

Taking Boys Seriously: the next steps (TBS 2)

- Increasing Attainment
- Raising Aspiration
- Promoting Positive Attitudes

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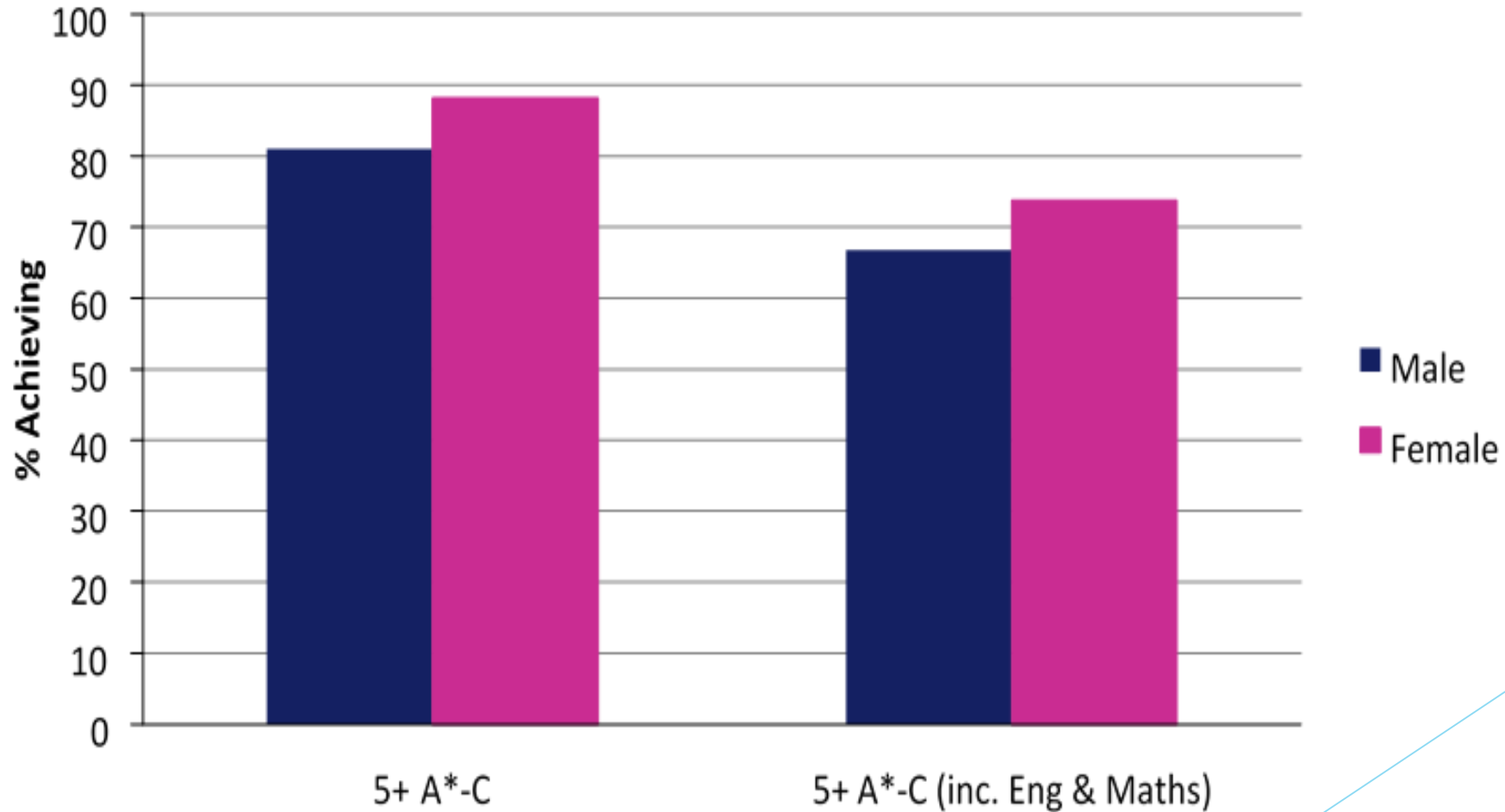
The 'problems' the new research is trying to address

