

ARK

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Can Singapore maths make our children fall in love with long division?

Pupils in the Far East are better at maths than ours. So why don't we use their methods? Damian Whitworth talks to the teachers doing just that

Tell me the commutative law of multiplication. Quickly now, spit it out. Sorry, too slow. Several of the six and seven-year-olds in Farhana Nazu's year 2 class had their hands up first and they all know the answer: the commutative law means that you can swap the numbers around and the answer will still be the same.

Not hard, but perhaps, like me, you panicked when the question was thrown out there. Let us take a seat at the back of the class and observe as the children do simple multiplication. They are asked to work out how many biscuits there are if there are five jars and each jar contains four biscuits.

Some of the children physically count off groups of four on a bead string. Others take a pictorial approach, drawing jumps along a number line. Those who are able write the equation: $5 \times 4 = 20$.

The lesson proceeds smoothly. When the children move from their desks to the carpet and back they count out loud together in multiples. They work quietly and diligently. "Maths is my favourite subject," one

girl tells me. "Honestly," Nazu says, "they love maths. It's a natural thing just to enjoy maths."

Enjoy maths? Now there is an intriguing concept. I managed to spend weeks at a time at primary school staring at the same page of the maths textbook. Without the groundwork in the early years I was tormented by the subject all the way through the desperate tutoring that enabled me to scrape the crucial grade C at O level (required for university) without actually understanding much of what I was doing.

It is possible that maths today is generally taught better than it was in the 1970s. Certainly my two children have got a better grip on the subject than I had. Yet Britain still fails its children when it comes to teaching them maths. The latest Pisa (Programme for International Student Assessment) results from the OECD (from 2012) show the UK's 15-year-olds in 26th place for their maths skills. The top of the table was dominated by Asian countries and cities, with Shanghai in first place followed by Singapore.

There may be cause for hope in lessons like this one at Grazebrook primary school in Hackney where children are taught using mathematics mastery, a system based on the successful approach known as Singapore maths (or sometimes

"shangapore maths" because it also takes in elements of the way maths is taught in Shanghai). Under the maths mastery system fewer subjects are studied, but in greater depth. The whole class studies the same subject at the same time, with the abler pupils exploring in greater detail, before everyone together moves on to the next subject. There is an emphasis on problem solving and understanding and less focus on memorising methods.

A recent study by the Institute of Education at University of

London and the University of Cambridge looked at

the progress made by pupils being taught using the maths mastery scheme at 90 primary and 50 secondary schools.

The researchers found that after one year of maths mastery

there were "small but positive" effects. They

concluded that while the system "cannot be seen as a 'silver bullet' that will guarantee a country success in mathematics", it "shows signs of promise, and should now be tested over a longer time horizon and a greater number of schools." The report suggested that the findings, which are the first evidence that British



students could benefit from the Asian approach to maths, had potentially important implications for education policy.

Nick Gibb, the schools minister, has lamented the “stagnation” in the maths performance of Britain’s children and praised maths mastery because it “embodies the idea that every pupil can do well and achieve high standards in maths”. Maths mastery was developed by the education charity [Ark](#), which runs a string of academies in the UK. The programme, which began in 2012, is running in more than 200 primary schools and 67 secondary schools.

Dr Helen Drury, the woman behind the programme, says in her book, *Mastering Mathematics*, that Britain needs to change its thinking. “It’s time to stop acting as if mathematics is for ‘clever’ people. It is not ‘OK’ to be ‘bad at mathematics,’” she writes.

“Every child can succeed in mathematics, whatever their socio-economic background or prior attainment, as long as they are given the appropriate learning experiences.” She says that if you go into a maths classroom in Singapore it is hard to work out which ability set you are observing. The teachers act as if they expect the children to succeed.

I am one of the “bad at mathematics” people. My kids, aged 12 and 9, gave up expecting help with maths homework when they discovered that I could no longer remember how to do long division. When I talk to Drury she certainly makes her scheme sound sensible. The problem with the teaching of maths in recent history has not been that schools are teaching too little maths, but that they are trying to cover too much, with the result that topics are skimmed over.

“Maths is such a connected subject but it gets sort of popped into tiny buckets, so you might spend a day or two days or three days learning about

multiplication. A lot of the class will only be beginning to make sense of the idea but you move on and look at area.” Some pupils will work out the area of a shape by counting squares because they haven’t mastered multiplication. “The teacher would feel it would confuse some of the children and they’d be right because they hadn’t spent long enough with multiplication in the first place so that they can then make the connections.”

In Singapore, she says, students in the first year of school spend several weeks looking at the number 10, even though many of them can already count above 100. This gives them deeper understanding, which is lacking in many older pupils here. “If you talk to people here about their experience of mathematics there was a point where it stopped making sense. They resort to memorising methods.”

Drury was on the drafting team for the maths national curriculum.

Schools using maths mastery still need to cover the national curriculum, which Drury says they do over the course of the year. However, they focus on teaching fewer topics in greater depth each term, rather than trying to cover the whole year’s topics in the first term then returning to them — an approach that she believes is driven by schools wanting to test pupils before Christmas. Drury also has concerns that the maths national curriculum

becomes too advanced at the top of key stage 2 (end of primary school). One example: she doesn’t think that primary pupils need to be doing algebra.

In the early years, maths mastery shows pupils how to tackle a problem in three different ways: first, by using concrete objects (such as the bead string), then through pictorial representations, before moving on to abstract symbols. Some pupils will inevitably progress to the symbols quicker than others, but the idea is

that a whole class will be working on the same topic.

