and saw it as a matter for individual members of staff to address in their classes.

Amongst both primary and secondary pupils there was support for the policies of active learning and for more pupil choice in activities. There was no support articulated for single gender classes, although the girls in one school were somewhat ambivalent about this.

In summary, while it was clear that strategies to address gender inequalities were in place in this cluster of schools, it was less clear that these were specific and focused on this issue. Rather, they were part of an initiative to improve the children's attainment and to raise their social and cultural aspirations. There were clear differences between the primary schools, where the initiative was more consistently highlighted, and the associated secondary where, after the impetus given by the initial staff development day, a softer line was taken and responsibility was left with individual staff. Nevertheless, it was also evident that there was a coherent strategy in place in the cluster, that it was relevant to the learning, social and cultural needs of the children, appreciated by them (whether overtly or not) and that it was shared by staff in the primary schools. In these senses, the initiative may be regarded as good practice.

There are also issues of progression and continuity raised by these case studies. It is important for such initiatives, if they are to work effectively across sectors, to be managed with vigour in both sectors. Although there was evidence of high awareness of gender issues amongst staff in the secondary school, there was less evidence that the momentum which had been provided in the primaries was being sustained. It is advisable to address this if the effectiveness of the strategy is to be maintained.

4.5 Achievement – single gender classes

A recent development in secondary schools is the use of single gender classes (SGCs), generally in selected areas of the curriculum and/or at particular stages (normally where schools are trying to improve achievement in external awards such as Standard Grade). This case study examined the use of SGCs in 3 secondary schools in one local authority in Scotland. There are some strong similarities in both the practice and the views of those involved in SGCs, as well as some noteworthy differences.

Data was collected from 3 schools through:

- interviews with management – Senior Management Team members or Principal Teacher;
- interviews with teaching staff working with SGCs;

- pupil focus groups – one girl-only group and one boy-only group of between 8-10 pupils where the practice of SGCs was ongoing (2 schools); and
- classroom observation of a boys' class and a girls' class in each school where the practice of SGCs was ongoing (2 schools).

i. Background of schools involved

Of the 3 schools involved, 2 were non-denominational. One of these had a mixed catchment area, with a stable community, while the other was situated in an area with significant economic and social issues. In the latter, a range of strategies had been used successfully over recent years to raise attainment and the profile of the school in the local community. The third school was denominational, with a wide catchment area encompassing urban and rural communities.

ii. Initial impetus and funding

The strategy had been implemented as a result of concerns regarding achievement in national certification at the upper secondary stages, with the aim of raising attainment generally rather than as a strategy focusing specifically on the issue of gender equality. There were no direct funding implications.

iii. The implementation of the strategy

The use of SGCs is a strategy that has been used on a limited scale only and for a relatively short period of time. Furthermore, within each case study school there had been a lack of consistency in practice over a number of years. Changes in the teaching programme and in staffing, limited availability of consistent supply cover, differences in pupil cohorts year by year, as well as differences in teaching and behaviour management strategies (some of which were more effective than others), were all cited as influencing factors. Although in one school it was felt that there had been an impact on pupils in credit/general groups, evidence from other schools did not support this.

iv. The impact

The findings for each school are presented separately, using the same headings as for each case study, and an overview is provided.

School 1

In **the first school**, non-denominational in a disadvantaged area, the key findings from the school visits were:

Impetus: The impetus for this initiative came from a desire to raise attainment. The areas targeted for this were English and Mathematics, where Principal Teachers were expected to use setting.

Implementation: SGCs were implemented in S3 and S4, and the strategy aimed to target pupils in the middle range of attainment. In Mathematics, the strategy is also intended to tackle boys' behaviour and to allow girls a chance to participate: in this subject the whole year group had previously been dealt with but staffing constraints had seen the strategy limited to those in the middle range of attainment. There has been no specific matching of teacher and pupil gender, nor has there been expanded staff development in relation to gender issues, although discussion at departmental level and some staff development has been planned to look at teaching of boys.

Impact: The teachers held mixed views about the benefits of SGCs – some teachers found the boys' classes difficult to manage, though others expressed more positive views. One female teacher talked about being a role model for the girls in the SGC. The pupils also had mixed views. Some boys were slightly more positive about SGCs, especially with a male teacher, while some pupils preferred mixed gender classes. Both boys and girls expressed the view that they were conscious of what boys/girls might be being saying about them. More significant in the pupils' view was the relationship with the teacher.

School 2

The second school was also non-denominational, with a mixed, though stable, social background.

Impetus: The impetus for the initiative came from the Principal Teacher of English.

Implementation: The strategy involved SGCs across the whole year group in English: these were initially in S3 and S4, but were extended to include S2. There was no specific matching of teacher and pupil gender, although there was some staff development in relation to boys and learning.

Impact: The practice of having SGCs has now been discontinued by the revised setting arrangements introduced by new management. Staff held positive views about the benefits of single gender teaching for both boys and girls in terms of behaviour and attainment – particularly for pupils who were borderline credit/general.

School 3

The key findings from **the third school**, a denominational school drawing pupils from both urban and rural communities, were as follows.

Impetus: The initiative was coordinated by the Depute Head Teacher and a detailed evaluation had been conducted by a school development group. The main focus was again on the raising of attainment.

Implementation: Single gender classes were used in S3 and S4, once again in English and Mathematics, currently targeting pupils in the middle range of attainment. Reduction in the size of classes which this group attended and the timetabling of a coherent PE programme were associated issues. There was no specific matching of teacher and pupil gender, nor had there been any expanded staff development in relation to gender issues.

Impact: In this school, the teachers reported that the SGCs were more about behaviour – both boys' and girls'. For girls it involved tackling self-esteem and underachievement, building a 'can do' feeling and providing opportunities for them to participate fully in the

class. Teachers also felt it gave them an opportunity to adapt strategies to boys' needs to help tackle the boys' behaviour in class routines: boys need a quick start, tasks right away, being set to work, providing more structure, more small steps. SGCs were about girls and boys not trying to impress each other. However, the school evaluation of the previous year indicated no discernible effect of the initiative on attainment.

