

PLEASE NOTE VENUE

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM AGENDA



Monday 11th December 2006

at 2.00 pm

in the Community Room, Central Library
York Road, Hartlepool

MEMBERS: CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM:

Councillors Brash, S Cook, Fleet, Griffin, Laffey, London, Preece, Rogan, Shaw, M Waller and Young

Co-opted Members:

Elizabeth Barraclough, David Relton and Jesse Smith

Resident Representatives:

John Cambridge, Evelyn Leck and Michael Ward

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**
2. **TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS**

3. **MINUTES**

- 3.1 To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 8th November 2006.

PLEASE NOTE VENUE

4. **RESPONSES FROM THE COUNCIL, THE EXECUTIVE OR COMMITTEES OF THE COUNCIL TO FINAL REPORTS OF THIS FORUM**

None

5. **CONSIDERATION OF REQUEST FOR SCRUTINY REVIEWS REFERRED VIA SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE**

None

6. **CONSIDERATION OF PROGRESS REPORTS / BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK DOCUMENTS**

None

7. **ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION**

7.1 Draft Final Report - Raising Boys' Achievements – Bridging the Gender Gap - *Chair of the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum*

8. **ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS ARE URGENT**

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

i) **Date of Next Meeting Monday 8 January 2006, commencing at 4.00 pm in the Main Hall, Owton Manor Community Centre, Wynyard Road, Hartlepool.**

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

MINUTES

8th November 2006

Present:

Councillor: Jane Shaw (In the Chair)

Councillors: Jonathan Brash, Shaun Cook, Mary Fleet, Frances London,
Arthur Preece and Maureen Waller

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.2(ii) Councillor Dennis Waller
attended as a substitute for Sheila Griffin.

Co-opted Members:
Elizabeth Barraclough

Resident Representatives:
Evelyn Leck

Also Present: Chris Simmons, Governor, West View Primary School

Officers: Mike Viner and Sue MacKreth, Capita
Paul Wilkinson, Senior Advisor, Children's Services Department
Jo Dickinson, Children's Services Department
Joan Wilkins, Scrutiny Support Officer
Angela Hunter, Principal Democratic Services Officer

33. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Sheila Griffin and Co-opted Member David Relton.

34. Declarations of interest by Members

None.

35. Minutes of the meeting held on 18th October 2006.

Confirmed.

36. Responses from the Council, the Executive or Committees of the Council to Final Reports of this Forum

None.

37. Consideration of request for scrutiny reviews referred via Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee

None.

38. Consideration of progress reports/budget and policy framework documents

None.

39. Scrutiny Investigation into Raising Boys' Achievements – Bridging the Gender Gap – Evidence Gathering – Evidence from Capita *(Scrutiny Support Officer)*

The Scrutiny Support Officer introduced the Senior Regional Director of the National Strategies, CAPITA who had been invited to attend this meeting and provide evidence in relation to the ongoing investigation into Raising Boys' Achievement. During his presentation comparisons were provided from 2002 to 2006 which highlighted that at Key Stage 1 there were issues with performance overall with a particular dip in boys performance in relation to reading. Across Key Stages 2, 3 and up to GCSE level, there had been marked improvement in boys' achievement. He acknowledged that there were already a number of strategies in place in Hartlepool to tackle the issue of raising boys achievement and that the action plan of this inquiry was helping to achieve this, but the importance of ensuring that this issue was being dealt with on a consistent basis across all schools in the town was noted. In light of this, the statistics identified that the gender gap across Key Stage 1 was the narrowest in the region. However, it was noted that this gap increased as pupils move up to Key Stage 3.

The significance of making sure that the transitional arrangements from primary to secondary school was highlighted and the DfES had produced a self-evaluation toolkit to assist with this. The development of personalisation models and vocational diplomas were also supporting raising educational achievement, in particular with boys and vocational qualifications. The key areas to consider with this issue was:

- a) A timeline must be established of what is expected and when including milestones along the way.

- b) If this issue was dealt with correctly, it would raise achievement across both boys and girls.

A discussion followed where Members raised a number of issues including the following.

- i) The personalisation of teaching styles was very important, different ways of teaching need to be adapted to ensure that the pupils were kept interested in the subject matter and the teaching style was suited to their needs.
- ii) Members were concerned about the transition from primary to secondary and how this affected pupils. The representative from CAPITA informed Members that in one area, a secondary school had implemented a system whereby for the first half term of attendance pupils were only taught by three teachers. Although this involved a lot of organisation, it helped the children adjust from having one dedicated teacher in primary school.
- iii) There was some concern that too much emphasis was being placed on academic achievements, which left a gap in the skills market. The representative from CAPITA indicated that education always provides opportunity but that there were more vocational qualifications through new diplomas available to ensure that this gap did not occur.
- iv) Had there been any research to find out if the drop off in achievement through Key Stages 3 and 4 was due to pupils maturing and influences outside school? The representative from CAPITA indicated that this would be research into learning styles became important as in order to keep pupils interested in learning, the style needs to change with them as they mature.
- v) Although the importance of involving parents was emphasised by the Forum, it was noted that consideration needed to be given to the timing of meetings and where they were held to encourage parents involvement.
- vi) Did school governors have an important role to play? The representative from CAPITA insisted that Governors had a very important role to play as they were in a perfect position to challenge the Head of a school about how the school delivered education. Governors were seen as the public's conscience in the schools and it was important that there was understood clearly.
- vii) Members felt that too much emphasis was placed upon achieving targets within schools and that pupils should be encouraged to study what they were interested in and not what would provide good statistics.
- viii) Members welcomed the introduction of more vocational qualifications but were concerned that it was not clear what these academic qualifications would be equivalent to for prospective employers and this could be demotivating to pupils.

The representatives from CAPITA were thanked for their very interesting and informative presentation and for answering a number of Member questions.

