



Conference Report Taking Boys Seriously 2: the next steps

**“Best Practice” Conference
October 2018**

*In partnership with the Controlled Schools’ Support
Council and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools*



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Table of Contents

<i>Welcome from Professor Brian Murphy, Director of Access, Digital and Distributed Learning at Ulster University</i>	3
<i>Welcome from Gerry Campbell, Chief Executive, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools</i>	4
<i>Welcome from Barry Mulholland, Chief Executive, Controlled School Support Council</i>	4
<i>Research Update: Taking Boys Seriously 2</i>	5
<i>Background Summary of Conference Aims and Objectives</i>	6
<i>Summary and Analysis of Responses to Structured Discussion</i>	9
<i>Case Study Examples from Schools</i>	23

Welcome from Professor Brian Murphy, Director of Access, Digital and Distributed Learning at Ulster University

I am delighted to introduce the "Taking Boys Seriously" Best Practice Report from the first joint conference of the Controlled Schools' Support Council and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools hosted by Ulster University.

The report details the highlights and insights gained when more than 100 educators and youth participants met together to reflect on 'what works' in order to support increasing the aspirations, attitudes and attainment of boys in their education and youth development.

One unique feature of the conference was that it drew from the wisdom and practice of both informal and formal educational practitioners, as well as the voices of the young men themselves. Youth Workers, Teachers, Principals, policy makers and pupils all reflected together on what they had experienced as effective pedagogies and practices to engage young men in their personal development and to increase educational aspirations.

At the conference a deliberate move was made away from deficit thinking about boys and attainment as 'problems.' Instead, a positive tone was set from the beginning by asking those gathered: "What do we love about teaching boys?" We hope you will find this positive tone throughout.

The report also aims to share practical suggestions from educators who increasingly understand that to create positive change and 'Take Boys Seriously', it requires effort within an entire educational ecosystem: at pupil, classroom, institution, family, community and systemic levels.

As a civic university, Ulster University is committed to playing its part in this ecosystem and, in particular, hopes to make a contribution through the findings of our ongoing, important and timely research which now is widely recognised under the Taking Boys Seriously expression.

Welcome from Gerry Campbell, Chief Executive, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools

I welcome the draft Report emanating from the Taking Boys Seriously “Best Practice Conference” in October 2018.

The conference brought together leaders and influencers across education, academia and the youth and community sectors, to highlight and showcase areas of best practice in relation to improving attainment and engagement for boys.

There was positive reinforcement of the steps and strategies being taken across education and beyond to engage and support boys in addressing underachievement and barriers to learning.

There were also numerous examples of best practice and where positive interventions were making a real difference to the lives of these young people across Northern Ireland.

In particular, I was struck by the holistic approach that supported such interventions and engagement as being the difference to getting boys engaged in learning and beginning to take ownership of their own learning and development. The investment in wider personal development strongly complemented that academic input and the boys were very positive and enthusiastic about this approach.

Welcome from Barry Mulholland, Chief Executive, Controlled School Support Council

The Controlled Schools’ Support Council, the advocacy body for 49% of Northern Ireland’s schools, is pleased to be involved with the Taking Boys Seriously research.

Our own research has shown that while 61% of controlled school pupils achieve five or more GCSEs at A* to C (including English and Maths), it adds to the growing body of evidence that male pupils entitled to free school meals are underachieving. When statistics are considered, the complexity of factors impacting on pupil attainment become apparent. Basic measures such as GCSE results do not reflect the added value that schools provide to enable pupils to achieve their potential.

It’s clearly evident there are innovative approaches in the controlled sector that focus on raising attainment; this conference provided an opportunity to showcase best practice from two of our schools, Markethill High School and Abbey Community College through its partnership with Monkstown Boxing Club.

It was inspiring to hear directly from the young men at the conference. It is clear that partnerships between pupils, teachers, parents and the wider community are important to enable young people to meet their potential.

Research Update: Taking Boys Seriously 2

The past year has been busy as the *Taking Boys Seriously 2: the next steps* research has truly commenced. We are delighted that under the expert guidance of our Steering Group we have now conducted audit interviews of school and community stakeholders, and focus groups with young men. The audit has allowed us to better understand what interventions are already under way to support boys in their education and development. Using case-study, the research will next investigate the impact of selected interventions with a refined research question. Taking an intentional asset-based approach, our research question begins with an assertion that, 'Boys are not the problem'- therefore, instead, the research seeks to investigate: "What is the eco system that supports the educational aspirations, attitudes and achievement of boys who experience compounded disadvantage?"

