

Sharing practice

Examples of practice that aim to counter the effects of gender stereotypes and unconscious bias, from educational establishments in Scotland.



Background

- The Improving Gender Balance and Equalities (IGBE) programme is working with school clusters to explore and assess interventions to address gender imbalances in participation, curricular preferences and learner pathways at every stage (3 – 18 years).
- We know that children receive and absorb gender stereotyped messages about what they can and cannot do as a girl or as a boy from a very early age.
- Research strongly suggests that there is no inherent difference between girls and boys which should limit their interests, capabilities or ambitions. And yet, we recognise that subject choice, and many subsequent work and life choices, are highly gendered.
- We promote a whole-establishment approach, in order to tackle the root causes of gender imbalances, in a sustained and embedded way.

This booklet shares approaches that educational establishments can use to begin to address gender inequality and counter the effects of unconscious bias and gender stereotypes. Some examples will work in any setting; others will need to be adapted to your particular context. We hope you will find the ideas relevant, pragmatic and inspiring.

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Early learning and childcare



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CRADLEHALL EARLY LEARNING CENTRE: WHOLE SETTING APPROACH - BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

What highlighted a new approach/intervention was needed?

- Noted that children as young as three were already showing gender-based choices and beliefs. When asked questions around stereotypical based jobs (e.g. astronaut, train driver, dancer, teacher) the children would all answer either man or lady, not both.
- There had also been several comments regarding appearance (boys can't have long hair) which challenged us to work towards an environment free from bias.
- Watched 'No more boys and girls' documentary.

What was tried?

- Received training from IGBE officer on gender stereotypes and unconscious bias
- Staff reflected honestly and critically about their own gender bias which included things like:
 - Assumptions that dads are still the main breadwinners and mums do the majority of childcare
 - Commenting on girls appearances more than boys
 - Setting up in traditional ways (all the home corner and baby stuff together...all the building stuff together)
 - Using the term "girls and boys" and language used
- Completed Gender Friendly Nursery environmental audit
- Bought new books to cover unconscious bias issues (same sex families, different families, beliefs, gender preference)
- Changed the way we set things out so that the home corner is more central thus more inviting to all
- Challenged each other on how we speak to the children (avoiding boys/girls)
- Introduced boy baby doll, black baby doll and more neutral clothes
- Introduced more drama/games to allow freedom of expression
- Larger loose parts outside to encourage more active play/risk for all
- Introduced a mantra to build self-esteem/belief (We are loved, we are strong, we've got this – and I believe in you)

Time taken - 6 months

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CRADLEHALL EARLY LEARNING CENTRE: WHOLE SETTING APPROACH - BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

What was the outcome / what was noticed?

- Children are beginning to understand that anyone can be anything regardless of gender, race, religion etc.
- They are more understanding towards different family groups and that boys can like pink, have long hair and even wear dresses if they wish, whilst girls can be soldiers, astronauts and have short hair and might not like pink.
- Children are more accepting when someone behaves or shows preferences that are outside gender norms, understanding it is the choice of the individual.
- The loose parts outside have seen girls become more active in risk taking – climbing on the crates, building obstacle courses, and this allows the boys to see them as equals in such activities.
- The children have engaged much the same way with the home corner, although it has been noted that the children who do access the home area are using more loose parts from the baskets etc – possibly because the whole area is more open.
- The mantra has been positively received with parents commenting that the children are doing it at home as well. One parent said that during dinner their little girl (aged 3) turned to her dad and said “Daddy, I believe in you”.

What will happen next?

- Decide on the five things to develop as per the audit
- Review policy
- Plan on informing parents about aspirations to become a gender friendly nursery
- Write a list of resources that need replacing or adding to
- Read 'Just like a child'
- Review how the above changes have impacted the children
- Observe children's interactions with arts/crafts to note any differences/changes we could make to this area

Further details and resources

[No More Boys and Girls - BBC documentary.](#)

[Let Toys Be Toys](#)

Growth Mindset concepts - Carol Dweck



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Primary



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STEM IMPROVEMENT - PRIMARY BEARSDEN PRIMARY SCHOOL

What highlighted a new approach/intervention was needed?

- Attending STEM roadshow in Glasgow City Chambers, speaking to various people/companies about gender equality, highlighted approaches that we hadn't thought of before
- Looking at some of our outdated resources highlighted the need for a change
- Professional learning from Improving Gender Balance and Equalities team
- Open and honest individual and collective reflection about biases

What was tried?

