

RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

Report
by
SCRUTINY BOARD

REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S POLICIES AND INITIATIVES TO RAISE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF BOYS IN SCHOOLS - FINAL REPORT

1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 At its meeting on 23 June 2003 the Scrutiny Board agreed to undertake a review of the Council's Initiatives to Raise the Achievement of Boys in Schools.
- 1.2 The objective of the Review has been to scrutinise the Council's existing policies and initiatives in this area, with a view to developing an Action Plan which identifies good practice and ways of documenting this and identifies areas for future improvement and development
- 1.3 In undertaking the Review and at its meetings on 11th and 25th August, 22nd September and 20th October 2003, the Board has considered evidence from a variety of sources. Contributions were received from:
- Senior Adviser, Curriculum
 - Senior Adviser, Performance Management
 - Family Support Service Co-ordinator
 - Home Link Worker
 - Senior Adviser, Inclusion
 - Education Adviser
 - Principal Psychologist
 - Head Teacher, Trinity High School
 - Head Teacher, South Primary School
 - Regional Manager, Careers Scotland
- 1.4 The Scrutiny Board is grateful to all contributors for the time given by each of them in preparing for and submitting evidence for this review and wishes to acknowledge their extremely helpful contribution to the Board's work.
- 1.5 This report summarises the evidence and the conclusions reached by the Scrutiny Board and presents a series of recommendations for the Council to consider.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Council.

- 2.1 Notes the findings of the review as set out in this report
- 2.2 Agrees the recommendations contained therein.

3 BACKGROUND TO THE REVIEW

- 3.1 The Department of Education and Leisure Services has identified the issue of Raising the Achievement of Boys as a key priority within the context of raising achievement overall.
- 3.2 A strategic study of this issue was undertaken and additional funding made available to support action in this area.
- 3.3 In May 2000 a working group was established to consider the background to this issue. This Group reported to the Senior Management Team of Education and Leisure Services. Their report culminated in the development of a specific strategy entitled "Raising the Achievement of Boys" which was approved in August 2000. The strategy formalised the approaches taken by the Working Group and set these within the wider issue of raising achievement overall.
- 3.4 The strategy analysed the evidence which highlighted the gap between girls and boys. The evidence pointed to the fact that there was a significant gap in performance between boys and girls in Renfrewshire.
- 3.5 The strategy set out a list of actions to be undertaken by staff over a three year period, to address the problem. This involved heightening general awareness of the under achievement of boys with teachers, parents and pupils.

The strategy and the actions which were pursued from it can be summarised as follows.

- Develop strategies which will raise achievement for all;
- Continually monitor research in order to provide best advice to schools;
- Focus on addressing the complex aspects of boys attitudes to learning;
- Recognise that difference in levels of achievement are evident prior to formal education;
- Establish support programmes in literacy at the very early stages;
- Recognise the clear links between disadvantage and educational achievement and establish a home-school strategy;

- Raise awareness of the issue of boys under achievement in the school and wider community;
- Develop strategies which will increase boys empathy with school and their motivation to learn.

3.6 The Scrutiny Board therefore began its review in the context of the Department of Education and Leisure Services having identified that there was an issue relating to the under achievement of boys and the implementation of a strategy to address this issue.

4 THE SCRUTINY BOARD'S APPROACH

4.1 The Scrutiny Board anticipated that its review would help to produce a robust and structured evaluation of the impact of the strategy.

In pursuing its enquiry the Board sought to gather evidence to increase its understanding of the issue and in particular to consider the following

- **How do we measure achievement?**
- **How do we ensure that the complex and interrelated factors which may affect boys performance are taken into account?**

Achievement in boys and girls will be influenced by a number of interrelated factors which may be summarised as:

