

**Boys' Education:
Good Practice in
Secondary Schools**

July 2008

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Overview

Several indicators, including international studies, NCEA data and the difference in school leaving qualifications for boys and girls recognise an ongoing achievement gap between boys and girls. International research on the achievement gap between boys and girls most often points to issues of literacy, especially writing, as being a key area of difference between boys' and girls' achievement.¹

Nevertheless, despite the relatively high numbers of boys who underachieve, research shows that just as many boys perform well in education as girls. Care is needed in discussing which groups of boys are not succeeding at school, and that the achievement differences between boys and girls are not seen as an educational problem for all boys.

This Education Review Office report provides schools and policy makers with examples of how 10 New Zealand secondary schools successfully support boys' education. The schools in this study were selected on the basis of their good overall levels of student achievement, previous positive ERO reports and their well-developed pastoral care and support strategies. Five boys' schools and five coeducational schools are used as case studies.

Most of the schools had developed initiatives that were specifically intended to raise boys' achievement, and that were successful with certain groups of boys. There are initiatives that have variously developed the academic, cultural, sporting and leadership qualities of boys. Several are in the important areas of literacy and numeracy. There are organisational and design initiatives to improve the way the curriculum and timetable worked for boys, and others that supported the achievement of Māori boys, Pacific boys, rural boys and boys who were at risk of not achieving.

This report also identifies the key strengths of the schools and some ongoing challenges faced by them in relation to boys' education. Where possible, each of the topics in these sections includes questions to help other schools reflect on how ERO's findings relate directly to their own work with boys.

The key strengths found at schools in this study were: high quality staff and student leadership; a positive school culture with a strong focus on positive image; relevant teaching and learning contexts; and constructive relationships. The schools all dealt positively with potentially negative images of boys' education, including: the bullying image that affects some boys' schools; the support structures that existed particularly for boys' literacy; and the various ways that schools had engaged different groups of boys.

The key challenges for the schools were: meeting the needs of a small percentage of disengaged boys, many of whom are from disadvantaged backgrounds; supporting Māori and Pacific boys; strengthening some aspects of literacy teaching; and undertaking useful analyses of the ongoing and complex gap between girls' and boys' achievement. It is also important to remember that, although an achievement gap

¹ Cuttance, P & Thomson, J. (2007). *Literature review on boys' education*.

exists between boys and girls, there are still high numbers of girls who do not succeed at secondary school, and any analysis of achievement should include issues associated with both genders.

Future directions for schools

Schools can use this report as a starting point to:

- inform their own review of the achievement of boys at their school;
- include in their analysis of achievement data, such as NCEA, a breakdown of how well different groups of students achieve at their school, and then examine the factors behind the achievement patterns for boys and girls; and
- review how well the school uses student feedback to inform their teaching, learning and co-curricular activities for different groups of students.

Introduction

That boys do not achieve as well academically as girls at schools has been an ongoing matter for discussion both in New Zealand and overseas. In New Zealand, the attention to boys' education has arisen in light of the relative gap between the achievement of boys and girls. In recent years, several indicators including international studies, NCEA data and the school leaving qualifications of boys and girls recognise this difference.

There has been considerable speculation about the origins of the differences in the achievement of boys and girls. Much of the research work undertaken on gender in education has tended to provide information for academic and/or policy audiences, with few studies specifically designed to help schools address issues associated with boys' achievement. Moreover, while in recent years evidence has been presented to New Zealand schools about improving teaching generally, educational research on boys has not provided definitive advice to schools about how they can improve their teaching practice to further support the achievement of boys.

This study aims to contribute to the educational debate on boys' achievement by identifying and reporting on practices that have supported boys' learning in some New Zealand secondary schools. It uses case studies to discuss examples of successful educational strategies for boys. These are not simply aimed at improving NCEA results, but are used to support boys in different learning contexts and curriculum areas throughout the stages of their secondary schooling.

Boys' achievement and participation

The central issue for boys' education, both in New Zealand, as well as many other developed countries, has been the achievement gap between boys and girls. At the end of 2007 the Ministry of Education produced a report, *Boys' Achievement - A Synthesis of the Data*, which states that there are some 'clear and consistent issues' related to the achievement of boys. Drawing on a wide range of educational achievement and participation data, this report found that boys are over-represented in:

- early problems in reading;
- disengagement with school;
- lower achievement in reading and writing; and
- lower qualification attainment.²

The Ministry's report also identified important differences in the achievement patterns of boys and girls. For example, it found that girls performed better than boys in all forms of literacy, although differences in reading tended to decrease during secondary schooling and differences in writing increase. No significant differences were found between boys and girls in mathematics and science achievement.

² Ministry of Education. *Boys' achievement - A synthesis of the data*. Wellington: Ministry of Education, 2007.

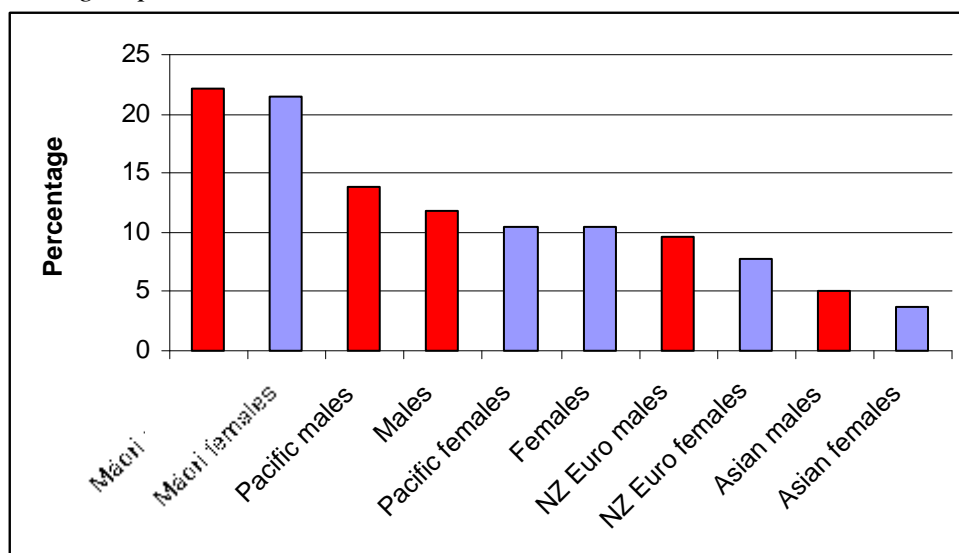
The report from the Ministry shows that, since the introduction of NCEA, there had been a consistent gap in the qualifications achieved by boys and girls. Approximately 10 percent more girls achieve Level 1 and Level 2 than boys, with 13 percent more girls achieving Level 3.

From 1993 to 2006 the number of girls achieving University Entrance increased slightly over the number of boys. In 1993 27 percent of girls left school with University Entrance compared to 23 percent for boys. By 2006 41 percent of girls gained University Entrance compared to 31 percent of boys.

Despite the differences that exist between boys and girls at University Entrance and Levels 1, 2 and 3 of NCEA, boys are awarded a similar number of scholarships to girls.³ For example, in 2006 1502 males and 1426 females won scholarships. Fifty-eight percent of the scholarships awarded to male students were in mathematics and science, while female students were notably more successful in English and the Arts.

Ministry of Education data also show that ethnicity differences were more marked than gender differences. One way to represent this information is to identify how different groups have performed in secondary school education. For example, of the students who failed to achieve a qualification at school, Māori males formed the highest percentage, followed by Māori females, Pacific males, and then Pacific females through to Asian females who had the lowest percentage of non-qualification. (see graph below).

Graph 1: Percentage of school leavers with little or no formal attainment by gender and ethnic group, 2006



Source: Ministry of Education

³ Ministry of Education. *Boys' achievement - A synthesis of the data*. Wellington: Ministry of Education, 2007.

Research on boys' education

Which boys are not succeeding?

International research on the achievement gap between boys and girls most often points to issues of literacy, especially writing, as being a key area of difference between boys' and girls' achievement.⁴ While some research indicates that girls are also slightly ahead in arts education, the differences between boys and girls in mathematics and science are not particularly marked.

Despite the relatively high numbers of boys who underachieve research shows that just as many boys perform well in education as girls. Many researchers emphasise that care is needed in discussing which groups of boys are not succeeding at school, and that the achievement differences between boys and girls are not seen as an educational problem for all boys.

International and New Zealand research evidence also draws attention to the effect of background on the performance of boys. For example, internationally, there is some evidence to suggest that there are larger gaps for boys from lower socio-economic backgrounds. There is also evidence that there is a larger gap in achievement between schools in rural settings and those in urban areas. In New Zealand the performance of Māori and Pacific boys (and girls) is a cause for concern.

It should be pointed out however, that although boys from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and Māori and Pacific boys, are among the lowest performing groups of students in New Zealand, NCEA data shows that the gap between the achievement of boys and girls actually increased with school decile. For example, in 2007 the results for Year 11 students doing NCEA Level 1 showed that there was a 6.6 percent gap between boys and girls in low decile schools, an 8.4 percent gap in mid decile schools and a 13.3 percent gap in high decile schools (see also Appendix 1 attached to this report).

