How do I/we help the students in Key Stage 4 improve their learning if they are in danger of underperforming?

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Introduction

Megahy (1998, p.27)[1] identifies the following as encapsulating the nature of pastoral care.

> "Pastoral care is concerned with promoting pupils' personal and social development and fostering positive attitudes: through the quality of teaching and learning; through the nature of relationships amongst pupils, teachers and adults other than teachers; through arrangements for monitoring pupils' overall progress, academic, personal and social; through specific pastoral structures and support systems; and through extra curricular activities and school ethos. Pastoral care, accordingly, should help a school achieve success." (DES, 1989, p.3).

How do I help to fulfil these criteria in my role as Head of the Middle School,[2] for those boys who are my responsibility? In my Methods of Educational Enquiry[3] I outlined a plan for students to improve their learning where they are in danger of underperforming. Being an academic school there is a level of expectation from boys, parents and staff that I am charged with co-ordinating.

The school's Learning Support Coordinator[4] suggested that the Salamanca Statement might provide a point of view that could help the process. This was in order to help quantify the boys' learning but it also made me question the situation in which I worked.[5]

> "Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective measures of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system." (UNESCO 1994)

The first quote parallels the nature of Bishop Wordsworth School in relation to its success, the school being classified as "highly effective" by OFSTED.[6]

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[1] Megahy T. (1998). *Managing the curriculum: pastoral care as a vehicle for raising student achievement,* in: Calvert M. & Henderson J. (eds), *Managing Pastoral Care,* Cassell, pp.26-52.

[2] Head of Key Stage 4.

[3] Lloyd G. (2003). How do I/we help the students in Key Stage 4 improve their learning if they are in danger of underperforming? University of Bath MA programme submission.

[4] Who was one of my critical friends.

[5] See Appendix A – feedback notes from the Learning Support Coordinator.

[6] OFSTED Report (Feb-March 2001)

However, the word 'regular' at the start of the second quote in terms of a cross section of society clearly does not apply; omit this one word and then the statement does sit alongside the first one as a description of the school.

This second quote challenged my perceived view with just one word. I had been happy that the school fitted an 'ideal' in terms of pastoral care but being in the 'rarefied' environment of selective education, compared to the full ability range, can this be a true reflection of the situation? Starting from this enhanced position with able students but having some that do not learn effectively, posed the question of why such a situation should arise. I had, to an extent, addressed this in my enquiry plan, in terms of the situation and dealing with the problems. What was not fully identified was 'my' influence, just the procedures and techniques for helping the boys.

In a discussion following the submission of the enquiry plan my tutor at Bath University, Jack Whitehead, he stressed this same point[7]. He drew more from my verbal account of events, through my reactions and the feelings I expressed, than from my written one. He felt he could 'see' my influence and had a feeling for the effect this might have on the students and the support given to the staff. This was further illustrated on the feedback sheet for my enquiry plan.[8] Through this enquiry I hope to illustrate my influence in improving the learning at Key Stage 4.

Context

Bishop Wordsworth's School is a Church of England Voluntary Aided Boys Grammar School. In two of the last three years we have received School Achievement Awards for our level of performance, in comparison to schools of a similar type. So this indicates we have a system that enables the students to be very successful.

At GCSE level students have an average point's score of 6.35.[9] This achievement equates to just slightly higher than a B across the full range of subjects. A strong indicator of the likely performance at this stage comes from the Year 10 Internal End of Year Examinations and this provided the starting point for my enquiry plan.[10]

A key indicator for underperformance was an average points score of below 5 or the equivalent of less than a grade C pass in all subjects.[11] Raising their performance to above 5 points would allow them to meet national criteria for their standard of education at GCSE level.[12]

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[7] Meeting held 27/02/03 in Jack Whitehead's office at Bath University.
[8] See Appendix B – feedback notes on my MEE from Jack Whitehead
[9] See Appendix C – GCSE summary sheet 2002.
[10] Lloyd G. (2003, p.2). How do I/we help the students in Key Stage 4 improve their learning if they are in danger of underperforming? University of Bath MA programme submission.
[11] Lloyd G. (2003, p.3). How do I/we help the students in Key Stage 4 improve their learning if they are in danger of underperforming? University of Bath MA programme submission.
[12] Five passes at C or above being a recognised standard of achievement.