I say that the methods don’t feel terribly new. “More than that, it was really common practice in the UK before it was in these other countries,” says Drury. Much of the practice draws on western educational research, such as the work of Jerome Bruner, the American psychologist who suggested children should learn through enactive, iconic and symbolic representation. “The idea isn’t to come up with something that is necessarily new because there is plenty that works out there,” says Drury. “In a lot of ways it is about coherence.”

Each one-hour lesson is divided into six parts. 1) Do Now: a warm-up task, done independently at desks. 2) New Learning: introduced by the teacher on the interactive whiteboard as the children sit in rows on the classroom carpet. 3) Talk Task: back at their desks the pupils do a task in pairs. 4) Develop Learning: on the carpet the teacher introduces a problem-solving element that the pupils do in pairs. 5) Independent Task: the children are given work to do by themselves. 6) Plenary: a recap of the lesson back on the carpet.

In the lesson I attend the children count in multiples of two and later five. However, I am told that maths mastery isn’t big on testing times tables. Drury says there is some confusion over times tables and their place in maths mastery. Although the scheme puts less emphasis on rote learning, she admits that it is helpful to know your tables.

“There is a tension in the UK where it is either about learning your tables or it’s about understanding the mathematics. You absolutely need both. You can’t engage in proper mathematics unless you know those times tables because it takes up too much thinking space.”

Not everyone agrees that adopting the Far East approach will work. Professor Ruth Merttens, co-director of the Hamilton Trust, a charity that supports teachers, questions the logic of importing Chinese or Singaporean

materials and “thinking that because it works there it will work here, without regard to cultural factors and differences.”

But Michelle Thomas, the executive head teacher at Grazebrook, says she had tried a variety of teaching schemes before adopting maths mastery. Less able children felt stigmatised, she says, especially when equipment was brought out to help them. Now that equipment is fully integrated in the teaching scheme this is not an issue. The most able pupils, meanwhile, lacked a full understanding of what they were doing. “If you asked very bright children to explain how they did something they would say: ‘I don’t know, I just know how to do it.’ The conceptual understanding was weak.”

The biggest challenge, however, may be to convince parents that maths really matters and stop them from telling their children: “I was rubbish at maths, it didn’t make any difference.”

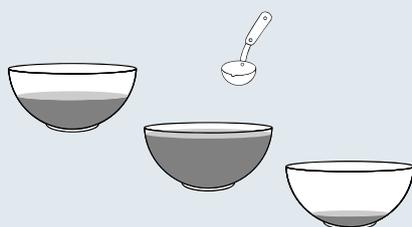
“
**Honestly,
they love
maths. It’s
a natural
thing just
to enjoy
maths**



A Grazebrook pupil doing maths. Above left: the head teacher, Michelle Thomas



Your starter for under-twelves...



QUESTION 1 (AGE 7)

There are 10 ladles of soup in a large pot. The soup is poured into three small bowls: A, B and C.

**Bowl A has more soup than Bowl C.
 Bowl B has more soup than Bowl A.**

Guess the number of ladles of soup in each bowl. Make sure the numbers add up to 10 ladles.

ANSWER

■ There are a number of possible answers (4, 5, 1; 2, 7, 1; 3, 6, 1; 3, 5, 2). There is a rich variety of follow-up questions: which one does the picture look most like?

■ Why can't bowl B have 8 ladles? Why can't bowl B have fewer than 5 ladles? Is there an answer where one bowl contains exactly half as much as another bowl? This last question ties in another area of the curriculum — fractions — to a question, which is originally about number bonds to ten.

■ For concrete support, pupils could use 10 cubes to represent the 10 ladles of soup and put them into piles representing the bowls.

QUESTION 2 (AGE 11)

This shape is made up of a rectangle and two identical right-angled triangles. Its area is 48cm^2 .

The rectangle has an area of 18cm^2 and a perimeter of 18cm. What is the value of x ?



CLUES

■ If the rectangle has an area of 18cm^2 and a perimeter of 18cm, what are the possible side lengths?

■ What must the total area of both triangles be to give an area of 48cm^2 ?

■ What is the height of each triangle?

■ One answer: x is 26. The area of the rectangle is 18cm^2 , so if the horizontal side of the rectangle is 6cm the vertical side must be 3cm. That makes the base of each triangle 10cm (the area of a triangle is the base multiplied by the height divided by 2). So the length of x is $10 + 10 + 6 = 26$.

■ What assumptions were made? The diagram appears to show the longer side of the rectangle as its base. Do we know this to be so? Is the diagram misleading? Could the orientation of the rectangle be different? Can you find a second solution?

■ Although the question is challenging, a range of children should enjoy and learn from it. Some pupils will use objects such as a geoboard or squared paper, many use more formal algebra. A saying among Shanghai teachers is: "the answer is only the beginning."

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Children test their problem-solving at Grazebrook primary school, London



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Education Ark Blacklands Primary Academy

Top marks for Ark as pupils improve

BY LYNDA TURNER
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Hastings Ark Blacklands Primary Academy has been given a major boost after recent statistics revealed that it is in the top five out of 14 primary schools improving faster than the national average.

The academy network Ark released updated key stage 2 results from its 14 primary schools in Hastings, London, Portsmouth and Birmingham. Figures show pupils at Ark primary schools posted their best ever key stage 2 results this year with 72 per cent getting 'Level 4' in reading, writing and mathematics, the expected level age 11. This represents a five point rise on last year's average of 6 per cent. In comparison, primary schools

nationally only improved by two points. There was also a five point rise for Ark pupils getting 'Level 5', above expected levels at age 11.

Lucy Heller, Chief Executive of Ark, said to put these figures in context, around half of Ark pupils in year 6 are eligible for the Pupil Premium and a large proportion of pupils start primary school behind expected levels. "We're pleased to see our pupils do even better than last year," she said. "But we are not complacent, we still want to see every child leave primary school ready for secondary."