The ecosystem investigated through the research includes four levels:

1. **Pupil (and Family)**
2. **Community**
3. **Institutional Level (School /HE)**
4. **Structural**

Each case study site will contribute toward understanding this ecosystem by exploring four crosscutting themes:

- **Intentional Adult/Pupil Relationships:** What is the link between the formation of key intentional relationships towards increasing engagement between boys and their learning?
- **Promoting Positive Masculinities:** What role and value does the promotion of positive masculinities within policies, pedagogies, curriculum and practices contribute towards increasing boys' aspirations and attainment?
- **Collaboration:** What models of practice best demonstrate the benefit and impact of collaboration between informal and formal educators to bridge between family, school and community to support boys at key transitional stages?
- **Sustainability:** As a result of learning gained from previous levels, what educational policies and resources are required to generate and sustain a supportive ecosystem?

It is vital that the voice of young men remains at the heart of the research and for this reason we are delighted that Youth Action has been instrumental as a partner leading our Young Men's Advisory Group. This group, drawn from partner schools and communities will act as a practice component to the research and will ensure that the Taking Boys Seriously 2 remains research 'with' rather than 'on' young men.

In April 2018, we said goodbye to Dr Erik Cownie and welcomed our new staff member Dr Emily Stanton as the Taking Boys Seriously Research Associate. We are delighted that Dr Cownie remains a member of the research team, however, for queries or future research updates please do not hesitate to contact Dr Stanton at e.stanton@ulster.ac.uk.

Background Summary of Conference Aims and Objectives

'Best Practice' conference held Wednesday 17 October 2018 at Ulster University, Jordanstown

Taking boys seriously subgroup:

Susan Morgan and Erik Cownie (UU)
Sara McCracken and Jayne Millar (CSSC)
Tony Scullion and Geraldine Duffy (CCMS)
Martin McMullan (Youth Action).

Overall Aim

A conference was hosted under the theme of 'Taking boys seriously'.

This met:

1. Over-arching aim one in TBS2 – proposed research outline - “Inform policy, teacher training and pedagogic practice in primary and post primary schools”
2. Over-arching aim two in TBS2 – proposed research outline - “Via evidence-based research... showcase best practice in terms of interventions across schools, communities, youth work practice and HE sectors which seek to address under-achievement in schools”.
3. Dissemination of research as outlined in TBS 2 proposed research outline - (yearly) best practice conferences (in partnership with CSSC and CCMS)
4. CSSC target/action 'Develop at least one partnership opportunity to co-host.... events to key stakeholders in the context of raising standards.'

Objectives

In terms of addressing underachievement of boys in Northern Ireland, the event would

1. Showcase best practice in Northern Ireland's schools in terms of improving attainment
2. Showcase best practice in Northern Ireland's youth and community groups in terms of engagement / attainment
3. Highlight relevant academic research to inform best practice
4. Inspire decision makers to effect change

The objectives would be met by:

- A conference under the auspices of the TBS steering group in partnership with CSSCNI, CCMS and UU
- EA and DE to be invited as key stakeholders in education

Conference planning was informed by the Learning Leaders Strategy which outlines approaches to teachers' professional learning (TPL) through harnessing innovative practice.

“Every teacher is a learning leader accomplished in working collaboratively with all partners in the interests of children and young people”

The conference would offer ideas and approaches as to how Northern Ireland's education system could equip boys with the skills they need to fulfil their potential.

It is only through collaboration and by sharing best practice and discussing what does and does not work that policy, teacher training and pedagogic practice will change to ensure that Northern Ireland's young people fulfil their potential.

Audience(s)

The audience for the event was:

- controlled and CCMS school leaders of post primary schools.
- academic researchers in this field
- youth and community organisations in Northern Ireland
- education policy makers
- bodies responsible for teacher training in Northern Ireland
- teaching unions

Supporting points from CSSC

CSSC had published a [baseline assessment of the controlled sector](#) which highlighted the diversity and inclusivity of the sector.