Decision

Members noted the presentation and information provided which would be used to inform them when forming their recommendations from this inquiry.

40. Scrutiny Investigation into Raising Boys' Achievements – Bridging the Gender Gap – Progress of the Investigation and Identification of Possible Recommendations for Inclusion in the Forum's Final Report (*Scrutiny Support Officer*)

The Scrutiny Support Officer outlined the progress to date in the 'Raising Boys Achievement – Bridging the Gender Gap' investigation. Members were asked to consider the formulation of possible recommendations in order that its final report can be submitted to Cabinet on 22nd January 2007. During this investigation, a series of formal evidence gathering sessions and site visits had been undertaken and they were detailed within the report. Members had noted that during the course of the school visits it was noted that many of the views expressed and activities undertaken were mirrored across all the schools. Attached by way of appendix was an extract from the Performance and Achievement Division's Operational Plan 2006/07. Included within this plan were full details of the activities undertaken by the Department and the proposed timescales for their completion. In terms of an overall view, of what was being done in Hartlepool schools, this information was not available at the time. However, Members were informed that this would be addressed through the appointment of the Boys' Achievement Co-ordinator.

Members noted that the level of staffing and resources allocated to deal with this issue varied from Council to Council. The Scrutiny Support Officer presented a table that compared the level of support given to raising boys' achievement and any strategies in place across the Tees Valley authorities.

A discussion followed in which Members raised a number of issues including the following.

i) There was some concern that extra staff were being appointed when it appeared that the authority was already dealing with the issue of raising boys' achievement. Members were advised that boys' achievement levels had not been highlighted as a major issue before and that a named co-ordinator would ensure the effective implementation of the strategies identified. The Co-ordinator would also be working with secondary schools to develop strategies to deal with boys' achievement at Key Stage 3.

ii) It was noted that although a marked improvement had been seen in boys' achievement since the implementation of unitary status for the authority, resources needed to be targeted to continue this excellent progress.

iii) Members were of the view that it was important to ensure that the

reading material used was interesting in order to hold the attention of the pupils.

iv) The importance of information sharing was noted by Members. The Senior Advisor from the Children's Services Department informed Members that although Head of Schools tried to tackle problems within their schools, there were network systems in place across all schools to share information.

v) It had been noted that funding had been provided for some schools to help with the transition from primary to secondary schools and it was asked how successful this was. The Senior Advisor reported that all secondary schools had a high degree of success although there were always room for improvement. A toolkit had been produced for schools to help with the transition period.

vi) Members were informed that a secondary school out of the area had introduced a system where initially, new pupils were only taught by three teachers, thus reducing the impact of transition from having one teacher at primary level. Although it was acknowledged that this may be a difficult system to introduce logistically, there were some good points.

In conclusion, Members felt that there was a need for radical ideas and changes in order to improve achievement across the town, but particularly in relation to boys' achievement.

Decision

Members noted the report and the discussions which would be used to formulate a draft final report to be presented to an informal meeting of this Scrutiny Forum on 27th November 2006.

41. Budget and Policy Framework Initial Consultation Proposals 2007/08 *(Scrutiny Support Officer)*

At Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee on 27th October 2006, it was agreed that Executive's Initial Budget and Policy Framework consultation proposals for 2007/08 be considered on a departmental basis by the appropriate Scrutiny Forum. The Director of the Children's Services Department was in attendance and presented the departmental pressures and priorities, grant terminations and proposed savings which were attached by way of appendix.

Budget Pressures

The Director of Children's Services informed Members that the pressures identified within Appendix A were unavoidable pressures for the next financial year. Members were concerned at extra statutory duties being placed upon the Authority by the Government in relation to Children's Services without any extra resources being provided. The Director of Children's Services reported that there had been no indication as yet, whether funding would be provided

to cover the extra duties detailed within the schedule of budget pressures.

Budget Priorities

The Director of Children's Services informed Members that top level priorities were identified as services that should be carried out, although not at the same level as a pressure. However, the priority identified was highlighted as high impact which may result in failure to comply with statutory duties if not fulfilled.

Proposed Savings

The Director of Children's Services reported that although the departmental budget totalled £71m, just over £50m was allocated to the dedicated school grant.

3%

Whilst Members acknowledged that some difficult decisions were required in relation to budget savings, it was noted that the proposed 3% savings should have the least impact on services.

4% and 5%

Members had significant reservations about proposing any savings over and above 3% as they felt this would have a major impact on services, in particular with regard to the Attendance Team and School Improvement. There had been significant improvements made through a very effective Attendance Team and this would be jeopardised if proposed as a saving. The Director of Children's Services advised that it was hoped that the Education Advisors would work alongside the School Improvement Team and work across both primary and secondary schools and build on their existing relationships with the schools, children and governors. It was also highlighted that the withdrawal of a third of the match-funding of £86k to support school improvement equated to a reduction in real service loss of £172k.

It was noted that budget monitoring reports would be submitted to Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee which would highlight any over/underspends on the Budget and Policy Framework proposals.

Decision

The Budget and Policy Framework initial consultation proposals for 2007/08 were considered and the following proposals would be presented to Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee on 17th November 2006:

a) Budget Pressures

It was proposed to accept the budget pressures as identified within Appendix A.

b) Budget Priorities

It was proposed to accept the budget priorities as identified within Appendix B.

c) Savings – 3%

Members fully supported the savings as identified within Appendix C up to the level of 3%.

d) Savings – 4% and 5%

Members felt that the savings identified at 4% and 5% would have a seriously detrimental effect on the services provided by the Children's Services Department.

JANE SHAW

CHAIRMAN

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

11 December 2006



Report of: Children's Services Scrutiny Forum

Subject: DRAFT FINAL REPORT – RAISING BOYS
ACHIEVEMENT – BRIDGING THE GENDER GAP

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To present the findings of the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum following its investigation into 'Raising Boys Achievement – Bridging the Gender Gap'.