At Ark Blacklands Primary Academy, which only joined the network last year, the numbers passing exams for 11 year olds rose from 69 per cent to 84 per cent. Level 5 increased from 10 per cent to 27 per cent. In addition, 86.5 per cent of pupils passed

the phonics check this year (Ark schools use a phonics programme to develop early literacy and communication skill and is a measure of how pupils learn to read in year 1) significantly above the most recent national average of 74 per cent. In the early years, 82 per cent get a 'Good level of development', also significantly above the national average of 60 per cent.

Lorraine Clarke, Principal of Ark Blacklands Primary Academy said the school is extremely pleased with the improved results, and says it's all thanks to the hard work of everyone in school, not least the pupils, adding: "We are looking forward to the new school year, continuing to build on our success.

"I'd like to thank the whole school community, including all the staff and parents for their support this year."





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Academies maintain high standards

The results of one in Marylebone has beaten a number of fee-paying schools in the borough

Hannah McGrath

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While jubilant scenes played out in schools across Westminster there was particular cause for celebration for the borough's academy schools where many staff and students built on last year's improved picture by notching up record results.

Quintin Kynaston Academy in St John's Wood, saw them hold last year's overall 54 per cent A*-C pass rate in five subjects including English and maths.

There were smiles all round as star students including Noor Razooki, 16, celebrated achieving clutches of A* and A grades with their teachers and families. Miss Razooki, 16, who scored four A*s, two As and two Bs said: "I'm so happy and was quite surprised with my results. I thought I would do well but I knew some of my exams were hard.

"I just called my mum and she was really happy and relieved- she's already told everyone!"

Other star performers at the school were Arwa El-Hashemi who achieved seven A*s and three As, Greis Kula who secured five A*s and four As and Ayesha Thaniya who was delighted with three A*s, six As and three Bs.

Ayesha said: "I am so relieved, I want eventually to go and study medicine at Imperial College in

London and these will help."

Her revision tip for future GCSE students would be: "Put 100 per cent effort into it- it's better not to regret it."

Head teacher Alex Atherton said: "congratulations to all students and thank you to all members of staff for all their hard work. Last year our results held when the national picture showed a significant fall. The early indications this year are that QK has bucked the national trend again. Exams are getting harder but we are maintaining our standards."

Students at King Solomon Academy in Penfold Street, Marylebone, managed a stellar performance this year, beating a number of the borough's independent schools and cementing their status as one of the top-performing non-selective academies for a second year running.

An impressive 93pc year 11s celebrated earning five A*-C grades including maths and English, upholding the standard set last year (93pc) while 75pc of students also made the benchmark Ebacc qualification- the Government measure of a student's performance in core academic subjects.

Star pupil Nadia Zaiman, 16, who achieved 11 A*s and whose three brothers also attend King Solomon academy is now hoping to be in the first generation of her family to go to university and has set her sights on medicine.

She said: "I'm excited for the future. I know I'm going to try my hardest."

Max Haimendorf, Secondary head teacher of King Solomon Academy congratulated students and staff and said: "Our pupils, parents and teachers give 100pc every day to build a community where academic success is expected of all our pupils".

A similar success story was to be found at Westminster Academy as students gathered to celebrate their results at the school in Harrow Road. Students kept up the competitive pace set last year with 70pc of students achieving A*- C grades including English and maths.

Staff were particularly proud of the students' achievements in additional and further science subjects, where 97 pc secured A*-C grades, spurring them on to future careers in science and technology.

Nevena Slavova, 16, achieved an outstanding 9 A*s and one A.

She said, "Thank you to the teachers for being so encouraging and for the emotional support they have given."

Principal Smita Bora, said: "Westminster Academy students work extremely hard so I am thrilled they have been rewarded with these wonderful results."



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School	% A*-A 2015	%5 A*-C incl Maths and English 2015	%E-Bacc 2015	%A*-A 2014	%5 A*-C Incl Maths and English 2014	%E-Bacc 2014
Francis Holland School (Westminster, Independent):	76.7,	100,	n/a	79.4,	98.5,	n/a
King Solomon Academy (Westminster):	not provided,	93,	75,	not provided,	93,	76
Portland Place School (Westminster, Independent):	32,	85,	99,	32,	85,	97
St Marylebone CofE School (Westminster):	45,	82,	not provided,	not provided,	78,	55
Westminster Academy (Westminster):	not provided,	70,	not provided,	not provided,	70,	21
Quintin Kynaston Academy (Westminster):	not provided,	54,	not provided,	not provided,	54,	21
Paddington Academy (Westminster):	not provided,	not provided,	not provided,	not provided,	83,	24



Texted your mum? Now enrol at college

Boys have done better at GCSE than last year, but experts say we should be worried that more young women than men are in higher education, writes Julie Henry

Scott Greenfield was not sure how his GCSEs had gone. Although bright, he had struggled with history and maths but was hoping his hard work had paid off.

The pupil at Evelyn Grace Academy, in Brixton, southeast London, need not have worried. Last week he celebrated gaining an A, five Bs and three Cs, with an A in English language and Bs in maths and Chinese. His grades ensure his place at the Brit School, one of the most prestigious performing arts and technology colleges in the country.

"The support the school gave me really helped," he says. "Teachers gave up their time in the evenings, weekends and half-terms to see us through and make us understand what we had to do."

Scott's results, and those of thou-

sands of boys like him, have chipped away at the gender gap that has become a feature of GCSE results. The stand-out statistic when the results were published last Thursday was the narrowing of the divide between boys and girls.

Just over 73% of girls' entries were awarded an A* to C, the same proportion as last year. Boys' results have improved slightly, however, with 64.7% of entries achieving the grades, up from 64.3% last year.

