

# Ask the Expert

**Got a problem?**  
If you're facing a challenge at school, email your questions to [info@teachprimary.com](mailto:info@teachprimary.com) and we'll put them to our expert panel

Gary Wilson, consultant on OUP's Project X reading programme, tackles the ongoing challenge of raising boys' achievement...

## Q

**WE HAVE NO MALE TEACHING STAFF IN OUR SCHOOL. SHOULD WE BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE LACK OF MALE ROLE MODELS FOR THE BOYS?**

## A

We are all aware that many primary schools and early years settings are made up almost entirely of female teachers. Nearly half the primary schools in the UK have no male teachers at all. We have long heard the cry that if only we had more male teachers then we wouldn't have such a problem with boys' underachievement. But it's not going to happen; we need to get over it and move on! We can't use this as an excuse to absolve ourselves of addressing the issue in other ways, such as focusing on appropriate teaching and learning styles; ensuring boys are actively engaged in developing literacy; engaging older males at home; and focusing on the development of emotional intelligence.

In primary schools we often hear parents crying out for more male teachers to "do the discipline!" and "Take the football!" Wrong! These are not the kind of male teachers that boys respond to, neither are they the kind we want. Boys love male teachers who are fun, fair and who let them know exactly where they stand. One thing is very clear: boys need boundaries; otherwise

## Q

**GENERALLY SPEAKING, READING IS NOT VERY POPULAR WITH OUR KS2 BOYS. HOW CAN WE ENCOURAGE THEM TO READ AND WHAT SORT OF READING MATTER MIGHT APPEAL?**

## A

The first question we need to ask is how did these boys get through KS1 without developing an interest in reading? One thing is certain, it's not always the school's fault. The latest Book Trust figures show that only around half of our KS1 children are read to at all at home. Very often it will be just mum that does the reading. In many cases boys will rarely see older males reading at home, and if they do it might be an instruction manual or a newspaper. This gives the impression that 'this is what men

do'; they read to find out.

As teachers, we've also been led down the path by people who say, "Just let them read whatever they want. They'll soon move onto other stuff later." This argument simply doesn't hold water. Many lose interest in reading fiction in KS2, and around 80 percent of boys in high schools do not read for pleasure at all. Before boys start school, we need to stress to their parents that we desperately need to get them excited about reading, and that reading really needs to be fiction. They need that love of story as it helps redress the weakest link in many boys' learning processes: their ability to reflect. What's more, reading fiction is about developing emotional intelligence.

they can fly off in any direction.

In the absence of male teachers in the primary sector, there are many things we can do. We can use some of our older boys - in Y6, for example - to work as playground buddies or to help younger children with their reading. Cross phase mentoring is also

extremely powerful. Boys from the local secondary school can help to coach the Y5 or Y6 football team. But don't stop there; they should also teach younger boys to sing, dance, do drama or cook in order to break down gender stereotypes.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gary Wilson is a leading expert on raising boys' achievement. As a teacher for over 27 years, he has led award-winning campaigns, written several books and delivered training in hundreds of schools. Gary is currently a consultant on Project X, a programme designed to raise boys' literacy standards. [garywilsonraisingboysachievement.com](http://garywilsonraisingboysachievement.com)