Methodology

On compiling the Year 10 summer examination results,[13] it was clear that there were students at risk of underperforming. Four boys were identified and the process of helping them improve their learning, and hopefully GCSE results, was implemented.

I contacted the parents of the boy's considered to be in danger of underperforming[14] in the hope of developing a relationship that would help improve the boy's learning. Subsequently, I had meetings with these parents and their son's that further strengthened the home school link and thus helped establish the informed consent necessary to aid the success of the process. This principle was identified in my enquiry plan[15] based on the work of Cohen and Manion (1994, p.349).[16]

An enquiry journal was established,[17] as advocated by Cohen & Manion (1994)[18] and Bassey (1998), [19] which was to provide a record of enquiry events and give a primary source of information during the later write up. This journal would provide a factual record of the events 'as they happened' and thus would capture the feeling of the moment rather than have this lost through the time altered view of the events.

The first task carried out was a review of the previous year's work in order to establish targets or areas for improvement. I personally dislike the term 'target setting' as it suggests because you have set a target for the end of the cycle embarked upon you will achieve an improvement, rather than addressing the real needs of the student. The target set may or may not be realistic and often does not meet the student's needs. Megahy (1998, p.35)[20] quotes Munby (1995) as an example of this practice.

> "Target setting is particularly difficult to implement effectively. High attainers are rarely given truly challenging targets ('keep up the good work') and low attainers are often asked to 'concentrate more' or 'work harder' rather than being given useful and graspable targets. Munby rightly stresses that effective strategies for raising individual achievement often involve the setting or negotiating of challenging, appropriate, specific and achievable targets."

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[13] See Appendix D – Year 10 Summer Exam Results showing boys at risk

[14] See Appendix D – Letter to parents.

[15] Lloyd G. (2003, p.3). How do I/we help the students in Key Stage 4 improve their learning if they are in danger of underperforming? University of Bath MA programme submission.

[16] Cohen L. & Manion L. (1994). *Research Methods in Education*, Routledge.

[17] See Appendix E – Enquiry Journal

[18] Cohen L. & Manion L. (1994, p.197). *Research Methods in Education*, Routledge.

[19] Bassey M. (1998, p.107). *Action Research for Improving Educational Practice*, in: Halsall R. (ed), *Teacher Research and School Improvement*, Open University Press. pp.93-107.

[20] Megahy T. (1998). *Managing the curriculum: pastoral care as a vehicle for raising student achievement,* in: Calvert M. & Henderson J. (eds), *Managing Pastoral Care,* Cassell, pp.26-52.

I would prefer to adopt a process of identifying achievable levels of attainment in subjects relative to the student's interests or more pertinently their needs as they progress through the education system. This process was carried out in tutorial time with a proforma given to the students with baseline information so they were able to assess their own situation and needs.[21] The tutor led the sessions and this enabled me to see and support those boys whose learning I was aiming to improve. Megahy (1998, p.35)[22] quotes Munby (1995) again;

> "We must ensure that students are given opportunities to be involved in their own assessment, … . This requires that proper, supportive reviewing procedures are built into the school's tutorial system to help the individual student to make sense of his/her attainment and provide a person-centred context."

(Following the boys preliminary examinations later in the year a similar review of the progress was made based on the levels of attainment identified at this point. This allows for the reflection and review of events based on the methodology of action research.)