"Girls in my school work really hard," says Scott. "I think boys can be overconfident and more easily distracted but we boys see the girls doing well and then start to knuckle down."

The improvement in boys' results is small but it could be the start of a trend, fuelled by GCSE reforms that are ushering in a reduction in "girl-friendly" coursework and a return to traditional end-of-course exams.

A government assessment of the possible effects of the reforms, published in 2013, suggested the changes could blunt the edge that girls have enjoyed for several years and "strengthen equality of

opportunity in relation to gender".

Schools say the narrowing of the gender gap is evidence of the efforts they are making to help boys.

Brian Lightman, of the Association of School and College Leaders, says: "One of the things schools have become good at is very closely monitoring the progress of every single student. They will be saying, 'Why is this boy who has been doing well at the earlier stages not achieving? What do we need to do?'"

Tony Little, the retiring head of Eton, believes parents have an important role to play too. In his new book, *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Education*, he advises parents not to broach more than one subject at a time with their sons if they want them to listen. He also emphasises the importance of reading. Parents should read to and with their

teenage boys, not just younger children, and even set up reading clubs with other families, he suggests.

While the gender gap at GCSE has reduced slightly, concerns are now being raised about male participation in higher education, with 27,000 more



young women than men due to start university next month.

This gender disparity cuts across social groups in the UK and also affects other western countries. In the US, attempts to maintain the male-to-female balance on campus has led to admissions tutors giving men places over women in borderline cases. In Britain, the Royal Veterinary College has tried to target male applicants to redress a gender imbalance.

The gender gap has “serious consequences” beyond university, according to Bahram Bekhradnia, president of the Higher Education Policy Institute think tank, who warned that female graduates will have to get used to the idea of marrying non-graduates.

“It is a very serious equity issue but it is also a very important social issue,” he says. “Society will need to adapt to the fact that girls won’t be able to marry graduates. Often the breadwinner is going to be a woman, which has implications for child-rearing.”

Bekhradnia and others complain about a lack of research into the issue. “It may be that the ‘lad culture’ among boys means it is just not cool to work hard at school,” he says. “It may be purely to do with biological development – we all go to university too young and boys suffer because of that. There could be a hundred reasons, but someone has to take a look at it and treat it seriously and try to resolve it.”

The lack of boys at university is just as big a problem as the under-representation of girls once was, Bekhradnia warns. “We took it very seriously that girls weren’t going to university 30 years ago,” he says. “We ought to be taking it equally seriously that boys are not going now.”



Scott Greenfield of south London, inset, and these pupils at Stoke Newington School in north London are celebrating GCSE results

What's happening in our state schools is little short of a miracle

Staggering advances have been made by teachers and Academies freed from the heavy hand of the state

FRASER NELSON



Next month, David Cameron will become the first Conservative Prime Minister to send his offspring to a state secondary school – a fact that he loves dropping into conversation. When discussing education in Parliament recently, the Old Etonian declared a personal interest: reform matters, he said, “if you have children at a state school, as I do”. Except, of course, his daughter Nancy won't be going to any old state school. She's off to join Michael Gove's elder child at Grey Coat Hospital School in Westminster, which is as good as a private school. And, if anything, harder to get into.

In a way, the average independent school is pretty egalitarian: if you have the cash, you can buy a place. But to get into the best state school, money is nowhere near enough. A house in a leafy catchment area is a prerequisite, then a five-year game begins. A speedy baptism, where appropriate. Dinner with the vicar, where it helps. And then years of school-gate intelligence-gathering: how big is the catchment area? Whom to nobble, and how? Playing Britain's state-school game is a long and

arduous task, but the prize is the best education that money can't buy.

While politicians have spent years moaning about the state-private divide, teachers have been hard at work breaking it down. The Government now releases results for each school every January, and the data destroys the idea of fee-paying schools having a monopoly on excellence. For A-Levels, England's 520 top state schools actually outperform the 520 private schools – in spite of having a fraction of their budget. This really is quite extraordinary. It's well-known that our private schools are the best in the world; what's less well-known is that the best state schools are even better.

Colchester County, Dover Grammar, Wirral Grammar, Reading School, Wolverhampton Girls' – they're not as famous as Eton, yet they all outperform it in the A-level league tables. Of course, they all have entrance exams so they're all dealing with pretty exceptional raw material. And often, dealing with parents who have been happy to move house, fake a divorce, pay for private tuition; anything to get past the 11-plus. This is why Sir Anthony Seldon, former Master of Wellington College, speaks about a “middle-class stranglehold” on the best state schools and wants parents to pay.

His argument is certainly coherent: if such schools are colonised by the rich and well-connected, why not ask them to pay fees just as the universities now do? The answer, of course, is that parents have already paid through their taxes. But at least his analysis goes beyond the tired (and tiresome) state vs private argument. You could abolish every private school in England (as the Labour Party has been



advocating, on and off, since 1943) and still end up with a hideously unequal

state system which educates the richest best and the poorest worst. The Prime Minister is not slumming it with Grey Coat Hospital School, as he well knows. But his reforms are helping to break the link between poverty and bad results. On the A-level league table, Grey Coat Hospital now sits right next to Mossbourne Community Academy – formerly the infamous Hackney Downs school in East London. Pupils threw stones at staff, discipline was non-existent and academic achievement was pitiful. Yet its closure in 1995 was deeply controversial. To its defenders, the problem lay with the pupils rather than the school. They're dealing with troubled families with chaotic lives, the argument ran, so its failure was the result of deep social problems, not bad teaching. Exactly the same argument – blame the parents – is trotted out today by the enemies of school reform. It's the soft bigotry of low expectations.