- Developed action plan
- Language - reflected on language and made small changes (e.g. stopped using boys and girls)
- Carried out environmental audit
- Reviewed seating plans
- Tried some gender equality lessons and evaluated these
- Made gender equality part of school improvement plan as part of STEM focus
- Pupils in one class carried out pupil enquiry project with an equalities theme
- Enquiry projects were shared on school blogs which meant families could also engage in discussion around this topic
- STEM week focus on gender equality in STEM - used STEM ambassadors that subverted stereotypes

Time taken - 1 year, still ongoing

What was the outcome / what was noticed?

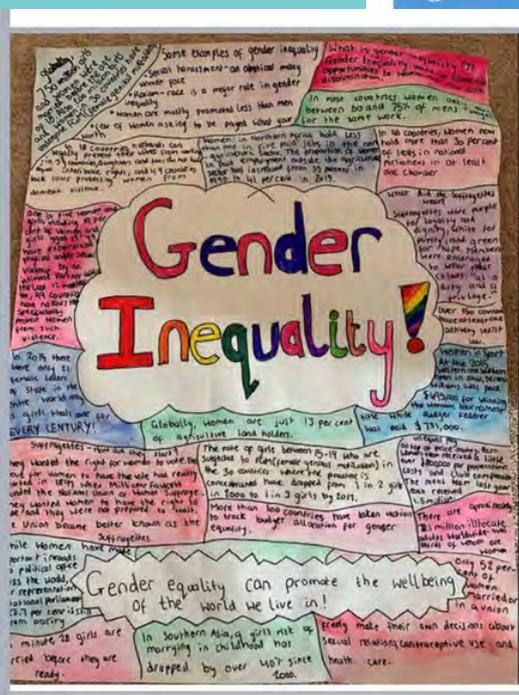
- There is a lot more professional dialogue in the school about gender equality following the training
- Teachers carry out more lessons about this topic and it makes up part of our science planning
- The children are becoming more confident in talking about equality, bias and gender stereotypes

What is Discrimination in Sport?

Discrimination is a big problem all around the world. Just in the world of sport it affects many people in different ways.

Types of discrimination are racial discrimination, religious discrimination, gender discrimination, homophobia and ageism. Problems faced include discrimination and abuse because of the way you look, wage differences because of your gender and age, not being included because of that they require extra work. We will talk about some of these during the showcase.

I am very involved in it we will have a focus for me but it is important to remember it is not in one way or another a problem in all sport.



Gender Equality

- Gender inequality is one of the main problems in the world of sport at this moment of time, the women you see are few of the thousands of women trying to get equality for women in sport...
- The problems that may show are:
 - Wage Difference
 - Less Televised Coverage
 - Less Sponsorship deals
 - Lower fan base in certain sports
 - Less opportunities e.g. Referees, commentators and obviously players.

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STEM IMPROVEMENT – PRIMARY BEARSDEN PRIMARY SCHOOL

What will happen next?

- Next session, STEM and gender equality will remain a part of our improvement plan
- We hope to organise another STEM week and invite people from various science careers to promote STEM jobs. This will probably be done via video calls. Last year we had a lot of female visitors and hope to have the same again this year
- Carry out lessons relating to the gender pay gap and gender stereotypes

Further details and resources

[STEM ambassadors website - how to find and request a STEM ambassador](#)

[Skills Development Scotland - My World of Work](#)



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STEM IMPROVEMENT – PRIMARY MOSSHEAD PRIMARY SCHOOL

What was the outcome / what was noticed?

- Surprised how many STEM books including female characters still represented boys/girls and men/women stereotypically - decided to use as a discussion point with children.
- Children are very aware of gender bias.
- Discussion with children made them likely to report what they've seen/read and it made the teachers think more about everyday stereotyping too.
- Greater awareness of gendered language eg policeman.
- An equal split in uptake of pupil leadership roles eg digital/STEM leaders.

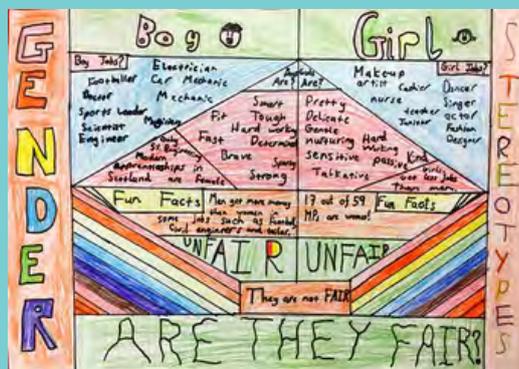
What will happen next?

