

Boys' Impact Collaboration with United Learning

Addressing the gap
with Disadvantaged Boys
Pilot Project



United Learning
The best in everyone™



Boys Voice

When you see us
By Year 9 boys at The Cornerstone Academy, Poole

We have dreams to travel the world,
to leave this place, build careers, our stories told.
Despite what holds us back, we all want to learn,
but our flame gets dim when respect's not returned.

We aren't as bad as we look, don't judge a book by a cover.
We're brothers, friends, someone's child, someone's other.
We've got stories behind these stares,
but most days it's like no one seems to care.

Teachers are unfair to us, or that's how it feels.
Some hold grudges like wounds that will never be healed.
But please can the teachers stop despising us,
ask us who we are before deciding on us.

We want teachers to ask us about us,
not just the grades, but the human stuff,
What makes us laugh, what keeps us awake,
what burdens we carry, what roads we intend to take.

Stop telling us we might as well leave when the lessons barely had time to breathe.
You only care when we shout, not about what we're saying.
You only listen when we're angry, not when we're fraying.

The United Learning and Boys' Impact collaboration was a focused initiative exploring how a targeted, collaborative model – guided by Ulster University's Taking Boys Seriously (TBS) principles – could positively influence outcomes for disadvantaged boys in secondary schools. The pilot investigated the model's potential to improve attendance, engagement, behaviour, and personal development, addressing entrenched educational inequalities faced by this group.

Running from September 2024 to June 2025, the project operated across four regional clusters (Manchester, South Yorkshire, West Sussex, and Northampton) with 17 United Learning secondary academies participating. Each school engaged in a structured process – supported by bespoke CPD – to identify key challenges and design interventions rooted in TBS principles (page 11) and a clear Theory of Change framework. While the issue is national, the pilot encouraged locally responsive solutions. Crucially, the project was grounded in the belief that targeted support for disadvantaged boys benefits the wider school and local community.

United Learning and Boys' Impact emphasised that raising outcomes for one vulnerable group can foster a stronger sense of belonging and equity for all students.

Emerging evidence suggests potential improvements in attendance, classroom engagement, behaviour, and attitudes among disadvantaged boys involved in TBS-informed projects. The pilot's success highlights the potential for national impact – both in practice and policy – towards more equitable learning environments.

Strategic recommendations

- **This collaborative model is scalable and sustainable:** the pilot's layered structure – central coordination, cluster leadership and school autonomy – proved effective in maintaining consistency while allowing flexibility. It encourages **distributed leadership**, builds **local capacity**, and fosters a **culture of collaboration**, all of which are essential for long-term impact
- **Meaningful engagement with boys and families enhances outcomes:** student voice and family involvement to build trust and deepened impact should be prioritised
- **Focus on preventative strategies rather than reactive ones to maximise impact:** early intervention with boys showing early signs of disengagement is more effective than reactive support
- **Tailored, locally relevant interventions are crucial:** schools can be empowered through CPD to design bespoke interventions using a shared framework (e.g. Theory of Change) to ensure relevance and ownership
- **Embed mentoring & staff CPD on relational pedagogy:** relationship centred approaches drive engagement & is linked to improvements in attendance, behaviour & motivation.

Authors:
Dr Alex Blower, Boys' Impact Founder, Dr Caroline Boreham, Research & Impact Lead (United Learning), Samantha D'Cunha, Professional Development Project Lead (United Learning) & Laura Moore, Secondary Regional Director & Project Sponsor (United Learning).

Background and wider context

Recent media coverage of the Netflix TV Drama Adolescence and a speech by ex-England football Manager Gareth Southgate in the spring of 2025, shone a light on growing concerns surrounding the influence of social media and the content creators aligned with the manosphere on boys and young men. Within the response from Government, Prime Minister Sir Kier Starmer spoke of the important role of education in responding to the challenges raised.

Underpinning recent concerns surrounding the digital lives of young men, are consistent disparities in educational attainment and progression of those who are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM). For decades, this disparity has been one of the most persistent challenges facing educators in the UK. Since the publication of Paul Willis’ seminal text Learning to Labour in the 1970s, the experience and attainment of young working-class men in education has become an embedded feature of Government and Media commentary. Over the proceeding decades, engagement with the issue by policy makers can be tracked through documents such as the 2005 report to the then Department for Education and Skills on Raising Boys’ Achievement, and the 2016 report on the underachievement of young men in higher education by the Higher Education Policy Institute. However, whilst the issue has been well documented, the gaps remain.

Evidence from the Department for Education on GCSE attainment in 2023/24 shows that in England just 24% of males who were eligible for FSM attained a grade 9-5 in GCSE Maths and English, compared with 43% who were not. Whilst in terms of progression to university, in 2022/23, less than 17% of White British, and White and Black Caribbean young men who were eligible for Free School Meals progressed into higher education by the age of 19. For those who were not, both percentages more than double.

The issue is persistent, significant, and remains largely unaddressed at a systemic level within educational policy and practice. Whilst progress has been made to understand the underlying issues which underpin the challenge through publications such as *Boys Don’t Try? Rethinking Masculinity in Schools*¹, and research projects such as Taking Boys Seriously from Ulster University in Northern Ireland, prior to 2023, such research had translated into very little strategic, cross-sector activity taking place to address it.