- *Biological factors.* Research into gender demonstrates that there are significant physiological differences between boys and girls. Boys are more active than girls, moving faster and spending more time in motion whereas girls tend to spend more time in communication. Girls read earlier than boys and tend to find it easier to cope with grammar, spelling and punctuation. One of the main reasons girls and boys perform differently at school is that differences in physiology predispose them to be more able in certain areas than in others. Schools must recognise these characteristics and play to both sets of strengths so that all pupils are able to thrive in the school environment.
- *Social factors.* The social changes which took place in the latter half of the twentieth century have left men with an ambiguous role in society. Delineation had been reasonably clear - the man was the breadwinner, the women the homemaker. Several changes have taken place to alter this balancing. The decline in jobs requiring manual labour; the increase in jobs requiring communication and social skills; fewer industries providing jobs for life, feminism which led in part to women redefining themselves as more than homemakers and the growth in one parent families with children usually raised by the mother. There is some evidence which supports the

assertion that the lack of a positive male role model can have a detrimental effect on boys performance. Boys with a man in their life who spends time with them, coaching them, listening to their problems are more likely to have high self esteem and a positive outlook toward school.

- *Educational factors.* Does the school environment in early years mitigate against the performance of boys? Factors might include the low proportion of male teachers in primary school; the concentration on particular types of fiction; the way in which children are taught ie. typically sedentary as opposed to moving around the class.

In pursuing our various initiatives how do we ensure that such factors are taken into consideration.

- **We want to ensure that boys achievement improves but this cannot obviously be at the expense of girls achievement. How do we ensure this?**

4.2 The Board's review attempted to address these issues. The Board also sought to confirm:

- The main issues which affect boys performance;
- The performance of boys relative to girls since the introduction of the strategy in 2000;
- Comparison of our performance with other areas;
- Best practice as identified within schools in Renfrewshire and other areas;
- The impact and good practice in other aspects of council provision that relate to the involvement and encouragement of boys as achievers.

5 HOW DO WE MEASURE ACHIEVEMENT

5.1 This is an important issue and one which the Board has given considerable thought to. The objective of the strategies employed by the Council is to raise boys achievement in the context of raising achievement overall.

However the focus has been on measuring attainment ie. how well are our pupils performing against national academic standards. If we are concerned to raise achievement overall, then we must be prepared or seek to put measures in place which allow us to capture what might be termed the "softer" indicators relating to achievement. These are indicators which may have the beneficial effect of raising self esteem and in so doing contribute to increases in attainment.

Meetings were held with the Raising Achievement Working Group on this issue and subsequently evidence was provided by members of the group. In order to set this in context it is worth focussing on some of the activities which have been pursued.

In primary schools in particular the focus has been on recognising achievement which may be extra curricular - sporting activities and club membership through School Assemblies. Informal recognition through Gold Awards, Success Award, Certificates for Attendance and Arts Competitions have also been areas which have been pursued.

In primary and secondary schools, we have developed Young Achievers award ceremonies; out of school opportunities including extra curricular learning; Ethos Indicators - recognising participation and involvement in developing school trips and citizenship in the local community.

The Board's view is that some attempt should be made to formally record pupils achievement outwith the recognised attainment standard. The Department of Education and Leisure should be encouraged to develop such plans within the context of Personal Learning Plans and in line with the current National Review of Assessment.

6 INFLUENCING FACTORS

6.1 As described at 4.1 a number of inter-related factors impinge on boys' performance.

Our practice in addressing these issues has been informed by research and has included recognising the different learning styles of boys and girls and that classroom methodology should take this into account; similarly approaches to teaching are influenced by focussing on targeting teaching in a way which responds to boys learning styles. An example of this is use of more factual reading material and report writing as well as creative essays.

Other factors which impinge in this area include staff consistency in dealing with incidents, focussing on increasing childrens appreciation of the value and contribution of learning and emphasising the benefits of parental contribution. Recognition is also given to the respective maturation levels of boys and girls. There is accredited evidence that the gap in attainment is not as apparent at University level. The key for the approach at school level is to recognise the capacity of the individual child to learn.

The Board endorses the approach being taken by the Department in these areas.

6.2 The issue of lack of a positive male role model and its negative impact on the performance of some boys was discussed. Consideration was given to the capacity of schools in helping to address this issue, particularly in the primary sector.

The Board recommends that consideration should be given as to how more male staff might be attracted to the primary school sector.