More research is needed to understand these trends and why certain groups of boys, in various educational contexts, do not achieve as well as girls.

Factors in boys' underachievement

A wide range of factors may influence the relative underachievement of boys. These include behavioural, biological, cultural, pedagogical and environmental factors. The complexity of the way these factors interact, and how they specifically relate to boys' education have made it difficult for researchers to provide definitive evidence on the causes of boys' underachievement and therefore develop advice for teachers.

The dominant research perspective is that connected to issues of male identity formation - specifically how boys see themselves as learners. Much of the research suggests that issues of gender identity are the most significant area to understand and address in boys' education issues. In this approach, consideration is given to how boys perceive themselves as learners in contemporary classrooms and how this translates into educational achievement.

⁴ Cuttance, P & Thomson, J. (2007). *Literature review on boys' education*.

It is also claimed in some research that aspects of education are ‘feminised’ and inherently biased towards the achievement of girls. In other research, issues of how boys approach the literacy areas of reading, writing and speaking form a significant part of the discussion about boys’ learning.

Responding to the educational needs of boys

The diverse range of factors influencing boys’ underachievement has resulted in a range of different perspectives and approaches on the educational needs of boys and the ways to respond. Many are based on anecdotal or observational data and, while they may be effective in a particular setting, the collection of evidence has not yet reached the point where teachers can be confident about what will work in their class. These approaches include:

- the use of goals and targets;
- practical, hands-on activities;
- giving boys responsibility for their learning and allowing them to make choices;
- providing high levels of structure and teacher-led activities;
- positive reinforcement;
- using competition in the classroom;
- incorporating physical activity into learning;
- mentoring and peer support programmes;
- the use of outdoor education programmes;
- developing relevant learning activities and contexts;
- importing popular culture texts into classroom reading;
- daily silent reading times;
- using computers and other electronic media to support writing;
- developing critical literacy approaches, including those that help boys understand how masculinity is created through texts; and
- making school fun for boys and avoiding repetitive learning.

As can be seen, the above list includes aspects that are somewhat contradictory. These education strategies for boys should not be divorced from the types of teaching and learning activities that have a more established evidence base regarding their effectiveness for both boys and girls, (the approach to teaching and learning in the Ministry of Education’s *Quality Teaching for Diverse Students* and Professor John Hattie’s research on the *Influences on Student Learning*).⁵

⁵ http://www.education.auckland.ac.nz/uoafms/default/education/staff/Prof.%20John%20Hattie/Documents/Presentations/influences/Influences_on_student_learning.pdf

ERO's previous work on boys' education

In 1999 ERO published its report: *The Achievement of Boys*. This noted that girls outperformed boys against most measures of school achievement. For instance, it provided evidence, for instance that the school certificate grade distribution, and the distribution of B grades or better, (moderately) favoured girls.

School Certificate grade distribution by gender

| Grade | A | B | C | D | E |
|--------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Girls | 8.9% | 24.6% | 31.3% | 26.1% | 9.2% |
| Boys | 7.1% | 20.6% | 31.5% | 29.1% | 11.7% |

Percentage of School Certificate results at B or better by ethnicity

| Ethnicity | European | Māori | Pacific Islands | Other |
|------------------|-----------------|--------------|------------------------|--------------|
| Girls | 38.0% | 14.5% | 11.2% | 38.8% |
| Boys | 30.8% | 10.0% | 11.0% | 33.6% |

This report noted that there was evidence that boys and girls learn and respond in different ways, and achieve best with different teaching styles. The report suggested that teachers needed to be knowledgeable about differences in the preferred learning styles and behaviour of boys and girls, and to be able to adopt a range of teaching strategies to help accommodate the differences. This could have included grouping boys and girls differently for different activities.

The report also noted that schools needed to collect and examine achievement information to assess where boys were not achieving as well as they could and use this information to review their policies and programmes to ensure that the strengths of boys were sufficiently channelled and developed.

An analysis of ERO findings in a sample of 60 secondary schools found that girls' schools or coeducational schools performed better than boys' schools against a wide range of indicators, including curriculum delivery and the quality of the school's physical and emotional environment.

ERO's findings indicated that in 1999 many boys-only schools provided an education with a strong emphasis on tradition, examination results and sporting success. This type of education, while successful for some, did not necessarily meet the needs of all students. In contrast, girls-only schools and coeducational schools tended to adopt a wider range of teaching styles that catered more successfully for individual differences.

This report pointed out that, despite the findings about boys' schools, most boys in New Zealand today attend coeducational schools. An analysis of School Certificate examination results carried out for this study showed that the gap between boys' and girls' achievement in coeducational schools was larger in some types of schools than others. For example the gap in small schools and rural schools was considerably larger than the average.

Methodology

Schools in this study

ERO selected 10 secondary schools as case studies for this study. These schools were selected in consultation with the Ministry of Education and followed on from the work undertaken by the Ministry's reference group on boys' education.

The schools all had a positive ERO reporting history, good levels of student achievement and had previously demonstrated good practice in the pastoral care of students. Because of the nature of the topic, the majority of the schools selected had also developed, to some extent, particular approaches or strategies related to boys' education. This criterion also influenced the final choice of the five boys' schools and five coeducational schools.

Given the influence of socio-economic and geographical factors on boys' achievement, the case studies included low and middle-decile schools; schools with moderate or high numbers of Māori and Pacific students; and schools that were either based in a rural area or drew on a significant number of students from rural backgrounds.

Approach to this study

Following the selection of the schools, ERO evaluated each school's approach to supporting achievement, including any particular approaches used to support boys' education. This information was then drawn together to develop the case studies and overall findings for the report.

The information collected included documentary evidence, achievement analyses and descriptions of any initiatives and school-wide approaches. The study also included interviews with principals, members of boards of trustees, senior managers, teaching staff, students, school counsellors, and parents and whānau.

Particular emphasis was given to talking with groups of boys (and in some instances boys and girls) at each of the schools. Over the 10 schools visited, as part of this study, ERO discussed issues of boys' education with approximately 160 students. These students offered consistent and thoughtful messages about boys' education and provided a rich source of information for this report.

Findings

The findings of this report are divided into the following sections:

- case studies (Schools A to J);⁶
- key strengths for the case study schools; and
- key challenges for these schools.

The majority of the findings section is dedicated to the 10 individual case studies. Each case outlines the context in which the schools operate as well as two or three initiatives or approaches that have especially supported the education of boys.

The sections dealing with the key strengths and key challenges faced by the schools follow the case studies and provide a broad summary of the important issues facing these schools. Many of the matters raised in these two sections complement those developed in ERO's recent report entitled *Supporting and Engaging Senior Students*.⁷

The Case Studies

School A - Decile 4, large urban boys' school

School context

School A is a large, urban, mid decile, Year 9 to 13 boys' school located in a big city. It has a multi-ethnic roll made up of approximately 30 percent Pākehā/European, 15 percent Māori and over 30 percent of students from Pacific ethnicities. The remaining 25 percent represent other ethnic backgrounds. According to the school's analysis of standardised testing, many of its Year 9 students arrive with low levels of literacy and numeracy.

The school's emphasis is on the development of well-rounded young men, who excel in academic, sporting, cultural and leadership domains. The school has developed a strong sporting tradition in various sports. Despite the low academic entry skills of many Year 9 students, School A's 2007 student NCEA achievement was comparable to similar schools.

School culture and relationships

School A has a positive and safe learning environment for its diverse population of boys. It has achieved this through a variety of approaches including consistent expectations for behaviour; emphasis on its core values; celebrating success through school and house assemblies; and the positive interactions between staff and students.

The school's vertical form classes and the regular house competitions support the positive relationships evident throughout the school. Of central importance is the school's culture of 'big brother little brother'. Everyday interactions between students are consistently framed by the concept of senior students supporting junior students. This approach has meant that there are low levels of bullying at the school and the relationships between senior and junior students are predominantly nurturing and supportive. Students told ERO that the school's reputation for safe and positive

⁶ The case studies are presented in the order in which the fieldwork was undertaken.

⁷ For a copy of this report go to www.ero.govt.nz.

interactions between boys has encouraged many fa'afafine students to enrol at this school.

Positive senior-junior interactions amongst boys have also been supported through the school's peer support programme. Year 13 boys have been given good quality training in how to support their 'little brothers'. Each year, Year 13 boys use their training as the basis of the way they organise a camp to induct Year 9 boys. Most Year 13 boys also use one of their weekly study periods to support junior students in class. In addition, the school has recently started a paired reading programme that involves Year 13 boys taking time out from a study period to read with a junior student.

Numeracy success

The school places a strong emphasis on numeracy and has had very high levels of success in this area. Entry testing in numeracy showed that approximately a third of Year 9 students had skills equivalent to Level 2 on the New Zealand mathematics curriculum. Drawing on their experience in the numeracy project, and citing the emphasis on thinking in the new curriculum, the mathematics department has sought to develop greater mathematical understanding and confidence among its boys.