It is important to note that SGCs have been used in a limited way in each of the case study schools and for a short period of time. The strategy has been limited in terms of subjects and in terms of targeting particular sets of pupils, predominantly the pupils in the middle range of attainment, although it had been used in one school across year cohorts S2 –S4 in specific subjects.

Further, the use of SGCs was focused on wider issues of raising attainment rather than specifically on issues related to gender and teaching and learning. In one school the idea originated from the Principal Teacher seeing this strategy as a possible way of raising attainment and it was introduced to the department as part of the task of setting each year group for the particular subject. There was no extended staff development related to gender issues, with only one or two instances of staff attending development courses on the issue of teaching boys. There was also very limited change in content to match more carefully the interests of either boys or girls. In only one school was there a coordinated development between two subjects where the intention was to reduce class sizes as well as timetable a coherent PSE programme. Discussion had been largely contained within the department, with some staff accessing recent articles and the work of another school. In only one school was the initiative related to wider school development processes and coordinated and evaluated. There were some common threads in the teachers' views:

- the issue of behaviour, particularly in S3 and S4, where boys and girls tend to show off in the presence of the opposite sex;
- S3/S4 was seen as an ideal time to use SGCs – although they were used with S2 in one school, some teachers had reservations about using them with younger stages;
- SGCs tended to be targeted at the middle range of attainment, with reservations about using it with higher- or lower-attaining pupils;
- they provided girls with the opportunity to develop confidence and to be able to speak out in class;
- in English it was felt that SGCs provided the opportunity to raise issues about emotions and experiences for both boys and girls in ways that would not have been easy in a mixed context;
- they provided opportunities to match content to boys' interests;
- they were considered by some as successful for boys in providing structure, short clear tasks and increasing motivation;
- some boys' classes proved difficult to manage, particularly where these were larger (~ 30 pupils); here there was a constant need to focus on behaviour. A lot of time was taken up with this and the pace of covering the course was consequently slower;
- in two schools there had not been any discernible impact on attainment; and
- in one school there was a view that attainment had improved to some degree.

However, there were differences in perceptions across teachers and schools. Some teachers thought it more enjoyable to work with SGCs, finding it easier to build up a good relationship and rapport. Others were less convinced and reported difficulties relating to behaviour in boys' classes. In one instance, a girls' class was seen as difficult to handle, but this was due to previous disruption.

For pupils, there were some common threads. There were mixed views in relation to their experiences – some pupils felt the SGC was good but others expressed a clear dislike of the system. Both sets of pupils talked about the influence of the other gender in mixed classes – concerns about what they *‘would be thinking or saying about you if you answered’*. Boys held the view that girls were dealt with more leniently in mixed classes, whereas girls tended to talk more about being able to give their opinions and not be embarrassed in the SGC. Some girls expressed irritation at the boys’ continual bad behaviour, while other girls said it was boring without the boys and they missed their friends. For both boys and girls, the relationship with the teacher and attempts to make the lessons more interesting were more important than the SGC context. A good teacher was someone *‘who made you work but also had a laugh with you’*.

In conclusion, it is difficult to assess the impact of SGCs specifically on attainment. They were seen to be successful where there had been opportunities for the teacher to build up a good rapport with the particular class and to address the specific needs of that class, either through increasing boys’ motivation or developing greater self-confidence in the girls and enabling them to engage in class talk.

4.6 Other reported initiatives

A small number of interesting individual case studies were identified by the project team from the local authority returns. Each tended to involve more than one strategy, with at least some element of raising attainment, often through improving pupils’ aspirations and motivation. They were implemented on a whole school or stage basis and contained some element of gender-specific activity.

A. Theme: a flexible curriculum

Curriculum flexibility can be described as the strategies that schools and local authorities implement when designing a customised curriculum that:

- takes account of their own local circumstances
- recognises the requirements of their students and communities
- meets the needs and expectations of all learners
- meets the demands of stakeholders and society in general
- encourages increased achievement and commitment to learning.

(<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/curriculumflexibility/>)

i. Background of the school involved

The school is situated in a comparatively affluent area on the edge of a major city, with most of the pupils coming from relatively advantaged homes. In addition, it takes pupils from two nearby housing estates, each with some measure of disadvantage. Approximately 95% of pupils stay on to 5th year and 65% to 6th year. Parents have high expectations, in the main, of their children and the school. The school, in turn, sets high standards of behaviour and dress for pupils.

ii. Initial impetus and funding

Some 5-6 years ago, an analysis of Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) results had raised concern about the underachievement of boys, coinciding with wider concerns about boys and literacy. At that time various strategies were identified and implemented within the English department to encourage boys to read more, and more widely. From this, a more general strategy for raising attainment was developed. Initially, a limited

number of boys-only classes were introduced in a targeted way, i.e. with boys who needed more intensive support. However, these were discontinued after 2-4 years and there is, at present, no desire amongst staff for SGCs and very little support from the senior management team for a return to this approach. Other measures taken to deal with underachievement are seen to be meeting the needs of pupils in satisfactory ways, without SGCs. Senior staff who were interviewed expressed a clear desire to make sure that any changes are justifiable in educational terms and to take staff and parents along with them in introducing new practices. The local authority is supportive but has not provided additional funding or staff to support the developments.

iii. The implementation

In the context of this specific school, curriculum flexibility involves: a modular structure to the curriculum, with shorter targets and blocks of study; class sizes, in the main, at maximum size, allowing greater resource to be allocated to those needing more support; and a timetabling procedure that slots in the 'smaller' subjects first and fits the core areas, e.g. mathematics and English, around these, thereby maximising choice.

The school has an inclusion policy, of which gender is an element. Raising attainment, and more specifically, achievement in national qualifications, forms a significant part of the school development plan and is on both the local authority's improvement and operational plans. In these, there is a particular focus on boys' achievement levels, most notably on literacy.

The initiative was originally driven by the depute head with responsibility for learning and teaching and all teachers within the school are involved. The original work in the English department was initiated and driven by the Head of Department as part of their response to the school development plan. The literacy dimension has diminished in prominence, with the national qualification dimension taking priority.