¹By Matt Pinkett and Mark Roberts (2019).

Project Delivery

The Boys’ Impact pilot project involved participation from 17 United Learning secondary schools across five different geographic regions of England. To support delivery of the project, the schools were divided into four regional clusters and were supported by a dedicated staff member who led co-ordination of the pilot at a local level. Participating secondary academies were Barnsley Academy, Campion School, Fir Vale Academy, Kettering Buccleuch Academy, Manchester Academy, Midhurst Rother College, Montsaye Academy, Northampton Academy, North Oxfordshire Academy, Sheffield Park Academy, Sheffield Springs Academy, Shoreham Academy, Stockport Academy, The Cornerstone Academy, The Regis School and William Hulme’s Grammar School. 206 boys were identified to take part in the project activities.

Over the course of the pilot, key staff members from each participating institution were supported to understand their local context, using the knowledge gained to devise a Theory of Change framework, Evaluation Plan, and produce an Impact Case Study at the end of the project. Aligning desired student-level outcomes to indicators of success published alongside the TBS principles, staff leading projects were encouraged to take an evidence-based approach to the design, delivery and evaluation of their programmes.



A key feature of the project approach and delivery was the formation of a cross-Trust project team of four experienced educationalists bringing complementary yet distinctive skills to the work with a shared vision and approach:

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Dr Caroline Boreham,
Research & Impact Lead
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Samantha D’Cunha,
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Principles of the Project

The TBS framework from Ulster University provided the theoretical foundation for the pilot. It is a relationship-centred, strengths-based model that emphasises dignity, identity, and the agency of boys within their learning environments.

The pilot was designed to understand the potential of its impact on addressing the longstanding underachievement of disadvantaged boys as noted in a report by the APPG on Boys’ Educational Outcomes, November 2023 and reported by the BBC in 2020 when they reviewed schools league tables for the past 30 years (**Appendix A**). National data from the Department for Education (DfE) shows that boys’ attainment since 2018/19 – 2023/24 is below that of girls and similarly, if you are in receipt of Free School Meals that the attainment gap is even wider (**Appendix B**). The 2023-24 national data from the DfE shows that boys are more likely than girls to be suspended and or excluded. The DfE data also shows that if you are in receipt of Free School Meals that you are also overrepresented in suspension and exclusion data (**Appendix C**), therefore if you are a boy in receipt of Free School Meals, the risk of facing suspension and or permanent exclusion is even higher. Boys are a group which continues to underperform nationally across key measures such as attainment, attendance, behaviour, and school engagement.

The pilot project sought to address the following aims:

- To increase engagement with learning
- To improve attendance and behaviour
- To enhance motivation, sense of belonging, and personal development
- To build capacity within schools to respond more effectively and equitably to the needs of disadvantaged boys.

A key objective of the pilot was to build a structure that would not only support delivery within the 16 participating schools but also establish a scalable model for broader adoption across United Learning and beyond. This required a careful balance of central Trust coordination, cluster-level leadership, and school autonomy.

Each school participating in the pilot began by identifying specific challenge(s) related to disadvantaged boys in their context, then aligned their approach with the relevant TBS principles. Through the Theory of Change model, schools were able to clearly articulate how their chosen interventions would address the identified needs and lead to meaningful outcomes.

Cluster Coordination and Support

Each of the four clusters had a designated school-based cluster coordinator who served as the key liaison between the participating schools and the central expert team. Coordinators were upskilled in:

- The national and research context around disadvantaged boys
- The principles and implementation expectations of the pilot
- Supporting schools in the development and delivery of their Theory of Change framework
- Developing their data collection plans for evaluation.

Coordinators were provided with ongoing administrative and strategic support, including:

- Regular briefings and reminders about documentation and timelines
- Access to resources and templates to support school-level planning
- Assistance from the Trust’s Personalised Learning Team to resolve issues and keep schools on track
- Monitoring and evaluation expertise from the Trust’s Research & Impact Lead and the Boys’ Impact Founder.

Data-Led School Engagement

Each school began by conducting an in-depth analysis of their own context, using available data to identify the specific challenges that disadvantaged boys were facing. These could include issues such as low attendance, disengagement, behavioural concerns, and/or a lack of connection to learning and school life.

Once schools had clearly identified their context-specific challenges, they selected the TBS principles that most closely aligned with those issues. The associated success indicators provided a scaffold for understanding what positive change might look like in practice.

Schools then developed their own Theory of Change (**Appendix D and E**), a strategic framework that outlined how their selected activities and interventions would address the challenges and lead to the desired outcomes. Staff were supported to:

- Understand the Theory of Change approach and its purpose in answering the question of whether the planned interventions were likely to create the intended impact
- Work backwards from success indicators to select targeted activities
- Connect their interventions to the needs they had identified through data analysis.

This ensured that schools weren’t simply implementing pre-designed programmes but instead were creating locally relevant and evidence-informed strategies, guided by a consistent and research-backed framework.

This layered implementation model; from school to cluster to central team; ensured consistency, responsiveness, and accountability across the pilot, while allowing schools to retain ownership of their approaches.