Now, Mossbourne – which serves the same neighbourhoods as it did in 1995 – is one of the best in the land. A quarter of its pupils qualify for free school meals, yet 84 per cent secured five good GCSEs yesterday, far above the national average. It's amazing what pupils from deprived neighbourhoods can do, given great tuition. It's a hugely cheering thought: children from communities once served by the worst school in Britain can now attend one as good as that used by the Prime Minister. This was exactly what Tony Blair was aiming for when he and Andrew Adonis started their City Academy reforms, setting schools free from local authority control. Soon, there will be 5,000 Academies.

Yet vindication of Blair's reform has come at a time when Labour has lost interest in helping pupils in this way. Its likely next leader, Jeremy Corbyn,

has pledged to end what he calls a "failed" experiment. Only the most ideologically blinkered could persuade themselves that reform has failed. The city that has undergone the most reform, London, emerged yesterday with the strongest GCSE results in England. The school chains based in

the capital that first started working with Blair – Harris Federation and ARK – have yet again published amazing exam scores. Council-run schools have also raised their game; competition and choice are working.

When Boris Johnson is asked about his education, he cheerily replies that he would like "thousands of school as good as the one I went to: Eton". Once, this would have been seen as preposterous: how can state schools compete with a £35,000-a-year Leviathan? But each year shows what teachers can do, given enough power and trust. Battersea Park was a failing school when Harris took it over last September with only 45 per cent of its pupils securing five decent GCSEs. Yesterday, it announced that this has risen to 68 per cent. King's Maths School, a free school in London, released its first-ever results earlier this week. Its average points score is among the top 10 schools in the land. Not the top 10 per cent; the top 10 schools.

The staggering advances being made by state schools in Britain are the work of teachers and pupils, rather than politicians. Kenneth Baker, Tony Blair and Michael Gove simply offered increasing amounts of freedom to teachers, and their faith has been amply rewarded. For those who had despaired of ever finding a remedy for sink schools, this is nothing short of miraculous – and it's only just beginning.

Fraser Nelson is editor of the 'Spectator'



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EDUCATION

Boys receive a GCSE boost after Gove abolishes coursework

By Richard Garner
EDUCATION EDITOR

Boys are closing the gap with girls in GCSE performance after the Government scrapped coursework.

Girls have dominated results day for most of the past two decades.

But this year's results published yesterday showed that girls only performed 8.4 per cent better than boys – down from 8.8 per cent last year. In total 64.7 per cent of boys obtained A* to C grade passes compared to just 64.3 per cent in 2014.

Headteachers' leaders said the narrowing of the gap was likely to be down to the former Education Secretary Michael Gove's exam reforms. He ushered in a switch away from marked coursework towards a reliance on the end-of-course exam.

Research has shown that boys perform better in an end-of-term exam while girls prefer doing coursework. This year's shrinking of the gender gap has been achieved through boys

improving their results whilst the performance of girls remains static.

Brian Lightman, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said: "Boys' underachievement has tended to be because they do things at the last minute." He added: "We need now to

make sure girls don't underachieve in the next phase of GCSEs."

Overall, the results – received by 600,000 teenagers yesterday – showed a rise in the number of grade A* to C grade passes with almost seven out of 10 entries awarded at least a C grade. However, there

was a slight drop in the number of A* grades awarded – down 0.1 per cent to 6.6 per cent. In English, there was a 0.5 per cent drop in the number of A* grades, awarded to 3.1 per cent, but the number of A* to C grades rose by 3.7 to 65.4 per cent. In maths, the number of candidates getting at least a C grade pass rose by 3.7 per cent to 65.4 per cent.

Figures showed a 22.9 per cent rise in the number of 17-year-olds and over taking English and a 30.2 per cent increase in those taking maths. The percentage gaining at least a C grade pass was much lower – 37.9 per cent and 38.9 per cent respectively compared with an average of 61.7 per cent and 62.4 per cent.

Andrew Hall, chief executive of the AQA exam board, said that one should expect a lower pass rate from the 17-year-olds because of the calibre of student who was taking the exam.

Mary Bousted, general secretary of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, said: "We agree all students need to be literate and numerate. However, making them resit their GCSEs until they get a C grade is completely demotivating."

{i} There was a rise in the number of older teenagers taking English and maths, as a result of the Government's insistence that pupils who failed to obtain at least a C grade at 16 be forced to take them again.

Case Study

'I started without much English'

KRISTOF KOKOSI, 16, was celebrating an A* in English literature last night despite arriving in the country just two years ago speaking hardly a word of English. The pupil at **Ark Elvin Academy** in Wembley, London, came to the UK from Hungary.

"I started GCSEs without much English knowledge and during those years I've been working extra hard," he said.

"I started by memorising 30 to 40 words each day and practised speaking and writing because it wasn't easy. In the second year I stayed at school until 7pm sometimes."

Kristof said his teachers helped by staying behind with him to improve his learning, which has inspired him to take up teaching as a career himself.

Yesterday he gained A* grades in English literature, maths and geography, as well as three more As, a B and two Cs.

Case Study

'It's about developing confidence'

EMILY MOTT, 16, was last night celebrating gaining at least a C grade in nine GCSEs from her school, Royton and Crompton High School in Oldham, Lancashire.

Teenagers at risk of dropping out



of school have had their GCSE results boosted by being paired with a three- to five-year-old to develop their self-confidence and sense of responsibility.

The “Teens and Toddlers” project has helped more than 400 pupils this year considered to be in danger of leaving school without any qualifications.