2. SETTING THE SCENE

- 2.1 Boys' achievement is one of the key factors effecting education performance and the gender-gap has been a high profile issue, both nationally and internationally, since the early 1990's.

- 2.2 The issue of boys achievement is complex and there is little consensus with professionals regarding its causes although some possibilities include:-

- (a) Girls' greater maturity and social awareness;
- (b) Some boys disregard for authority, academic work and formal achievement;
- (c) Girls' intuitive use of talk, reflection and collaboration to support learning;
- (d) Girls' apparent ability to rise above indifferent teaching;
- (e) Differential gender interactions between pupils and teachers in the classroom;
- (f) Differences in students' aspirations and their attitudes to work;
- (g) A 'macho' or 'laddish' peer culture among boys;
- (h) Boys' efforts to avoid the culture of failure; and
- (i) Modification of the examination system.

- 2.3 It is acknowledged that literacy skills play a key role in the gender gap, however, it is important to recognise that the pattern of boys' underachievement does not relate to all boys, or all subjects. Whilst girls do consistently outperform boys in all four stages in English the position in mathematics up to the age of 16 is more evenly matched. Nationally there are also signs that girls are beginning to fall behind in science by the age of 11.

3. OVERALL AIM OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

- 3.1 The overall aim of the Scrutiny investigation was to examine the educational achievement levels of boys in Hartlepool with a view to identifying possible ways of improving performance to bridge the gender gap.

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

- 4.1 The Terms of Reference for the Scrutiny Investigation were as outlined below:-

- (a) To gain an understanding of national policy issues relating to boys achievement levels and the bridging of the gender gap;
- (b) To gain an understanding of the national and regional picture relating to the gender gap in education achievement levels;
- (c) To gain an understanding of work undertaken nationally and regionally to identify factors affecting boys achievement and the strategies/models identified to address the gender gap;
- (d) To consider examples of good practice in other Local Authorities;
- (e) To examine boys achievement levels in Hartlepool and explore:
 - (i) The reasons for/factors linked to underachievement by boys and the gender gap;
 - (ii) The strategies in place to improve boys achievement levels and close the gender gap; and
 - (iii) The effectiveness of the strategies in place.
- (f) To compare strategies/practices implemented in other Local Authorities, and strategies/models identified nationally, with those in place in Hartlepool with a view to identifying possible areas for improvement.

5. MEMBERSHIP OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

5.1 The membership of the Scrutiny Forum was as detailed below:-

Councillors Brash, S Cook, Fleet, Griffin, Laffey, London, Preece, Rogan, Shaw, MWaller and Young.

Co-opted Members: Elizabeth Barraclough, David Relton and Jesse Smith.

Resident Representatives: John Cambridge, Evelyn Leck and Michael Ward.

Education Advisor: Rob Lowe.

6. METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

6.1 Members of the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum met formally between 17 July 2006 to 11 December 2006 to discuss and receive evidence relating to this investigation. A detailed record of the issues raised during these meetings is available from the Council's Democratic Services.

6.2 A brief summary of the methods of investigation are outlined below:-

- (a) Detailed Officer reports supplemented by verbal evidence;
- (b) A site visit to examine the good practice that exists within a neighbouring Local Authority in relation to 'Raising Boys' Achievement'. Visit undertaken to Sunderland City Council (4 October 2006);
- (c) Site visits to the following schools to illustrate the work already being undertaken in Hartlepool:
 - (i) West View Primary School – 15 September 2006;
 - (ii) Golden Flatts Primary School – 20 September 2006;
 - (iii) Kingsley Primary School – 22 September 2006;
 - (iv) Manor College of Technology – 26 September 2006;
 - (v) Dyke House Secondary School – 5 October 2006; and
 - (vi) Brierton Community School – 17 October 2006.
- (d) Evidence received from the National Education Breakthrough Programme;
- (e) Evidence received from the Blended Learning Pilot Programme (currently being implemented in Hartlepool);

- (f) Evidence received from a representative from North East of England National Strategies for School Improvement; and
- (g) The views of local residents, parents, children/young people, teachers, school governors and adults other than teachers working in schools.

FINDINGS

7. NATIONAL POLICY RELATING TO BOYS' ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS AND THE BRIDGING OF THE GENDER GAP

7.1 The Scrutiny Forum was informed of the Government's commitment to raising the performance of all underachieving pupils, both boys and girls and its efforts to address the gender issue through the work of the DfES and its partner organisations. Further details of the research undertaken and the strategies implemented are outlined in Section 10 of this report.

7.2 Based on the information shared with the Scrutiny Forum, Members also found that:-

- (a) The Government recognised the complexity of the factors contributing to the gender gap and the absence of a simple solution;
- (b) Appreciated the diverse nature of each school in terms of their history and culture; and
- (c) Recognised that whilst many of the problems experienced by schools were shared, there was a need for solutions to be based on the requirements of each individual school. In order to achieve this it was necessary for each school to focus on the evaluation of its results to find out when and where boys' underachievement occurs.

8. THE NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PICTURE RELATING TO THE GENDER GAP IN EDUCATION ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS

8.1 Member were pleased to find that statistics showed that the percentage difference between boys and girls achievement levels for 2006 confirmed that the gender gap in the North East region differed very little from the national position.

8.2 The Forum was also advised of evidence that in some instances:-

- (a) The gender gap in the North East region was in fact smaller, or equal, to the national figure, as shown in bold in **Tables 1, 3 and 4** overleaf; and that

- i) Boys outperform girls, as shown in the shaded boxes in **Table 2**, and have consistently achieved similar results as girls in maths and science.