7 THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

7.1 It is fundamentally important to recognise that not all boys under perform in relation to girls, that not all boys lack the motivation to learn and that there will also be girls who are underachieving.

It is also important to note that this is not a Renfrewshire problem. It is an issue which is now recognised and impacting in most developed countries. Our approach to the issue should be seen in this context and it is important that we continue to share our experiences and learn from other approaches.

7.2 However, it is important that we understand the issue as it applies to Renfrewshire and to gauge whether the measures that the Council has put in place are having an impact. The tables and graphs below focus on Renfrewshire's performance in comparison with our comparator Councils in Scotland and are tracked over the period since the formalisation of our new approaches in 2000 through to 2002.

7.3 SCQF Data

National Qualifications are awarded at SCQF (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework) levels 1-7. the following table shows that part of the SCQF equivalencies which involve National Qualifications.

SCQF Level	Standard Grade	Other National Qualifications
7		Advanced Higher
6		Higher
5	Credit	Intermediate 2
4	General	Intermediate 1
3	Foundation	Access 3
2		Access 2
1		Access 1

Comparator councils are those councils which HMIE (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education) have identified as having a similar socio-economic profile to Renfrewshire Council and to which Renfrewshire Council is compared in terms of performance. These are Clackmannanshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Fife, Falkirk and West Lothian.

3+ awards at SCQF Level 6	2000	2001	2002
Renfrewshire Gap (%)	8	11	7
Comparator council's average gap(%)	8	10	10
National gap (%)	8	10	9

The gap in Renfrewshire is now below the gap nationally **and** when compared with the comparator councils.

It should be noted that over this period there was a small but consistent improvement in boys' performance with a slight dip in 2002.

See graph 1.

5+ awards at SCQF Level 5	2000	2001	2002
Renfrewshire gap (%)	12	16	14
Comparator councils' average gap (%)	10	8	9
National gap (%)	10	10	10

Renfrewshire's gap has been greater than the national and comparator councils' gap since 2000. The 2002 figures show improvement on 2001 however. *Nevertheless, over the last five years the performance of boys has demonstrated consistent improvement.*

See graph 2.

5+ awards at SCQF Level 4	2000	2001	2002
Renfrewshire gap (%)	8	10	10
Comparator councils' average gap (%)	7	7	8
National gap (%)	6	6	7

Renfrewshire's gap has widened by a greater margin than both the national and comparator councils' gaps.

The performance of boys has generally improved year on year but the improvement for girls has been even greater.

See graph 3.

5+ awards at SCQF Level 6	2000	2001	2002
Renfrewshire Gap (%)	2	3	1
Comparator council's average gap(%)	4	1	2
National gap (%)	2	2	2

The most recent figure (2002) shows Renfrewshire's gap as below the gap nationally **and** when compared with comparator councils.

It should be noted that the performance of both boys and girls has improved over a five year period (1998-2002) with the 2002 position for boys being the highest in that period.

See graph 4.

7.4 5-14 Data

5-14 attainment is measured in reading, writing and mathematics across all stages of primary schools and in S1 and S2 secondary schools. Teachers' assessments are confirmed by national tests administered at school level.

The following data reflects the performance measures and targets in the education and leisure service plan.

PRIMARY

Reading	2000	2001	2002
Renfrewshire Gap (%)	8	7	7
National gap (%)	7.7	7	6.7

The gap in Renfrewshire is in line with national data.

The percentage improvement for boys was greater than for girls over the period in Renfrewshire.

Writing	2000	2001	2002
Renfrewshire Gap (%)	13	14	14
National gap (%)	12.6	12.5	12.1

The gap in Renfrewshire is greater than the national gap.

The percentage of improvement for boys and girls was roughly the same over the period in Renfrewshire.

Maths	2000	2001	2002
Renfrewshire Gap (%)	4	4	3
National gap (%)	3	3.1	2.9

The gap in Renfrewshire is greater than the national gap but shows signs of improvement. *The percentage improvement of boys was greater than for girls over the period in Renfrewshire.*

SECONDARY

Reading	2000	2001	2002
Renfrewshire Gap (%)	20	13	14
National gap (%)	12.8	12.2	11.5

The gap in Renfrewshire is greater than the national gap but shows signs of improvement over the three year period.