In 2002-03, the school replaced Standard Grade programmes of work and examinations, including National Qualification units for almost all subject areas, and is continuing to work to achieve this for all pupils and subjects. The pacing of units and assessment events is believed to offer a more coherent learning experience for pupils, encouraging more of them to study for Higher qualifications. In particular, the short timescale of the units is considered more appropriate for boys. Those interviewed agreed that the National Qualification units offered better continuity, coherence, pace and progression than Standard Grade, and had greater relevance to the Higher programmes of study.

The school has held a number of seminars and staff development events related to the initiative. In addition, there have been meetings with parents to share plans and aspirations and gain their support for the developments. The various strands of the initiative are integrated into everyday practice.

iv. The impact

The school monitored and evaluated the original initiative and the subsequent developments relating to achievement in national qualifications. The impact received considerable publicity, with the outcomes presented at seminars and reported widely in the press.

Copies of slides used in seminars and with parents showed clear educational arguments for the initiatives, including references to research findings.

It was stated that there was a belief among staff that gender is not the key factor: that there is a cluster of factors affecting attainment of which gender is only one, albeit a visible and important one. More recently the school has been concerned with the intersection of gender and other factors such as ethnicity and ability.

Staff interviewed thought that a particular strength of the strategy was the fact that it was a whole school approach that involved parents as well as staff and pupils. Changes had been made to the ways in which they communicated with parents at, for example, parents' nights. Considerable time had been spent on 'awareness-raising' and on consulting with staff, parents and pupils. This had been complemented by in-house staff development on related issues such as learning styles. On the downside, there were some subjects that did not readily adapt to the National Qualifications format.

They had encountered a number of obstacles, including the attitudes of some parents and staff who had not been convinced of the need for change. In addition, some parents held traditional views of appropriate roles and career options for their sons and daughters.

B. Theme: developing emotional literacy

One primary school had developed a series of strategies designed to address the very challenging behaviour of some boys: behaviour that was impacting on the attainment of those boys in particular and on the classroom climate generally. Unfortunately, the coordinator of the initiative was ill at the time of the study and, as a result, the report was compiled from a brief visit to the school to meet the headteacher and a telephone interview with the coordinator, supplemented by information from the school handbook.

i. Background of the school

The school is a denominational primary school which, in earlier years, had been a combined primary and secondary school. When the secondary department moved to its present location, the primary department remained in the original accommodation and was re-named. Its buildings are traditional and centrally situated. Many parents and grandparents within the community attended the school and maintain close ties with it. The area has suffered from a degree of deprivation in the past.

ii. Initial impetus and funding

The strategy had been developed to respond to pupils – mostly boys – in the later stages of primary school who had very challenging behaviour and who seemed unable to manage their own responses to situations. One pupil, in particular, gave cause for concern because of his lack of self-awareness and self-control. The headteacher and the behaviour support teacher (who was also a Primary 7 teacher) believed that there might be benefits in a more direct and sustained attempt to develop emotional literacy in some pupils. Accordingly, parents, pupils and staff were consulted. A high level of support was expressed and the initiative proceeded. No research was identified as contributing to the development.

Funding had been made available from the Scottish Executive as part of the national programme, *Better Behaviour – Better Learning* (BB-BL)⁵. This was used to provide cover for the Behaviour Support Coordinator who worked with the extraction group one morning each week.

iii. The implementation of the strategy

For one morning a week, the Coordinator worked with a small group of pupils extracted from their ordinary lessons. The materials used to develop emotional literacy were taken from the nferNelson pack designed specifically for that purpose. Activities and tasks aimed, for example, to enable pupils to develop empathy by encouraging them to appreciate the impact of their actions from others' point of view. The approach also aimed to draw parents into thinking more about their children's responses and how these might be developed to improve relationships.

The initiative was relatively small-scale, targeted and *ad hoc* in that it operated in response to the needs of particular pupils, as these emerged. At the time of the visit, the procedure had been suspended for the remainder of the session as it was felt that the need did not exist at that time. It would be revived if a need was identified.

The specific initiative on emotional literacy was linked to other approaches used in the school such as Circle Time. It was perceived that boys had particular difficulties in expressing views and feelings and that the additional support provided in an extraction group for one morning per week would enable them to function more effectively in social situations. It was hoped that their improved behaviour would have positive implications for other pupils in their class and in the school generally.

iv. The impact

The approach here was not intended primarily to address boys' under-attainment, nor was it targeted specifically at boys. However, since the extraction group was composed solely of boys, this school's experience reflects a wider situation where there is a significant gender imbalance in discipline referrals and in national exclusion statistics. Concern about boys' performance in school relates to a number of outcomes and not just to attainment. *Better Behaviour – Better Learning* makes explicit links between learning and behaviour and advocates more integrated systems of pupil support. In that policy context, the work here could be seen to address boys' attainment by supporting their wider development.

For the headteacher, the continued use of this strategy will require funding to enable the Behaviour Support Coordinator, a Primary 7 teacher, to be released from her class. The strategy is very dependent on this one teacher and it does not seem to be embedded in practice in ways that would allow it to function independently of that member of staff.

⁵ www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/education/pbis-00.asp

The initiative had not been evaluated in any formal way and its impact was difficult to track as some of the pupils involved had left the school. There was a possibility that the initiative would operate again should the need arise and the staffing flexibility be available.

C. Theme: 'Reach for the stars'

This particular strategy, Reach for the Stars (RfS), had been in place for approximately ten years at the time of the visit and so was well established within the school. The school had a policy which covered the initiative.

i. Background of the school

The school, a denominational secondary, has a mixed catchment area and is situated in a town close to a major city. The school roll is under capacity and accommodation comprises two main buildings with two huts, each containing two classrooms. The school is scheduled to have a completely new building financed under a public/private partnership arrangement. The new school will be built on the site of the current establishment and the school will move to temporary premises in 2006 when this work is due to start.

ii. Initial impetus and funding

'Reach for the Stars' has been established for 10 years. It was originally developed as a response to Promoting Positive Behaviour developments and had a focus on pupils in the first two years of secondary school (S1 and S2). There was a desire amongst staff to shift the focus away from punishment and towards the positive reinforcement of desirable behaviour. The strategy was designed to provide added motivation for all pupils, not just boys.