- Continue to focus on this through school improvement plan
- Explicit DYW planners linking the world of work in day to day learning
- Use of My World of Work including exploration of gender balance by sector and pay
- STEM a Story incorporated into all stage planners
- Diversity celebrated through events such as Show Racism the Red Card
- Engagement in the Young STEM Leader programme with 2 staff members certified tutor assessors and 32 Young STEM leaders out of 42 Primary 7's
- Monitoring gender balance within YSL programme – even mix of boys and girls (75% P7 girls and 77% P7 boys are STEM leaders)
- Whole school participation in Science Week, Maths Week Scotland and Careers Week
- New STEM/gender books including the Collins Big Cat series Dani Binns and Tara Binns
- Developing links with local partners eg McLaughlin Harvey Construction & Architects Holmes Miller – Whole school design competition, mini COP26 Homes for the Future
- Participation in Digital Pedagogy project with Local Authority and Education Scotland



Further details and resources

'Draw a ...' test information



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GENDERED PLAY IN P1

What highlighted a new approach/intervention was needed?

- Personal relevance of having studied engineering and been only one of a few females on course
- Professional relevance in noticing boys and girls tended to play with different toys and interact with them differently
- STEM was chosen as the vehicle as it was found parents and teachers didn't want to explore the issue of gender but focusing on STEM and jobs was a good route to open this up

What was tried?

- Phase 1 - Baseline observation of children playing with Lego sets (hospital, school, laboratory, garage, shop, hairdressers), noted which gender they were and the frequency of interaction with Lego plus which type of Lego each gender was interacting with.
- Phase 2 - Four STEM lessons delivered focusing on STEM jobs and working towards Experience and Outcome SCN0-20a.
- One of these was drawing what they wanted to be when they grew up. Asking learners to explain the picture and talk them through the pictures was insightful.
- Other lessons involved watching videos about what a biologist does, an astronaut etc. as well as inviting in speakers who subverted gender stereotypes to discuss their jobs.
- Phase 3 - Undertook baseline observation again.

Time taken - 3 weeks

What was the outcome / what was noticed?

- Stereotypes existed which later on would perpetuate occupational segregation and gender pay gap.
- Lego was a great proxy to not only determine their understanding of gender stereotypes in STEM but the skills and knowledge the participants would have learned by using Lego.
- Initially more boys playing with Lego (60% to 40%) and they played with largely gender stereotypical sets (girls with hairdressers, boys in garage etc.).
- The drawings of what they wanted to be when they grew up showed that a lot of the girls wanted to go into lower paid jobs and the boys went beyond domestic jobs. The majority of the jobs the boys chose were in more highly paid jobs.
- After the four STEM lessons, slightly more girls were playing with Lego (56% boys to 44% girls) but interestingly the proportions of who interacted with which set changed slightly. It was found more girls played with laboratory and hospital Lego sets than before.
- The teacher has an influence on the way the children construct gender stereotypes by providing the children with the skills and knowledge to make more informed ideas and believes it has had an impact on the participants views on gender stereotyping.
- Mindsets of the learners can change.

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GENDERED PLAY IN P1 CONTINUED..

What will happen next?

- Funding for Lego kits
- Repeat this intervention in other schools throughout the local authority
- Compare data from different schools
- Articulate similarities/differences between different classes
- Examine the impact of Lego play on behaviour (as practitioner had noticed in this study that it had a calming effect on learners who previously had found it difficult to engage).

Further details and resources

Observation scale used in this study:
[Click here to access IGBE wordpress blog:](#)
<https://bit.ly/3u7cWqa>