The main messages from this research were

1. Within the controlled sector some excellent schools exist. On the whole controlled school pupils are on par with those in the maintained sector in terms of standard GCSE performance and further education.
2. However, the report highlights a number of weaknesses in the sector, particularly concerning English and Maths GCSE results amongst our pupils.
3. The report also adds to the growing body of evidence that pupils in the sector entitled to free school meals are underachieving, especially male pupils, when compared to the other sectors.
4. There are definite opportunities for improvement, particularly if English and Maths teaching is addressed, attention is focused on initiatives targeted at free school meal entitled pupils and community/family engagement in schools is considered.

It was CSSC's intention to publish examples of best practice from controlled schools to demonstrate creative approaches being taken to tackle some of these issues, and a principal from one of these schools could be invited to speak at the conference

Supporting points from CCMS

CCMS is the employing authority for Catholic maintained schools, including 62 non-selective post-primary schools.

The performance of pupils in maintained post-primary schools in 2017/18 was more than 5% above the Northern Ireland average for all non-selective schools. Although the performance of boys in maintained schools is above the Northern Ireland average, there is a significant gender gap (11.5%) between the attainment of boys and girls, due in part, to the significant increase in the attainment of girls in maintained schools over the past 3 years.

CCMS is committed to raising standards for all pupils and in particular the attainment of boys and all pupils on FSM. CCMS will continue to support and challenge school leaders and Governors to ensure that a range of strategies are in place to address the barriers to learning and underachievement of all pupils, particularly boys and pupils facing social deprivation. Key aspects of this work will be through:

- on-going support of Education Advisers in all schools
- designated work streams and workshops to address specific issues identified by school leaders
- supporting and promoting opportunities for the dissemination of innovative and next practice.

This conference would enable school leaders to share and discuss proven approaches to addressing boys' under-achievement with a view to reviewing provision in their own settings as appropriate.

Agenda for the Conference

The theme for the conference was boys' attainment, aspiration and attitude.

1. Overview of conference aims - focus on attainment, aspiration and attitudes
Dr Erik Cownie, UU
2. Welcome to UU
Professor Rafaella Folli, UU Provost
3. Caelan Donnelly, Youth Action
4. Opening address
Professor Brian Murphy, UU
5. Overview of taking boys seriously
Dr Erik Cownie, UU
6. Introduction to panel discussion
Susan Morgan, UU

Panel co-hosted by Barry Mulholland, Controlled Schools' Support Council and Gerry Campbell, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools

Panel: James Maxwell, Markethill High School
Gerry Beattie, St Joseph's Boys' School, Derry
Harry Murphy, Artillery Youth Club
Paul Johnston, Monkstown Boxing Club
Connor McGilloway, Youth Action

7. Structured discussions
8. Conference summary and next steps
Professor Brian Murphy, UU

Summary and Analysis of Responses to Structured Discussion

Discussions and structured questioning e.g. through use of UU technology / voting buttons

Questions:

- 1) What do I like about working with boys and young men?
- 2) What have you done that made the biggest impact on boys'/ young men's learning?
- 3) What can we/you do to inspire boys and young men to achieve?

Q1. What We Like About Teaching Boys

Personalities

- Boys are less inhibited
- They tell you how it is
- Boys bring different perspective / uniqueness
- Forgiving; Issues easily resolved
- Humour and opportunities for banter
- Like banter but never cruel
- Fun / joy to teach / work with
- Enthusiasm
- Spark they bring to lessons; Energy xx
- Unpredictable

Rising to Challenges

- Raising their expectations
- Resilient
- Healthy competition
- When boys get something, they throw themselves into it
- Determination and persistence
- They are happy to study new skills
- Thrive on leadership opportunities
- Seeing them overcome barriers & succeed

Growth

- Openness
- Positivity/pride after achievement
- Meeting a range of needs and abilities
- Keeps you on your toes
- Providing them with support
- Helping them grow socially and academically
- Watching their confidence grow
- Impact of success on their development

Relationships

- Caring and empathetic
- Reciprocation of trust
- Respond well to praise
- Straightforward – Uncomplicated xx
- Honesty xxxx
- Being a positive role model for them
- On a journey with them
- When you 'get in'
- Amazing the appreciation they have when someone actually listens
- Driven by relationships
- Hearing their stories
- More willing if you give them a chance
- Amazing the appreciation they have when someone actually listens

We like teaching boys because of...