The percentage improvement for boys was greater than for girls over the period in Renfrewshire.

Writing	2000	2001	2002
Renfrewshire Gap (%)	23	18	21
National gap (%)	16.1	17.3	16.9

The gap in Renfrewshire is greater than the national gap but shows signs of improvement over the three year period.

The percentage improvement for boys was greater than for girls over the period in Renfrewshire.

Maths	2000	2001	2002
Renfrewshire Gap (%)	9	7	7
National gap (%)	4.6	4.8	4.1

The gap in Renfrewshire is greater than the national gap but shows signs of improvement over the three year period.

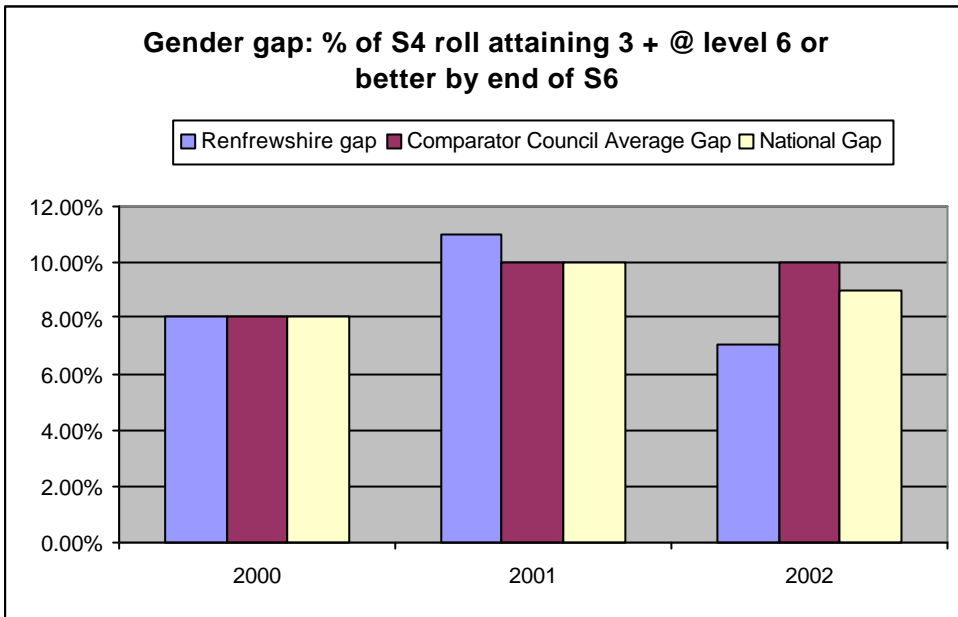
The percentage improvement for boys was greater than for girls over the period in Renfrewshire.

- 7.5 These figures show that the Initiatives being pursued by the Council have had some impact in terms of closing the gap.

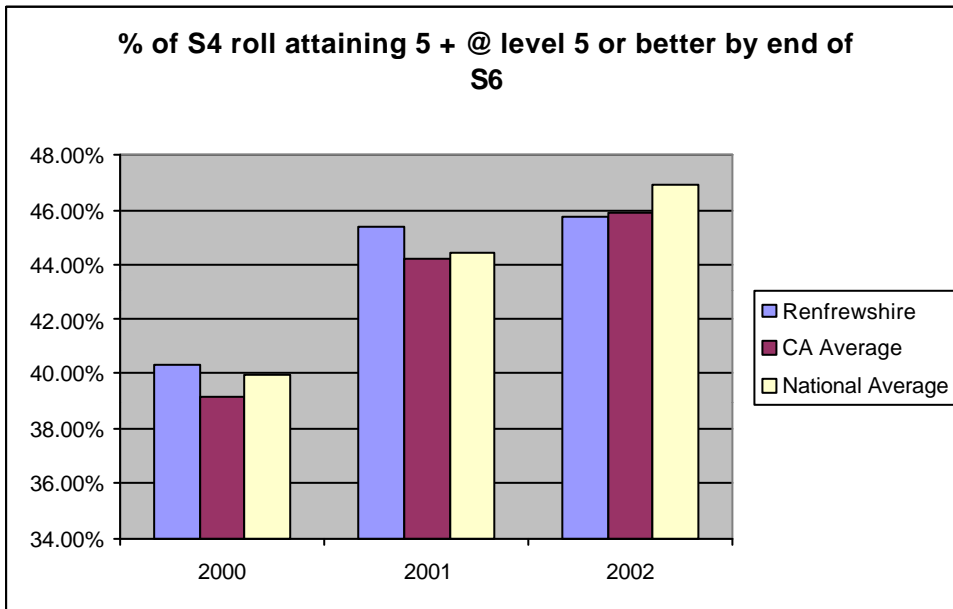
The figures in 7.3 also demonstrate, perhaps not unsurprisingly, that the gap is smaller the higher the level of academic attainment being pursued. This would suggest, as enunciated by the head teachers who were consulted, that the gender gap is more marked at the more junior end of Secondary School ie. S1-S4.