TABLE 1 – Percentage Gender Gap at Key Stage 1 (KS1) – Achieving Level 2 or above*

	Reading %	Writing %	Maths %
England (LA maintained schools)	11	17	3
North East	13	18	2
Hartlepool	14	19	5

TABLE 2 – Percentage Gender Gap at Key Stage 2 (KS2) - Achieving Level 4 or above*

	English %	Reading %	Writing %	Reading %	Writing %
England (LA maintained schools)	10	8	15	1	1
North East	11	8	20	1	2
Hartlepool	8	8	17	3	1

TABLE 3 – Percentage Gender Gap at Key Stage 3 (KS3) – Achieving Level 5 or above*

	English %	Reading %	Writing %	Maths %	Science %
England (LA maintained schools)	15	15	14	1	1
North East	15	16	15	2	1
Hartlepool	16	17	18	4	1

TABLE 4 - Percentage Gender Gap at Key Stage 4 (KS4) – GCSE or equivalent*

	5+A*-C %	5+A*-C (inc. English & Maths) %	5+ A-G %	5+ A*-G (inc. English & Maths) %
England (LA maintained schools)	9.7	8.2	4.3	4.7
North East	8.9	7.3	4.1	4.7
Hartlepool	7.4	11.2	3	3.3

* Figures provided by the DfES (North East of England National Strategies for School Improvement)

8.3 The Forum was particularly pleased to see the lower than national figures in relation to Key Stage 4 (GCSE or equivalent results), however, it was noted that there was an increase in the gender gap for 5+ A*- C grades in Hartlepool when English and maths figures were included. The Forum observed that this was a reverse of the national and regional trend and were of the view that this reflected the real area of concern for boys' achievement in Hartlepool, i.e. English and in particular writing.

8.4 The Forum also drew attention to the increase in the gender gap following the movement of boys from primary school (Key Stage 2 – Table 3) to secondary school (Key Stage 3 – Table 4). It was noted that this increase occurred nationally, regionally and more specifically in Hartlepool and tended to be larger in English, maths and writing. This added further weight to the point made in paragraph 8.4 and highlighted concerns regarding the effectiveness of transitional arrangements across the region and nationally.

9. WORK UNDERTAKEN TO IDENTIFY FACTORS AFFECTING BOYS' ACHIEVEMENT

9.1 The Forum was informed that in identifying factors affecting boys' achievements a number of pieces of research had been undertaken resulting in the production of the following papers:-

- (a) 'Yes He Can – Schools Where Boys Write Well'; and
- (b) 'Boys' Achievement in Secondary Schools'.

- 9.2 The main findings of these reports were that whilst the issue of boys' underachievement was complex schools that had been successful in raising boys' attainment and writing skills all exhibited the following characteristics:-
- (a) A positive learning culture that stimulates high standards, engages boys' interests and insists on good behaviour;
 - (b) Good teaching and learning;
 - (c) Good classroom management;
 - (d) Track and support boys' performance; and
 - (e) Have strategies focused on literacy which provides intensive support on reading, writing and literacy across the curriculum.
- 9.3 Members of the Forum were encouraged to find that many of the characteristics identified were already present in schools in Hartlepool and felt that this was a contributory factor to Hartlepool's success in dealing with the issue. Further details of the Forum's observations in terms of work being undertaken in the schools visited in Hartlepool as part of the investigation are outlined in Section 12 of this report.
- 9.4 The Forum was also advised that the Government had initiated a three year pilot project (The Raising Boys' Achievement Project), the aim of which was to 'examine strategies employed by specific schools which appeared to be effective in raising boys' achievements'. The results of the project showed that:-
- (a) Boys respond well to an integrated approach to literacy, where the emphasis is less on the teaching aspects of learning to read and write, and more on the process of becoming a reader and a writer. Drama provides a medium through which this approach can be effectively delivered;
 - (b) Target setting and mentoring have a strong potential to raise achievement for boys;
 - (c) Single sex classes can contribute to raising achievement as they enable a classroom environment to be created which allows both sexes to learn with less distraction and disruption; and
 - (d) Socio-cultural approaches underpin other strategies through challenging images of masculinity.
- 9.5 Regarding the work of the Raising Boys' Achievement Project, the Forum was particularly interested in the elements of its recommendations relating to the factors necessary for the effective implementation of strategies to deal with raising boys' achievement. These included:-

- (a) The importance of leadership and support;
- (b) A shared commitment by all staff involved; and
- (c) The creation of school ethos where staff and pupils feel valued and involved, have clear boundaries and where there is a focus on the individual pupil.

9.6 Members of the Forum acknowledged the importance of these factors and gave consideration to how they related to the work currently being undertaken in Hartlepool schools. The Forum commented that on the basis of the visits undertaken as part its investigation it appeared that schools also recognised the importance of these strategies and that activities were being undertaken to achieve them. It was, however, noted that only a selection of schools had been visited and at the time of the investigation a full analysis of activities being undertaken was not available, although work was now underway on obtaining this.

10. NATIONAL AND REGIONAL STRATEGIES/MODELS IDENTIFIED AND IMPLEMENTED TO ADDRESS THE GENDER GAP

National Strategies and Models

10.1 It was brought to the Forum's attention that the Government had in recognition of the importance of the gender gap issue developed and implemented a range of strategies. These included:-

- (a) The National Literacy Strategy;
- (b) The Key Stage 3 National Strategy;
- (c) Materials and Guidance;
- (d) The Raising Boys' Achievement Project;
- (e) The Blended Learning Project;
- (f) The National Reading Campaign;
- (g) Playing for Success;
- (h) The Dads and Sons Campaign;
- (i) LEA Education Development Plans;
- (j) The Breakthrough Collaborative Project (i.e. The National Education Breakthrough Programme referred to in section 9 of this report.);
- (k) Sponsoring work with Beacon Schools; and

(l) The Gender Achievement website.