Validation of this work with the students was carried out through interviews with the schools Independent Careers Advisor. All boys in Year 11 are interviewed at some point during the year to help them with their post 16 choices and options. Due to the particular circumstances that the four boys identified 'at risk' found themselves in, I decided that it would be beneficial for them to have their interviews as promptly as possible. This would enable them to clarify their needs within their current situation.[23] One boy was to have a follow up meeting, with his mother present, to help further with his post 16 planning.

Following these interviews I arranged a meeting with the Careers Advisor for a debriefing session to identify an appropriate way forward for the boys. I had decided to record this meeting via a web cam connected to my laptop in order to have easy access to the images to reflect on my 'unseen' reactions to our conversation plus notes on the pre-agreed areas of discussion.[24] Having done trial web cam sessions[25] in preparation for the debriefing I found I was unable to record the actual meeting due to feedback from the mains supply in my office. Fortunately I had arranged to do the notes at the same time.[26] One of the boys missed his initial meeting and when this was rearranged I tried to record that debriefing session, this time using the laptops battery power in order to over come the problem but was still unsuccessful.

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[21] See Appendix F – An example of a completed proforma.
[22] Megahy T. (1998). *Managing the curriculum: pastoral care as a vehicle for raising student achievement,* in: Calvert M. & Henderson J. (eds), *Managing Pastoral Care,* Cassell, pp.26-52.
[23] See Appendix G – Boys notes from meetings with Careers Advisor.
[24] Lloyd G. (2003, p.7). How do I/we help the students in Key Stage 4 improve their learning if they are in danger of underperforming? University of Bath MA programme submission.
[25] See Appendix H– CDRom with trial sessions.
[26] See Appendix I – Meeting notes.

The Careers Advisor's meeting with the boys and then myself helped to clarify the situation and confirm my feelings with regard to the boys' progression post 16. The Careers Advisor was able to offer advice and information with regards to other educational establishments and courses. We both felt, having spoken to the boys, that in certain cases they would be better suited to different educational environments to the one found here. This was to influence the subsequent discussions and advice given to the boys with regard to their current studies and application procedures for the next academic year, in order to maximise their learning potential. This information was subsequently shared with the school's Head of Sixth Form, so she was aware of the boys' situation if she had to match them to appropriate AS/A2 courses for next year.

The boy who missed the initial careers interview was also missing an increasing number of lessons. The school has a system of concern forms which allows teachers to inform Heads of School of such instances or problems. I received two such forms in quick succession with regard to this boy, which questioned whether he should be entered for the GCSE in that subject.[27] This type of information relies on the member of staff being able to exercise their professional judgement in these circumstances. As Hanks (1998, p.170-171)[28] indicates with regard to professional judgement in terms of underachievement there are certain characteristics demonstrated,

> the student had presented an exceptional piece of work but had never (or rarely) achieved this standard since;
> staff had overheard other colleagues discussing the work of a student and noted that s/he does not perform as well for them in their lessons;
> the student's oral work is often thoughtful, provoking and articulate but written work rarely matches this standard. (p.170)

On further discussion with the appropriate members of staff it transpired that the first and third points were apparent in this boy's situation and in addition the following from Hanks (1998) is noticed.

> "A further factor mentioned was that while the teacher may have set expected standards of achievement and the rest of the class are striving to meet these, the underachiever pays only lip service to this and does only what is necessary to meet the minimum requirement. This involves a sense of rejection on the part of the underachiever for the subject, the methodology and perhaps the culture of the school." (p.171)

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[27] See Appendix J – Concern forms

[28] Hanks K. (1998). *Monitoring Students' Work to Raise Attainment and Investigate the Problem of Underachievement*, in: Halsall R. (ed), *Teacher Research and School Improvement*, Open University Press. pp.167-178.

At this point I circulated a questionnaire[29] to all members of staff who taught this particular boy in order to gauge his current situation with regards to attendance and progress.[30] There was concern in all subjects and I decided to invite the boy's mother in for a discussion on the way forward with regard to his current situation. Part of the boy's problem was non-attendance due to uncertificated "illness"; his mother worked and was not always able to make sure he attended school. The school followed up the absence through direct contact with the home and subsequently the school's Education Welfare Officer. However, due to the nature of the condoned absence little more could be done under the circumstances.