As with most of these strategies investigated, attainment data had been instrumental in initiating the change in practice. Both the headteacher and the depute head indicated that attainment levels within the school were in line with national trends; girls generally tended to perform better than boys in 5-14 outcomes and in SQA awards.

The main cost has been staff time and this was met through the creation of a post of responsibility – Principal Teacher (Ethos).

iii. Implementation of the strategy

The initiative involved all teachers, first and second year pupils and their parents and was managed by the coordinator and a team of teacher volunteers whose main role was to organise and run the award ceremonies which form an integral part of the strategy.

Approximately two years ago, the principal teacher (PT) post in developing the ethos of the school was established, providing the coordination for the initiative (the RfS coordinator). In addition, there was a very effective system of distributed leadership wherein teacher volunteers cooperated to implement the various elements (the RfS team). All teachers in the school were involved, although their involvement was not considered to be demanding of their time and the administrative systems were simple and user-friendly. Involvement in the RfS team was regarded as a form of staff development.

The key aim of the strategy was to motivate pupils in S1 and S2 by providing a consistent, school-wide system of incentives. All pupils started with a maximum number of 48 points (i.e. 4 points for each of the twelve subjects on their timetable), but these could be deducted by teachers in any subject. Therefore, the challenge for pupils was to safeguard those 48 points. Points could be regained or awarded in line with four criteria, i.e. pupils were required to be caring, prepared, positive and responsible.

In discussions with staff and pupils, two issues arose in relation to these conditions. Some staff felt that they might disadvantage boys by emphasising traditionally ‘feminine’ qualities such as caring. In the focus group with pupils, there was considerable discussion of these criteria in relation to the consistency of their application. Some teachers, it was reported, gave rewards merely if asked to do so, whereas other teachers required that ‘*you save somebody’s life*’ before they would allocate rewards.

Award ceremonies were held approximately every 6 to 8 weeks and those who had maintained their tally had their achievement publicly recognised. In addition, teachers could give ‘gold awards’ and these, too, were recognised at the ceremonies. Approximately two thirds of pupils would receive an award at each ceremony and a letter would go home to their parents comparing their rating with the year average. The ceremonies were intended to be both educational and fun, and to this end a number of team games and activities were included.

It is readily acknowledged that the strategy is firmly rooted in behaviourist theory and emphasises the importance of rewarding the behaviour the school wants rather than punishing the behaviour it does not want.

iv. The impact

The approach here was not intended primarily to address boys’ under-achievement, nor was it targeted specifically at boys: the strategy was designed to increase motivation to succeed in all pupils. While girls tended to attract more of the rewards, it was felt that the very structured and comprehensive approach to incentives served boys well.

There is ongoing monitoring of the strategy. The coordinator maintains a database in which all returns from teachers are entered. This enables the identification of patterns and trends and the analysis of these by the RfS team.

In the discussion with pupils, behaviour rather than ability emerged as a main distinguishing characteristic of boys and girls. It was also a key concern for the focus group, with one girl advocating that the school should ‘*put those who do not want to learn in a class of their own*’. Girls were thought to worry more about their performance and to try harder. There was agreement between pupils (and some teachers) that boys were more optimistic about their futures. One S2 boy, for example, thought that boys generally believed they could always get an apprenticeship, even if they did not do well in school.

Pupils could not comment on whether the strategy had made a difference. It has been operating for ten years and is closely associated with their experience of the school. However, from the focus group discussion with pupils it was clear that the RfS strategy mattered to them. Pupils cared about their performance within it and enjoyed the award ceremonies.

Other schools have expressed interest in the strategy and some have visited with a view to establishing their own similar approaches.

E. Theme: streaming by ability

The final case study undertaken by the project team was on the impact of streaming by ability within a secondary school.

i. Background of school

The school, a denominational secondary community school, is located in a housing scheme on the edge of a city. It is housed in recently built and very attractive accommodation and was one of the first within the city to have its accommodation modernised and upgraded. The new buildings had much improved the school’s image within the local community and beyond, and the Head of the Learning Community

indicated that he believed there was a strong link between the quality of the physical environment and pupil attainment. At the time of the visit, the school roll sat at about two-thirds of its capacity.

ii. Initial impetus and funding

The strategy has been in place for four years. The initial impetus came from the outcomes of an inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate (Education) and the development of the follow-up Action Plan, in combination with wider concern and policy development relating to raising attainment. The key aim was to improve attainment levels of all pupils, which were below national standards. The initiative was not supported by any targeted staff development activity.

Any costs were met within the standard resources received by the school.

iii. Implementation of the strategy

The strategy centres on the policy of establishing a two-class accelerated stream within the school. It was originally pioneered by the Head of the Learning Community and is now embedded in the organisation of the school, and involves all staff and pupils.

Sixty pupils in each year are assessed as suitable for inclusion in the scheme on the basis of their 5-14 assessments. These pupils form two classes of 30, allowing some flexibility to work with smaller groups of the remaining pupils.

Alongside streaming, the school had adopted a number of other strategies for raising attainment. For example, a high priority was given to pastoral care, and two 15-minute sessions were used for mentoring groups of pupils each week. This time was partly devoted to encouraging pupils to think about themselves and their ambitions. Furthermore, the depute headteacher with responsibility for the inclusion agenda coordinated a system called *Alpha* where more pro-active support was given to pupils seen as being vulnerable. In addition, the pastoral care team, augmented by Classroom Assistants, offered a range of forms of support to certain pupils, including ICT programmes and counselling. A number of projects allowed pupils to engage in learning beyond the classroom. The intention was to support pupils to expand their horizons and to consider new possibilities for themselves.

iv. The impact

The school uses the established systems of local and national data-gathering procedures to monitor the impact. These indicate that the school has significantly improved its statistical outcomes for examinations, attendance and exclusions – outcomes that have led to considerable interest from the national press.