Boys' Personalities

“Boys have a great sense of humour; there are opportunities for banter”

“Boys are a joy to teach”

“Boys bring enthusiasm and spark to lessons”

“Boys tell you how it is”

“Boys are Fun!”

We like teaching boys because of...

**Opportunities to
Grow**

“Their positivity and pride after an achievement”

“Watching their confidence grow”

“Boys Keep you on your toes!”

“The Impact of success on their development”

“Helping them grow socially and academically”

We like teaching boys because of...

**Their ability
to Rise to Challenges**

“Resilient”

“Boys thrive on leadership
opportunities”

“When boys get something, they
throw themselves into it”

“Seeing them overcome barriers &
succeed”

“Raising their expectations”

Q 2-3. What is Working Well? What More Can Be Done?
Engaging Boys in Education

Focus: Pupil Level

Theme:	What is Working? Responses	What more can be done? School Leaders Responses	What more can be done? Young Men's Responses
Changing Attitudes about Educational Achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise boys' expectations of themselves *¹ • Spark their enthusiasm • Focus on aspirational target-setting • Focus on strengths – work on weaknesses • Find out what really interests them and show them the benefits, create relevance- a glimpse of their future • Identifying the role model who is not the 'standard' from all levels of school life 	<p><i>Consider consequences of repeatedly telling them they are not good enough</i></p> <p><i>Make success attractive Start with them – small achievable steps and reward</i></p> <p><i>Relentless focus on increasing expectations among working class boys</i></p> <p><i>*Teach resilience – how to handle failure – do more to develop positivity and positive narrative</i></p>	<p>Create tangible reward systems:</p> <p>-For attendance or helping out in class</p> <p>-An incentive to come to school and do well</p> <p>Raising Expectations:</p> <p>-Having someone who wants to challenge me and push me</p> <p>-*Give us responsibility and have higher expectations of us</p>

¹ Asterix indicates a response that was stated more than once

		<p><i>Power of oneself in developing future achievements</i></p> <p><i>Value learning (not just for qualifications)</i></p>	<p>- Remember too that teachers' and parents' expectations can be overwhelming</p>
Supporting the Learning Needs of Boys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge learning barriers • Early Intervention • Student with low reading ages – deliver discreet provisions • Address challenges around sleep / technology / social media – lots of boys doing nothing only playing computer games especially if unlimited access. Peer pressure in primary schools to play certain computer games (Fortnight etc.) • Introduce relaxation techniques– pre-exam for self-care (i.e. yoga) 	<p><i>More oral communication skills learning; develop their active listening skills</i></p> <p><i>Address fear of exams – boys may use intentional bad behaviour to be excluded from class</i></p> <p><i>Understand that not every pupil understands a subject</i></p> <p><i>Greater focus on boys' engagement at KS3 – before pressure of exams</i></p>	<p>Teachers offering one-to-one additional help</p>
Investing in their Wider Personal Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give them responsibility; trusting them with leadership roles– but not just the usual suspects • Mental health ambassadors • Bullying ambassadors • Building their confidence and motivation and self-esteem-giving boys rewards can help support this. 	<p><i>Wider skills and dispositions</i></p> <p><i>Pupil voice – let them have their say</i></p>	<p>Boys need to be comfortable to express themselves</p> <p>-Allow me to voice my opinions</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on health and wellbeing 	<p><i>Celebrate success – not just results</i></p> <p><i>*Widen understanding of what achievement looks like; Qualifications are not everything</i></p> <p><i>Change mindsets – less insular</i></p>	<p>-Give them responsibility and have higher expectations for them</p> <p>-Getting involved in youth work which opened up different opportunities</p>
Exploring Masculinity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address troubling notions masculinity 	<p><i>Exploring masculinity with boys and looking at how we frame things</i></p> <p><i>*More male role models: for example, past pupils; Young male mentors from University or external professionals</i></p> <p><i>A lot of boys will fear failure and don't try and will say how many times they have been excluded so there won't be anything expected from them</i></p>	<p>Understanding the Tensions/ Issues:</p> <p>-Not showing weakness</p> <p>-Trying to prove manliness</p> <p>-Boys not being able to express themselves</p> <p>-Choosing the wrong role models</p> <p>-Understand boys more – know more about them and take an interest</p>