The subsequent meeting which took place after the preliminary examinations was attended by the boy, his mother, the assistant head of middle school and myself. The meeting was initially quite antagonistic as the mother felt the school was not helping the situation by our actions. Eventually the boy expressed a desire to discuss "his GCSE's" and we were able to move on with the meeting. This showed a significant breakthrough as the student was now taking responsibility and 'possession' of his learning. The end result was a reduction in the boy's timetable from nine to six GCSE subjects, which all parties felt was achievable.

Subsequent checks were made on the four boys through the termly grade and the post preliminary examination reports. Both gave strong indications of the boys' progress and areas of concern that required improvement.[31] I produced a preliminary examination results sheet,[32] as I had for the year 10 examinations, which started the cycle of monitoring the boys' progress. This sheet directly showed the progress or lack of progress made from the initial analysis. This is illustrated in the comparative results table below.

		Eng	Eng Lit	Mth	Sci	Fre	His	Gy	BS	Art	DT	PE	Avg pts
Boy 1	Y10 Exams	C		E	DD	D	E	C	D				4.0
	Prelim Exams	B	C	C	DD	C	E	E	B				4.6
Boy 2	Y10 Exams	B		D	EE	D	D			C	C		4.3
	Prelim Exams	C	B	D	DD	C	C			E	D		4.4
Boy 3	Y10 Exams	C		D	CC	C	D				E	C	4.5
	Prelim Exams	D	C	D	DD	C	D				D	C	4.3
Boy 4	Y10 Exams	E		A*	CC	E		C		B		E	4.8
	Prelim Exams	D	E	D	DD	F		E		U		E	3.0

A fifth boy became of concern following the preliminary examinations because his average points score dropped below the indicator point of 5, which triggers the process of intervention. This is illustrated in the next table.

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[29] Lloyd G. (2003, p.8). How do I/we help the students in Key Stage 4 improve their learning if they are in danger of underperforming? University of Bath MA programme submission.
[30] See Appendix K – Questionnaires and response summary sheets.
[31] See Appendix L – Examples of completed grade & preliminary examination reports.
[32] See Appendix M – Preliminary examination results sheet.

		Eng	Eng Lit	Mth	Sci	Fre	His	Gy	BS	Art	DT	Spa	Avg pts
Boy 5	Y10 Exams	B		D	CC	A		C		C		A	5.5
	Prelim Exams	B	B	D	DD	B		D		E		B	4.8

He was supported alongside the others as he continued to work towards his GCSE's. The process of identifying achievable levels of attainment in subjects was repeated using a modified proforma[33] but this time the boys had the knowledge that their actual GCSE's were much closer and the examinations they had taken were of that standard.

The parents received the reports and the completed proformas so as to provide feedback and as much information as possible about the progress made, based on the starting point of the initial meetings held at the beginning of the year. To emphasis this by using Megahy (1998, p.35)[34] quoting Munby (1995) again but extending the quote,

> "*We must ensure that students are given opportunities to be involved in their own assessment,* and that grades and levels are not reported to parents in isolation."

