

Identifying the issues – 1

You are the headteacher of a large comprehensive school. Since 1990 achievement has been recorded by gender. The percentage of girls achieving five GCSE A to C grades is 38%; the percentage of boys is 21%. In every subject the girls lead by up to half a grade. Cognitive ability tests show no significant difference for boys' and girls' verbal or quantitative reasoning. Explain how you plan to tackle the problem in the light of the speculation detailed below:

- A recent *Panorama* programme has reported research that boys' brains are less well developed for verbal purposes (ie talk, reading) and that their parents spend much less time talking with them than with their sisters.
- Boys prefer going out with their mates to doing homework – completion rates are dramatically less than for girls. Boys don't like sitting still and writing.
- Boys play around in class much more than girls, attracting more attention to contain disruptive behaviour. Boys seem peer-centred and hyperactive, inclined to set more store by a joke that leads to a laugh with mates than serious study.
- Boys prefer active learning styles (eg Drama, Art, Sport) and are impatient with sitting still in classrooms listening or writing. They naturally rebel and antagonise teachers who prefer compliant, 'nice' students. They are more inclined to question accepted norms.
- Boys do not attach importance to neat presentation and handwriting so that although they produce good work, the decoding process required alienates teachers and causes males to score fewer marks for assignments of equal quality.
- Parents encourage boys to be boys, fostering traditional male stereotypes, eg girls cry, discuss feelings, display emotion; boys play out, especially at football, and are tough and manly in their approach to pain and people.
- Boys are disadvantaged in co-educational schools where they are presented with female role models and reject what they perceive as 'soft' curriculum choices. So there are few boys in choirs and orchestras; males do not choose Textiles, Biology, etc. They are disadvantaged by a choice of texts which emphasises emotion, feelings and fiction at the expense of action and violence.
- Boys mature less quickly than girls, so that their performance is chronologically behind until at least Year 9. With their tendency to misbehave and joke, they tend to be placed in lower sets and achieve less. ALIS (A-level Information System) and YELLIS (Year 11 Information System) show girls well ahead at GCSE and A-level.

3 Action plan for underachievement related to gender

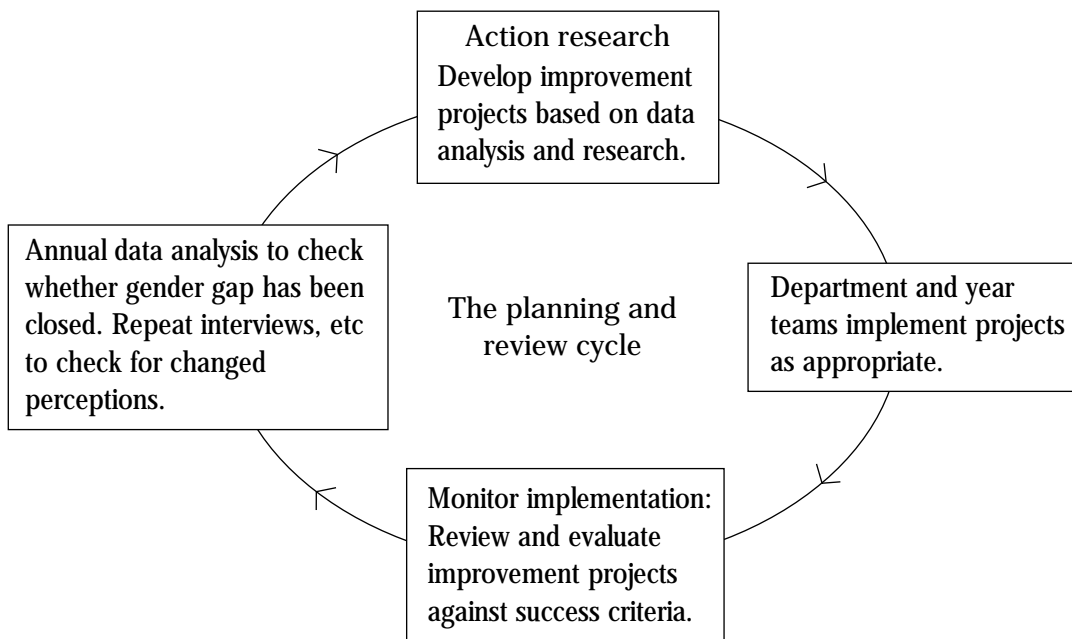
If boys at your school underachieve in relation to their potential (as measured by objective tests, eg an NFER cognitive indicator), there is significant scope to improve effectiveness and results.

If you can close the gap by changing unsuccessful practice and attitudes, the number of students attaining five GCSE A to C grades will increase disproportionately and enhance your league table position.

But the task should not be under-estimated. You need to plan carefully how to re-shape teaching and learning styles so that student resistance, especially male resistance, is minimised and effective learning is enhanced for everyone. Girls don't benefit from those attention-seeking males who disrupt so many lessons. You should turn your research into active projects for improvement.

Planning and review cycle

Major cultural change requires an integrated, coherent approach to planning, as indicated in the diagram below:



Action research

Once data has been analysed and some working hypotheses have been formulated, you should establish a research group to test ideas against the perceptions of students and staff. Unless there is general agreement about why some students underachieve, proposals for improvement are unlikely to succeed.

The aim is to design a project that can be completed in a reasonable time span (eg about a term) and which will identify a small number of key proposals for improvement.