Three S5 pupils, all of whom had been in the accelerated stream, took part in a group interview. All three had very clear views of their futures in that they knew that they wanted to continue into higher education and, in two instances, were very clear and well-informed as to how they could achieve their aims. For example:

I am going to do an HND in Social Work and then I would like to do a degree in Child Psychology. (boy, S5)

The school reported that parents had accepted the streaming arrangements, even when their child had been placed outside of the accelerated stream. One member of staff believed that this was because they had always managed to convince parents that the school had their child's best interests at heart.

There is a further issue that emerged from discussions with teachers in schools which had attempted the implementation of single gender classes – the gender imbalances in attainment-set classes. For example, in one school in particular, the 'top' set had been largely girls and the 'bottom' set largely boys. Prior to the use of SGCs, there had been 22 girls and 4 boys in the 'top' set and 15 boys and 2 girls in the 'bottom' set. Thus there

are issues, not just in relation to the under-achievement of some boys, but to the experiences of pupils – both boys and girls – where they are in a significant minority position in a class.

4.7 Summary

The case studies included in the project ranged from small, focused initiatives to authority-wide developments targeting specific sections of the education system and populations more generally. Looking across the reports, the key features to success appear to be that:

- gender is only one of a number of factors recognised by schools as having an impact on pupils' educational opportunities and achievement as well as future career possibilities;
- the initiative has a number of strands designed to address motivation, self-esteem and confidence and to challenge stereotypical ideas with regard to roles, choices and behaviour;
- there are sound educational reasons, that can be communicated to parents, for adopting new strategies and approaches (which were often grounded in an understanding of theory and/or research);
- there is a buy-in across staff, pupils and parents, with all three involved in the consultation, decision-making and the on-going monitoring and further development of the initiative;
- deliberate steps are taken to build the initiative into the day-to-day practice of the schools/authority; and
- there is ongoing monitoring that allows modifications and adjustments to be made as practices develop.

In addition, while some funding and the existence of a 'champion' in the initial stages were important, if not essential, these factors were not, of themselves, sufficient to sustain long-term development and success. Nor was it realistic to expect to turn around achievement levels, for example, in a short period of time – those strategies that showed the greatest return had been in place for a number of years.

CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION

The review of strategies to address gender inequalities was designed to provide feedback on four key aspects:

- the extent of and key factors in gender inequalities in Scottish schools and how these relate to the international context;
- current policies and strategies to address inequalities in Scottish schools;
- the perceptions and views of pupils, teachers and managers in schools on the impact that inequalities have on self-esteem and confidence, aspirations and choice within and beyond the school system; and
- examples of where strategies have been effective in addressing gender inequality issues across the school sector.

These are considered in turn.

5.1 Gender inequality and Scottish schools

The review of the literature indicated that much of the concern over gender inequality in achievement, personal development (including self-esteem and behaviour) and career options is as relevant to Scotland as to the other countries discussed. Statistics from the Scottish Executive indicate that, as elsewhere, girls tend to outperform boys in most areas assessed through national qualifications and assessment programmes, with particular strengths in literacy. While girls are more successful in aspects of primary and secondary schooling, this is not reflected in higher education statistics, nor in later career achievement figures. Other issues which have been highlighted in the research as being current in Scottish schools include participation in particular subject areas; gender stereotyping and careers choice. In respect of the last of these, key issues for the career achievement for women include the extent of, and limitations of, part-time working and low pay compared to men.

5.2 Current policies and strategies

In the majority of local authorities and schools involved in the study, it was reported that gender was one of a number of factors of potential inequality addressed through broader inclusion policies, rather than an area for specific action. The local authorities' views on what was happening at school level did not always match the reality in the schools. For example, although some authorities indicated that all schools should have policy statements, they frequently did not. A very small number of authorities provided guidance for schools on addressing gender in the context of learning, teaching and achievement.

In the schools visited, most reported that they were guided by the authority's inclusion policy, although a few had their own, local policy. Where there was a school-focused policy, it tended to be in relation to the development of specific strategies, e.g. single-sex classes.

Overall, there was no discernible pattern in authority or school policies with regard to the issue of gender in schooling. If it was acknowledged explicitly, it tended to be one of a number of factors to be addressed within the inclusion agenda. The implementation of strategies was, in the main, a response to local 'problems' such as boys' underachievement or a lack of appropriate male/father role models. The principal area of concern within schools was that of boys' underachievement, particularly with regard to

reading and, more generally, literacy. This reflects the differential performance levels identified in national and school-level statistics.

Attempts had been made to address gender-related performance and behavioural issues through single gender classes, with mixed results. In boys-only classes, behaviour management was frequently cited as problematic, confounding attempts to improve achievement and motivation and to raise aspirations. The use of girls in mixed classes to 'police' the behaviour of the boys was seen by some as detrimental to girls' performance and aspirations.

Where strategies with a gender dimension had been implemented, an important feature was the extent to which the whole school was supportive of, and involved in, the initiative, and how leadership was provided. In secondary schools it was not usually the headteacher who had instigated the development, but rather a member of staff, usually in a post of some responsibility, who was interested in gender issues – a champion within a department or with specific responsibility in a related, cross-curricular area, e.g. learning and teaching. In primary schools, where good practice was observed, the headteacher was often responsible for the original initiative. Longer term sustainability seems to depend, however, on the development of whole school approaches. Ideally, for continuity and progression, the involvement of all schools within a cluster, including pre-5 establishments, would be desirable.

In one instance, the education service was working with other agencies such as social work and community education to develop a family-oriented approach to tackling traditional, stereotypical roles and improve children's life chances. Given the relatively small proportion of a child's day-to-day existence spent in school and the strong influence of the family and wider community in the socialisation process, including the development of gender identity, this would seem to offer a greater chance of success in the long term, albeit more demanding of the agencies and resources. However, innovations, other than the most trivial kind, take time – and changing attitudes to gender is not a trivial matter.