Focus: Teacher / Classroom /School Level

Theme:	What is Working? Responses	What more can be done? School Leaders Responses	What more can be done? Young Men's Responses
Teacher / Pupil Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relationships / mutual respect is key <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Show them that you care; that you are interested in them; If they know you care about them – they will come on board ○ They need one person who believes in them ○ Take time and have genuine interest – you can't fake it ○ Make it personal (family; interests) reverberates round the classroom. ○ Listening to the needs of boys; understand their specific/personal aspirations ○ Find out what is behind certain behaviours ● It's important not to stereotype boys – boys are into different things – not just football – this can be difficult to find esp. with ASD children ● Expectation permeates everything ● Being persistent – keeping going ● Being direct with them 	<p>Create right learning environment</p> <p>Build better relationships with boys:</p> <p><i>-Spend more time getting to know them</i></p> <p><i>-* Treat each boy as an individual; learning as an individual;</i></p> <p><i>-Focus on all pupils – not just bright ones</i></p> <p>Set clear boundaries</p> <p><i>Setting clear goals for boys; simplify any targets</i></p> <p>Continual improvement – on message</p>	<p>*Building Relationships</p> <p><i>- Having conversations with boys and building rapport with them; adults who wants to listen</i></p> <p><i>-Gain their trust and help them get through the best and worst of times</i></p> <p><i>-Being able to listen to young men voicing challenges they face in day to day life and trying to help them through them</i></p> <p><i>-Teachers who don't just care about school but also have interest in the lives of boys; Getting to know them on a personal</i></p>

			<p>level and exploring issues that are most relevant to them (home-life, friends, hopes and fears for the future)</p> <p>-Teachers who are not too harsh</p> <p>- Treat me as a young man and not a child</p> <p>-Teacher adopting an aggressive approach doesn't work</p>
<p>Pedagogy, Learning Styles/Modalities and Timetabling</p>	<p>Youth work pedagogies helpful:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More connections between formal and informal education would be useful • Group work – self-awareness and self-development really work with boys <p>Practical work with boys – visual, doing not just listening</p> <p>Physical Activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporating recreation, activity and reflection into boys' learning • Physical exercise in the morning to wake boys up and get them energized 	<p><i>Be a more hands-on teacher (give guidance, get involved, find a way to motivate)</i></p> <p><i>Devise competitions with tangible rewards</i></p> <p><i>Make lessons fun and exciting; Capture their imagination</i></p> <p><i>Provide them with new experiences</i></p> <p><i>Adopt different Learning and Teaching methods</i></p>	<p>-Get young men talking more</p> <p>-Give them more opportunities for discussion</p>

		<i>Greater access to youth work methods</i>	
Support for Teachers and School Leaders	Training for teachers and parents –i.e. impact of nurture and attachment	<p><i>More training for teachers on boys</i></p> <p><i>Allow teachers / principals to solve problems their own way</i></p> <p><i>Take risks – think outside the box</i></p> <p><i>Share good practice (not only in education)</i></p> <p><i>Value educators</i></p>	More training for teachers around hard to reach boys
Relevant, Flexible and Connected Curriculum	<p>Providing a curriculum that meets their needs and really engages them:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choosing suitable English text to suit boys or reading resources that boys connect with (comics, mystery, fiction) • Taking boys out and about and showing them how their skills are practically useful e.g. math <p>Changing the Curriculum to widen what is offered</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating flexibility and creativity in curriculum. e.g. for repeat exam opportunities • Adapt courses annually • Enrichment period – horticulture etc. creates value-added. 	<p><i>Link curriculum to labour market;</i></p> <p><i>Create links with local industries / create outreach partnerships, for example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Saintfield United FC working with school</i> • <i>Organisational engagement (Cinemagic)</i> • <i>Game of Thrones (creative industries)</i> 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soft skills are key (sport, drama, community work) to engagement with learning • More creative approaches to learning and linking to professions (e.g. journalism, DJ, music, cookery) • Preparedness for employment • Qualifications in subjects they are interested in – agriculture, motor vehicles. More assessment in art, IT and creativity • Good careers guidance – tailored to what they are interested in and what they can realistically achieve 	<p><i>Effective and accessible careers advice</i></p> <p><i>Facilitate more site visits</i></p> <p><i>Strong work ethic – links to trades / agriculture</i></p> <p><i>Need to review the curriculum every year – different children with different interests</i></p>	
Pastoral Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring boys have someone to talk to • Mental health ambassadors • Bullying ambassadors • Creation of a nurture centre – early attachment needs • Reviewed and reconfigured our pastoral care and behaviour management systems 	<p><i>Increased visibility of pastoral care, in-school counselling services and child protection team</i></p> <p><i>Whole-school buy-in to pastoral care</i></p> <p><i>Focus on mental health; greater provision and use of school counselling</i></p> <p><i>Having the confidence to just stop and meet their needs</i></p> <p><i>Help boys to talk about their problems</i></p> <p><i>Be more lenient in approach</i></p>	<p>School needs to be a safe environment</p> <p>-You can't eliminate bullying, but you can try and reduce it and create awareness around different types of bullying</p> <p>-Some people are afraid to speak out about bullying – especially young men</p> <p>-Young men need to be more aware of how to report bullying online (to schools) – this removes the stigmatizing and</p>