Through an analysis of NCEA Level 1 results, the mathematics department also identified that a key barrier to student achievement was the way in which students addressed 'word problems' in mathematics examinations. With this knowledge, the mathematics department has taken an active approach in developing the mathematical language of boys. The teachers did this by giving definitions of key words, supplying students with many more word problems in class, and teaching students key strategies to deal with word problems. In some cases teachers also used analogies between mathematical words and concepts used in sports to help boys understand the underlying mathematical ideas.

The work carried out to improve the boys' numeracy has contributed to a significant improvement in the number of students gaining their Level 1 numeracy requirement. In 2003, 72 percent achieved the Level 1 NCEA requirement and by 2007, 93 percent had achieved this. The success of this approach by the mathematics department has led the school to investigate how similar approaches to aspects of numeracy can be used in subjects with mathematics content, such as science, accounting and economics.

School B - Decile 6, rural coeducational school

School context

School B is located in a small town and has approximately 670 students from Year 9 to 13, most of whom travel to school by bus. The school has identified that 85 percent of leavers do not go on to university, and that their learning programmes need to cater for a range of needs.

School B's strategic and annual plans demonstrate a strong student-centred philosophy, with an emphasis on individual students, rather than on groups of students such as boys or Māori.

There is a low staff turnover, with 30 percent of teachers having also been students at the school. Staff members note that the fact they know their students so well provides a strong foundation for identifying and responding to individual needs.

The school has recently developed a new charter based on an agreed set of values. The values were developed with high levels of input from teachers, parents and students and this process has contributed to their high profile in the day-to-day life of the school. The students ERO talked with knew the school values and understood how these translated into high expectations in terms of their learning and behaviour.

Timetable flexibility

A recent and significant innovation has been the development of a new timetable structure with eight option lines. This has enabled students to choose from a much broader range of subjects than has previously been the case and, in some cases, to 'double up' on options that they especially prefer.

The increased flexibility has benefited all students, but particularly boys and those not heading to university. Boys now have the option of choosing several courses from a list that includes: building and construction, automotive engineering, legal studies, financial studies, trades studies, classical studies, agriculture, creative literature, senior health and daily physical education.

As the above list implies, the options available to boys in the technology curriculum feature in the school. The technology department offers formal academic qualifications as well as industry-related unit standards. Moreover, the school's technology areas have been fitted out with many of the tools and machines found in industry, which means that the students learn to work with the sorts of equipment found in the workplace.

Boys said that they appreciate the opportunity to spend large amounts of time in the workshops gaining useful skills and qualifications, and for some, this component in their school programme has motivated them to stay at school.

A 'literacy line' added at junior level has enabled teaching of te reo Māori, Greek and Italian for more able students, and extra literacy support for students who need it. Financial literacy is also included for all Year 9 students. English, mathematics, science and physical education are blocked in Year 11 to allow a variety of options to be taught simultaneously and to provide greater flexibility in meeting the diverse learning needs of the students.

Support for 'challenged learners'

School B has very high levels of literacy and numeracy achievement at NCEA Level 1, with 100 percent of Year 11 students gaining required numeracy credits and 97.8 percent meeting literacy requirements in 2007. Effective learning support programmes have contributed to this success.

A primary-trained learning support teacher works with junior students whose literacy and/or numeracy levels put them at risk of not achieving and leaving without qualifications. Her main goal is that all students gain the required literacy and numeracy credits. The school has several strategies to support this goal. These include enabling Year 10 students to gain credits in numeracy and literacy to reduce pressure on their Year 11 programme; giving all of the 'challenged learners' in the junior classes specific support from a reading tutor; and using the literacy line in the

timetable to allow the learning support teacher to take a Year 11 English and a Year 11 mathematics class for challenged learners, thereby continuing the strategies learnt in the junior school.

School C - Decile 6, medium size urban boys' school

School context

School C is an established Year 9 to 13, single-sex boys' school located in a provincial town. Nearly 90 percent of the students are Pākehā/European, 6 percent are Māori, 2 percent are from Pacific ethnicities and 2 percent are Asian. In 2007, School C's NCEA achievement at Level 1, 2 and 3 was well above national averages.

Boys can do everything

School C focuses on developing the all-round achievement of boys. It encourages boys to participate in cultural and sporting activities including the school's house competitions and one of the many school choirs. Colourful and informative wall displays in the school's entrance foyer acknowledge the wide range of cultural and sporting achievements of the boys.

While rugby, singing and the various inter-house competitions play a large role in the school, boys are genuinely encouraged to participate in a variety of cultural or sporting pursuits. For example, one boy, who had been reluctant to take up one of the many sports on offer, was eventually persuaded to take up croquet. He subsequently went on to achieve national success in this sport. Year 13 boys, especially those on an academic programme, are encouraged to work with the school's physical education department to develop a personal fitness programme so that exercise is included in their weekly routine.

The school works hard to foster boys' interest in reading. A well-organised silent reading programme operates for a 20-minute period after each lunch break. The prefects present book reviews in assembly once a week and the principal actively promotes an interest in books at assemblies as well.

School ceremonies are an important part of school life and they help develop the school's emphasis on developing all-round achievement. The school has some important historic buildings and, together with the assemblies, they help provide a sense of tradition, belonging and respect. Similarly, the school's Anzac Day commemorations have become a community-wide focus.

The principal provides a strong role model for all-round achievement. He regularly makes short historical presentations to the whole school, takes a keen interest in the school choirs and has directed school drama productions. He is also a strong pedagogical leader and has used his own research about educating boys to support the professional learning of teachers.

The emphasis on all-round achievement includes a focus on academic achievement. Indeed where a boy's studies appear to be taking a backseat to co-curricular activities a 'yellow' and 'red' card system is used to warn and then suspend him from co-curricular activities. A yellow card gives a boy two weeks to catch up, while a red card denotes suspended involvement in these activities. At the time of ERO's visit

the school had yet to employ a red card owing to the high levels of motivation shown by those boys with a two-week warning.

Professional development to support boys' learning

A well-developed professional mentoring system for teachers has contributed to School C's high level of academic success. Over the last five years the school has dedicated the equivalent of one full-time teacher to support a group of trained mentors. These mentors regularly observe teachers in the classroom and provide them with constructive feedback. They have worked with most staff since 2003 and have built up considerable experience in this sort of role over that time.

The school's mentors were initially trained by an external facilitator who has considerable experience in teacher development. Their work with staff members was developed as part of a series of goals for school development. These goals have since been updated to ensure that the mentoring relationships continue to be linked to school improvement, as well as personal development goals.

The mentoring process has not been linked to appraisal or attestation and, in this regard, the mentors have developed very trusting relationships with staff, many of whom have been teaching for several years.

The outcomes from the mentoring programme have included an increase in boys' achievement and the development of a more reflective, professional culture among staff. The principal and mentoring coordinator note that a majority of teachers now welcome other staff into their room; that there is more professional dialogue about pedagogy in the staffroom; that there has been highly positive feedback from those staff being mentored; and noticeable positive changes in teaching practice.

School D - Decile 4, large urban boys' school

School context

School D is a long-established single-sex boys' school located in a provincial city. It has a roll of over 1000 students. Seventy-three percent are Pākehā/European, 23 percent Māori and 2 percent of Pacific ethnicities. There is a school hostel and Year 7 and 8 boys have been integrated into the school since 2005. This change has resulted in an increased roll, an increase in the numbers of teachers; and required the refurbishment of a classroom block for junior boys.

In comparison with similar schools, 2007 NCEA achievement in Years 11, 12 and 13 is above national averages. In 2007, NCEA Level 1 literacy and numeracy results for Year 11 boys were well above average for similar schools, at nearly 90 percent.

Literacy skills across the curriculum

School D has placed a high priority on raising school literacy levels. The school has been part of a local literacy cluster and places considerable emphasis on literacy achievement, especially reading across the curriculum.

School D has managed this by improving the Year 7 and 8 teachers' skills in instructional reading. A literacy coordinator has helped to develop these skills, which are likely to be extended to teachers at Years 9 and 10. She has developed an extensive professional development programme for Year 7 and 8 teachers which has

involved understanding how to use assessment tools; reflecting on good practice research⁸ in literacy teaching; and learning how to teach specific reading strategies to boys. Boys who talked with ERO particularly enjoyed the ‘literature circles’ strategy used to extend their reading. This initiative involved boys choosing from a series of titles. Their choices would then be used to create groups and these groups would discuss what they had read.

School D has also developed an extensive whole-school reading programme where all teachers and boys read for 15 minutes a day. The programme has made reading an accepted part of school life and helped to create a strong interest in both fiction and non-fiction reading. This interest is especially evident in the data reflecting the high use made of the school’s library.

21st century men

The principal believes in the importance of supporting boys to develop positive identities as ‘21st century men.’ His vision includes a notion of what it is to be a ‘good bloke’, and one who knows that it is OK to be a male in a contemporary world. He uses international research and his own experience to lead professional discussions about these issues. As a result of these efforts, the school has developed a professional culture that reflects the importance of a balanced approach supporting boys to become positive, modern men.