This parallels the themes identified by the schools Learning Support Coordinator in her comments on my Methods of Educational Enquiry.[35] A subsequent parent teacher meeting was held to allow discussion of the reports and proforma information and I had further meetings with the parents of the boys to deal with their concerns. After this we only had a few weeks left prior to the start of Year 11 study leave. During this time the staff concentrated on revision with the boys and I helped support them to the best of my ability during what can be a difficult time for the boys at school between the preliminary examinations and the start of the GCSE's.
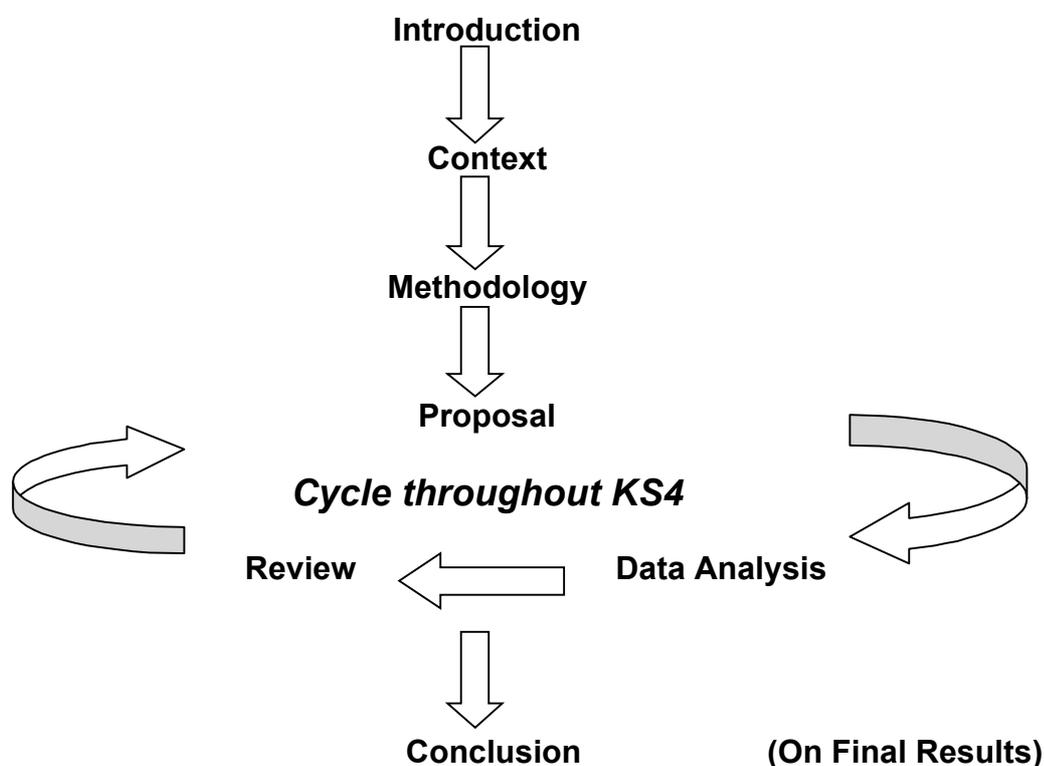
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[33] See Appendix N – An example of a modified proforma.
[34] Megahy T. (1998). *Managing the curriculum: pastoral care as a vehicle for raising student achievement,* in: Calvert M. & Henderson J. (eds), *Managing Pastoral Care,* Cassell, pp.26-52.
[35] See Appendix A - feedback notes from the Learning Support Coordinator.

Conclusion

The following conclusion is longer than originally intended as it ties in the many themes covered in the previous section. My Methods of Educational Enquiry outlined specific areas for the presentation of this enquiry.[36] However, when writing it up I found these headings needed to be less rigid, following more the approach advocated by McNiff (2002, p.14)[37] than those outlined by Bassey (1998, p.93-95)[38] and Cohen and Manion (1994, p198). [39] The identification of an area of concern, the action taken, followed by the review and appropriate new action happens as a continuous cycle, as seen in the methodology section, rather than the initial linear approach to description outlined in the enquiry plan. As I state in my plan, 'Although this process is shown as a linear model, the methodology to review stages will form a cycle of research, analysis, and reflection as the enquiry unfolds.' (Lloyd, 2003, p.10)[40] This is illustrated in the following diagram.

The cycle of proposal, data analysis and review would occur throughout KS4, on the adoption of the educational enquiry within the school. A conclusion is then reached on completion of the GCSE examinations.