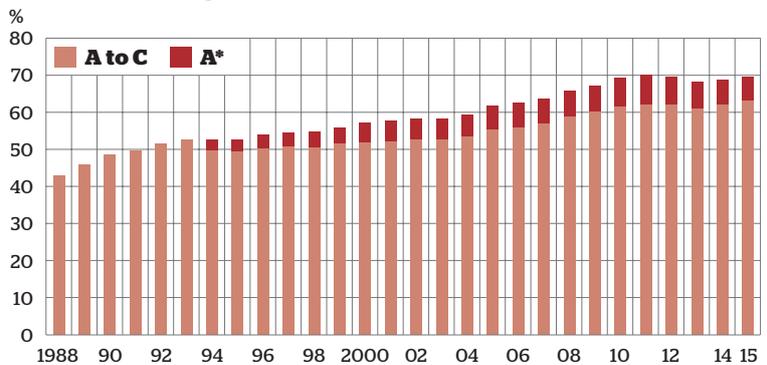
Emily, who was one of 423 young people on the programme, said the results were “better than expected” and is now planning to go to college to study childcare.

She was seconded to a nursery for 18 weeks where she worked with a toddler who was learning English as a second language.

Sam Marcus, a member of the Teens and Toddlers team, said: “She was working to develop communication skills and she developed her own confidence.”



GCSE A* to C grades awarded



SOURCE: CENTRE FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT RESEARCH



**Emily Mott, 16,
(front right)
receiving her GCSE
results at Royton
and Crompton High
School, Oldham**



Half of students earn five A*-Cs

By JACK DUGGAN
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Ark William Parker is celebrating after the percentage of students who earned at least five A*-Cs in their GCSEs increased by six per cent.

Those grades included both maths and English and means the percentage went up to 50 per cent.

Oliver Tattersfield passed 11 GCSEs and one BTEC and was thrilled to achieve two

A*s, five As, four Bs and a distinction.

"I can only describe how I feel as ecstatic happiness mixed with an intense sense of relief; when you know you have worked so hard and then, finally, you get the end results. This is the best day of my life!" Oliver said.

"The teachers at Ark William Parker have been really supportive, especially the English department.

"I was not particularly good at English but with the help of my teachers I got an A and C.

"I will definitely be staying

on for 6th Form and my aim is to go to university to study physics."

Academy principal Daniel Hatley was delighted with the results and commended the hard work of all Ark William Parker staff.

"We are really pleased with the progress that we've made at Ark William Parker Academy," he said.

"You can see that our students have a renewed sense of pride and purpose. These results show that all of our hard work is really starting to pay off."

Student Billy Foster who achieved 9 GCSEs was very pleased with his results.

"It's been really good here and the teachers have put in extra time with us, which has made a real difference," he said.

"I'm really happy and surprised with my results."

Other delighted students include Joshua Graham (five A*s, five As), Frank He (five A*s, three As), Stephen Jones (four A*s, six As), Ollie Owen (four A*s, six As), Matthew Browning (two A*s, five As) and Alex Pine (seven As).



Matthew Browning



All smiles as pupils pick up their results





Josh Miller, Zezen Fayez Mutawi-Rabeh and Daniel Whiffen



William Fuller, Billy Gentry, Thomas West and Michael Mortimer



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SPECIAL FEATURE

‘We are committed to Hastings long-term’ says top schools boss

We submitted your questions to Mark Phillips from Ark as part of our Ask the Head series

Earlier this year we asked you to submit your questions for Mark Phillips, regional director of Ark’s secondary schools in Hastings.

Because of the number of in-depth questions submitted we have had to split the response into a series of articles.

Below are the second questions and responses, some questions have been edited for brevity.

Q Why did Ark remove the Sports college aspect from the school when it took over? The school has been highly regarded for many years because of its sporting achievements including producing sporting stars!

Do you think this could be a strong factor in why you are not attracting students to your school? The school and the boys that attend should be proud of its history and should celebrate this.

A We are really proud of our sporting stars – past, present and future. We have developed and improved our sports offer since becoming an academy. I’m really proud of our achievements: our year 10 cricket team recently reached the finals of the T20 County Cricket Cup and our year 10 football team won the District Cup.

We’re involved in the RFU’s All Schools Rugby Programme and our rugby players recently got to meet Prince Harry.

In terms of the future, we host the Hastings Athletics Club which is training many of the stars of Team GB. We’ve recently joined forces with Hastings United FC to develop an Under 19 football academy. I’m pleased to see Steve Cook who progressed through our school team to the Brighton and Hove Albion youth team will be in the Premier League next year with AFC Bournemouth.

Q Why was Helenswood’s name changed to Helenswood Academy? Every other school locally has had Ark prefixed to its name why are they so special/different?

A We work closely with the local community, parents and governors when a school joins the Ark network.

In Helenswood’s case, they decided to join the Ark network and wanted to retain their previous name. This isn’t always the case, sometimes schools decide they want to signal a fresh start by changing their name. We try to respect local feelings wherever we can, but hope that whatever the school sign may

say, that staff and students feel the benefit from collaborating with other schools.

Q What are the Ark schools doing to improve their reputation within the community?

A We would genuinely welcome suggestions and feedback for how we could do more to build a strong relationship with the community. We accept we haven’t always got things right, and that difficult decisions such as staff restructuring affect not just staff but the wider community.

We are committed to Hastings for the long term – we want to see all our schools, primary and secondary thrive and hope we will have an improved set of results this year. We also want to play our part in community events – be that the Hastings Festival and other cultural events or the commemoration of the 950th anniversary of the Battle of Hastings next year. Of course, the most important thing is that we have improving results with happy and fulfilled students who go on to university or successful careers. This our aim above all and I hope will help improve our reputation.

Q Why do we have to wait until September to receive the new full staff listing following the restructure? In the past teachers have disappeared without students and parents having the opportunity to say goodbye and more

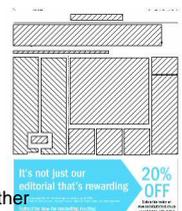
importantly thank you.