Taking Boys Seriously: The 10 Principles

The following ten principles underpinned the strategies and approaches adopted throughout the pilot:

- 1 Recognise the Primacy of Relationships
- 2 Demonstrate Dignity and Respect
- 3 Utilise a Strengths-Based Approach to Learning
- 4 Challenge and Affirm Masculine Identities
- 5 Promote Positive Mental Health
- 6 Identify Blocks to Boys' Learning
- 7 Connect Boys' Learning to Context
- 8 Engage Meaningfully with Boys
- 9 Enable Creative Learning Environments
- 10 Value the Voice of Boys

TBS | Taking Boys Seriously



Impact-Focused Summary and Selected Case Studies

The project's holistic approach – blending data with lived experience – ensured that interventions were not only evidence-informed but also human-centred. Creative outputs, storytelling, and family engagement all contributed to a deeper sense of belonging and motivation among boys.

The pilot project demonstrated clear positive impact – both quantitative and qualitative – across participating schools. The most significant improvements were seen in schools that:

- Created time and space for meaningful engagement with staff, students and their families
- Strategically selected boys showing early signs of disengagement.

In contrast, impact was less visible where boys were already deeply disengaged or had entrenched behavioural issues. This reinforces the value of **preventative, not reactive**, approaches.

Quantitative data shows early gains in attendance, classroom engagement, and behaviour. While long-term academic outcomes are still being tracked, early indicators suggest strong potential for sustained improvement.

Qualitative feedback from students, families, and staff highlights the importance of trust, voice, and relationships. Boys responded positively when given structured opportunities to reflect, express themselves, and build connections with adults and peers.

Across the 16 schools, six in-depth case studies were developed. These illustrate how different contexts applied the Taking Boys Seriously principles and achieved tangible outcomes. Notably, even when schools focused on specific principles, the benefits often extended more broadly – demonstrating the interconnected nature of the framework. The external organisations working with the six case-study schools are in [Appendix F](#).

Thematic summary of the most significant student impacts

One

Behaviour and engagement

- Marked improvements in behaviour, with reductions in truancy, lesson removals, and suspensions
- Staff observing increased self-pride and motivation among boys
- Boys became calmer, more focused, and more respectful in class
- Boys expressed a stronger connection to school and a desire for the project to continue.

Two

Emotional wellbeing and relationships

- Boys reported feeling happier, more confident, and more able to express emotions
- Boys building trusting relationships with staff; many felt a stronger sense of belonging
- Emotional regulation improved, with fewer outbursts and better peer interactions
- Creative activities like storytelling and personal reflection helped boys explore identity and build trust [Appendix G](#).

“

I’ve got used to this now. Every Monday or Wednesday morning I’m thinking: have we got the workshop now? ”

(Pupil)

“

It is possible to make bad decisions and then turn your life around...if you focus you can make your life better again. ”

(Pupil)

“

When I am not understanding the work, they are actually helping me instead of kicking me out and shouting at me and getting me to understand it more and being kinder to me. ”

(Pupil)

“

Our year 9 boys have set a powerful example, raising standards in behaviour and attitude and peer influence across the school. ”

(Staff)

Three

Academic progress

- Positive impact on reading scores and boys reporting a greater appreciation for education and future aspirations.

Four

Family and staff involvement

- Parents reported stronger relationships with schools and greater interest in their child’s progress and expressing gratitude for the support provided
- Staff gained deeper insight into boys’ personal and academic needs
- Mentors and teachers built stronger rapport, leading to more positive classroom dynamics.

Five

Attendance and punctuality

- Improvements in attendance, reduction in lateness and suspensions.

“

I really enjoyed the trip because I got to learn about uni life – everyone was really nice. I had never visited a university before and did not realise how big a campus was and all the things on site like, shops, café’s and rooms to stay in. After the trip it made me think that maybe I would like to go to university one day. I had never thought about it until then. ”

(Pupil)

“

Mentoring helped me see the boys in a different light. They opened up more than I expected. ”

(Staff)

“

He wanted to thank the school because the school had believed in him when others had not. The positive calls were something (he) had never had and had really helped and were really appreciated. ”

(Parent)

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Case Study One

Principle 6: Identifying Blocks to Boys' Learning



Case Study: Manchester Academy

A comprehensive weekly mentoring programme was introduced. This involved individual and group sessions that encouraged boys to reflect on their learning experiences, identify personal and academic barriers, and set achievable targets. The school supplemented this with two masculinity workshops, designed to challenge societal stereotypes and support boys in developing healthier self-perceptions and relationships.

In response to student interest, the academy organised a session facilitated by The University of Law, Manchester focusing on finance, business, and Year 9 options, giving boys practical insights into future opportunities. A structured team-building activity was also incorporated to build peer relationships and foster a sense of community among participants.

The outcomes were highly positive:

- Improved behaviour across all regular participants, 86% of boys reported the project positively impacted their behaviour
- Reduction in truancy, lesson removals, and suspensions
- Improved punctuality and engagement with school values
- At the start of the project, only 25% of participants would recommend the school; by the end, this rose to 86%
- Boys reported feeling a greater sense of belonging, happiness in school, and increased motivation to earn reward
- 100% of participants expressed a desire for the project to continue.