School D’s values reflect this emphasis. The school values include *Perseverance, Respect, Honesty and Compassion*. These values form part of the everyday expectations for boys and are understood and reinforced by staff. Staff and students have helped structure positive relationships across the school through such initiatives as the paired reading programme between senior boys and Year 7 boys; and through the school’s ‘colours’ programme, which celebrates achievement in academic, cultural sporting or leadership domains.

The principal’s emphasis on 21st century men has also seen the introduction of the ‘Rock and Water’ programme at the school. This initiative was originally based on Netherlands research into boys’ education, although researchers have since found that it also works well with girls. The basis of the programme involves boys considering their own identity in a changing world and understanding the types of values and understanding they each need to succeed in this world. In essence the programme teaches boys about relationships and how to ‘honourably’ react to situations such as someone verbally abusing or bullying themselves or others. While the school has not quantified the effects of the programme, teachers report that it has particularly helped those students who have had difficulty in sustaining friendships. Teachers also report seeing students using the programme’s techniques in playground interactions.

School E - Decile 8, medium sized rural coeducational school

School context

School E is a Year 7 to 13 coeducational school of just over 700 students located in a small rural town. Just under 80 percent of the students are European/Pākehā, and approximately 10 percent are Māori.

⁸ See for example the Ministry of Education’s Effective Literacy Practice in Years 5-8

The school maintains strong links with the local community and continued economic growth in the area has resulted in recent roll growth. School E's achievement information shows that students achieve at levels generally above students in schools of a similar type and decile.

Boys-only classes

School E has run two boys-only classes in Years 9 and 10 since 2002. These classes have been an attempt to develop a motivating learning environment for a particular group of boys, which is based on sport, physical activity and relevant contexts and activities for core subjects.

Although there is a mix of abilities, overall the classes typically comprise a disproportionate number of lower achieving boys. The criteria for entry to the programme include boys having an interest in sport; a lack of motivation for normal academic studies; and/or having some history of behavioural problems. Boys are selected to join the classes on the advice of Year 8 teachers, deans and, in some circumstances, on the request of boys and parents. Because of the way the boys were selected, it was initially hoped that there would also be academic and social benefits for those boys and girls who remained in the mainstream classes.

In the initial years of the programme the core subjects were taught by two staff members. These staff were very capable and dedicated teachers who had built positive relationships with the boys. They had also introduced some important aspects to the programme. For example, the teacher who originally established the programme reported that it was important to provide in the boys a sense of what it was to be a "real bloke". Part of the programme involved boys reflecting on what it meant to be a positive young man, rather than the alternatives.

An ongoing quality of the programme has been the emphasis placed on providing boys with strong structures such as clear rules, high expectations and consistent daily routines. Teachers have also endeavoured to provide hands-on or physically active learning experiences. For example the boys do physical education everyday, although this could be revoked if a boy's work in core studies was below an acceptable standard. The learning has also included some emphasis on outdoor education and camping. For example, the Year 9 class has traditionally gone on a week-long course at nearby army camp.

A series of evaluations was undertaken in the first three years of the programme. The results showed that the boys enjoyed their time in the class. The findings also showed some variable academic results for both the boys-only classes and the remaining cohort of students in mainstream classes. In the first two years the boys in the programme generally performed as well as, or better than the other students in Years 9 and 10. While this was positive for the boys-only classes, it raised questions about the teaching and learning for students in the mainstream classes. In 2004, the results were more mixed, although there were some issues with the cohort in the boys-only classes largely because it contained a high number of students with learning disabilities.

There have been no evaluations of the boys-only classes since 2004. In part, this has been influenced by the loss of the staff member who originally set up the initiative. The loss has also posed something of a challenge for the school in terms of maintaining the original intention of the programme. Furthermore the school has also been faced with issues of funding for the programme and at the time of ERO's

evaluation the school was at something of a crossroads in how the initiative might continue.

Hands-on courses assessed with unit standards

School E provides a range of courses in the senior school. Many of these courses are assessed with unit standards, which one staff member noted were a ‘god send for boys’ because of the flexibility they allowed to structure a course to the interests of students.

Two of the most popular options for boys have been furniture making and the school’s rural education academy. School E’s furniture-making course provides students with thorough training in furniture making skills. The teacher notes that because the course uses industry unit standards, rather than achievement standards, it does not need to involve particular groups of boys in large amounts of design work. In that sense the course fits well with those students going on to apprenticeships in furniture making and who are seeking woodworking rather than design skills.

School E’s rural college also provides a way for certain groups of boys to develop technical skills. This option attracts high numbers of boys in the senior school, many of whom may have left school early to take up rural employment. The course enables students to be assessed against unit standards in such areas as tractor driving, fence building, crutching and shearing. The course also features a large number of field trips and work experience opportunities. The students, particularly the boys, respond particularly well to these practical hands-on activities.

School F - Decile 5, large coeducational secondary school

School Context

School F is a decile 5 Year 9 to 13, coeducational secondary school located in a provincial town. The school draws its students from a wide rural and urban catchment. The majority of students are European/Pākehā (53 percent) and Māori (41 percent). In 2007, just under 90 percent of Year 11 students achieved the Level 1 literacy requirement with just under 95 percent achieving the numeracy requirement. Its results for Level 2 and 3 compare favourably with national statistics.

Focus on achieving success through effective teaching

School F has a strong focus on teachers’ professional learning, aimed at enhancing teaching practice. Four years ago the school emphasised the importance of formative assessment and higher order thinking as part of their school-wide professional development. Working within departments, teachers set departmental and individual practice goals based on their understanding of which strategies worked well for students.

The strength of the professional learning process is evident in the extent to which teachers now use self and peer evaluation and, increasingly, student feedback to reflect on what they are doing in classroom.

The school’s teaching emphasis on formative assessment works well for boys. Staff have found that boys in particular want to know “why am I doing this?”. This has helped to reinforce their formative approach to teaching. The boys reported that they

liked their teacher being clear about what they were going to learn; having specific short-term goals that they had been part of developing; and knowing what they needed to do to succeed.

As a result of their professional learning, teachers are also varying the ways they teach. Boys acknowledge that practices such as: interactive discussion, where their views are taken seriously; practical activities especially in science and technology; and chances for role-play, all help them engage better with their learning.

Leadership for holistic learning and development

The principal and senior leaders take a holistic approach to student learning and development which puts value on the academic, co-curricular and social aspects of students' lives.

This is done in many ways at School F, including the time taken by senior staff to coach sports; help with student tutorials and 'catch ups'; and acting as mentors in a wide variety of co-curricular activities. While all students benefit from this approach, boys particularly acknowledged the effort taken by senior staff.

Aside from their support of co-curricular activities, senior leaders also manage various pastoral initiatives. Senior leaders have, for instance, led the development of restorative practices at the school. These practices have been beneficial in resolving challenging behaviours that impact disproportionately on boys' learning. Similarly, through the Student Engagement Initiative, facilitators have worked with staff to build their knowledge and use of restorative practices such as 'mini chats' and relaxed vigilance.

This holistic approach to student engagement and participation has strengthened the relationships between the school, students and their families. Data and anecdotal evidence suggest that boys are increasingly beneficiaries of the school's approach. This is seen through the increasingly positive school environment, the increased retention rates and a decrease in the numbers of stand-downs and suspensions.

School G - Decile 7, large urban boys' school

School context

School G is a large long-established single-sex boys' school. The school's roll is over 1000 students. Seventy-eight percent of the boys are European/ Pākehā, 10 percent are Māori, 3 percent Pacific ethnicities and 5 percent Asian. In comparison with similar schools, achievement levels in Years 11, 12 and 13 are above those of similar decile.

Diverse opportunities for all boys

School G offers its boys a variety of sporting cultural and academic opportunities. Boys with a range of interests, skills and abilities can all succeed.

In the curriculum, the school has developed courses in the senior school suited to artistic, academic, physical, and technological interests. These include drama, environmental science, outdoor education, Māori performing arts, sports extension, business studies, food and hospitality, legal studies, media studies, electronics, trade building and mechanical engineering.

In the co-curricular programme, boys have the opportunity to take part in a wide variety of sports, including bowls, karate, mountain biking, skiing and ultimate frisbee. Cultural pursuits include chess, choir, creative writing, various instrumental bands, kapa haka and several different drama and theatre activities. The school has an active house competition, which enables regular competitions for both junior and senior boys.

Peer relationships

School G has set aside the traditional system of using a small number of Year 13 boys as prefects, in favour of using nearly all Year 13 boys in leadership roles in the school. School G's student leadership programme involves Year 13 boys:

- mentoring Year 9 students;
- working in a junior class, local primary school or coaching a sports team;
- organising homeroom and house competitions;
- attending weekly leadership seminars; and
- being positive role models.

The guidance staff train the Year 13 boys for their role as leaders. This training aims to develop effective communication and relationship strategies. It helps Year 13 boys develop the listening, guidance and goal-setting skills they need for working with the Year 9 boys. The training also engages mentors in discussion about male values and what roles need to be taken by a Year 13 boy supporting the development of a Year 9 boy. Both senior and junior boys endorsed the worth of the programme. Senior staff members said that the more distributed leadership approach had helped develop a more supportive school culture.