A It is normal to issue a new staffing list at the beginning of the academic year. Mr Hatley and Mrs Monk acknowledged staff who have left the academies in their end of year letters.

Q Why is there a need for a regional director?

A The new post of regional director will allow for more effective collaboration between our secondary schools, sharing skills in order to raise standards at both **Ark William Parker** and Helenswood and allowing the schools to streamline senior leadership. To do this, it is important to have a senior leader in post with the relevant experience. There is great potential for the schools to work together more on extra-curricular and other activities that can really add to the offer to students, as already happens at our joint sixth form. It will allow the head teachers of both schools to focus on raising standards and improving teaching while the regional director can focus on shared resources and financial management. This has been achieved at no additional cost to the school.

“We are really proud of our sporting stars”



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LOCAL NEWS

Education Schoolgirl also her mum's full-time carer

Success despite pre-exam crash

By JACK DUGGAN
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A mother has said she is 'so proud' of her daughter who is not only a full-time carer but was also hit by a car the day before her first GCSE exam.

Despite her ordeal Natasha Burrows, from Hastings, picked up a distinction in her BTEC in children's play, learning and development from Ark Helenswood Academy yesterday.

She also gained a distinction in ECDL – the equivalent of an A grade.

"The day before my exam, I was crossing the road on my way home and I got hit by a

car," she said. "I was in the hospital for six hours and had to miss the exam. My teachers sent in supporting information to the exam board so they can determine my grade, but I still had five exams to get on with after that.

"I was on very strong painkillers after the accident because I had a bruised coccyx, but I tried my best."

Natasha is a carer for her mother who has fibromyalgia but the school helped her to manage revision while looking after her mum.

"My mum's condition affects her whole body and it means that she can't do a lot of normal, day-to-day tasks," she said.

"When it was my exams, Helenswood supported me

to make sure I could manage studying while being a carer.

"They offered extra revision sessions and materials to make sure that I never missed out, even if I had to leave early to help my mum."

Natasha said she was thankful for the academy's support throughout the exam period.

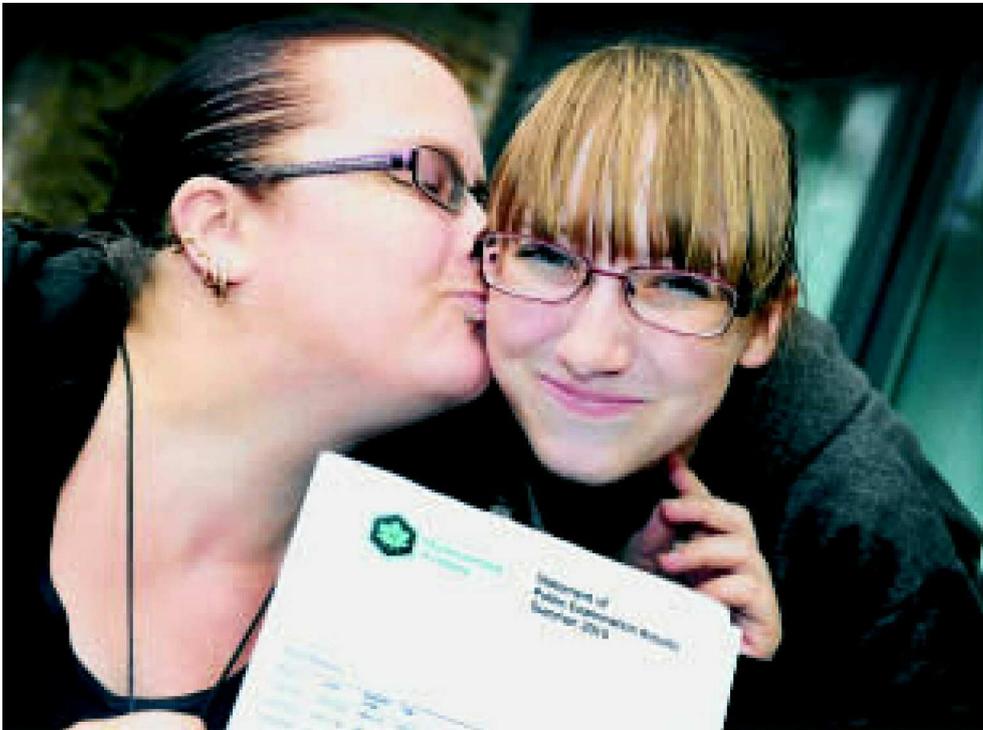
"There were a lot of changes when Helenswood became an Ark academy, but they've been for the better. There's a lot more support to help students get the grades they are capable of," she said.

The 16-year-old was among many students in the Observer area picking up their exam results yesterday.

For full results and pictures turn to pages 24 and 25.



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Natasha Burrows was hit by a car the day before her exam but still managed to gain distinctions in her BTEC exams



Principal's pride after stellar results

It was a great day for Ark Helenswood Academy as 62 per cent of students received five or more A*-Cs in their GCSE results yesterday.

That's an increase of 11 points from last year when just over half of students made that goal.

Students can breathe a sigh of relief after months of eagerly waiting for their results.

Hira Husain is celebrating after getting two A*s and eight As and thanked his teachers for all of their help.

"I'm so happy, all the hard work paid off. I'm in shock, I did a lot better than I expected. I didn't even expect to pass history, let alone get an A," she said.

"The revision classes really helped, and the teachers were brilliant. They were so supportive. I just want to go and thank them all now.

"I'm going on to study bi-



After months of anxiety the wait was finally over on



Ella Rudge

ology, chemistry, maths and Spanish A level at Ark Sixth Form East Sussex."

Hira's whole family was at school to celebrate her results and her grandmother Ms Ali said: "I'm very proud, she has worked so hard, and the teach-

ers have been marvellous. It's the best school ever."