5.3 The views of school staff, pupils and parents

i. Awareness of gender as an issue

There was an almost universal view amongst those staff interviewed that gender was a pertinent issue in the context of schooling. For most, gender was one dimension, albeit a significant one, of a more complex cluster of factors including social background, ethnicity and culture – as in most of the available policy-related documentation received. School staff held diverse views on the importance of gender as an issue, from those who were actively working to address gender-related issues to those who felt that it 'had been done'. It was, however, a very small number of teachers who expressed the view that gender had been addressed in the 80s and 90s and that things had moved on – that gender was no longer an issue.

While gender was acknowledged as a factor affecting pupils' educational experience, there was also evidence of uncertainty as to the best ways to address it. Broadly speaking, the primary and pre-5 sectors were more active than the secondary. Whereas, in previous years, gender inequalities had concerned secondary schools (e.g. gendered subject profiles), it was those working with the pre-school and early primary years who were the most active. They tended to see it as a whole person issue, rather than tackling one aspect such as literacy or behaviour, and aimed to develop aspects of self-esteem and confidence in all children, including those on the margins of what might be described as stereotypical views of being a boy or a girl.

Pupils were particularly aware of gender. Girls were of the view that boys got more attention, and both groups thought that girls were better learners than boys. Even amongst the youngest children interviewed, there was already evidence of stereotypical views of what constituted ‘boys’ or ‘girls’ activities, in school or in later life. However, some children were prepared to challenge these. In order to break down some of the barriers that result from stereotypical images, children should be encouraged to reflect on and challenge such stereotypes – and to consider whether they really reflect what happens within their own families.

Parents tended to think that gender was not as important as achievement – and most did not seem to see a link between the two, although some parents were concerned about issues relating to perceptions of underachievement by boys.. They were rarely aware of any specific strategies to address gender inequalities operating within the school but tended to be more concerned that it was, broadly speaking, a ‘good school’. The overall ethos was more important. Parents tended to be more aware of, and involved in, gender-related strategies in the pre-5 and primary sectors than in the secondary, where achievement and behaviour were the key issues.

It is easy to forget, in all the discussion on gender inequalities, that, broadly speaking, boys and girls tend to be more similar than different in a range of characteristics such as attitudes, abilities, dispositions and behaviours.

ii. Strategies to address gender inequalities

Strategies identified by authorities and schools were intended to address perceived differences in achievement, behaviour, self-esteem, confidence and career aspirations. The literature identified a danger in adopting a strong stereotypical identity as the model of the male pupil in selecting resources, teaching styles and reward systems. Such approaches are typified by contexts traditionally associated with boys (action adventures, football and machinery), by requiring short concentration spans and changing the pace of activities. While this may be effective in managing those boys who conform or aspire to such a model of masculinity, it ignores, if not disadvantages further, those boys who do not. Neither does it address the issue of whether this is an appropriate, accurate or even helpful image to promote in schools, either for girls or for the wider community.

There was little evidence of specific strategies to address gender inequalities in vocational education through, for example, support for pupils to pursue non-traditional subjects or career choices.

iii. Staff development and research

Most local authorities identified at least one gender-related strategy adopted by a school or schools in their area, but few indicated that any staff development had been undertaken prior to its implementation. However, staff in several of the schools visited had attended seminars and workshops on themes that included aspects of gender, such as differences in learning styles. These had been delivered by external consultants and their practical advice had been valued and adopted in various ways. Some of those interviewed had followed up the sessions with personal research, were knowledgeable about some of the key literature and were working to address issues within their own classroom or institution, guided by what they had learned.

5.4 Effective strategies to address gender inequalities

Fullan (2005), in reviewing a number of large-scale initiatives, identifies a series of characteristics that contribute to effective strategies for change and, importantly, sustainability. These include:

- the acknowledgement of poor performance and the need to seek solutions;

- a focus on improving practice and achievement;
- the development of a system-wide framework and infrastructure to support innovation and change;
- distributed leadership (so that sustainability is not dependent on a ‘champion’);
- the availability of relevant, useful professional development; and
- the recognition that change takes time.

Together, these characteristics can be summed up as accountability and capacity building. Accountability refers to the need for systematic data gathering, monitoring and evaluation, while capacity building supports those involved in acquiring and developing the requisite skills, understanding and dispositions to bring about change. While Fullan’s analysis was based on studies of large-scale, often national, developments, these characteristics also have relevance for an analysis of the strategies investigated here.

In this study, most of the strategies investigated had some of these characteristics, but few, if any, had all. The first, an acknowledgement that things were not as they should be, or could be, was evident in all instances – as was the second. All case study schools and authorities were concerned at performance levels (e.g. examination results), behaviour statistics (e.g. exclusion rates) and/or subject choices. A decision had been taken, at some level, to introduce changes in structures and/or practices at specific stages, or institution-wide.

The third characteristic, the development of a system-wide framework and infrastructure, was rarely witnessed. In some instances, such as in some schools using the ‘bags of books or ‘story sacks’ approach, there were insufficient resources for it to make a real impact on children’s reading habits or there was limited monitoring of any impact. In other areas, a lack of consistency and/or coherence led to a degree of disillusionment. In one of the case studies, for example, a few pupils were concerned by the inconsistent ways in which a reward system was implemented by teachers, but this was a minor concern and the programme was making a significant impact on pupil motivation and aspirations throughout the school.

Where initiatives are introduced without clear parameters and a supportive framework, the impact on the pupil’s experience is fragmented and the potential unrealised. In addition, initiatives need to be sustained over a significant period of time, with consistent messages being conveyed.

The case study, ‘Reach for the Stars’, demonstrated the impact that distributed leadership can make. The other, larger initiatives also showed this characteristic and, in the authority-driven initiative to raise self esteem and confidence in pre-5 and early primary pupils, ownership of some elements was handed over to participants once they had been shown to work and were considered relatively stable.

For change to be effective, teachers need to operate from a position of informed professional judgement (Barber, 2002). While many of those interviewed made reference to educational consultants, researchers and theorists, this was rarely as the result of targeted staff development events on gender-related differences and their implications for learning and teaching. Examples of good practice observed by the researchers were often down to individual teachers’ own interests or experiences, but were not always underpinned by a deeper understanding of the issues. The literature indicates that gender, and its impact on performance, behaviour and life chances, is complex and multi-dimensional. In addition, it intersects with other factors to the extent that simple one-dimensional strategies are rarely effective.