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[36] Lloyd G. (2003, p.10, 4-5). How do I/we help the students in Key Stage 4 improve their learning if they are in danger of underperforming? University of Bath MA programme submission.

[37] McNiff J. (2002). Action Research for Professional Development - Concise Advice for New Action Researchers.

[38] Bassey M. (1998). *Action Research for Improving Educational Practice*, in: Halsall R. (ed), *Teacher Research and School Improvement*, Open University Press. pp.93-107.

[39] Cohen L. & Manion L. (1994). *Research Methods in Education*, Routledge.

[40] Lloyd G. (2003, p.10). How do I/we help the students in Key Stage 4 improve their learning if they are in danger of underperforming? University of Bath MA programme submission.

A key aspect of my approach with the boys was based on mutual respect. If I wanted them to respect me I felt I had to show respect for their situation or circumstances. The possibility of them underperforming may have to do with personal circumstances either at home or in relation to pastoral issues within school rather than purely academic reasons. The International Telegraph carried an article which described how Ofsted had identified success in the education of boys where a level of respect existed with their staff[41]. This helped to justify and provide confirmation that this was an appropriate approach to have adopted during the year.

Validation of this approach was to come on the book collection day which followed the completion of the GCSE papers. At the end of the session one of the five boys I had been supporting came up and shook my hand and thanked me for everything I had done for him during the year. The words that he used which struck me the most were, "thanks for putting up with me". I had spoken to his mother regularly over the twelve months and she indicated that he felt I was supportive towards him, but this conversation for me was to demonstrate my educational influence in this situation.

Three of the boys were from maternal single parent families, it would be too easy to blame the problems they experienced on this but they demonstrated certain features identified by Morgan (1985, p.22-38)[42] as characteristic of children in these circumstances.

> "Safeguarding loyal adherence to the family may lead to failure in outside social involvements in the categories of school phobia, learning failure, or delinquency." (p.22)

The school phobia and learning failure were certainly demonstrated along with minor levels of delinquency. He then quoted Wallerstein and Kelly (1976) who;

> "theorize that divorce has the potential for disrupting the flow of the natural developmental process in children because several years of disequilibrium might follow a divorce. A span of several years represents a significant proportion of a child's entire life experience; however, these researchers believe that the disruption can be reversed or modified with counselling." (p.24)

The value placed on education by these boys was not that high; their priorities lay elsewhere, possibly due to the family circumstances. Their education had experienced a disruption but I felt through developing a 'mentoring role' with them I was able to encourage them to strengthen their learning. Hymer (2000, p.67)[43] uses The Tomorrow's Men Project to illustrate the problem identified which I was trying to compensate for through my position.

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[41] International Telegraph, July 2003 issue No.625 pg. 10 – See Appendix O Copy of Article
[42] Morgan S. (1985). *Children in Crises – A Team Approach in the Schools,* Taylor & Francis.
[43] Hymer B. (2000). *Understanding and Overcoming Underachievement in Boys*, in: Montgomery D. (ed), *Able Underachievers*, Whurr Publishers, pp.62-75.

> "The Tomorrow's Men project carried out by a group of unspecified researchers at Oxford University was widely reported in the press. They surveyed more than 1400 boys aged 13 to 19 and found that over 90% of them who felt that their fathers spent time with them and took an active interest in their progress emerged as confident, hopeful, 'can-do' individuals. Seventy-two per cent of those boys whose fathers were perceived as having low levels of engagement fell into the group with the lowest levels of self-esteem and confidence, and with the greatest susceptibility to depression, poor attitude to school and delinquent behaviour."

One boy in particular demonstrated various levels of school phobia often dictated by his circumstances. Morgan picks up two themes to further illustrate this, one on the fear of abandonment from (Pecot, 1970);

> "…… the custodial parent will also desert the home. As a result, they become overly dependent upon the remaining parent and unwilling to attend school, often developing psychosomatic illnesses if continued pressure is applied ……" , (p.31)

and a second on a study from (Levy-Shiff, 1982) which found that

> "…… single-parent mothers had a conflict between overindulgence of their sons because of a desire to compensate for the father's absence and an attempt to avoid overindulgence because of a desire to bring up their sons normally ……" . (p.38)

This second theme often caused tensions which allowed the boy to control the mother-son relationship through the first theme.

