

■ course of the week: underachievement



GETTY

Jobs for the boys

Is the national curriculum a feminine document? I certainly think there's too much coursework and not enough of the kind of hands-on challenges that motivate boys. I find fewer boys than girls reach level 5 in their Sats and I think this is one of the reasons.

This course, for secondary teachers, encourages us to change the way we deliver lessons, to make sure they suit boys and girls. I've introduced more work under timed conditions. It means you can give the boys a pep talk, get them psyched up. They know it's for a short time so they focus and give it everything. It's almost like a race, and that excites them.

I've also started pairing up girls and boys and letting them work together. Boys are often happy to stay within their peer groups and not to be noticed. This is one way of shaking them out of that. I thought they might mess around or just let the girl take charge, but they respond really well.

It gives them a sense of responsibility and they

don't want to let their partner down. I use it all the time, with every year group, even if it's only for 10 minutes a lesson.

The course also made me think about the way I talk to boys. Instead of ordering them around, I try to give them a sense of control. So I don't say: "You've got a test next week". Instead, I ask them whether they'd like the test at the beginning or the end of the week.

I think one of the reasons boys can be less successful is that they are afraid of being judged. I try to stress potential, rather than past performance, and I constantly encourage them and tell them what I think they can achieve. Once they start to surprise themselves, motivation takes care of itself. This course has made a huge difference and I hope it will be reflected in this summer's results ■

Rhian Lewis is an art teacher at Stamwell School, Glamorgan. She was talking to **Steven Hastings**

The details

Boys are from Mars, Girls are from Venus: Practical Classroom Strategies to Address Underachievement of Boys. Run by Lighthouse Professional Development www.lighthouse.tv Several dates in June and November, £195+VAT