Change takes time, especially where the aim is to change deeply entrenched attitudes and culturally determined patterns of behaviour. The evidence that there are gender-related

differences in the ways that boys and girls experience and benefit from schooling would appear to be compelling – addressing these inequalities requires coherent, inclusive policies and gender-sensitive practices to be developed and sustained throughout the educational careers of children and young people.

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APPENDIX 1 QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES



Review of Strategies to Address Gender Inequalities in Scottish Schools



Questionnaire for Local Authorities

The Universities of Strathclyde and Glasgow have been commissioned by the Scottish Executive Education Department to undertake a review of the strategies used to address gender inequalities in Scottish Schools.

The first phase was a review of the recent research and literature on such strategies. **This, the second phase of the study, is concerned with gathering information on what is happening in this area across the local authorities.** This will be followed by a series of case studies of strategies in action in a small number of authorities in the first half of 2005.

We appreciate your help in establishing what is happening in the local authorities – the information you provide will be used to identify a number of case study schools. However, we will not approach any schools without the permission of the authority.

In this questionnaire, we have used the term ‘gender (in)equality’ for the sake of brevity although we appreciate that other terms might be used to reflect the same issues. **If you have any questions on completing this questionnaire or if you would like an electronic version, please contact us as indicated below.**

Please return the completed form by 8 October 2004, using the FREEPOST label enclosed.

Name:	_____
Local authority:	_____
Post held:	_____

Please be assured that all the information you provide will be treated in confidence. Individual respondents will not be identified in reports, either internal or for publication.

Contact details: Phone: 0141 950 3186
Email: rae.condie@strath.ac.uk

A. Policy

Please indicate the policy position in your authority by ticking the relevant boxes.

1. a. Does your authority have a written policy statement on gender (in)equality?
 yes no

If 'yes', please answer (b).

- b. The policy in this authority: *(please tick as appropriate)*

i. covers educational establishments only	
ii. covers all aspects of authority provision	
iii. other (please specify)	

If you have a written policy, we would appreciate a copy with your completed questionnaire.

2. Does your authority's Improvement Plan make reference to gender issues in schools?
 yes no

3. Regardless of whether or not there is an authority-level policy, would you expect schools to have a written policy on gender (in)equality?
 yes no

4. Please estimate the percentage of schools within each sector that have a written policy that includes gender issues.

	%
pre-school establishments	
primary schools	
secondary schools	
special schools	

5. Typically, the policy for gender in schools within this authority is:

(please tick as appropriate)

a stand-alone policy	
an integral part of the inclusion policy	
permeates other policies	
other <i>(please describe briefly)</i>	

6. Would you expect any written policy to refer to the National Priorities?
yes no

7. Would you expect any written policy to refer to the GTC Guidelines?
yes no

8. Would you expect to see gender issues on the school development plan?
yes no

If you have any comments on policy in relation to gender issues, please use this space:

B. Staff development and research

1. We are interested in staff development activities in relation to gender (in)equality and in any strategies that have been adopted by schools.

Please tick to indicate:

- (i) aspects that have been addressed in staff development events by your authority, and
(ii) which aspects are being addressed through specific strategies within schools.

Area of concern	(i) staff development	(ii) strategies adopted
access to the curriculum, e.g. through option choices		
access to specific curricular areas, e.g. literacy (boys)		
access to equipment, e.g. computers		
attainment differences		
learning and teaching strategies		
class organisation		
pupil support		
exclusion		
other (<i>please specify</i>)		

2. To what extent has research into gender inequalities influenced the strategies adopted by schools? Any particular research findings?

3. Has your authority brought in ‘experts’ or researchers in the gender area to assist with policy, practice or staff development?

yes no

If ‘yes’, please give brief details of who and what for:

4. What, would you say, are the **two** priorities in relation to gender (in)equality in education today?

(i)

(ii)

C. Strategies to address gender inequalities

Part of our remit is to visit and observe such gender-related strategies in action. We are hoping to sample across pre-school/nursery establishments, primary and secondary schools and a range of different strategies. If there are such strategies within your authority, we would appreciate more detail in order that we can draw up a sample of schools to visit. (We will not approach them without consulting with the authority first.)

We would therefore ask you to describe strategies that you are aware of, indicating who was actively involved by ticking the relevant column(s).

	l.a.	staff	pupils	parents
1. Area of focus: School:				
2. Area of focus: School:				
3. Area of focus: School:				

Please continue on additional sheets, if you have more than three strategies that you would like us to know about.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire – we are very grateful.

APPENDIX 2 LIST OF STRATEGIES IDENTIFIED BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Local authority	Strategy/Area of focus	Reported involvement			
		l.a.	staff	pupils	parents
1	Reading: Blokes and Books, Bags of books			✓	✓
2	SQA performance – girls		✓		
3	Gender specific classes		✓	✓	
	Learning styles	✓	✓	✓	
4	Raise Boys' Attainment, S-Grade		✓	✓	
5	Handle Techniques			✓	
	Boys literacy/home reading initiative			✓	✓
	Use of learning maps P1-7			✓	
	Getting the best out of boys		✓		
6	Early years Parent Services – promote role/ involvement of fathers in children's learning				✓
	Contexts for learning – boys				
	Sure Start work – promote health improvement, men and boys in particular				
7	Boys' underachievement; single gender classes, class organisation, learning and teaching styles		✓	✓	
	Boys' underachievement; learning and teaching styles, use of ICT, Mindstore, tracking systems, supported tutorials		✓	✓	✓
	Literacy: learning and teaching styles, selection of resources, emotional literacy programme	✓	✓	✓	
8	Tracking of individuals' progress		✓	✓	✓
9	Active Learning for boys		✓	✓	✓
	Early literacy		✓	✓	✓
	Top 30 Tips		✓	✓	
10	Partnership/role modelling/reading champions		✓	✓	
	Storytelling	✓	✓	✓	
	Science Squad	✓	✓	✓	✓
	CASE	✓	✓	✓	
11	Developing language skills and motor skills	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Variety of teaching experiences	✓	✓	✓	
	Language across the curriculum	✓	✓	✓	✓
12	Under achievement of boys		✓	✓	
13	Boys' underachievement	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Raising boys' achievement in writing		✓	✓	
14	Boys and literacy	✓	✓	✓	✓
15	Citizenship in the 3-5 curriculum		✓	✓	✓