- 7.6 Evidence presented to the Board also suggested that the success in addressing the gender gap was not uniform across the range of Renfrewshire schools.

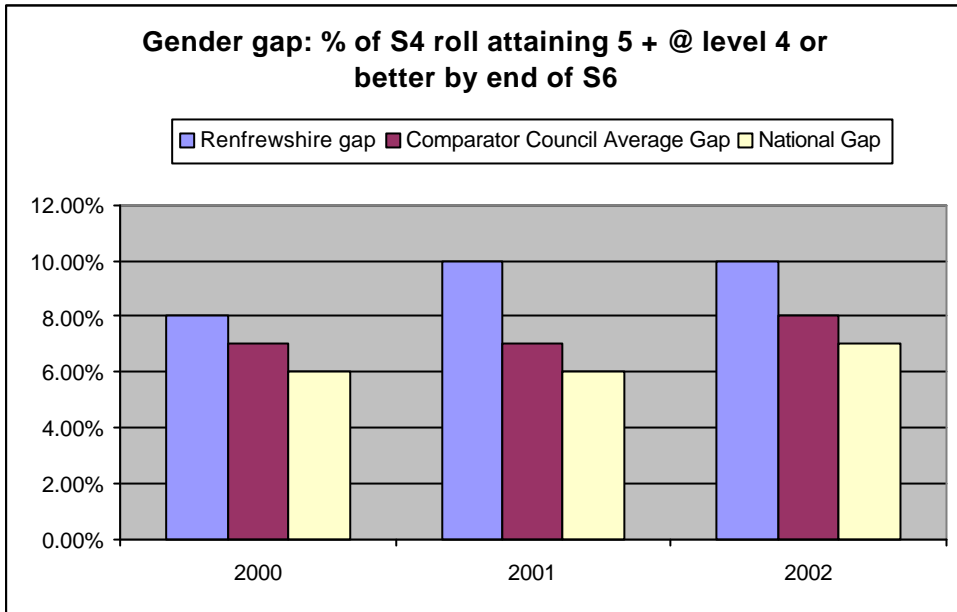
GRAPH 1



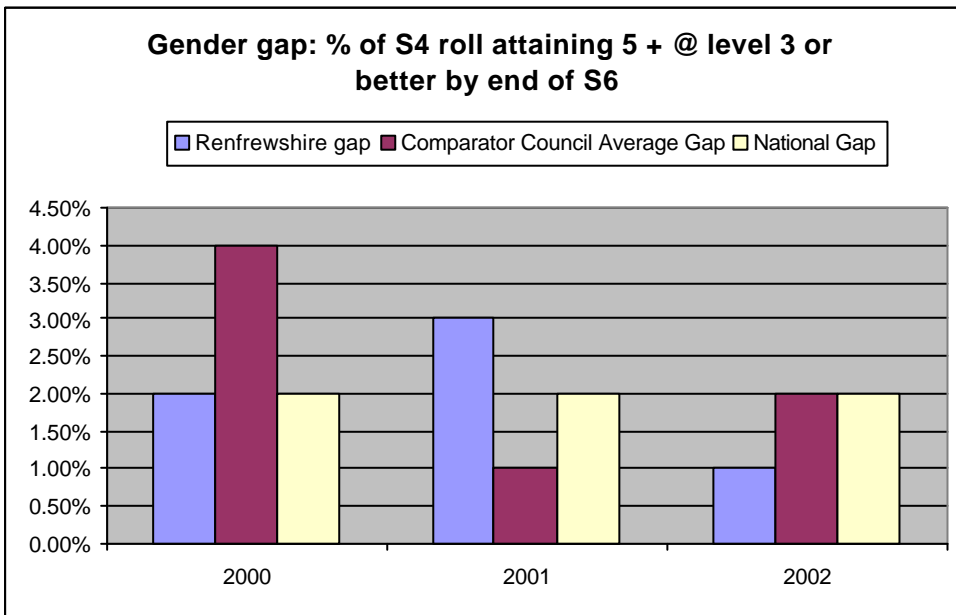
GRAPH 2



GRAPH 3



GRAPH 4



- 7.7 Also and more problematically in terms of policy and initiative development there was no clear evidence that a particular suite of interventions in one school to one grouping which was successful could be replicated in others. Indeed Head Teachers cited evidence to the contrary which further emphasises the difficulties of pursuing a uniform approach in this policy area.
- 7.8 The Board welcomed the contribution that the Raising Achievement Working Group is making. The Board recommends that the Working Group should continue to meet on a regular basis to review performance and policy.**
- 7.9 The Board concluded that good practice should continue to be disseminated and that the Working Group should attempt to ascertain the views of individual teachers on initiatives which worked. A method should be established to ensure that these ideas are fed back into policy development.**
- 7.10 The Board recognised the difficulty of being able to address the gender gap at the same pace across the range of Renfrewshire schools, given issues such as the characteristics of individual pupils and teachers and the catchment areas of individual schools. However the Department should continue to reinforce the view at the individual school level of the need to continue to place the closing of the gender gap high on the schools agenda, by ensuring that this continues to be identified as a priority in school development plans.**

8 SOCIO ECONOMIC FACTORS AND THE COUNCILS APPROACH

- 8.1 It is evident that socio-economic factors will play a contributing role in a child's capacity and commitment to learning.