Academy principal Lucy Monk was proud of the student's successes and believed the hard work of both the pupils and teachers paid off.

"Our students and staff to-

gether have worked very hard to achieve these results – they represent a significant improvement for Helenswood Academy," she said.

"We're very proud of what we have accomplished as a school and as a community."



Emily Whiteman and Mia Page



Smiles all round



Keyword: Helenswood Academy

Carer Natasha gets top grades after car crash a day before exams

Carer Natasha gets top grades after car crash a day before exams. Despite being run over a day before her exams, Ark Helenswood Academy student Natasha Burrows, who is also a registered carer for her mum, has passed six GCSEs and three BTec courses.

After being hospitalised following a car accident, 16-year-old Natasha worried for her future career as she missed her first exam.

“The day before my exam, I was crossing the road on my way home and I got hit by a car. I was in the hospital for six hours and had to miss the exam,” she said.

“My teachers sent in supporting information to the exam board so they can determine my grade, but I still had five exams to get on with after that. I was on very strong painkillers after the accident because I had a bruised coccyx, but I tried my best.”

Despite these challenges, Natasha passed six GCSEs and three BTecs, including a double distinction in her BTec in children’s play, learning and development.

As well as being a full-time student, Natasha is a registered carer for her mother, who has fibromyalgia.

“My mum’s condition affects her whole body and it means that she can’t do a lot of normal, day-to-day tasks,” she said.

“When it was my exams, Helenswood supported me to make sure I could manage studying while being a carer. They offered extra revision sessions and materials to make sure that I never missed out, even if I had to leave early to help my mum.”

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English A* for boy who couldn't speak language two years ago

KRISTOF KOKOSI arrived here from Hungary two years ago unable to speak English – but the 16-year-old student at [Ark Elvin Academy](#) in Wembley got A*s in English literature, maths and geography as well as three more As, a B and two Cs.

He said: “I started GCSEs without actually having much English knowledge, and during those years I’ve been working extra hard. I started by memorising 30 to 40 words each day and practised speaking, writing, because it wasn’t easy. In the second year I stayed at school until seven o’clock sometimes.”

The support he received from his teachers at [Ark Elvin](#) – who stayed late themselves to provide after-school lessons – has inspired him. He said: “I would like to become maybe a maths teacher. I like to help other people, and I think the greatest asset you can give to a person is knowledge.”

Kristof is already providing tutoring to primary school pupils over the summer holidays.





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Ambitious twins score 16 top grades between them

TWIN sisters Amarachi and Onyinyechi Orié achieved 16 A* and A grades at GCSE between them, as well as two Bs. Amarachi, above left, notched two A*s, six As and a B, while Onyinyechi achieved one A*, seven As and a B. The sisters, of Evelyn Grace Academy, Brixton, already have career plans.

Amarachi intends to study English at university. She said: "My English teacher, Ms Feasey, was a journalist first. She has really helped me to develop my love of English and inspired me to work in communications." Onyinyechi wants to become a doctor. She said: "Our science teachers have

been really inspiring." Amarachi added: "We both aimed for the top grades and really spurred each other on." "There was a bit of competition but it was more about helping each other."





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'School helped me to focus on exams after brother died'

STUDENT

Shantel Harvey, 16, has passed eight GCSEs, despite coping with her brother's death at the start of her course.

She said: "He was diagnosed with a brain tumour at a young age and ever since the doctors have been telling us that he wouldn't make it.

"When he died my confidence really went downhill and I felt completely unmotivated." Despite the tragedy, the student at Evelyn Grace Academy in Brixton achieved an A, four Bs and three Cs. She now plans to study law at university.

Shantel, above, praised her school and a mentor for their help. "They have been like a family," she said.





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He learnt English aged nine, now Isa is now on his way to study medicine

A BRIGHT spark student who only learnt to speak English at nine-years-old, has just achieved an A and two Bs at A-level.

Somalian-born Isa Mohammed is going to fulfil his dream of studying medicine after he got an A in Maths and two Bs in Biology and Chemistry last week.

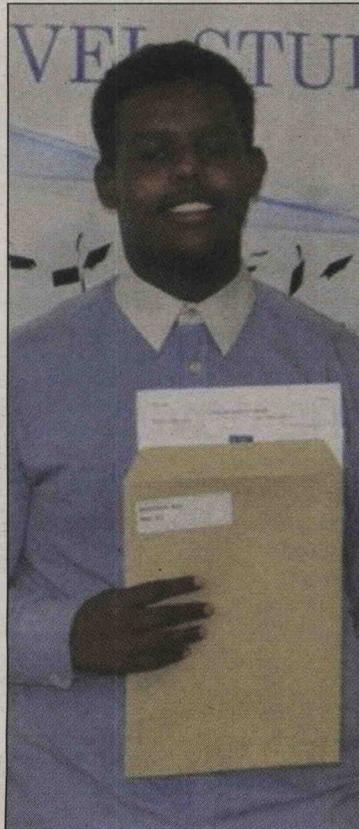
“From day one I have always dreamed of studying medicine and I couldn’t be happier that now I get to do that,” he said.

Isa is being joined at Southampton University by his fellow Walworth Academy pupil, Sanmi Makanjuola, who achieved two As in Maths and Biology and a B in Chemistry.

“It just goes to show that hard work pays off - mine did,” he said.

Walworth Academy Principal, Yvonne Powell, was delighted to see the number of students at the Ark chain school achieving at least three A* to B grades had doubled since last year.

“These results are a huge testament to the hard work and high expectations of all of our students and teachers,” she said. “Our results have been improving year on year and we’re more determined than ever to enable our students to continue on to some of the best universities in the country.”



Delighted ... Isa Mohammed