The research group(s) may be located within departmental/curriculum areas, or year teams, or both, depending on the size and scope of the project.

The group(s) should address the following questions when deciding on how to advance the project:

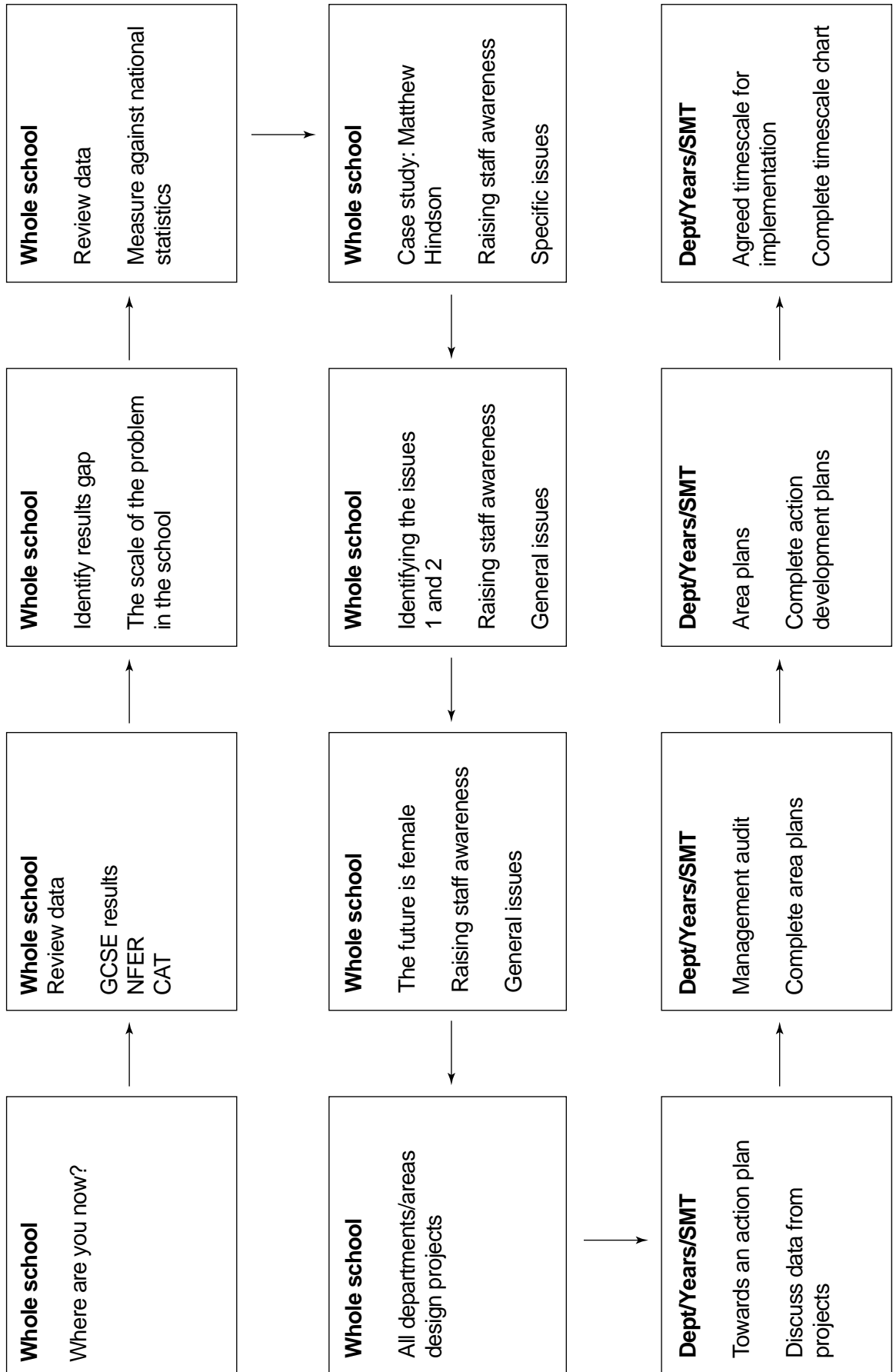
- Size of the sample (if in departments, all students; a year group; random sample).
- Composition of sample (age, number, gender)
- Whether to include staff, parents, governors (and how selected?).
- Research methods (eg interviews with staff/students; questionnaires; observation of lessons against agreed criteria).
- Focus (eg teaching styles; student attitudes; homework).

Three questionnaires are provided at the end of this section. They can be used to support the action research stage of the planning and review cycle. They are as follows:

- Form 5 (page 27): General questionnaire for students
- Form 6 (page 28): Departmental questionnaire for students. This one is for use by the English department but others could be devised for use by other departments.
- Form 7 (pages 29 to 31): Student questionnaire: Learning styles. This format can also be used to test other preferences, perceptions, subjects, lesson activities, etc. A blank version is provided on page 31 for your own questions.

Complete your own survey before proceeding to the results of the national survey overpage.

Towards an action plan – 1



Towards an action plan – 2

Checklist

		Tick when completed	Date
1	Where are you now? SMT/governors discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Review data	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Identify results gap	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Review data and measure against national statistics	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Staff discussion Case study: Matthew Hindson	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Staff discussion Identifying the issues 1 and 2	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Staff discussion The future is female	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	All departments/areas design projects	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	Towards an action plan Discuss data from projects	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	Management audit	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	Area plans		
12	Agreed timescale for implementation	<input type="checkbox"/>