Play pedagogy and gender balance
webinar: <https://youtu.be/nFrcB0iBCWc>



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DUNBLANE LEARNING COMMUNITY - CLUSTER APPROACH

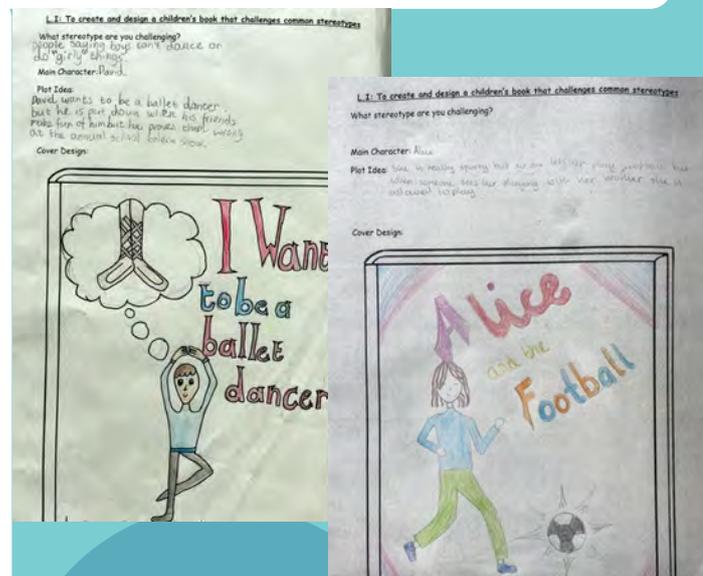
What highlighted a new approach/intervention was needed?

- Self-evaluation processes recognised the need to increase understanding and celebrate diversity within our learning community
- To build staff confidence when approaching or addressing diversity and the recognition for staff to feel empowered
- Increased awareness, interest and discussion around current issues in the media e.g. Black Lives Matter movement, further prompted the need to be proactive in our approaches

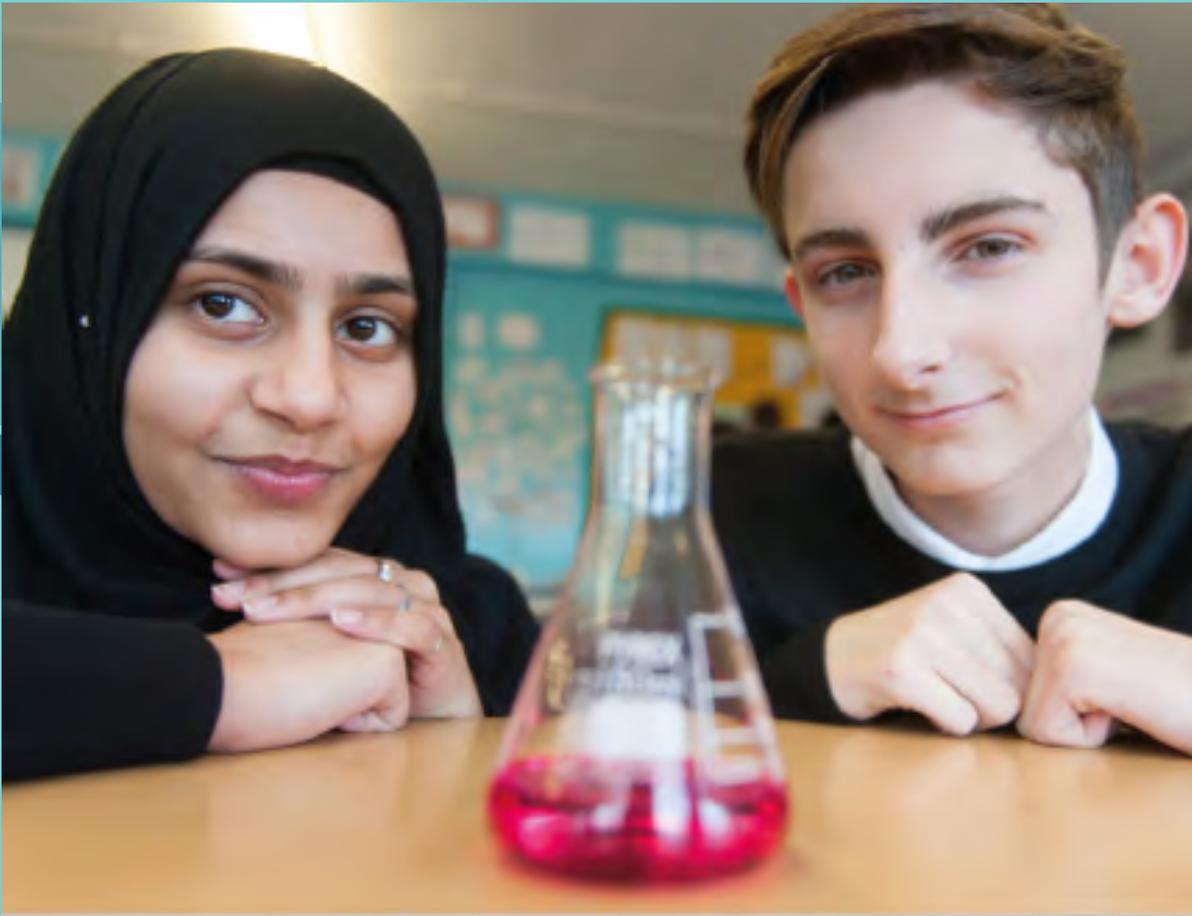
What was tried?