- 8.2 The Board sought to understand the role of the Family Support Service and its contribution to the issue of raising achievement. Evidence was presented to the Board which confirmed:
- Boys outnumber girls in terms of referrals for behaviour
 - Boys less capable of controlling anger
 - Boys respond well to activity based approaches
 - Lack of a positive male role model is a contributory factor to boys underachievement
 - It is predominantly mothers who engage with home link workers/school
- 8.3 The evidence also confirmed the links between exclusion; bad behaviour and poor attendance and their contribution to learning difficulties and underachievement.

- 8.4 The approach taken by the Family Support Team includes home visiting, the development of a menu of initiatives to support pupils and parents recognising that parents may need assistance to help children in areas like homework. The support is targeted at the most vulnerable and referrals are made from the Joint Assessment team.
- 8.5 Activities include group and individual work with pupils and parents including parenting skills; involvement in learning; parent run libraries; assertiveness for parents; promoting positive behaviour; self-esteem raising; behaviour and attendance support and anti bullying programmes.
- 8.6 The Board welcomed the positive impact that the Family Support Service was making in this area. It did note as mirrored in the school environment that the staffing was predominantly female and questioned, given the concerns about the lack of positive male role models, what, if anything, could be done to address this.
- 8.7 The Boards' view is that the Family Support Service was having a positive effect in addressing the issue of underachievement. The Board would recommend that this level of support continues to be directed to raising achievement of boys. It is also recommended that an evaluation of the work of the family support service be undertaken.**