		<p><i>Understanding what is behind poor behaviour – nerves rather than bad behaviour – dealing with the underlying reasons for the behaviour</i></p>	<p>promotes the idea that talking about it is OK</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Listen, respect, believe and follow up on them -Social media bullying is prevalent and hard to manage <p>Emotional Support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Create a safe space for boys to open up and discuss issues -Having someone to talk to i.e. counsellors, fellow pupils, outside services
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Focus: Collaboration with Key Systemic Stakeholders (Parents and Carers; Community and Relevant Bodies, Agencies Statutory and Non-Statutory)

Theme:	What is Working? Responses	What more can be done? School Leaders Responses	What more can be done? Young Men's Responses
Relationships between School and Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • *Liaising with parents and pupils; connecting with whole family (e.g. parents and grandparents) • Connecting boys to adult world – family decision making • Raising aspirations of boys and parents 	<i>Increase and create more meaningful engagement with parents</i>	
Involve and Understand the Wider Community Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with local youth work services • Involving boys in projects in partnership with external organizations – e.g. YMCA which increased pass rate • Recognising the structural issues facing Young Men • Creating safe learning spaces 	<p><i>**Involve more external agencies – youth workers / mentors in school</i></p> <p><i>More outreach (street) work</i></p> <p><i>Better links/partnerships (not just EA)</i></p> <p><i>Connect with community – community can reach parents easier – especially those with poor experiences of school</i></p>	<p>Encourage young men to have a voice in their communities:</p> <p>-To make them feel more valued</p>

<p>Systemic Changes</p>		<p><i>Provide adequate school budgets</i></p> <p><i>Better use of existing funding</i></p> <p><i>Less focus on academic data performance</i></p> <p><i>Use of positive language – there is too much negativity around boys’ underachievement</i></p> <p><i>Address the gender imbalance in teaching</i></p> <p><i>Less focus on Belfast</i></p>	
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Case Study Examples from Schools

St Joseph's Boys' School, Derry Achievement for all

St Joseph's is an all-ability 11-18 maintained school situated in the Creggan area of Derry. While the school's catchment comprises some of the most deprived wards and enumeration districts in the North as defined by the Multiple Deprivation Measures (NIMDM 2017), the area has a dynamic and impressive community spirit and infrastructure which engages with life in St Joseph's on a daily basis. The school has built real and meaningful partnerships with a range of local sports clubs and community organisations which assist in the personal, social and academic development of the boys.

This case study looks at how St Joseph's raises the aspirations and achievements of its pupils through:

- developing strong and purposeful partnerships with the local community;
- building relationships with parents and grand-parents;
- striving to meet the needs of all pupils especially the more vulnerable;
- developing the boys' literacy skills; and
- providing the boys with relevant and appropriate curriculum opportunities and learning experiences.



Context and outcomes

The school has a current enrolment of 720 which represents a decline over the past few years due to the demographic downturn and the competition from local grammar schools.

The number of boys requiring additional support with aspects of the learning in the school has risen over the past three years and currently 327 (44%) boys are on the SEN code of practice. Sixty-five pupils have a statement of Special Educational Needs.

Over the past two years the performance of pupils achieving 5 or more GCSE (or equivalents) at A*-C including GCSE English and maths has been in line with the NI average for boys in schools with the same FSM band.