10.2 Each of these strategies could be grouped into four different areas:-

- (a) Pedagogic - Classroom-based approaches centred around teaching and learning;
- (b) Individual - Essentially a focus on target-setting and monitoring;
- (c) Organisational - Ways of organising learning at the whole school level; and
- (d) Socio-cultural - Approaches which attempt to create an environment for learning where key boys and girls feel able to work with, rather than against the aims and aspirations of schools.

Strategies and Models Implemented Regionally

10.3 Following an examination of the national strategies available, the Forum was encouraged to see that many were already being 'rolled out' on a regional basis. In looking more closely at some of these strategies the Forum received presentations on the work being undertaken through the National Education Breakthrough Programme for Raising Boys' Achievements in Secondary Schools and the Blended Learning Project.

10.4 In relation to the National Breakthrough Project the Forum was advised that sixty six schools across the country, including a number from the North East region, were taking part. One Council which had been taking part in the programme was Sunderland City Council and in order to observe its operation first hand the Forum undertook a visit as part of its investigation. Details of the visit are outlined in Section 11 of the report.

10.5 The Forum was also informed of the work being undertaken as part of the Blended Learning Project, the aim of which was to raise boys' achievements by changing organisational systems of learning and teaching in order to maximise the potential of students. A pilot of this project was already being implemented in Hartlepool and details of this are outlined in section 12 of this report.

11. GOOD PRACTICE IN OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES

11.1 As part of the Forum's remit, consideration was also given to comparing a neighbouring Local Authority's activities in addressing the issue of raising boys' achievement and reducing the gender gap.

11.2 Sunderland City Council had over recent years been involved with National Education Breakthrough Programme for Raising Boys' Achievements in Secondary Schools, the key principles of which were:-

- (a) Use of strong leadership and the creation of an environment for change;
 - (b) Focus on teaching and learning methods;
 - (c) Use of mentoring and targeted intervention;
 - (d) Create capacity; and
 - (e) Use data to drive improvement.
- 11.3 These key principles mirrored a number of the findings of the Raising Boys' Achievement Project.
- 11.4 Members received evidence from the Boys' Underachievement Project Manager, and School Improvement Officer, for Sunderland City Council. During the course of the presentation it was highlighted to Members that some of the schools participating in the programme had achieved a 17% improvement in GCSE results. Members were also advised that involvement in the programme had for Sunderland City Council resulted in a 4% reduction in the gender gap (to 8.15%) between 2005 and 2006.
- 11.5 During the course of the visit those Members of the Forum present were clearly impressed with operation of the programme and in particular the use of learning conversations as a way of reaching boys. An additional issue raised during the Forum's visit related to the sharing of information. It became evident during the course of discussions that there was a considerable amount of expertise available within the North East region in relation to raising boys' achievements. Whilst it appeared that there were informal mechanisms in place for the sharing of this information Members suggested that the creation of a formal body should be explored.
- 11.6 Members at a later meeting of the Forum received a detailed presentation on the work of the programme from the Programme Director of the Education Breakthrough Programme and were interested to hear that a secondary school in Hartlepool (Brierton Secondary School) was already participating in the first stages of the programme. Members welcomed the involvement of Hartlepool schools in the programme and it was suggested that the situation at Brierton Secondary School should be monitored with a view to the involvement of more Hartlepool schools in the programme should it prove to be effective.
- 11.7 In considering the possible extension of involvement in the National Education Breakthrough Programme for Raising Boys' Achievements the Forum acknowledged the possible financial implications. During discussions with programme Director a possible option for the formation of a funding cluster approach came to light and the Forum was of the view that this should be explored further.

12. BOYS ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS IN HARTLEPOOL

- 12.1 Following detailed consideration of the national and regional position in relation to raising boys' achievements, and the gender gap, the Forum went on to look at the position in Hartlepool.
- 12.2 The Forum was informed that locally the issue of raising boys' achievements was one of the key priorities within the Council's Children and Young Persons Plan. Members were encouraged to note that Hartlepool had a history of dealing well with the gender gap issue and had consistently performed close to the national figure.
- 12.3 The Forum received information to illustrate this, as outlined in **Tables 5 to 8** below, with instances where boys outperform girls shown in the shaded boxes:-

**TABLE 5 – Percentage Gender Gap In Hartlepool at Key Stage 1 (KS1)
- Achieving Level 2 or above***

Year	Reading %	Writing %	Maths %
2003	11.5	13.1	1.7
2004	11.6	12.5	4.5
2005	9.4	12.5	1.8
National Figure 2005	8	11	2
2006	14	19	5

**TABLE 6 – Percentage Gender Gap In Hartlepool at Key Stage 2 (KS2)
- Achieving Level 4 or above***

Year	English %	Maths %	Science %
2003	13.1	0.2	1
2004	6.9	1/9	0.1
2005	8.8	0.2	1.5
National Figure 2005	10	1	1
2006	8	3	1

TABLE 7 – Percentage Gender Gap In Hartlepool at Key Stage 3 (KS3) - Achieving Level 5 or above*

Year	English %	Maths %	Science %
2003	13.1	4.3	4.5
2004	15.7	3.1	2.7
2005	14.9	2.7	4
National Figure 2005	13	1	1
2006	16	4	1

TABLE 8 – Percentage Gender Gap In Hartlepool at Key Stage 4 (KS4) - GCSE or equivalent*

Year	5+A*- C %	5+A*-C (inc. English & Maths) %	5+ A-G %	5+ A* - G (inc. English & Maths) %
2003	9.5	8.3	3.2	2.1
2004	4	6.8	2.1	3.8
2005	8.3	7.5	3.7	4.4
National Figure 2005	11	9	5	5
2006	7.4	11.2	3	3.3

12.4 From the statistical information provided for the last three years the Forum observed that:

- (a) The highest gender gap percentage was consistently in the area of English and in particular writing. This pattern was mirrored nationally and was recognised by Members as a possible area for the concentration of efforts in Hartlepool; and
- (b) Where boys had outperformed girls it always tended to be in the areas of maths and science.