9 LINKS WITH THE WORLD OF WORK

- 9.1 The Board sought evidence from Careers Scotland to assess the extent to which the issue of underachievement of boys affected their capacity to secure work.
- 9.2 In the earlier analysis contained in para 4.1, comment is made on the changing nature of work. Indeed it is possible to postulate that this changing nature of workplace opportunity has contributed to recognition of the extent of the issue of boys underachievement. The regular availability of work opportunities at various levels has in the past mitigated the effects of boys underachievement. Now that these opportunities are no longer available to the same extent, the effects of boys underachievement in school are aggravated.
- 9.3 The evidence presented by Careers Scotland confirmed that the issue of underachievement by boys in school is repeated in terms of the detailed intervention by Careers Scotland. The figures for Renfrewshire School leavers outlined below confirm this with girls out performing boys initially in all main destinations.

Renfrewshire Figures as at 17 October 2003
(Paisley/Johnstone Centres)

Skillseekers including Get Ready for Work

	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
<u>Renfrewshire</u>	374	260

Unemployed

	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
<u>Renfrewshire</u>	229	117

On Track

	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
<u>Renfrewshire</u>	19	8

Analysis of school leavers – Renfrewshire 2001 – 02

Destination	Female	Male	Total
Higher Education	403	342	745
Further Education	225	187	412
Training	60	47	107
Employment	189	275	464
Skilled Employment	10	31	41
Modern Apprenticeship	3	20	23
Get Ready for Work	6	27	33
Unemployed	95	146	241
Moved/Not Available	34	34	68
Unknown	25	22	47

- 9.4 Careers Scotland also reported on the views of employees who confirmed that their main requirements were motivation, attitude and reliability. Consequently it is inevitable that if lack of progress on these matters is contributing to underachievement amongst boys in school, then this will be confirmed in first impressions in the world of work.
- 9.5 Interestingly, and in confirmation of the feedback from head teachers, Careers Scotland and the employers surveyed reported that boys catch up eventually.
- 9.6 Careers Scotland have developed a number of approaches to tackle these issues in partnership with our education department and post school. These include the use of role models from industry and amongst former pupils; enterprise activities; development of pre-vocational programmes which permit pupils to substitute a vocational programme for a standard grade; initiatives such as Get ready for Work and Supported Employment are also having a beneficial effect.

9.7 The Board welcomes the contribution by Careers Scotland. The Board would encourage the continued development of linkages between our schools and Careers Scotland to further address this complex issue.

10 ACTION PLAN

10.1 The Scrutiny Board having conducted its review concludes that:

- The issue of addressing the gender gap in achievement in school is a national and international issue as well as a local one and that future policy development in Renfrewshire should continue to take account of the wider picture.**
- The policies being employed by the Council are having a positive impact in terms of reducing the gender gap whilst increasing overall attainment; but that performance should continue to be closely monitored in the context of overall achievement**
- Further consideration needs to be given to how we record improvements in achievement.**
- This performance improvement is not uniform across the range of Renfrewshire schools and age groups and that the issue of Raising the Achievement of Boys should continue to be reinforced at the individual school level.**
- The Raising Achievement Working Group has made a positive contribution to the development of programmes and interventions.**
- The activities of the Family Support Service are impacting positively.**

The Board recommends that the following Action Plan be pursued:

- The department of education and leisure should be encouraged to the develop a method of recording achievement within the context of current National Review of Assessment and which builds upon the development of Personal Learning Plans.**
- In the context of the need for more positive role models consideration should be given to how more male members of staff might be attracted particularly to the primary school sector.**

- **The remit of the Raising Achievement Working Group should be extended to include acting as a sounding board for innovative practice and to consider the impact of current intervention. The group should be encouraged to meet on a regular basis and attempts should be made to gather views of individual teachers on initiatives which are having a positive effect.**
 - **The Department should continue to reinforce the view, at the individual school level, of the need to place the closing of the gender gap high on the school's agenda by ensuring that this continues to be identified as a priority in school development plans.**
 - **The role of the Family Support Service in addressing the issue of under achievement of boys should continue to be developed and an evaluation of its impact should be undertaken as part of ongoing monitoring within the department**
 - **The gender gap spans a range of age groups and that the linkages between our schools, Careers Scotland and other partners should continue to be developed.**
-