Inspection evidence

St Joseph's was inspected in November 2011 and evaluated as Very Good overall. The ETI identified as key strengths: the standards achieved; the quality of SEN; the care, guidance and support provided for the boys; the curriculum provision; and the quality of leadership and management. The report made specific reference to the strong and effective links with local employers and, in particular, with former pupils who act as role models for the boys.

The school took part in the ETI pilot of the sustaining Improvement inspection (SII) in June 2015 and had a further sustaining improvement inspection in May 2018. The key findings from this recent report included;

- *The school has carried out a thorough and detailed review of the curricular offer at KS 4 to ensure that all pupils can access courses which are suited to their individual interests, abilities and career aspirations. As a result, the curriculum has been broadened at KS 4 to include a range of vocational and applied subjects, including those provided through the Foyle Learning Community. The rigorous processes of self-evaluation enable senior leaders to monitor progress of individual subjects towards the targets and the school is focused appropriately on improving the outcomes the pupils attain at GCSE. Over the past three years, the percentage of pupils attaining five or more GCSE qualifications at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, has improved steadily and is now around the Northern Ireland (NI) average for non-selective schools in the same free school meals band.*
- *Literacy is afforded a high priority on the school development plan. The school completed a comprehensive literacy audit which clearly identified strengths and areas to develop. Consequently, they have focused on enhancing the literacy provision across the curriculum through: a common marking and assessment policy; the use of 'working walls' and the dissemination of effective practice. Literacy-based tasks have been successfully implemented across a number of subjects and are subject to ongoing internal quality assurance processes. A variety of literacy assessment tools have been used to track progress and identify pupils who require additional support with their learning. The school's internal data shows that almost all of the pupils who received support demonstrated improvement.*
- *In discussions with the inspectors, the pupils spoke positively about their experiences and engagement in literacy activities across the school and the common approach being adopted by their teachers to help them improve their work. The year 8 pupils spoke enthusiastically about their creative literacy project and the many opportunities they had to develop wider skills and dispositions. They were able to articulate fluently how literacy is a key foundation for learning in all subjects.*

Raising Aspiration and Achievement in Joseph's

Within the distinctive Catholic ethos that permeates St Joseph's, we seek to create community in where each individual is as unique and where mutual respect is shown for a diversity of opinions and viewpoints. Central to raising the boys' aspirations and improving steadily the standards they achieve are:

- **Building positive relationships**

A key feature of the school is the focus on promoting very positive relationships between the staff and the boys. Whole school strategies have been developed successfully to ensure a consistent approach to building positive relationships. These strategies include:

- an agreed approach by teachers to engaging with pupils at the beginning and end of all lessons (meeting and greeting, ending and sending);



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- a clear focus on promoting positive behaviour through the Ready, Respect and Safe guidelines; and
 - a Shared approach by all staff to ensure respectful interactions with all pupils through a “parent on the shoulder” approach.
- **Never giving up**

The staff place a strong emphasis on supporting all the boys’ learning and pastoral needs, with particular attention on the most vulnerable pupils. The staff visit the homes of some boys and meet with the parents and grandparents as appropriate to provide them with the support they need so they in turn may help their sons and grandsons. By going the extra mile for the pupils and putting in place suitable and timely interventions, boys who would have struggled to cope with the demands of school life, have achieved notable and celebrated successes.

- **Supporting Emotional Health and Well-being**

The school takes a proactive approach to supporting the boys’ emotional health and well-being. The staff, form tutors, Learning Support Team and the Multi Agency Support Team put in place support structures and interventions to meet the needs of vulnerable pupils. Recently, a cohort of boys have completed a course in Equine Therapy which has helped them develop their self-esteem and confidence.

- **Promoting literacy**

At whole school level there is a determined approach to the promotion of literacy. Form tutors have embedded sustained independent reading sessions on a daily basis. Subject departments have engaged in literacy-based projects such as Book Buzz, Project, Reading Rooms (the Arts Council) and the Irish News Literacy project. These events help raise the profile of literacy and boost the boys’ confidence. The KS2/3 Literacy Project with our feeder primary schools has been very successful and has broadened out across a number of departments.

- **Role modelling**

Senior pupils are enabled to accept responsibility and to acts a role models for the younger boys.