Case Study: Montsaye Academy

Montsaye Academy implemented a 12-week mentoring programme supported by career guidance and a relational development initiative. Sessions were held weekly with selected boys and focused on building trust, enhancing aspirations, and addressing engagement barriers. A notable feature was the family engagement strand, in which 8 out of 10 families actively participated. Additionally, staff CPD sessions were delivered to support identification of root causes behind boys' disengagement.

Key outcomes at Montsaye Academy included:

- 80% of boys showed improved attendance
- 90% of boys demonstrated improved behaviour over the course of the intervention
- Post-event surveys indicated increased motivation to pursue further education or apprenticeships from students involved
- Members of staff reported deeper understanding of students' personal and academic challenges
- Engaged parents expressed increased interest in their child's progress.



Key finding: When boys are provided time to explore their personal and academic barriers and aspirations they attend better and behave better.

Nine schools (Kettering Buccleuch Academy, Manchester Academy, Midhurst Rother College, Sheffield Park Academy, Sheffield Springs Academy, Stockport Academy, The Regis School, Montsaye Academy and Fir Vale School) focussed on this principle. The schools implemented a diverse range of tailored interventions but maintained a common goal: to uncover and tackle the specific blocks preventing boys from thriving in school.

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Case Study Two

Principle 8: Engage meaningfully with boys

Case Study: Barnsley Academy

Barnsley Academy adopted a holistic, community-oriented approach, engaging boys and their families from the outset through a launch event to introduce the project’s aims. Targeted mentoring, career-focused activities, and wellbeing interventions formed the core of the offer, alongside staff CPD focused on understanding boys’ developmental needs. A notable feature was the adaptation of citizenship and PSHE curriculum content to support the school’s character programme, while integrating work on positive male role models and challenging masculinity stereotypes.

Impact highlights:

- 90% of boys reported that the project helped them understand themselves better and clarified their aspirations
- 70% noticed improvements in their behaviour and classroom effort
- 80% reported building trusting relationships with staff
- All parents expressed gratitude for the support and noted a more positive relationship with the school, especially where prior engagement had been limited or negative.

Case Study: William Hulme’s Grammar School

William Hulme’s Grammar School delivered a 10-week “Boys and Love” project, aimed at fostering emotional intelligence, communication, and teamwork. This was complemented by mentoring, both internally and externally, which offered emotional support and personalised targets relating to behaviour and attendance.

Half-termly assemblies were used to promote respect, a core school value, while addressing themes of masculinity, femininity, and cultural identity.

The school reported:

- Reductions in behavioural incidents, lesson removals, and internal suspensions
- Improved conflict resolution and peer interactions
- Staff observed greater respectfulness and maturity among participating boys
- Students reported feeling more confident expressing emotions, both with adults and peers.

Case Study: Montsaye Academy

Montsaye Academy’s approach to Principle 8 mirrored its work under Principle 6, centring on weekly mentoring, career support, and a relational development programme. A 12-week programme was delivered to a targeted group of boys, supported by a family engagement strand that successfully involved 8 out of 10 families. The project also included staff CPD on identifying the root causes of disengagement.

The outcomes were notable:

- 80% of participating boys improved their attendance
- 90% demonstrated improvements in behaviour
- Families reported strengthened relationships with school, and students showed greater trust and confidence in engaging with staff.



Key finding: Meaningful engagement with boys and their families can support relationships and positively impact mental health and wellbeing.

Eight academies (Kettering Buccleuch Academy, Barnsley Academy, Midhurst Rother College, Shoreham Academy, The Regis School, William Hulme’s Grammar School, Montsaye Academy, and The Cornerstone Academy) focussed on this principle. From this group, four case studies were developed to explore the activities delivered and their impact on boys’ engagement, behaviour, emotional development, and relationships within school and beyond.

Despite varied contexts and school priorities, several common strategies emerged across the case studies, including mentoring (1:1 and in small groups), emotional intelligence development and mental health awareness, family engagement and home–school relationships, CPD for staff on understanding boys’ emotional needs and challenging gender stereotypes and promoting progressive masculinity.

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Case Study Three

Principle 10: Value the voice of boys



Case Study: Campion School

Campion School delivered a 14-week creative arts and personal development programme, co-designed by the school lead in collaboration with Lemonpop Workshops, an arts-based organisation. The initiative focused on building trust, enhancing emotional literacy, and sparking motivation through identity-driven creative expression and future-oriented dialogue.

Impact reported:

- Where data was available, students showed an average reading age gain of 1.7 years
- Teachers observed calmer, more focused behaviour following workshop days
- The 12 participating boys maintained an average school attendance of over 90%
- Video diaries and session reflections revealed increased confidence and emotional articulation, with students becoming more comfortable discussing their feelings and aspirations.

Case Study: Barnsley Academy

Barnsley Academy implemented a tailored literacy strategy using Lexonik and fluency interventions, embedded within the existing timetable. This targeted approach aimed to ensure that all participating boys achieved a reading level of STANINE 4 or above, ensuring learning is accessible to all.

Impact reported:

- School attendance increased by 4.5%, rising from 85.1% to 89.6% across the cohort over the course of the programme
- Average SAS (Standard Age Score) reading score improved from 89 to 99, reflecting a significant gain in reading proficiency
- 7 out of 10 boys improved their reading age, with an average SAS increase of 10 points
- 9 out of 10 boys are now reading at STANINE 4 or above, meeting the programme’s literacy target.