As a result of the success of the Year 13 leaders, the school has also taken the opportunity to use peer leadership processes in other contexts. The school's boarding houses have also moved away from a prefect-type model in favour of a supportive mentor role for house leaders. From Year 11 onwards boys also have the opportunity to be trained as leaders for the week-long Year 10 camp held by the school.

School H - Decile 7, large coeducational secondary school

School context

The school is a large coeducational secondary school catering for students from Years 9 to 13 in a growing provincial town. It has a roll of just under 1150 students, 86 percent of whom are European/Pākehā and 10 percent are Māori. It is the only secondary school in the town and it attracts students from the surrounding rural area. This school achieves well in NCEA compared to other decile 7 schools, although NCEA Level 2 and 3 results indicate that girls do somewhat better than boys.

Enterprise Education

An enterprise programme has been effective in providing student-centred learning programmes that have strong appeal for boys. The school believes that this approach makes learning more relevant. It involves the support of local businesses and community groups. About 20 staff are developing enterprise learning with students. Examples include:

- An anti-graffiti campaign in social studies that involved all Year 10 classes in painting a portion of a mural on the wall of a local hardware warehouse wall. At the same time, various community groups spoke to students about the whole issue of graffiti in society.
- A statistics project involved students in researching the merits of bulk buying as opposed to single-item buying in local supermarkets. The results of the survey were published in the local newspaper.
- Most of the students in a Year 10 learning support class completed a Level 1 achievement standard in constructions and loci, by designing a fence system for a local farm. Two boys achieved excellences for the standard with two more achieving merits.

One teacher uses an enterprise approach in the majority of her teaching. She does this by being clear with her classes what outcomes that are to be achieved and what assessments will need to be undertaken. The class works together to design the programme by identifying an enterprising context that will help them learn. She commented that this approach had engaged boys who had traditionally struggled with more teacher-led approaches. Boys said they liked getting out there and doing practical things because they liked seeing the effect of what they had achieved.

Opportunities in physical education

School H has developed courses in its physical education curriculum to cater for a range of student interests. These classes are especially popular with boys. In Year 10 there is an exercise performance class that has been developed for high sports achievers. The programme deals with a variety of fitness and sports management matters and promotes aspiring students by offering them scope to develop their skills and abilities. In 2008 the course had attracted 75 boys and 27 girls.

In Years 11 and 12 the achievement standards-based physical education courses have been paired with two practical physical education options. The practical education classes provide an option for those students who have a keen interest in physical activity but do not want to take part in the Year 11 and 12 physical education classes, which are assessed through achievement standards. The majority of the students taking these classes are boys. They participate in skiing, snowboarding and rifle shooting, and have an active role in coaching of primary school sport as part of developing leadership skills.

Year 13 physical education students have the option to take part in a senior 'sport and exercise' course. This is a full year STAR funded course, operating through the local polytechnic. Operating in addition to the Year 13 achievement standards course, this one serves as the first year for students in a Diploma of Sport. The course offers 19 Level 3 credits, based on fitness, first aid and sports officiating and administration.

School I - Decile 2, medium-sized boys' school

School context

School I is urban decile 2, with about 670 students. The boys come from a variety of backgrounds, with the majority drawn from the poorer suburbs surrounding the school. Approximately 40 percent of the school's population are European/Pākehā, 40 percent are Māori and 15 percent are students from Pacific ethnicities. The school

has good systems for pastoral care and an active inter-house competition programme. Boys from School I recently won a local stage challenge competition.

Improved academic success

School I has significantly improved its academic results from 2003 to 2007. In 2003 the majority of its Year 11 students did not achieve NCEA Level 1. Its Levels 2 and 3 NCEA results were well below those at other low decile secondary schools. Since 2003 the school's results have improved such that by 2007, 100 percent of Year 11 boys achieved their level 1 NCEA numeracy requirement with 91 percent of Year 11 boys achieving the NCEA literacy requirement. Three-quarters of Year 11 students now achieve NCEA Level 1, and the school's Level 2 and 3 results are higher than other decile 1 to 3 schools.

A variety of strategies has helped School I to improve the academic achievement of its boys. In the initial stages it emphasised the development of literacy and numeracy skills. It also put more emphasis on course selection processes to ensure that boys enrolled in suitable courses. Over time, school I has developed the number and range of courses it offers students. Since 2003 it has included more unit standards across the curriculum. In 2007, the mix of achievement standards and unit standards was approximately half and half.

Since 2003 School I has focused on boys' completing their classroom work and the necessary assessment material. This emphasis on completion has included various catch-up options and homework clubs including particular homework options for Māori and Pacific students.

The school has provided targeted professional development where the student results indicated that teachers may be in need of greater support. Much work has also gone into ensuring that students attend their classes and into emphasising the celebration of students' academic success. A system of goal-setting has seen each student set one academic goal per course, which is entered into a database and followed up by teachers, heads of department and senior managers.

Differentiated learning

The school is aiming to build on its success through the increased use of differentiated learning in its classrooms. Teachers are currently using a differentiated approach in English, science and social studies. This involves students having a choice of different learning activities in each unit of work, as well as having access to assessment tasks set at different levels. The staff member responsible for the programme says that, although there is significantly more preparation involved, it is an easier way to teach because the more personalised approach motivates boys and he is able to spend more time facilitating individual learning rather than managing whole-class behaviour.

Support for Māori and Pacific students

The school has good retention levels for Māori and Pacific students due, in part, to the supportive approach of the school. The school's pastoral care systems provide well for students' needs and the teaching staff have developed good relationships with groups of Māori and Pacific boys. Staff have been supported in their work with Māori and Pacific students through school-based professional development on Māori

and Pacific expectations and cultural norms. Staff are taking care to pronounce words (including students' names) correctly.

The school has a strong focus on Māori and Pacific performing arts. A Māori performing arts course has helped many Māori students develop a strong sense of belonging to the school. The high numbers of Māori and Pacific staff at the school offer positive role models for the boys.

A key challenge for School I is to analyse its Māori and Pacific achievement data as part of a process to identify more fully the key factors that support these boys to learn.

School J – Decile 4, large urban coeducational secondary school

School context

School J is a multicultural Years 9 to 13 secondary school, with a roll of over 1500 students.

The school has a complex achievement pattern. Evidence gathered by the school shows that the numeracy and literacy levels of its Year 9 intake are below average when students enter the school. Although students have a relatively low NCEA pass rate at Year 11, by Year 12 and 13 data show that students catch up to pass NCEA. The school has a very high number of Year 12 students passing Level 1 NCEA and Year 13 students passing Level 2 NCEA. By the time students reach Year 13, their results for Level 3 NCEA are commensurate with national averages.

Retaining boys

The majority of boys and girls enrolled in Year 9 stay at the school to Year 13 making for a very high retention rate. There are many factors supporting this including the positive school atmosphere and the range of co-curricular options. Early leaving exemptions from the school are rare.

One of the key reasons for School J's high rate of retention is the number of subject choices it has on offer and the opportunities students have for many different pathways and qualifications. The board and principal have made a conscious effort to grow the school so that students are able to have the choice in Years 11 to 13 of as many subjects as possible. Double line programmes in practical subjects such as catering and automotive engineering also mean that students can spend blocks of time in their favoured options.

Other subjects available to students in the senior school include electronics, media studies, mechanical engineering, photography, art history, dance, design, music and painting. School J has options for students develop foundation skills in the core subjects, including an English pathway for NESB students. A business school caters for students considering careers involving economics, accounting, law and business.

A services academy, which is part of a national programme for students entering the armed services, also operates at the school. It offers a full-time programme for about 15 students most of whom are boys. The teacher believes that the course has been effective in providing a pathway option for boys who would otherwise have left school with very few qualifications.

Real learning through building and construction

Since 2004, School J has worked with a range of business and community partners to operate a building and construction school. The building and construction school has provided cohorts of boys with the skills and knowledge necessary to become high quality workers in the building and construction industry.

School J's building and construction school involves boys dividing their time between the hands-on learning involved in a building project and classroom time doing English, mathematics, business studies and physical education.

The teaching in the core subjects of English and mathematics includes units that draw on the requirements and context of the building industry. Subsequently boys have the opportunity to achieve unit standards in mathematics, reading and writing while also learning about safety matters, construction plans and building legislation.

The core subject teachers work closely with the building and construction staff. This enables high quality teamwork between the staff and means that they work naturally together if a student is struggling in a particular area of the programme.

The building and construction teachers are trained and qualified builders with considerable experience in the industry. They relate positively to the students and work with them in a supportive and good-humoured way. A feature of the programme is the practical experience, or *real learning*, gained by boys in Year 12. The building projects undertaken by the boys include the construction of cabins, which are fully fitted with windows, insulation and electrical fittings; and upgrading the school's own environment by building pergolas and retaining walls. The boys have also undertaken building projects at nearby primary schools.

The opportunity for boys to achieve in the building and construction school has been especially welcome given that most of the boys have not had high levels of success in Years 9 and 10. By the end of their time in the building and construction school the boys have achieved building industry approved unit standards at Levels 1 and 2. They also gain a range of building skills and associated experience in such areas as problem solving, preparing plans, marketing and discussing issues with building inspectors.