- Diversity was identified as a priority on school improvement plans.
- Local authority contact matched Dunblane Learning Community with an IGBE officer.
- Three professional learning sessions on stereotypes and unconscious bias delivered on in-service days throughout the year (sustained approach).
- Staff reflected, made small changes to, and monitored their language (such as finding alternatives to 'boys and girls') as well as asking learners what they would prefer and generally adopting gender neutral language.
- Plans were made to challenge stereotypes on a day to day basis using existing materials and through language. For example within one learning context focus on Fairytales explored 'Cindafella', 'Jackie and the Beanstalk' and compared gender stereotypes in characters. Children also explored assumptions made regarding names in relation to gender.
- Staff further considered how learning contexts could be more gender aware and how the topic of gender stereotypes could be built into all areas of the curriculum. This also tied in with identifying links with the Global Goals. Gender inequalities within STEM jobs and other careers were explore through an Evolving Inventions context and prejudice and discrimination was linked to the novel study of Wonder.
- Contexts based around Women in Science and Gender Equality were identified and covered across different stages.
- A variety of lessons were tried and explored including; rules were changed depending on gender/characteristics (e.g. only girls allowed to speak out), sorting jobs or statements into gender categories and follow up discussions, exploring assumptions in advertising, research on the history and significance of the different colours of the Rainbow Flag and creating characters in story writing which challenge gender roles.
- In play based learning, the layout of spaces was considered to ensure a more inclusive approach.
- Generated and agreed core attributes for a gender aware setting allowing a shared vision and understanding throughout the learning community.

Time taken - 1 year so far



Secondary



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KNOX ACADEMY: FEEDBACK DURING LOCKDOWN – SECONDARY

Context: During the Covid-19 pandemic, schools were closed from January 2021 until March 2021 and learning took place in an online environment. The observations in this example are from this time period.

What highlighted a new approach/intervention was needed?

- Noticed a lack of engagement online during remote learning from more boys than girls.
- There seemed to be more communication from girls when doing online lessons and in response to feedback.
- However there was a risk of bias in identifying who was engaging less, therefore potentially skewing monitoring reports.
- Girls are often more likely to take the subject (Modern Studies) onto senior level.

What was tried?

- Google form asking pupils in National class questions such as:
 - What type of feedback on your learning do you prefer?
 - Do you think you receive enough feedback?
 - Does the feedback you receive help support your next steps?
- Results showed there were no significant differences between boys and girls when asked if they felt they received enough feedback or whether they felt it was effective.
- There was a slight difference in the type of feedback they preferred - girls tended to prefer written feedback whereas boys preferred verbal.
- This may have contributed to engagement levels online given that more teacher time was spent giving written feedback whereas individual verbal feedback was rarely provided.
- On return to face to face teaching, attempts have been made to vary the type of feedback, in particular review verbally some written feedback with boys who were perhaps struggling to engage returning back to school.

Time taken - 2 months

What was the outcome/what was noticed?

- Given social distancing measures it was difficult to fully observe impact before the change of timetable.
- Ensuring varied feedback is provided will be an ongoing strategy to improve attainment and uptake but also promote more positive relationships.

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KNOX ACADEMY: FEEDBACK DURING LOCKDOWN - SECONDARY

What will happen next?

- Continue to work on feedback techniques and observe if this has an impact on pupil attainment and course choice

Further details and resources

Tom Sherrington - The Learning Rainforest

Dylan William - [Using assessment strategies to support feedback](#)

Dylan William - [The secret of effective feedback](#)

[Austin's butterfly - Critique and descriptive feedback](#)

Hattie and Clarke (2019) Visible Learning Feedback. Routledge: London and New York



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STEM IMPROVEMENT GROUP – SECONDARY **LARBERT HIGH SCHOOL, FALKIRK**

What highlighted a new approach/intervention was needed?