Key finding: When boys are encouraged and facilitated to actively contribute, they feel more affiliation to the environment and a greater sense of ownership and belonging.

Six schools (Barnsley Academy, Campion School, Fir Vale School, Kettering Buccleuch Academy, Sheffield Springs Academy, and The Regis School) focussed on this principle. Despite differences in context and school priorities, several common strategies emerged across the case studies. These included:

- Mentoring programmes designed to foster trust between boys and staff
- Career conversations which provided opportunities for boys to reflect on their interests and aspirations
- Targeted parent engagement initiatives aimed at strengthening relationships with families.

These activities contributed greatly to ensuring boys felt a strong sense of ownership, belonging, appreciation, and connection with their teachers.

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Case Study Four

Principle 1: Recognise the primacy of relationships

Case Study: Montsaye Academy

Montsaye implemented a 12-week intervention to support a group of Year 8 and 9 Pupil Premium boys facing ongoing challenges with attendance, behaviour, and aspiration. Designed to re-engage students, the programme blended mentoring, careers exploration, and relational learning with a strong emphasis on building trust and connection. Each student received weekly 1:1 mentoring sessions with trusted male staff, focusing on behaviour reflection, goal setting, and personal development. Despite some variation in mentor availability, 8 out of 10 boys participated consistently, demonstrating early signs of increased motivation and a stronger sense of belonging within the school environment.

Impact report:

- 90% of targeted students had fewer suspensions
- Lesson removals decreased for 80%
- Staff reported deeper understanding of students’ personal and academic challenges
- Mentors and teachers noted improved rapport and more positive classroom interactions
- Parental engagement was strong, with families actively participating in progress discussions.

Case Study: Campion School

Campion launched a 14-week arts-based intervention for a group of disadvantaged Year 8 boys struggling with attendance, engagement, and academic confidence. The programme used creative expression, relationship-building, and career exploration to re-engage students. Its core aim was to boost confidence, strengthen identity, and foster a sense of belonging, while improving academic motivation and long-term aspirations.

Impact report:

- Boys engaged confidently in storytelling, singing, and personal reflections expressing emotions and identity in ways rarely seen in a classroom setting
- Male teachers and mentors shared personal life stories during sessions, helping to build trust and inspire deeper connections.

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Case Study: Barnsley Academy

To foster a stronger sense of belonging among students, Barnsley adopted a two-pronged strategy that engaged both staff and students. Staff received training inspired by the principles outlined in Boys Don’t Try? Rethinking Masculinity in Schools, aimed at equipping them with the knowledge and skills to build meaningful, trust-based relationships. This training empowered staff to create inclusive environments where boys felt recognised, respected, and valued. At the same time, the school introduced an informal mentoring programme designed to nurture positive student-staff connections, further reinforcing a culture of care, trust, and belonging.

Impact reported:

- Improved attendance and a reduction in fixed-term sanctions among the targeted group
- 90% of boys reported feeling happier at school due to the support they are receiving
- 70% of boys acknowledged a greater appreciation for the role of education in shaping their future success
- 85% of staff observed a positive shift in boys’ self-pride and engagement with their work
- 100% of boys’ families expressed gratitude to the school and staff for their dedicated work with their children

Key finding: The nature of the educator/boy relationship is a primary factor in a boy’s motivation, attitudes, and aspirations towards education and learning.

Five schools (Barnsley Academy, Campion School, Montsaye Academy, Manchester Academy, and Northampton Academy) focussed on this principle. Despite differences in context and school priorities, several common strategies emerged across the case studies. These included:

- Mentoring programmes designed to foster trust between boys and staff
- Career conversations led by staff which provided opportunities for boys to reflect on their interests and aspirations
- Targeted parent engagement initiatives aimed at strengthening relationships with families
- Staff CPD to support building trust based relationships in the classroom.

These activities contributed greatly to ensuring boys felt a strong sense of ownership, belonging, appreciation, and connection with their teachers.

Next steps and recommendations

This table summarises key strategic actions for school leaders, as well as broader system-level recommendations based on the findings from the Boys’ Impact Collaboration with United Learning: Addressing the Gap with Disadvantaged Boys Pilot Project 2024–2025:

Recommendation	Action Required	Responsible Stakeholder(s)	Timeline
This collaborative model is scalable and sustainable	Adopt and scale a layered governance model comprising central coordination, cluster leadership, and school-level autonomy as a strategic framework for system-wide improvement. Our model balances top-down coherence with bottom-up innovation , making it particularly effective in complex education systems where one-size-fits-all approaches often fall short.	Education and Trust Leaders	Throughout the project implementation planning
Meaningful engagement with boys and families enhances outcomes	Where intervention programmes are designed, schools must involve families when communicating the aims and progress of the project. Regular communication around the project will support the building of trusting relationships.	School and project Leaders	Throughout the project
Focus on preventative strategies rather than reactive ones to maximise impact	Schools should review their internal data at regular intervals to identify boys, particularly disadvantaged boys, showing early signs of disengagement. Schools should provide early intervention programmes for boys identified as becoming disengaged.	School Leaders	Half termly
Tailored, locally relevant interventions are crucial	School Leaders should be provided CPD around how to design strategies to meet their contextual challenges. For example, how to use Theory of Change. CPD to be provided around how to design bespoke interventions that meet their own contextual needs.	Trust Leaders and Professional Development teams	Throughout the project
Embed mentoring & staff CPD on relational pedagogy	Teacher training providers and all schools should provide regular relational CPD for members of staff. Targeted members of staff should also receive mentoring training and be afforded time to provide this support.	Education and School Leaders	Annually