- ▶ Low attainment among young males from MDM Decile 1 communities
- ▶ Their lack of aspiration, self-belief and self esteem
- ▶ Their low levels of Higher Education participation
- ▶ Deficit-model thinking and the pathologizing of low attainers

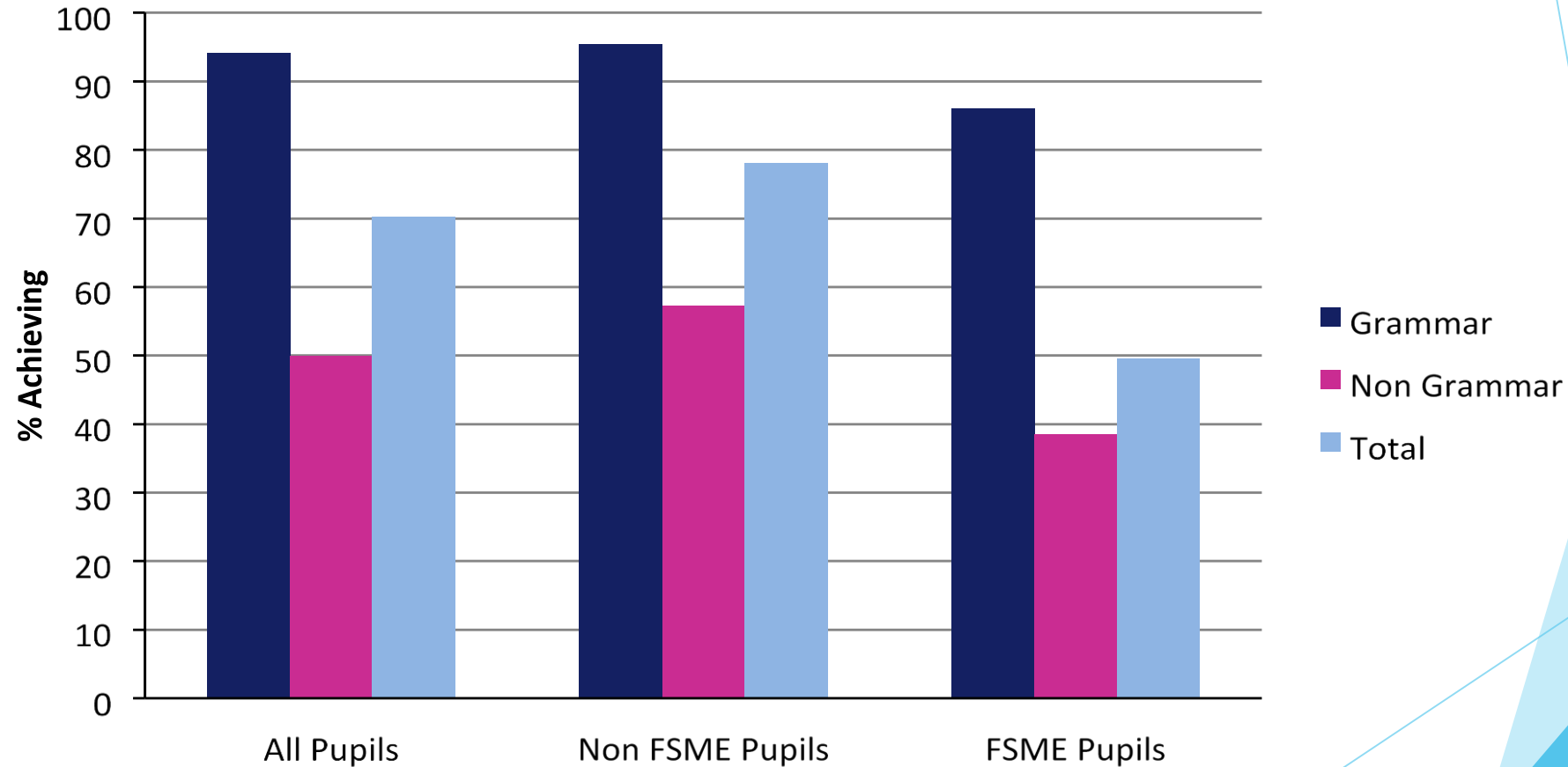
Key aspects of the new study

- ▶ Builds on the (2012) seminal study “Taking Boys Seriously” by Ken Harland & Sam McCready
- ▶ Mindful of the context within which this low attainment occurs
- ▶ Recognises the value of youth & community work
- ▶ Masculine identities and their impact on learning
- ▶ Aims to inform policy, practice and training

NI male/female GCSE performance 2017/18



5 GCSEs (A*-C) including English & GCSE maths 2017/18



HE participation among MDM Decile 1 males in Northern Ireland

- ▶ Data show a significant under-participation of young MDM Decile 1 males in HE
- ▶ Across NI, participation rate of young MDM Decile 1 males is around 2% - an equitable proportion would be around 5%
- ▶ Data suggests these young males are both unqualified and uninspired to participate in HE
- ▶ Non-continuation rates are also higher for this social group

Learning barriers for boys

- ▶ Motivation
- ▶ Falling behind their peers
- ▶ Literacy & numeracy deficits
- ▶ Boredom & distraction
- ▶ Being unprepared for key transitional stages
- ▶ Construction of masculine identities (Harland & McCready, 2012)

The construction of masculine identities

- ▶ The centrality of schools in the regulation and reproduction of masculinities (Younger & Warrington, 2005)
- ▶ Boys establishing self-esteem through social interaction not academic performance (Haywood & Mac an Ghail, 2012)
- ▶ The adoption of 'laddish strategies' (Stahl, 2017)
- ▶ Maintaining a 'macho image' (Renold, 2004)
- ▶ Boys perceiving education as a feminine activity (Blanchard et al., 2017)

Acknowledging the context within which working class male under-performance occurs

- ▶ Poverty and low attainment
- ▶ Problematic conceptualisations of 'achievement' & 'underachievement'