- Noticed gender imbalance in STEM subjects and identified it as an improvement priority
- S1s were asked at the start of the year what they would likely pick and it already showed gender stereotypical patterns - wanted to investigate what difference could the S1 course make
- Work with cluster primaries also highlighted these views start early

What was tried?

- Staff completed Harvard Implicit Bias test and reflected
- Small team/working group took this forward and collaborated on a list of achievable targets for the year
- School improvement group staff reviewed documentation and examples of practice from IOP to evaluate what we are already doing and what we could do in the future
- Professional learning input at STEM Faculty meeting which involved discussion of scenarios around how people may unwittingly stereotypically treat girls and boys in a classroom e.g. provide scrutiny over girls' work but praise a 'misbehaving' boy just for being on task
- Lesson observations to monitor interactions and environment - Who speaks more in class? Who does teacher interact more with?
- Developed top 5 tips for teachers campaign - posters and key messages delivered through staff meetings, assemblies and STEM week
- Incorporated addressing gender stereotyping into mental, social, emotional and physical health lessons
- Human bingo activity with staff to reveal and challenge bias
- Professional learning and follow up session at cluster primaries meeting
- Training materials and tools shared with cluster primaries

Time taken - 8 months initially (and still ongoing)

What was the outcome/what was noticed?

- Evaluations from the professional learning at the STEM meeting showed that some staff were completely unaware of their unconscious bias and the impact that this has. Staff found the activities eye-opening in most cases and took away valuable insights for their own practice
- Results from interactions monitoring showed that boys tended to answer more, put their hand up more and have questions directed at them more. Girls tended to ask more questions
- Staff then became more aware of these tendencies and made alterations to their questioning techniques in the classroom
- Some cluster primaries used materials to cascade key messages

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STEM IMPROVEMENT GROUP – SECONDARY LARBERT HIGH SCHOOL, FALKIRK

What will happen next?

- Potential to have a teachmeet across the school and make it a focus for their professional enquiry topic for next year
- Look into options choice booklets
- Develop shared language for self-evaluation of improving gender balance
- Further examine effective questioning in light of gender stereotypes and bias
- Learner involvement in campaign
- Meet with SLT to plan input at whole school level for pupils through Mental Emotional Social Physical (MESP) lessons for different year groups S1-6 – similar activities to those undertaken by staff to highlight and extend awareness
- Liaise with Larbert cluster for STEM week celebrations and provide an opportunity for staff CLPL
- STEM Academy girls are all applying for the S2 Young Weir Wise programme at Strathclyde and then S3 when it opens up

Further details and resources

Human bingo activity (available soon via IGBE toolkit)

LHS 5 top tips campaign poster (see image below)

5 Tips for Improving Gender Balance in Education @ LHS

Challenge discriminatory language
There is still a surprising amount of sexist language used: challenge this just as you would racist and homophobic language in a constructive manner

Monitor your interactions with different genders
High-achieving boys are more likely to put up their hands and dominate discussions. Low-achieving boys sometimes contribute least of all. Self-evaluate your own interactions.

Refer to careers which use skills from your subject
Are a range of careers presented and described? Is the full range of pathways and choices evident? When describing jobs, do you use adjectives as well as verbs?

Use gender-neutral contexts whenever possible
Encourage students to identify and challenge gender stereotypes, unconscious bias and their effect.

Expose pupils to a diverse range of role models
Is there a range of positive role models for all children? Are women and men portrayed in a range of roles in both the workplace and the home? Do your resources celebrate diversity?



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BOYS' ATTAINMENT AND GENDERED EXPECTATIONS

What highlighted a new approach/intervention was needed?

- Professional learning around barriers to boys' learning
- Department exam results showed boys' attainment was significantly weaker than girls, especially those from lower SIMD areas
- More boys presented for identified learning needs (ADHD common)
- More boys presenting negative behaviour

What was tried?