Appendices

Appendix A

Educational gender gap data – 1989-2019

Persistent gender gap

Percentage of GCSEs passed by girls vs boys

Year	Girls (%)	Boys (%)	Gap (points)
1989	49.0	45.0	4
1999	58.0	49.0	9
2019	75.0	68.0	7

Source: Buckingham University (1989-2009) / DfE (2010-2019)

Appendix B

Percentage of pupils achieving grades 5 or above in English and maths GCSEs

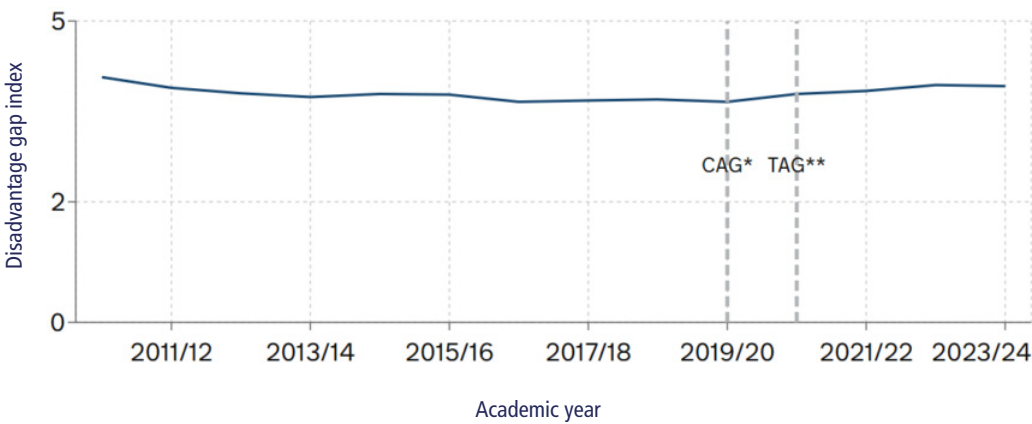
Year	Boys (%)	Girls (%)
2018/19	40.0	46.6
2019/20	45.9	54.1
2020/21	48.2	55.8
2021/22	47.0	52.7
2022/23	43.2	47.5
2023/24	43.6	48.3

Average Attainment 8 score

Year	Boys	Girls
2018/19	44.0	49.5
2019/20	47.4	53.1
2020/21	48.1	53.9
2021/22	46.3	51.4
2022/23	44.0	48.6
2023/24	43.7	48.2

Appendix B

The disadvantage gap index has narrowed slightly compared to 2022/23



— Disadvantaged attainment gap index [*CAG = Centre assessment grades **TAG = Teacher assessment grades]

Source: KS4 attainment data

Appendix C

Suspensions and permanent exclusions by sex, 2023/24

Female

Suspensions	354,551
Suspensions (rate)	8.58
Permanent exclusions	3,190
Permanent exclusions (rate)	0.08

Male

Suspensions	600,401
Suspensions (rate)	13.93
Permanent exclusions	7,695
Permanent exclusions (rate)	0.18

Suspensions and permanent exclusions by FSM eligibility, 2023/24

FSM – Eligible

Suspensions	573,538
Suspensions (rate)	27.55
Permanent exclusions	6,929
Permanent exclusions (rate)	0.33

FSM – Not Eligible

Suspensions	381,414
Suspensions (rate)	5.99
Permanent exclusions	3,956
Permanent exclusions (rate)	0.06

Appendix D

Snapshots of three schools’ Theory of Change Framework

Campion School

Situation				
Year 8 boys in the disadvantaged cohort at Campion School have attendance rates that are 10% lower than their peers and experience higher rates of behavioural incidents. National research indicates that boys in this group often struggle with self-esteem and motivation, which can lead to long-term disengagement from education. This project applies the principles of Taking Boys Seriously to address these challenges by fostering trust-based relationships and engaging students through creative and career-focused activities.				
Aims				
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve attendance among Year 8 disadvantaged boys by at least 5% by the end of the school year.• Increase engagement in learning activities, as measured by participation rates and teacher evaluations.• Enhance self-confidence and sense of belonging through creative workshops, as evidenced by pre- and post-programme surveys.• Develop career awareness and aspirations by introducing students to higher education and professional pathways.				
Processes			Impact	
Inputs	Activities	Output	Outcomes	Impact
Students: 10 Year 8 Pupil Premium boys. Mentors and Teachers: Trained staff who will focus on relationship-building and trust-centred strategies to develop supportive connections with students. Teachers will also provide feedback on students’ progress in workshops.	Relationship building workshops (TBSP1): Weekly group workshops will foster trust, connection, and a sense of belonging among students. Activities will include discussions around shared experiences, teamwork challenges, and peer collaboration, all designed to strengthen relationships with both teachers and peers.	Workshop Participation (TBSP1): <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Track the number of boys attending and actively participating in relationship-building workshops.• Collect attendance data and student self-assessments to monitor changes in mindset, relationships, and overall engagement.	Recognise the primacy of relationships (TBSP1) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Renewed sense of belonging to education• Increased confidence about their knowledge and learning.• Educators show an interest in them and their lives.• Boys feel more comfortable seeking personal and educational support. Boys perceive learning as essential for their future opportunities.	Improved Attendance and Engagement Survey and attendance data indicate: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Boys with a renewed sense of belonging and confidence demonstrate higher attendance and active participation in school activities.
Rationale and Assumptions				
This project uses Taking Boys Seriously principles to engage disadvantaged boys through relationship-building, creative expression, and student voice. It focuses on three key principles: building trust-based relationships (TBSP 1), enabling creative learning environments (TBSP 9), and valuing boys’ perspectives (TBSP 10). Activities such as storytelling, graffiti art, and music production help boys explore identity, boost motivation, and feel more connected to their education. Guided by the Arts Education in Secondary Schools framework, the project assumes that positive identity exploration and creative, relationship-focused interventions combined with career guidance will improve boys’ self-perception, engagement, and sense of purpose. This is expected to lead to better attendance, behaviour, and academic outcomes.				