Derry Lads

A highlight of the range of strategies to drive improvement in literacy was the Derry Lads project. Funding was secured from the Arts Council for a literacy project and Mrs Donnelly decided to create a school magazine full of features which were pertinent to the school and the city. Mr

Beattie’s Year 8 class threw themselves into the tasks of researching, reporting, interviewing, writing, editing and designing the magazine. This was done under the inspiring excellence of professional journalist Leona O’Neill and photographer Jim McCafferty.

The magazine was titled ‘Derry Lads’ in homage to the smash hit Channel 4 show Derry Girls. It was a project which gave the ‘lads’ many inspiring insights but perhaps most critically, it showed that literacy skills, creativity and imagination are not confined to the classroom but can follow the boys into the real world and make it a much more enjoyable place.





A year 8 boy who developed a passion for photography during the project said this about his experiences: “at St Joseph’s you get the chance to be who you want to be and do what you what to do. You don’t have to hide”.





Markethill High School

How self-evaluation and planning impacts on improved educational outcomes

Markethill High School is an 11-16 non-selective co-educational school situated in Markethill, County Armagh. The current enrolment stands at 525 pupils. A submission has been made to the Department of Education for the development of a sixth form and a new build.

This case study focuses on the school's ability to effect improvement through self-evaluation and school development planning and the consolidation of quality teaching and learning with improved educational outcomes.

In October 2013, the school had a standard inspection in which achievements and standards, provision for learning and leadership and management were each deemed to be very good, contributing to the same overall performance level. ETI commented, "the school is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the learners; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement."

This was followed by a Sustaining Improvement Inspection in May 2017.

Sustaining improvement

The outcomes of this inspection highlighted "highly strategic leadership", collegial staff approaches and "the development and consistent implementation of a school-designed, research-informed approach to classroom practice."

The report highlighted the steady improvement in GCSE outcomes and the "narrowing of the gender gap" with the proportion of pupils achieving five or more passes, including English and maths, at grades A* - C as "significantly above the average for similar schools."

The school's analysis and use of data was commended highly as was the fusion of the academic and the pastoral. The findings evidenced a school that continued to demonstrate a "high level of capacity for sustained improvement".

The school's results in 2017 reflects this sustained improvement.

Improvement in educational outcomes

The Principal noted a record GCSE pass rate in 2017 with almost 95% of pupils attaining five or more GCSE passes at A* - C. This is over 20% higher than the Northern Ireland average of 74.4% for non-grammar schools. Over 92% of boys achieved five or more passes at A* - C while the equivalent Northern Ireland average is 81%.

The improved outcomes are due to several factors including the development of a culture within the school in which high expectations are set for pupils and their teachers. There is a clearer

understanding of the elements that make up a successful lesson with a sharper focus on pupils' learning.

A revised learning and teaching policy was produced in 2015, followed by a revised assessment and feedback policy in 2017. Both form the core of all of the school's work.

More effective use is made of assessment data to track the progress of individual pupils and ensure the appropriate action is taken either to amend the teaching programme or to provide additional support. A pupil progress manager was appointed in 2015 to oversee and manage the intervention and associated mentoring processes.

Continued professional development

Improved outcomes along with improved learning and teaching have been underpinned by a whole-school investment in the professional development of staff. In 2015, the school introduced the research lesson study (RLS) model to supplement the existing PRSD system.

This has created a horizontal structure which has led to greater professional discourse on learning and teaching, heightened awareness of misconceptions in learning and robust strategies to deal with these.

Staff work together to co-create lessons and the emphasis is directly on the learning as opposed to the teaching. The outcome has been greater staff collaboration coupled with an increased understanding of the challenges in the design, delivery and evaluation of good lesson practice. Teachers use research and evidence to inform future planning. Observation of lessons is constructive and informative.

The school's focus on 'how' pupils learn is based on current educational research. Staff commitment is evidenced in the postgraduate study of staff members and the uptake, by 13 staff, of in-house twilight middle management training for aspiring and current middle leaders.

High aspirations for all

Markethill High School has very clearly shown "its capacity for sustained self-improvement".

There is a clear vision of high aspiration for each pupil which is shared by the school community and communicated effectively by leadership and Governors.

This has informed planning and actions which are continuous, cohesive, inclusive and developmental, resulting not only in improved outcomes but in increased professional discourse with a focus on learning in the classroom.

For further information, please contact:

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Taking Boys Seriously: the next steps
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