12.5 From the statistical information provided for 2006 the Forum also learned that:-

- (a) In terms of GCSE (or equivalent) results Hartlepool was now within the top ten percent of all local authorities with 58.1% of all pupils achieving at least 5+ A*-C. This exceeded the 55% national target set for 2006 and was only 3.9% off the target already set for 2007;

- (b) When broken down into boys and girls achievements 2006 results showed a 7.4% gender gap, in favour of girls. This was an improvement on the 8.3% figure for 2005 and was only 2.2% off the national figure for 2006 of 9.6%; and
- (c) The importance of literacy in terms of boys achievements could be seen when 2006 results were looked at more closely in terms of the number of 5+ A*-C GCSE (or equivalent) including English and mathematics. Results showed that the gender gap increased to 11.2% in 2006 compared to the national figure of 8.7% and in terms of how this compared to previous years it represented an increase in the gender gap from 7% in 2003, 7.3% in 2004 and 7% in 2005.

12.6 On a regional basis, the Forum considered and compared Hartlepool's results with those of the neighbouring Tees Valley Authorities, as outlined in **Tables 9 and 10** below .

12.7 The Forum noted from the information provided that Hartlepool performed well in comparison to its Tees Valley neighbours in relation to Key stage 4 and the number of A*-C grades achieved and was in fact under the national figure. An examination of the figures for A*-C grades including English and maths, however, resulted in the Forum reiterating its view regarding the major contributory factor which English and maths grades make to boys achievement levels and the need for the focusing of strategies in Hartlepool towards this in the future.

TABLE 9 - Achievement Gap Between Boys and Girls - 2006 - Key Stage 4 (A*-C Grades)

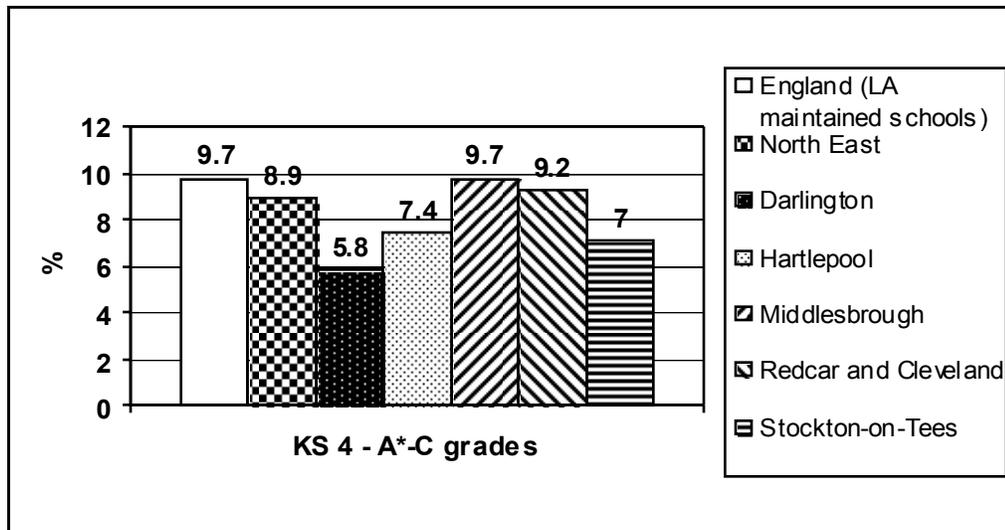
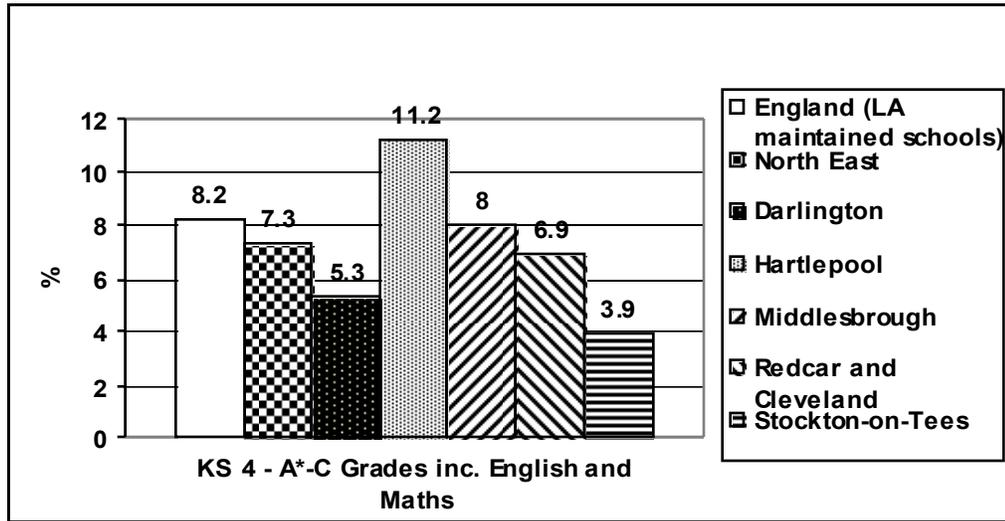


TABLE 10 - Achievement Gap Between Boys and Girls - 2006 - Key Stage 4 (A*-C Grades - Including English and Maths)



The Reasons for Factors Linked to Underachievement by Boys and the Gender Gap

12.8 In examining the statistical information provided Members of the Forum acknowledged that Hartlepool started with a very low baseline in terms of boys' abilities, i.e. when they start school at the foundation stage, and were of the view that Hartlepool's achievement in relation to the size of its gender gap was even more commendable.