- ▶ Issues within the school curriculum
- ▶ Class-based inequities in the current education system

Poverty, deprivation & low attainment

- ▶ The poorest children have the lowest level of attainment
- ▶ Educational deficits emerge early & widen throughout childhood
- ▶ Limited parental support
- ▶ Negative community norms (Leitch et al., 2017)
- ▶ Levels of Child Poverty in the UK

Problematic conceptualisations of 'achievement' & 'underachievement'

- ▶ Monologic focus on individual attainment
- ▶ Socially constructed / class-based conceptualisations of 'achievement'
- ▶ 'Underachievement' as a label
- ▶ The neglect of structural and institutional barriers (Gillies, 2008)

Issues within the school curriculum

- ▶ Assumed engagement (Young et al., 2014)
- ▶ Insufficient flexibility in the curriculum (Barrow, 2015)
- ▶ Perceived relevance of the curriculum (HoC, 2014)
- ▶ Disconnect between curriculum and boys' own life experiences and aspirations (Harland & McCready, 2012)

The current education system

- ▶ Middle class values & working class identifications
- ▶ Class-based inequities
- ▶ Pathologising the low attainer
- ▶ (an education system) “specifically geared to differentiate and separate, to select and reject, to reward and promote, on the grounds of attainment” (Gillies, 2008: 14)

Our case study projects and pilot interventions

- ▶ Initial focus in North Belfast Schools and Youth Work organisations
- ▶ E.g. Belfast Boys Model – pastoral care and efficacy of existing school-community linkages
- ▶ E.g. Monkstown Boxing Club – Box Clever project
- ▶ School-based interventions using Youth Work methodologies
- ▶ Community Learning Hubs

Emergent themes in the early data

- ▶ The value of youth work methodologies
- ▶ Support during key transition stages
- ▶ Early identification of learning barriers
- ▶ Helping boys develop and sustain higher levels of resilience
- ▶ Promotion of a positive and solution-focused narrative around boys and education

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