The programme provides a strong and secure pathway. Most boys enter further training up to Levels 3 and 4 with an outside provider and, from there, most move into apprenticeships.

Key strengths found across the case study schools

While not all the schools were highly effective in each of the following areas, the strengths of these schools represent the aspects that ERO found to be important overall.

- Leadership
- School culture
- Relationships
- Engaging boys
- Relevant teaching and learning
- Literacy and numeracy support for boys.

Leadership

A notable feature in each of the 10 schools was the way leadership supported boys' education. Leadership was well articulated at board, principal and senior management level through vision or values statements. The school's vision statement often underpinned the staff's approach to leadership and the structures operating for student leadership.

Several schools, particularly the boys-only schools, had defined their aspirations in statements emphasising holistic development and all-round achievement. These statements were axiomatic bywords for expectations and values including such notions as *boys can do everything*, *21st century men*, *big brother-little brother* and *boys to men*. Some had more symbolic precepts such as the notion of *rock and water*, guiding expectations for decision-making and personal conduct about the appropriateness of reactions and actions.

The most important feature was not the statements themselves, but the extent to which these were promulgated at all levels of the school. They were embedded in school culture, relationships and the school's approach to teaching and learning for boys. In discussion with students, it was evident that the boys themselves not only knew the catchwords or phrases, but could also talk about the practical implications and activities underpinning them.

Principals drove each school's approach to boys' education. Their professional leadership influenced curriculum developments and particular initiatives supporting boys' learning. Principals or other senior staff had taken an evidence-based approach to improving boys' achievement. Through their professional direction and expertise they raised staff awareness and understanding of ways to improve the quality of teaching for boys. Principals were visible in their school, demonstrating through their own actions the participatory and holistic ideas being espoused.

Principals were able to build distributed networks that enabled their staff to assume leadership responsibility. Staff often demonstrated considerable professional commitment and leadership in the way they promoted a wide range of achievement opportunities for boys by actively participating in classroom and co-curricular activities. Boys spoke positively about the various chances they had to work alongside their teachers in cultural, sporting and outdoor activities. These different contexts provided boys with role models and helped to strengthen positive and constructive relationships.

In many of the schools, leaders had a strong focus on professional learning. The principal and senior staff were seen as leading learning in teaching practice, curriculum design and organisation. Their staff considered the learning needs of boys, either as part of a whole student cohort or as a separate group. They took active steps to develop curriculum management and delivery strategies that were appropriate for the boys. This often involved consideration of systemic and organisational aspects such as timetabling, course development and professional mentoring to make teaching more effective and relevant for boys.

Senior students provided leadership for junior students. Schools expected that senior students would act as leaders and mentors to junior students and they gave them

opportunities to acquire the skills necessary to undertake leadership roles. There are several examples of senior boys taking various leadership roles to support junior students. These included inducting junior students at the beginning of the year, acting as support leaders on junior school camps, peer mentoring throughout the year, operating as reading and classroom tutors, and coaching sports or cultural groups.

Although such activities are not uncommon in most secondary schools, the schools in this study gave senior students training and support so they could undertake these roles effectively. These leadership roles were considered important for the tone of the school because they helped develop a supportive culture between senior and junior boys, one that was safe and welcoming, and conducive to learning.

Questions for your school – School leadership

1. How well do your school leaders draw attention to the teaching and learning issues affecting different groups of students?
2. What student leadership opportunities exist across your school?
3. How well do the student leadership positions across your school support a safe and welcoming culture?

School culture

A school's culture is about what is valued and what actions people take to enact those values. It reflects the quality of the relationships in the school and is manifest in a school's day-to-day activities. Each school has a different reality of 'how things are' (Stoll, 1999).⁹ In the 10 schools in ERO's study, staff and students understood how the values and expectations worked in their context and what they had to do to contribute to and maintain the culture.

Some staff and students at the boys' schools noted that boys' education, or boys' schools were often perceived as having a harsh or 'bullying' environment. The traditional sporting emphasis and success orientation of some boys' schools may have contributed to this image of boys' education. ERO found that all the schools, including the five boys' schools, had safe and supportive school cultures. Most of the schools put high proportions of senior boys in peer support roles with junior students. For these schools, a nurturing rather than a bullying culture was the norm.

Certain aspects of a school's culture were considered especially important for the boys. These included the emphasis on all-round success, the importance of developing good relationships between staff and students and the extent to which boys felt that they belonged at the school. Boys were often involved in discussions about the values and beliefs underpinning the school goals and objectives, and considering how their own actions reflected these aspirations.

Such discussions and school activities promoting values and positive relationships underpinned the concept of 'belonging' - found to be important for boys across the schools. Belonging involved creating an atmosphere where boys felt connected to the

⁹ Stoll, L. (1999). School culture: Black hole or fertile garden for school improvement In J. Prosser (Ed.), *School culture*. British Educational Management Series. London: Sage Publications.

traditions, events, staff and students of the school. In turn, a sense of belonging enabled boys to commit to life at the school and to value their involvement in learning, sporting and cultural activities. In several of the schools, staff had returned to teach at the school they themselves had attended as students, thereby maintaining the sense of belonging.

Questions for your school – School culture

1. To what extent do boys feel welcome and supported at your school?
2. What messages does your school give to boys about being a successful student and/or young man?
3. How well do students understand and apply the values of your school?

Relationships

Strong and positive relationships were emphasised as integral to developing a successful learning environment for boys in all schools in this study. The development and maintenance of good quality relationships had links to the quality of leadership decisions, the quality and relevance of teaching and learning, and the school's espoused and enacted values. Good quality relationships were an intrinsic component of matters such as classroom and co-curricular learning, developing self-management skills and self-image, students' mentoring programmes and approaches to behaviour management and discipline.

In many of the 10 schools there was evidence of senior students mentoring and supporting junior students. Younger boys talked about maintaining the relationship with an older boy throughout their first year at school, and how this had helped them get to know routines, expectations and become part of the school culture. These relationships included cultural activities, sports activities and academic activities such as study or tutoring support.

Several of the schools had established specific programmes or approaches that encouraged boys to consider matters of male identity and the quality of their own relationships and decision-making. These schools had provided training in developing positive self-image and self-management. Some of the boys and staff also reported the importance of letting boys make decisions for themselves about their learning and having some choice about how to approach some of their objectives. Boys responded well to being treated as adults and had strong views about fair treatment. Linked to this, some boys and staff also emphasised the importance of not embarrassing boys, or escalating situations where a boy may 'lose face' or social status.

The quality of student-teacher relationships was critical. Staff and students who talked to ERO reported that boys benefited from the development of positive and constructive relationships with their teachers. An aspect that was considered important was the teacher's ability to develop connections with boys based on life outside the classroom. Boys and teachers stated that better classroom relationships were developed when a teacher understood the wider interests of boys, and where they might also have worked with boys in situations other than the classroom, such as involvement in a cultural event, with a sports team or working on a project.

Both students and staff emphasised the place of humour in developing relationships with boys. Having a sense of humour is often seen as a desirable quality in any vocation, but for teachers of boys, a sense of humour is regarded as essential. There were various justifications for why a sense of humour was considered particularly important in developing relationships with boys. These included the role played by humour in the everyday conversation of boys; the common use of humour by boys to mediate topics that might be 'too serious' without levity; the use of humour by boys to build relationships outside the classroom; and, for teachers, having an ability, where necessary, to laugh with boys (at what might be a juvenile act or comment) but then quickly move them on to more productive activities.

Questions for your school – Relationships

1. What is the quality of relationships between all staff members and boys?
2. What encouragement can your school offer staff members who need support in developing constructive relationships with boys?
3. To what extent do staff understand the importance of humour in working with boys?
4. What opportunities do staff take to relate to boys about aspects of life outside of the classroom?

Engaging boys through rich experiences

A key to boys' achievement is having them attending and engaged in learning while at school. In part, the schools were chosen for this study because they had good processes for dealing with attendance and truancy, and their rates of suspension and stand-downs were low compared to national data. However, boys were not simply present; their engagement and achievement was most influenced by the opportunities available to them while at school.

Most schools placed emphasis on having boys engaged in a wide variety of activities. The options altered for different groups of boys, although a well-rounded education was one of the primary considerations. This holistic approach was especially so in the boys' schools where academic, cultural, leadership and sporting success was generally celebrated.

Several schools in this study had managed to retain boys at school longer than might have been expected, by providing classes and experiences that kept them motivated and involved in learning. Principals and senior staff had thought carefully about the immediate learning needs and interests of boys, as well as their educational and vocational potential. In response they had developed courses and strategies designed to further boys' immediate and long-term goals. In some cases this involved systemic initiatives such as curriculum and vocational design, timetabling or class organisation. In other instances the development of strong external relationships, for example, with local businesses and employers strengthened the options available and the imperative to retain and engage boys.

Boys talked enthusiastically to ERO about the different sorts of activities they had engaged in at their school. They often acknowledged the encouraging attitude of staff

at their school as a factor in their decision to take up a wide range of activities both in school and outside. The emphasis, in this sense, was not on closing the educational ‘gap’ in the achievement data between boys and girls, but instead ensuring that boys were given rich and interesting experiences at school.