The Cornerstone Academy

Situation				
<p>The school currently has 692 students, with 347 boys (50.1%). Year 9 is the largest cohort, comprising 157 pupils, including 80 boys – many of whom have been identified as needing additional support and opportunities to explore aspects of male identity. The school’s Pupil Premium rate is nearly double the national average, with the target group representing the highest proportion of eligible students at 43%, and 36% of Year 9 boys falling into this category. While overall attendance among Year 9 boys is good, their progress is hindered by internal exclusions, cluster suspensions, and fixed-term exclusions. Notably, 12 boys in the focus group account for 22% of all Level 5 negative behaviour incidents recorded over the past two terms.</p>				
Aims				
<p>The project applies Taking Boys Seriously principles through a multi-intervention programme, focusing on three core principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• TBSP 1: Recognise the Primacy of Relationships• TBSP 5: Promote Positive Mental Health• TBSP 8: Engage Meaningfully with Boys <p>The primary aim is to improve behaviour, attendance, and academic progress among Year 9 boys. Key areas of focus include fostering a sense of belonging, exploring men’s mental health, masculinity, resilience, and acceptance, and encouraging personal responsibility. Insights from student voice, staff observations, and parent feedback highlight the need to increase time spent in lessons, boost motivation and resilience, and strengthen students’ sense of belonging.</p>				
Processes			Impact	
Inputs	Activities	Output	Outcomes	Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• £1250 grant funding from AUB.• An afternoon of staff CPD time.• Specialist speakers/facilitators in masculinity, mental health and peer mentoring.	<p>Multi intervention project engaging with young men and their families over 2 terms in the Spring and Summer term:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Progressive Masculinity workshop.• THRIVE Workshops.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students will participate in a workshop on Progressive Masculinity.• A separate group of 12 students will take part in the THRIVE course, consisting of eight 2-hour sessions.• Another 12 students will be trained to mentor and support peers with low-level mental health needs.	<p>Through participation and engagement in sessions, activities and workshops students will demonstrate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• More self-awareness regarding the source of their own stress triggers, fears and anxieties (TBS5)• Being more resilient and articulating emotional competency (TBS5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improvement in data and statistical improvement in the attendance of students who are engaged in the projects/activities.• The number of negative level 5 behaviour incidents will decrease.• The number of internal exclusions, FTE suspensions and cluster suspensions of the cohort will decrease.
Rationale and Assumptions				
<p>This aim will draw on the “Taking Boys Seriously” study conducted by Harland and McCready in 2012 and use the Taking Boys Seriously Principles in the hope that the information, use and experience of this study will share similar outcomes for young men. It should be seen through the activities mentioned above that young men who are eligible for Free School Meals, will have improved outcomes and experiences. It is assumed that there is a significant problem in our schools where too many boys are struggling and the list of things that concerns teachers is too long: from disappointing academic results, a lack of interest in education, increasing mental health issues and inability to express emotions (Pinkett and Robert, 2019). Using information, research and practical solutions from Pinkett and Roberts, 2019 will offer long term strategies for young men to be happier in school, achieve higher academic success and improve resilience and self-esteem.</p>				