12.9 During the course of its investigation the Forum undertook a series of visits to schools in Hartlepool. During the course of these visits the Forum obtained a 'snapshot' of each school's view on the gender gap issue and the types of activities being undertaken to address it. From these visits it was apparent to Members that many of the reasons for boys' underachievement in Hartlepool mirror those identified nationally, as outlined in paragraph 2.2.

The Strategies in place to Improve Boys' Achievement Levels and Close the Gender Gap and their Effectiveness

12.10 During the course of the investigation and in particular the visits to schools the Forum noted that many of the views expressed and activities undertaken were mirrored across all the schools. These included:-

- (a) The absence of a single solution to the gender gap issue and the need for a combination of initiatives and options to be available for schools;
- (b) The importance of:-
 - (i) Good transitional arrangements;

- (ii) Mentoring;
 - (iii) Knowing your students and identifying what types of learners they are;
 - (iv) Social skills and interaction;
 - (v) Creating a positive ethos in the school, in terms of manner and speech with the aim of making learning 'cool';
 - (vi) Sharing information with other schools in relation to each child and best practice for dealing with the gender gap;
 - (vii) Good teachers and having teaching assistants in class;
 - (viii) Continuous monitoring of staff and pupil performance;
 - (ix) Making boys to feel secure in their learning environment;
 - (x) Curriculum development were possible and the problems which the rigidity of the curriculum in the first three years of secondary school causes in terms of keeping boys engaged;
 - (xi) Effective transitional arrangements between primary and secondary schools; and
 - (xii) Personal and subject profiles so that everyone knows what is expected of them and what is needed to move onto the next level.
- (c) The need:-
- (i) To teach every child as an individual and address their learning needs;
 - (ii) For teachers to adapt teaching styles;
 - (iii) Gear the curriculum to each child's needs/curriculum enrichment; and
 - (iv) For parental involvement at all levels.

12.11 It was, however, apparent to Members that views differed on issues such as the importance of male teachers in their position as role models for boys and the effectiveness of single sex classes. Whilst there had been some success with single sex classes some there were concerns regarding the impact of separation on children's social skills and where it is used it tended to be in single subjects, i.e. English. It was also noted that the use of single sex classes tended to raise the performance of both genders and as such did not tend to reduce the gender gap.

12.12 In considering the issues/areas of importance identified through the schools visits the Forum welcomed the views expressed regarding the need for good teachers and teaching assistants in schools if boys and indeed all pupils were to succeed. Particular support was also expressed for the:-

- (a) The provision of information sharing;
- (b) The need to teach every child as an individual and address their learning needs;
- (c) Provision of effective transition arrangements for children between Key Stages 2 and 3 and the establishment of a consistent approach across schools;
- (d) The need for teachers to adapt teaching styles;
- (e) The need to make learning 'cool' for boys;
- (f) The importance of portraying a good school image in the press and the role the Local Authority can play in assisting in this;
- (g) The need to gear the curriculum to each child's needs/curriculum enrichment; and
- (h) The need for parental involvement at all levels.

12.13 The Forum acknowledged that a considerable amount of work was being undertaken, however, it was noted that an overall view of what was being done across all schools in the town was not yet available. The Forum noted that this situation was in the process of being addressed through the appointment of the Boys' Achievement Co-ordinator, the remit of whose post was to be to focus on addressing the issue of underachieving boys from Key Stage 2 to 3 and beyond. This was to include an audit of current practice in schools across Hartlepool and the Forum hoped that its work could feed into the future activities of this post.

12.14 The Forum also learned that work was also just beginning to be undertaken by:-

- (a) A small number of enquiry groups across Hartlepool's primary schools to look at the issue of boy's achievement which it was felt might benefit from elected Member involvement; and
- (b) The Blended Learning Project (a national strategy). As a project currently being piloted across a small number of schools in Hartlepool the Forum was impressed by its operation so far. The Forum expressed its support for the 'rolling out' of the project across all schools in Hartlepool the Forum and was of the view that serious

consideration needed to be given to how this was to be resources in terms of officer support.

- 12.15 In relation to the wider issue of the activities being undertaken by the Children's Services Department, the Forum observed that details of each activity and timescale were outlined in the Performance and Achievement Division's Operational Plan 06/07. The Forum noted that whilst it was clear from the Operational Plan that a considerable amount of work was being undertaken to address the gender gap issue funding for this area of work, as with others, was tight. Work on this issue had in the past been undertaken alongside officers other duties and the new Boys Achievement Co-ordinator post was the first to be created specifically to deal with the issue.

13. COMPARISON OF STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES – HARTLEPOOL'S APPROACH

- 13.1 In comparing strategies and practices implemented by other local authorities the Forum was as previously indicated impressed by the work being undertaken by Sunderland City Council. Members were, however, aware that the Authority had in place specifically appointed officers to undertake this work. When compared to other Tees Valley Authorities it became apparent to the Forum that as in Hartlepool the activities undertaken to address the boys' achievement issue were undertaken by officers as part of their other day to day duties. The Forum felt that this would continue to be the most appropriate course of action and welcomed the flexibility which the appointment of the new Boys Achievement Co-ordinator on a fixed term basis would provide in the future.
- 13.2 In terms of possible areas for improvement the Forum was of the view that the practices and strategies currently being implemented in Hartlepool continued to be very effective. This was reflected in the level gender gap in the town. There were, however, some areas where further work could be explored and these are outlined in Section 14 below.

14. CONCLUSIONS

- 14.1 The Forum concluded:-
- (a) That Hartlepool continued to do well in addressing the boys' underachievement issue in its schools with the gender gap being very close to national figures. However, the gap in Hartlepool related to boys writing rather than reading and as such future strategies should be focused upon boys literacy and in particular writing;
 - (b) That the Authority should be commended on the appointment of a dedicated Raising Boys' Achievement Co-ordinator and that the findings of this scrutiny investigation would clearly feed into the development future practices.