Questions for your school – Engaging boys

1. To what extent are boys engaging in a variety of academic, cultural, sporting and leadership roles at your school?
2. What processes does your school use to recognise and celebrate all forms of success by boys?
3. Are there boys at your school who are not engaged in curricular or co-curricular life of the school? What processes can be used to support the level of engagement shown by these boys?
4. What processes does your school have for identifying and addressing the social and pastoral issues of disadvantaged boys and their families?

Relevant teaching and learning

Relevant teaching and learning was a common strength in the schools.

Many schools emphasised the importance of teachers knowing students well and being able to personalise programmes and differentiate lessons accordingly. In these schools, recognition of individual learning needs was underpinned by, for example, increasing teachers’ capability in the analysis and use of assessment data to develop focused teaching programmes. Several schools had also drawn on research studies to help develop specific teaching approaches aimed at enhancing boys’ learning. This led to a greater focus on pedagogy that worked for boys and, in turn, encouraged innovative teaching approaches.

ERO found examples where particular courses, activities or teaching approaches worked with different boys to make their learning relevant and more meaningful. For example, many enjoyed the opportunity to take on the additional physical exercise offered in some initiatives (see for example the all-boys class in school E) and the hands-on activity offered at many of the schools. Many boys also enjoyed the opportunity to exercise their competitiveness through classroom activities such as quizzes and races. Long-term career goals implicit in the technology courses of some schools, with their links to industry standards and apprenticeships, gave meaning and relevance to boys’ learning.

Teachers, and the boys ERO talked with, frequently expressed the importance of boys’ understanding why a particular classroom focus was important. Boys, even more so than girls, were reported to benefit from ‘knowing why they were doing something’. Both groups also agreed that boys tended to have lower boredom thresholds than girls, especially for an activity that they perceived as irrelevant. In this sense it was also said to be important for teachers to develop situations that appealed to boys, such as using sports data to form part of a mathematics investigation or using ‘boy friendly’ mnemonics to remember key information.

Questions for your school – Relevant teaching and learning

1. How does your school reflect boys' interests and goals in the curriculum?
2. What processes do teachers at your school use to make sure that students understand the point of each lesson?
3. How do you make your classroom activities relevant and engaging for diverse groups of boys?

Literacy and numeracy support for boys

Literacy and numeracy support was found to be intrinsically important to boys' success at school. Schools recognised at entry level where they focused on identifying students who had not developed the same reading writing and numeracy skills as the peers in their cohort. They put specific specialist literacy and numeracy teachers in place to help reduce disparities in these basic learning areas. Moreover, where schools had provided high quality support for the development of literacy and numeracy skills, there was usually a marked increase in the results of students in NCEA.

Many of the schools had well-developed reading programmes for boys, drawing on peer reading processes, reading mileage practices and specific instructional reading strategies. These reading skill sessions, often taught by specialists, were important for boys who had not developed the reading abilities that might be assumed by secondary teachers. In some of the schools, teachers' professional learning had resulted in the implementation of literacy strategies across the curriculum. In these instances teachers in different departments placed a strong focus on boys, in particular, having the necessary vocabulary to be able to take an active part in learning, and they made sure that students understood the literacy components of the learning before proceeding further with lessons.

ERO found that improving boys' writing skills was critical to success. Teachers emphasised the need for some boys to be given specific teaching and support to develop basic writing skills, especially transactional writing skills. Boys, it is argued, often need additional support in learning how to take their key ideas and build these into paragraphs, arguments and essays. Despite this recognition, overall the schools had not generally developed the same level of support for boys' writing as for reading, although most agreed that this was an important area for future development.

Intensive numeracy programmes found in some of the schools were aimed at improving boys' skills. Schools helped students by giving them extra tutoring and by tailoring programmes to suit those who had difficulty with components numeracy, although these programmes mostly involved teaching basic skills, and supporting students in achieving the required NCEA numeracy credits. In keeping with the need to develop literacy skills some teachers noted boys' difficulty in dealing with mathematical language and word problems.

Boys' reading and writing was a matter of concern for all the schools in this study. Although many of the schools had considerably improved aspects of student literacy

in recent years, it was clear that this needed the ongoing attention of staff. Writing remained a key issue for the schools in this study.

Questions for your school – Literacy and numeracy support

1. What processes does your school have for identifying and addressing the literacy and numeracy problems of new students?
2. To what extent are Years 9 and 10 subject teachers able to help students develop reading strategies?
3. To what extent does your school give students useful strategies to develop writing skills?
4. How does your school model the worth of reading and writing to boys?

Key challenges for the schools in this study

Although the schools in this study were able to demonstrate good practice in many areas of their operation, each school also faced its own challenges in maintaining and improving some boys' learning. In this section five ongoing challenges facing the study schools are discussed.

- Literacy and achievement
- Disengaged boys
- Māori and Pacific boys
- Analysing the ongoing and complex gap between girls and boys achievement
- Approaching NCEA strategically.

Literacy and achievement

As noted in the previous section, the development of good quality literacy programmes is important if boys are to achieve. Both reading and writing were areas of concern raised by all schools in this study. In particular ERO found that writing was a key concern and, although schools were trying different ways to tackle this problem, they felt that they needed to maintain this impetus for boys in particular.

In ERO's discussions, staff in some of the schools raised questions about the possible barrier presented by the amount of writing and theoretical preparation needed to pass some achievement standards. While understanding the need to prepare students as thoroughly as possible, teachers felt that some achievement standards favoured those students who had good writing and presentation skills. These questions were raised particularly in relation to technology, drama and physical education achievement standards where there is a significant literacy component.

Questions for your school – Challenges for Literacy and achievement

1. To what extent are boys helped to develop their skills in writing across different curriculum areas?
2. Where written literacy skills form a significant part of achievement standards' requirements, what support is given to boys who are finding this a barrier to achieving.

Disengaged boys

All the schools in this study acknowledged that a small percentage of boys did not meaningfully 'engage.' This group of boys, variously estimated at between three and 10 percent, were unable to find curricular or co-curricular ways into successful school life. As a result they tended to be academic underachievers and outsiders in the day-to-day activities of the school. School staff reported that high proportions of these boys had problematic home lives, including, in some cases, issues related to drugs, alcohol and abuse. Staff noted that some of these boys simply did not respond to what was offered at the school.

Questions for your school – Disengaged boys

1. Are there boys in your school who are not engaged in curricular or co-curricular life of the school? What processes can be used to support the level of engagement shown by these boys?
2. What processes does your school have for identifying and addressing the social and pastoral issues of disadvantaged boys and their families?

Māori and Pacific boys

ERO found many examples of Māori and Pacific boys succeeding at the 10 schools, as well as many positive initiatives for these boys. However, the performance of Māori and Pacific boys overall remains not as high as that of European/Pākehā or Asian boys.

There are complex issues of male identity and role modelling connected to educational issues for Māori and Pacific boys. For example, while the schools in the study were developing particular approaches to all their boys becoming 'young men', they were at the introductory stages of articulating what similarities and differences there were in becoming a young Māori or Pacific man and becoming a young European/Pākehā man.

Many of the schools in the study were, nevertheless, developing some useful approaches to specifically support the education of Māori and Pacific boys. For example schools used capable Māori and Pacific students as peer leaders and role models in their school. They had also employed Māori and Pacific staff, who could not only teach subjects relevant to Māori and Pacific boys, but also operate as role models for students and conduits between whānau and families and the school. The challenge for these schools, and most others in New Zealand, is to build on these approaches to support the achievement of Māori and Pacific boys.

Questions for your school – Māori and Pacific boys

1. Who are the role models for the Māori and Pacific boys at your school?
2. How can the school make even greater use of positive role models for Māori and Pacific boys?
3. How well do Māori and Pacific boys achieve in relation to other groups in the school?
4. What links does your school have with the families and whānau of Māori and Pacific boys?

Analysing the ongoing and complex ‘gap’ between boys and girls

The analysis of boys’ achievement was not a consistent strength across the schools. Coeducational schools tended to undertake a more limited analysis regarding the performance of boys than did boys-only schools. In some cases staff reported that analyses of gender and ethnicity would not be useful because they “treat everybody the same.” This is not helpful because schools need to know whether their programmes/courses are meeting the needs of different groups of students equally effectively. Without focused achievement analyses it is not possible to make these judgements.

Teachers face many challenges understanding the overall context of boys’ achievement and also understanding the way boys achieve at their school. For instance, achievement levels in four of the five boys’ schools in this study were above the national achievement figures for girls at that decile.¹⁰ The boys at four of the coeducational schools also seemed to perform as well as, or better than, all girls of the same decile. Nevertheless, to varying degrees, the boys at the coeducational schools in this study did not achieve as well as the girls at their school.

The challenge for the study schools, as well as other schools nationally, is to understand which groups of boys are not achieving and to carefully consider what improvements might be made.