Barnsley Academy

Situation				
<p>School Context: Barnsley Academy is a medium-sized school with a cohort of approximately 900 students with 46% of students identified as PP eligible. There is a legacy issue, particularly with our most disadvantaged boys, of under achievement, inconsistent attendance and negative behaviours, which had led to small cohorts of boys in each year groups finding themselves in cycles of negative behaviour that have been difficult to break. The context of the specific boys that we have identified to work with as part of this project.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• PP: 8 out of 10 boys are PP.• SEND: Two have an identified SEND need.• Ability: 1 LAP, 7 MAP, 2 HAP – most will feature in our 5+ target group at KS4.• Attendance: Low. 50% below 80% for 2024-25.• Behaviour: FTS are low this year, but removals are broadly quite high. When they are here, they are not consistently in lessons. <p>Personal context: Several of the boys have complex backgrounds that raise different safeguarding concerns that absolutely impact their behaviours, attitude towards school and consequently how they experience school.</p>				
Aims				
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Significantly increase attendance ensuring all boys make contextual improvements. (TBS Principles 1, 2 and 6)• Significantly reduce behaviour incidents that lead to increased engagement in learning and the wider school community. Both qualitative and quantitative evidence will demonstrate that boys are building positive relationships and developing strategies to overcome barriers. (TBS Principles 1, 2 and 6)• Surveys confirm that the boys feel increasingly supported, valued, and ‘heard’ by staff, and more confident in understanding themselves and the traits of being a positive individual, regardless of gender. (TBS Principles 1, 2, 4, 8 and 10)				
Processes			Impact	
Inputs	Activities	Output	Outcomes	Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time – phone calls, meetings, PP funding for refreshments.• Family engagement	<p>A focused launch with boys and their families:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fresh faces (staff who they have not dealt with in a behaviour setting)• A focus on building trust and currency with families. <p>Regular informal check-ins, positive home contact.</p>	<p>All 10 boys and their families will have the opportunity to engage with the school through a new, positive avenue separate from behaviour-related interventions and structures they may have previously found challenging.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Educators showing an interest in their lives (TBSP 1)• Feeling more comfortable seeking personal and educational support. (TBSP 1)• Being active in setting specific educational and personal goals. (TBSP 3)	<p>Qualitative: Surveys indicate that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Boys feel more supported by educators and believe they are invested in their future successes.• The quality and quantity of independent practice in books produced by boys contextually improves over the course of the pilot in comparison to work produced in the Autumn Term. <p>Quantitative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is a reduction in behaviour incidents over the course of the pilot indicating greater engagement and resilience.
Rationale and Assumptions				
<p>Despite a strong and improving curriculum, many boys face deep-rooted challenges shaped by home and community. This pilot aims to build trust with students and families, offering purpose, identity exploration, and a sense of belonging creating the conditions for meaningful engagement, improved behaviour, and better life chances. The pilot’s success relies on the right team, clear roles, and strong collaboration. Trust must be built early with boys and families. Interventions must be strategic, research-informed, and embedded in school life. Understanding boys beyond data and engaging parents are essential to fostering lasting change and improving life outcomes.</p>				

Appendix E

DATA COLLECTION PLAN – BOYS IMPACT PILOT PROJECT							
School name: Cluster name:							
Objective What are you trying to answer?	Measures What metrics or outcomes are being measured?	Data Type Qualitative or quantitative	Data Source(s) Primary sources (e.g. direct observation, surveys) or secondary sources (existing data, reports)	Scope of data collected Step-by-step process of how data will be collected	When will data be collected Termly? Annually?	Who will collect & how will data be shared Data Manager? Teachers? Boys Impact pilot project school lead?	Who will check the data? How data accuracy and validity will be verified (e.g. double-checking entries)
Example 1: Will participating in basketball club with a qualified mentor give Year 9 PP students an improved sense of empowerment and school experience?	Improvement in positive scores on pre-and post-student surveys (Year 9 PP basketball mentoring group)	Qualitative	Primary	10 X identified Yr 9 boys will complete 4 questionnaires in total (empowerment and school experience)	Pre and post intervention survey Nov 2024 and March 2025	PP lead will send MS forms link to pupils & share aggregated results with Boys Impact pilot project lead in SharePoint folder.	Boys' Impact pilot project school lead
	Pupil attendance at the group over time and % of total sessions run	Quantitative	Secondary		Weekly registers kept. Period of 10 weeks	The registers for the club will be saved in Arbor (Interventions module) – Data Manager will run data at the end of the 10 week period.	

Appendix F

Balraj Samrai and Nuradin Abdi, Kids of Colour facilitators [Home](#) | [Kids of Colour](#)

Marvin Mudzongo (Lemonpop Workshops) [Lemonpop Workshop](#) | [WNSETCIC](#)

Lexonik [Lexonik – Literacy Intervention Programmes That Empower Learning](#)

Damaged Goods – Daniel Wilshire [We all have areas of our lived that are damaged, that’s what makes us human. It’s how we deal with those areas that truly makes us great.](#)

Sana Chishty: Aspire Higher Project Coordinator (University of Northampton) [Home](#) – [Aspire Higher](#)

Progressive Masculinity [Home](#) – [Progressive Masculinity Ltd](#)

Appendix G

When you see us
By Year 9 boys at The Cornerstone Academy, Poole

We have dreams to travel the world,
to leave this place, build careers, our stories told.
Despite what holds us back, we all want to learn,
but our flame gets dim when respect’s not returned.

We aren’t as bad as we look, don’t judge a book by a cover.
We’re brothers, friends, someone’s child, someone’s other.
We’ve got stories behind these stares,
but most days it’s like no one seems to care.

Teachers are unfair to us, or that’s how it feels.
Some hold grudges like wounds that will never be healed.
But please can the teachers stop despising us,
ask us who we are before deciding on us.

We want teachers to ask us about us,
not just the grades, but the human stuff,
What makes us laugh, what keeps us awake,
what burdens we carry, what roads we intend to take.

Stop telling us we might as well leave when the lessons barely had time to breathe.
You only care when we shout, not about what we’re saying.
You only listen when we’re angry, not when we’re fraying.



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