- (c) That it was evident that there was no 'one fits all' strategy that would address the boys' underachievement issue and where strategies were successful in Hartlepool, it was as a result of individual schools implementing innovative initiatives and practices tailored to their own cultural environments;
- (d) That where possible the curriculum should be tailored, and vocational courses utilised, to meet the needs of individual boys;
- (e) That there was a need to encourage schools in Hartlepool to share best practice and whilst informal arrangements were in place consideration needed to be given to the creation of a formal network and perhaps Hartlepool's involvement in a regional network;
- (f) That transition arrangements for pupils moving between primary and secondary schools appeared on a whole to be working effectively in Hartlepool although it was evident that further improvements could be made;
- (g) That in view of the effectiveness of the National Education Breakthrough Programme for Raising Boys' Achievements in helping other local authorities to raise boys' achievement levels, there was a need to explore the extension of schools involvement in the programme within Hartlepool;
- (h) That it was evident that a 'cluster' funding approach to reduce the costs of involvement in the National Education Breakthrough Programme would be beneficial;
- (i) That to ensure the effectiveness of the 'rolling out' of the Blended Learning Project it was crucial for adequate staffing arrangements to be in place;
- (j) That whilst the Primary School Enquiry Groups had recently been established there may be a benefit for Elected Member involvement in them together with the creation of similar groups for Secondary Schools;
- (k) That a large factor in boys reaching their true potential was the provision of good all round support and this was particularly applicable to parents; and
- (l) That whilst Departmental Action Plans were in place to address the underachievement of boys' there was clearly a need for the establishment of a separate departmental policy/strategy.

15. RECOMMENDATIONS

15.1 The Children's Services Scrutiny Forum has taken evidence from a wide range of sources to assist in the formulation of a balanced range of recommendations. The Forum's key recommendations to Cabinet are as outlined below :-

- (a) That the Authority focuses its future strategies in relation to the raising of boys' achievement levels on boys' literacy and writing;
- (b) That in addition to the Authority's Children's Services Departmental Action Plans, the creation of a policy, that includes a clear timetable and future aims and objectives, in relation to the raising of boys' achievement levels in Hartlepool be further explored;
- (c) That a review be undertaken to ensure that an appropriate staffing structure is in place for the effective 'rolling out' of the Blended Learning Project across all Hartlepool schools;
- (d) That a review be undertaken to ascertain what, if anything can be done to strengthen the authorities transfer and transition arrangements, including the possible extension of use of the Transfer and Transition Self Evaluation Toolkit;
- (e) That a formal process be developed for the sharing of information and best practice to assist in the raising of boys' achievement levels across all schools in Hartlepool;
- (f) That the feasibility of establishing a Regional Network with Local Authorities to share best practice to relation to addressing the boys' underachievement issue be explored;
- (g) That ways of encouraging greater parental involvement in the education of boys' within schools across Hartlepool be explored;
- (h) The Authority encourages schools with low levels of boys' achievement to become involved in the National Breakthrough Programme;
- (i) That the Authority explores with National Breakthrough Programme the possibility of adopting a 'cluster' funding approach, to assist in the reduction of costs associated with participation in the programme; and
- (j) That Elected Member involvement in the Primary School Enquiry Groups together with the creation of Secondary School Enquiry Groups be further explored.

16. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 16.1 The Scrutiny Forum is grateful to all those who have presented evidence during the course of our investigation. We would like to place on record our appreciation, in particular of the willingness and co-operation we have received from the below named:-

Hartlepool Borough Council:

John Collings, Assistant Director of Children's Services

Paul Wilkinson, Senior Advisor

Ruth Chalkley, Secondary AFL and Literacy Co-ordinator

Geraldine Chapman – KS3 Strategy Co-ordinator

Anne Pringleton (Blended Learning Project)

Gillian Richmond, Gender Achievement Co-ordinator

Schools:

Andy Brown (West View Primary School)

Kate Callan (Golden Flatts Primary School)

D.Dobson, M.Mailen, A.Darby and K.Hill (Kingsley Primary School)

Alan White (Manor College of Technology)

Bill Jordan (Dyke House Secondary School)

Chris Simmons, Governor, West View Primary School

External Representatives:

Janet Potts, Programme Director, the Education Breakthrough Programme

Mike Viner, Senior Regional Director, North East of England National Strategies for School Improvement, DfES

Dave Howcroft, Boys' Underachievement Project Manager, Sunderland City Council

Chris Campbell, School Improvement Officer, Sunderland City Council

**COUNCILLOR SHAW
CHAIR OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM**

December 2006

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were consulted or referred to in the preparation of this report:-

- (a) DfES – Research Report No 636 – Raising Boys' Achievement (Raising Boys' Achievement Project);
- (b) Department of Health Report – Using the National Healthy Schools Standard to Raise Boys' Achievements;
- (c) CYPP;
- (d) Raising Boys' Achievement - DfES – Research Report by the Raising Boys' Achievement Project - No 636;
- (e) Raising Attainment at Key Stage Two – Medway Council – Education and Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Feb 2005); and
- (f) Addressing the Educational Needs of Boys (Submitted to Department of Education, Science and Training - 2004).

In addition, the following websites have been used for background information in the preparation of this report:-

- (a) Raising Boys' Achievement Project: www-rba.edu.cam.ac.uk
- (b) The DfES Standards Site: www.standards.defs.gov.uk
- (c) The Basic Skills Agency: www.basic-skills.co.uk
- (d) Case studies: www.teachernet.gov.uk
- (e) Ofsted: www.ofsted.gov.uk