As well as student achievement data, information about student retention, teacher and student feedback and departmental analyses are also important. Such reflection might include an analysis of the merits and excellence grades received by the school as well as how other groups performed at the school, including those boys and groups of girls who performed well. Understanding the performance of these groups may reveal the groups of students who are succeeding at the school and provide a way of understanding the specific initiatives that might raise the overall performance of others.

What about the girls?

Inevitably any focus on boys’ education also raises questions about how well girls are learning. Potentially, the NCEA achievement gap, which favours girls by approximately 10 percent, could result in some complacency that New Zealand girls are generally doing well in their learning.

Many girls, however, are not achieving well in the current system. Māori and Pacific girls in particular achieve far less well, for instance than Asian and European/Pākehā boys and girls. Girls in low decile schools achieve less well than boys and girls in high decile schools. In some schools both girls and boys achieve far less well than students in other schools of a similar decile.

Coeducational schools should be aware that any analyses they undertake about boys’ learning should have counterparts for the education of girls. This is especially so when considering that complexities related to how boys learn inevitably overlap into the complexities of how girls may learn. At the level of the individual student, questions of gender may not be so useful. Many girls relish the opportunity to include

¹⁰ The other school was in line with girls in some areas and slightly below in others.

physical activity as part of their daily learning, they also enjoy hands-on activities and may be less motivated to read. Similarly many boys are excellent writers and enjoy less active learning and will not necessarily respond to the same teaching and learning activities as other boys.

Questions for your school – Analysing the performance of boys

1. How well do boys perform relative to girls at your school?
2. Which groups of boys are underperforming relative to the rest of your school?
3. How well do the boys at your school compare to boys and girls nationally, and in schools of a similar decile?
4. How well does your school retain boys?
5. In what areas are boys performing well? What supports this success?
6. In what areas are boys not performing well? Which boys are not performing and what affects their performance?
7. What trends exist from year to year in the achievement of different groups of boys?

Approaching NCEA strategically

During ERO's discussions with staff some concerns emerged about the extent to which boys were using strategic approaches to NCEA. For instance, some staff thought that boys were less motivated to gain merit and excellence awards, given that they were satisfied in reaching the standard. Other boys might be satisfied once they had achieved their Level 1, 2 or 3 NCEA certificate or their in-school pre-requisites or their necessary credits for university entrance. The most positive response to this was where school leaders such as the principal, heads of departments or other key teachers directly challenged their students, particularly their boys, to strive for better than the mere requisite.

Planning an achievement pathway that is both challenging and achievable is an important part of a school's culture of learning. However it requires more than notions of school ethos. It has much more to do with carefully planned and structured teaching, learning and assessment strategies that encourage and motivate boys to go that one step further. It helps if key school leaders take the initiative in raising their levels of acceptance, but there are also key challenges in providing those options that make possible relevant learning pathways for boys. The matter of boys taking a strategic approach to NCEA is worthy of further investigation as part of future research on boys' achievement.

During the study ERO also found that several teachers discussed the availability of unit standards as being especially useful for some groups of boys. This included those boys who were in foundation subjects for the core curriculum as well as those in technology subjects such as automotive engineering and building. The mix of standards available in planning a suitable learning pathway is critical for all students and, in this regard, the relationship boys develop with the range of staff who both know them and who can help them choose wisely is vital to their success, especially in their senior years.

Questions for your school – Planning strategically

1. To what extent does your school help boys choose a course programme that is relevant and achievable?
2. How does your school set high expectations for boys about striving to reach their potential?

Conclusion

This report acknowledges that boys' achievement is a complex area. Nevertheless, the central issue surrounding boys' education is the ongoing achievement gap between boys and girls. In New Zealand NCEA results show that there is approximately a 10 percent gap in favour of girls across Levels 1, 2 and 3. There are also some important trends in these data, such as the low achievement of certain groups of boys, such as Māori and Pacific boys, and the increasing gap that is found between boys and girls as school decile becomes higher.

The overall complexity of the statistics and research on boys' education means that there are very few definitive answers that would enable schools to address the achievement gap between boys and girls easily. Outside the more highly verified research on high quality teaching (for both genders), the research on boys' education provides a collection of anecdotal, somewhat accepted and 'proven by personal experience' accounts of what works for boys.

Part of the reason why there are not clear answers for improving boys' education rests with the fact that issues of male underachievement are linked to particular groups of boys, rather than all boys. In this manner, a variety of different strategies is needed to support and promote improved achievement among these diverse groups.

The case studies in this report reflect a variety of strategies implemented by the schools for boys who might otherwise underachieve. The key strengths across these schools reflect the extent to which good relationships and relevant teaching and learning characterise many of the initiatives. Many of these schools also have strong, positive school cultures in which boys can feel safe, take leadership roles, and be expected to achieve in a range of academic, sporting and cultural contexts.

These approaches can and do work well at other schools. Indeed schools can reflect on the initiatives described here to understand their own approach and consider how they might continue to improve educational outcomes for all boys.

Future directions for schools

School personnel can use this report as a starting point to:

- inform their self-review about the achievement of boys at their school;
- include in their analysis of achievement data, such as NCEA, how well different groups of students achieve at their school, and use this information to examine the factors behind the achievement patterns for boys and girls; and
- review how well the school uses student feedback to inform their teaching, learning and co-curricular activities for different groups of students.

Self Review: Questions for your school

These questions have been prepared to help your school reflect on boys' education.

School leadership

1. How well do your school leaders draw attention to the teaching and learning issues affecting different groups of students?
2. What student leadership opportunities exist across your school?
3. How well do the student leadership positions across your school support a safe and welcoming culture?

School culture

1. To what extent do boys feel welcome and supported at your school?
2. What messages does your school give to boys about being a successful student and/or young man?
3. How well do students understand and apply the values of your school?

Relationships

1. What is the quality of relationships between all staff members and boys?
5. What encouragement can your school offer staff members who need support in developing constructive relationships with boys?
2. To what extent do teachers understand the importance of humour in working with boys?
3. What opportunities do staff take to relate to boys about aspects of life outside of the classroom?

Engaging boys

1. To what extent are boys engaging in a variety of academic, cultural, sporting and leadership roles at your school?
2. What processes does your school use to recognise and celebrate all forms of success by boys?
3. Are there boys at your school who are not engaged in curricular or co-curricular life of the school? What processes can be used to support the level of engagement shown by these boys?
4. What processes does your school have for identifying and addressing the social and pastoral issues of disadvantaged boys and their families?

Relevant teaching and learning

1. How does your school reflect boys' interests and goals in the curriculum?
2. What processes do teachers at your school use to make sure that students understand the point of each lesson?

3. How do you make your classroom activities relevant and engaging for diverse groups of boys?

Literacy and numeracy support

1. What processes does your school have for identifying and addressing the literacy and numeracy problems of new students?
2. To what extent are Years 9 and 10 subject teachers able to help students develop reading strategies?
3. To what extent does your school give students useful strategies to develop writing skills?
4. How does your school model the worth of reading and writing to boys?

Challenges for literacy and achievement

1. To what extent are boys helped to develop their skills in writing across different curriculum areas?
2. Where written literacy skills form a significant part of achievement standards' requirements, what support is given to boys who are finding this a barrier to achieving.

Disengaged boys

1. Are there boys in your school who are not engaged in curricular or co-curricular life of the school? What processes can be used to support the level of engagement shown by these boys?
2. What processes does your school have for identifying and addressing the social and pastoral issues of disadvantaged boys and their families?

Māori and Pacific boys

1. Who are the role models for the Māori and Pacific boys at your school?
2. How can the school make even greater use of positive role models for Māori and Pacific boys?
3. How well do Māori and Pacific boys achieve in relation to other groups in the school?
4. What links does your school have with the families and whānau of Māori and Pacific boys?

Analysing the performance of boys

1. How well do boys perform relative to girls at your school?
2. Which groups of boys are underperforming relative to the rest of your school?
3. How well do the boys at your school compare to boys and girls nationally, and in schools of a similar decile?
4. How well does your school retain boys?
5. In what areas are boys performing well? What supports this success?

6. In what areas are boys not performing well? Which boys are not performing and what affects their performance?
7. What trends exist from year to year in the achievement of different groups of boys?

Planning strategically

1. To what extent does your school help boys choose a course programme that is relevant and achievable?
2. How does your school set high expectations for boys about striving to reach their potential?

Appendix 1: 2007 NCEA results by gender and year level

| | | Low decile | Mid decile | High decile |
|---------------------------------|------------|--|------------|-------------|
| | | Percentage of roll achieving NCEA qualifications | | |
| NCEA Level 1 Year 11 | Male | 46.0 | 59.7 | 67.8 |
| | Female | 52.6 | 68.1 | 81.1 |
| | Difference | 6.6 | 8.4 | 13.3 |
| NCEA Level 2 Year 12 | Male | 44.3 | 58.9 | 67.1 |
| | Female | 54.9 | 70.4 | 80.5 |
| | Difference | 10.6 | 11.5 | 13.4 |
| NCEA Level 3 Year 13 | Male | 27.9 | 43.2 | 55.6 |
| | Female | 40.6 | 57.5 | 72.7 |
| | Difference | 12.7 | 14.3 | 17.1 |