Having these concerns overshadowing their school work I tried to deal with the boys' as sympathetically as possible, taking into account the importance of their education at this time. I did wonder if part of the problem was that the boys were unable to show their feelings and relate to others because of the lack of a 'male' role model. If this was the case I felt I had to use my position to provide this positive supporting role. As Skelton (1998, p.77)[44] identifies from (Siedler, 1991),

> "Part of the problem is the myth of a 'monolithic' masculinity the assumption held by most men that *other* men act in a coherent, unified and 'manly' way. A pastoral care programme in secondary schools can play an important role in breaking down this myth by encouraging men, including male pastoral care managers, to share experience and consider alternative ways of behaving."

The remaining two boys came from stable families. I felt their difficulties were also based in these ideas put forward by Siedler. They were at the lower end of our academic spectrum and had problems dealing with this in terms of the

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[44] Skelton A. (1998). *Managing pastoral care with masculinity in mind,* in: Calvert M. & Henderson J. (eds), *Managing Pastoral Care,* Cassell, pp.69-80.

school society as whole. They found it easier to 'go along' with the 'monolithic masculinity' than be fully open with regard to the situation they were experiencing. So they also needed a positive supporting role to be played by myself but in this different context.

As I commented in my introduction with regard to the Salamanca Statement, we are not a regular school but we do experience some of the same problems as regular schools, due to the boys being exposed to the different elements of society. Hopefully, with this in mind I am able to help the boys and encourage them to improve their learning.

Postscript

The day of the GCSE results was to provide the confirmation as to how successful I had been in supporting the boys during the year. Their final grades would show what improvement had occurred during the twelve months since the year 10 internal end of year examinations.

Boy 1 had decided to leave and achieved six passes at A-C, with an average point's score of 5.0. He also obtained three D grades, two from dual award science and one in geography, giving him nine GCSE's in total and was able to take up his college place.

Boy 2 achieved seven passes at A-C, his average points score was 5.1 this included two D grades from dual award science which gave him nine GCSE's in total; he just needs to finalise his AS courses in our sixth form. He was the boy who thanked me on book collection day.

Boy 3 was undecided whether to leave and obtained nine passes at A-C with an average point's score of 5.4; he has still not decided what to do next year in terms of his post 16 education. I felt staying with us was his best option, as did his mother, for a variety of reasons both educationally and socially. He eventually decided to return to school and on the first day back thanked me for the help and support given during the previous year. He said he wanted to be back and was grateful in his own words for me 'kicking him up the arse' to make sure he did his work and achieved the results he did!

Boy 4 had his timetable reduced to six subjects after the preliminary examinations and this proved to be a successful decision as he gained all his passes at C grade or above with an average points score of 5.6. He did not want to see his grades on the results day. I had seen them and encouraged him to open the envelope; he was visibly relieved and smiled briefly. Talking to him he felt he had done well but wished he had done better. I said that under the circumstances he had achieved a great deal, as he was now able to go to college and do his course, which would give him a fresh start. He said he supposed so and shook my hand and thanked me for my help, which was the most emotion he had shown all year.

Boy 5 had decided to leave and achieved seven passes at A-C. He also had two D's in dual award science which gave him an average points score of 5.5 and ensured him of his college place.

All the boys achieved the initial trigger score for concern of 5.0 points or above, so can be considered to have been successful. Their scores were below the schools average points score of 6.83 for the year group. So their performance in terms of a selective grammar school may have been below 'average' but they achieved results, which compare very favourably with other students nationally.[45]

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[45] Five passes at C or above being a recognised standard of achievement.

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Articles:

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