- Short life working group set up after staff professional learning
- Mindset surveys with S1 and S2 boys, collated data and presented to senior leadership
- Staff mindset surveys about benefits of teaching girls and teaching boys and discussion on this
- Staff discussion about barriers to boys' learning matched up with pupil surveys (perceptions of subjects boys choose as less challenging/academic, expectations from society/home, unable to talk about feelings, low expectations, lack of male role models)
- Consulted pupils on what would be useful for them
- Teachers, guidance staff and support for learning staff identified boys for the intervention (those who were peer influencers and potential role models)
- Further staff professional learning
- Work with partners that included:
 - S1 boys created a lifestyle magazine targeted at their age group/ P7 learners coming into S1
 - S2 boys created a book about what they wish people knew about teenage boys
 - Staff from Edinburgh Castle & Mercat Tours delivered training to the boys on how to be ambassadors for their school. Boys devised tours which are given to VIPs, guests and visitors
 - Worked with a slam poet to devise poetry
 - Yoga and mindfulness sessions
 - Worked with associated primaries - reading to P1/nursery, peer mentors for P7s
- Challenged laddish culture, racism, homophobia and sexist thinking and introduced gender balanced approach to work, tone and language. Tried to challenge idea of literacy being perceived as feminine
- Provided activities avoiding male stereotypes, discussion before extended writing tasks, group challenges not individual competition, mixed ability sets to remove 'bottom set' mindsets
- Stopped using writing as a punishment, used positive male role models, praised process and effort
- After first year- repeated mindset surveys, consulted learners, staff and partners and made modifications

Time taken: 2 years of research and planning to get to delivery point - still ongoing

“We cannot inspire change if we passively accept our own low expectations of boys”



BOYS' ATTAINMENT AND GENDERED EXPECTATIONS

What was the outcome / what was noticed?

- Improved attainment
- More boys presented for N5 English
- Calm and focused start to lessons, improvements in behaviour overall
- S1 boys had significant improvements in self-belief
- S2 boys had significant improvements in pride in their work and confidence for completing school assignments
- Raised awareness with staff of issues through professional learning and coaching
- Changed mindsets and made literacy feel more 'real life' for the boys

What will happen next?

- Expand beyond S1/S2 (up the school and with P6/P7s in associated primaries)
- Consider how to use seniors as peer mentors
- Use lessons learned to engage boys who are at greatest risk of missing out on learning
- Considering using tracking and monitoring for targetted groups and think about how to measure impact
- Increase access to specific study support
- Inputs on careers and further study

Further details and resources

A more detailed account can be found in the [GTCs Teaching Scotland magazine](#), page 50

[It's 'no wonder' that boys are doing less well than girls | Tes](#)

Texts that supported this enquiry:

- Breaking the Barriers to Boys Achievement by Gary Wilson
- When the Adults Change, Everything Changes by Paul Dix
- Boys Don't Try, by Matt Pinkett and Mark Roberts
- Making it Better for Boys, by Ali McClure
- [Education Endowment Foundation - Setting or Streaming](#)



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Other partners



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SPRINGING THE GENDER TRAP

Education, sexual health and sexual violence prevention partnership

What highlighted a new approach/intervention was needed?

- Link between gender stereotypes and violence against women and girls
- Observation of the need for training on this topic amongst education settings, parents and professionals

What was tried?

- Three professional learning sessions were developed in partnership between Education Scotland, NHS and a 3rd sector sexual violence prevention organisation.
- They had the following aims:
 - To recognise gender stereotypes.
 - To understand the short and long term impacts that gender stereotypes and bias have on children and young people throughout their lives – Learning; Work; Relationships.
 - To think differently about gender and to reflect on the changes they will make as a result of their learning.
- Sessions were piloted with educators, sexual health professionals and sexual violence prevention workers, feedback provided and tweaks made.
- At the start of the session, participants were issued with an attitude survey. They were also given a workbook to keep notes and complete tasks easily.
- Between each session, participants had a reflection task to carry out.
- At the end of the three sessions, participants repeated the attitude survey.
- Sessions were then advertised to workers in Angus including newly qualified teachers, social workers and nurses working with children & young people.

Time taken - 6 months

What was the outcome/what was noticed?

- Attitude survey was thought provoking and important for gauging any change
- Reflective tasks between sessions really helped to make the topic relatable for the audience
- Partnership working between 3 sectors enhanced the content and made it relevant for a wider audience

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SPRINGING THE GENDER TRAP

Education, sexual health and sexual violence prevention partnership

What will happen next?

- Roll out the programme to selected localities, evaluate and extend the reach further
- Replicate the partnership working in other regions
- Adapt sessions to be delivered with parents and carers through the NHS Speakeasy programme

Further details and resources

This programme was run in the Tayside locality.

If you work here and would like to participate or would like to explore something similar for your region please contact:

IGBE@educationscotland.gov.scot



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