Local authority	Strategy/Area of focus	Reported involvement			
		l.a.	staff	pupils	parents
16	Range of gender issues on S2 equal opportunities day				
	Classroom practices				
17	Working with fathers				
	Learning and Teaching Strategies	✓	✓	✓	
	Gender imbalance in attainment				
18	Single gender classes, mentoring	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Reading in the upper stages		✓	✓	✓
	Alternative Curriculum: general focus on motivation through enterprise, pupil support and inclusion agenda	✓	✓	✓	✓

APPENDIX 3 INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Strategies to address gender inequalities in Scottish schools

Interview Structure: staff in schools

This schedule should be used as a guide to the key areas to be discussed during the interview with individual members of staff in case study schools.

1. **Outline of role:**
 - What has been your role in this work/project?

2. **What is the problem/issue that you are trying to address through this project?**
 - Why did you begin this project?
 - Who is involved in the project?
 - How long has it been running – how long do you intend it will continue?

3. **What has been the impact of the project so far?**
 - Why do you think it is having this impact?
 - What have been the good aspects, the not so good aspects?
 - What has been the impact on the wider school?

4. **How has the project been managed in the school?**

5. **What support and guidance have you been able to draw upon?**
 - SMT/LA
 - Staff development
 - development time
 - materials/resources

6. **Where would you like to see this project go (next)?**

**Thank you very much for answering my
questions.**

Focus group schedule: pupils

The themes for the focus groups have been taken from the aims of the research. Although most of the prompts are framed as questions, they are meant only to be guiding questions for the interviewer. The actual wording, and the number of questions or statements used, is at the discretion of the interviewer at the time of the visit.

Theme 1: the extent of and key factors in gender inequalities

Prompts: Do you think that boys or girls do better in school?
Why do you think this is?

Theme 2: current policies and strategies

Prompts: What do you do in your school to help girls/boys have a better experience?
Tell me about 'programme X'.

Theme 3: impact of inequalities on self-esteem, confidence, aspirations and choice within and beyond school

Prompts: What subjects do you like best in school?
Are girls or boys better at those subjects?
Why are they/are they not better?
Does it matter if you are a girl or a boy?
What subjects are you looking forward to doing at secondary?
Why do you want to do those subjects?
What would you like to be when you leave school? Why?
Do you think boys/girls would be better at that job and does it matter?
Give me an example of a typical boy/girl job.
What jobs could a boy/girl not do?
Are there any of these jobs that you would like to do?

Theme 4: examples of effective strategies

Prompts: How well do you think that 'programme X' has helped girls/boys?
What do you think would have been different if there had been no 'programme X'?
What changes has 'programme X' made to the school?

**Thank you very much for answering my
questions.**

Interview structure: parents

The following questions should be modified in the light of the sector (pre-5, primary, secondary) and with regard to the specific strategies under discussion.

1. General

Can you tell me a bit about your son/daughter? What stage is s/he at? How is s/he doing at school?

What contact have you had in general with the school?

Are you happy with how the school provides for your child (for his/her learning, well-being, etc.)? Is your son/daughter happy?

2. Gender

There is interest in how boys and girls do in the education system. Do you think that there are particular issues affecting boys? Or girls? If so, what are they?

If you think that there are gender differences in education, how would you explain them?

What kinds of things might schools do to address gender differences?

3. Gender strategies

Are you aware of what this school is trying to do to address gender issues? What are your views of this initiative?

Were you informed about this project? How?

Can you describe what is involved for your child? And for you?

How long has the project been running? Do you intend to continue your own and your child's involvement?

4. Impact

Has the project made any difference to your child, for example, to his/her attitude or attainment?

What have you particularly liked about the project? Can you give me any examples?

Have there been any drawbacks?

How could this project be developed further, do you think?

5. Conclusion

Is there anything you would like to add to what you have already said?

Thank you very much for answering my questions.

Appendix 4: Protocol for case study visits

Strategies to address Gender Inequalities in Scottish Schools

Protocol for analysis of data from field visits

Section 1 – General

Name of Strategy

Local Authority

School

Sector

Pre-5

Primary

Secondary

Brief description of strategy from school

How long has the strategy been in place?

Number of schools involved

Policy origin of the initiative

Local Authority

School

SEED

Other

Why was the initiative felt to be necessary?

Comments

Section 2 – Pedagogical and Management implications (Staff, School Management)

Is there a school policy in place?

Within the school, who is involved?

Coordination/direction of the strategy

Groups targeted

Gender

Social Class

Context of the school

(eg urban/rural; area of affluence/deprivation; geographical context; context within authority – high achieving/low achieving; any specialisms, etc)

Management implications

a) within the school

b) across the school (eg in secondary, across departments)

c) within a cluster of schools

Relationship with other strategies

E.g. improving attainment more widely, social issues, subject-specific initiatives, etc.

Monitoring/evaluation of the strategy

Strengths

Limitations

Obstacles

How is it carried out?

Who is responsible for the strategy?

Support for the strategy – e.g. from local authorities

Staff development initiatives since inception

Awareness of research?

Section 3
Focus group – Children

Pupil perceptions of the issues OR awareness of gender issues

Pupil perceptions of whether the strategy has made a difference

Pupil perceptions of methodology used

Effectiveness

Fairness

Enjoyable

Pupil views on what SHOULD be done

Section 4
Focus Group – Parents

General perceptions of school

Awareness of gender issues

a) in education

b) in the school

Awareness of strategies in action in the school

Perception of effectiveness of these strategies

Assessment of the impact of the strategies more widely

Suggestions for future development

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