



Boys' Achievement in Secondary Schools

February 2026

Kindness Curiosity Collaboration Respect Resilience Endeavour



Our Cohort:

- Students:
- 52% Male
- 48% Female

- Teachers:
- 49% Male
- 51% Female

- NB: There are wider disparities in Maths (M), Digital Communications (M) and Health and Social Care (F).



National Picture:

- Male suspensions and PEX are both a third higher than they were at this stage in 2023, and are significantly above female suspensions and PEX.
- Statistically, boys are 8% more likely to exhibit poor behaviours in schools than girls.
- 62% of all students in Alternative Provisions are male.
- There has been a huge surge in PREVENT referrals for boys. 86% of all referrals are for teenage boys. (DfE, 2025)



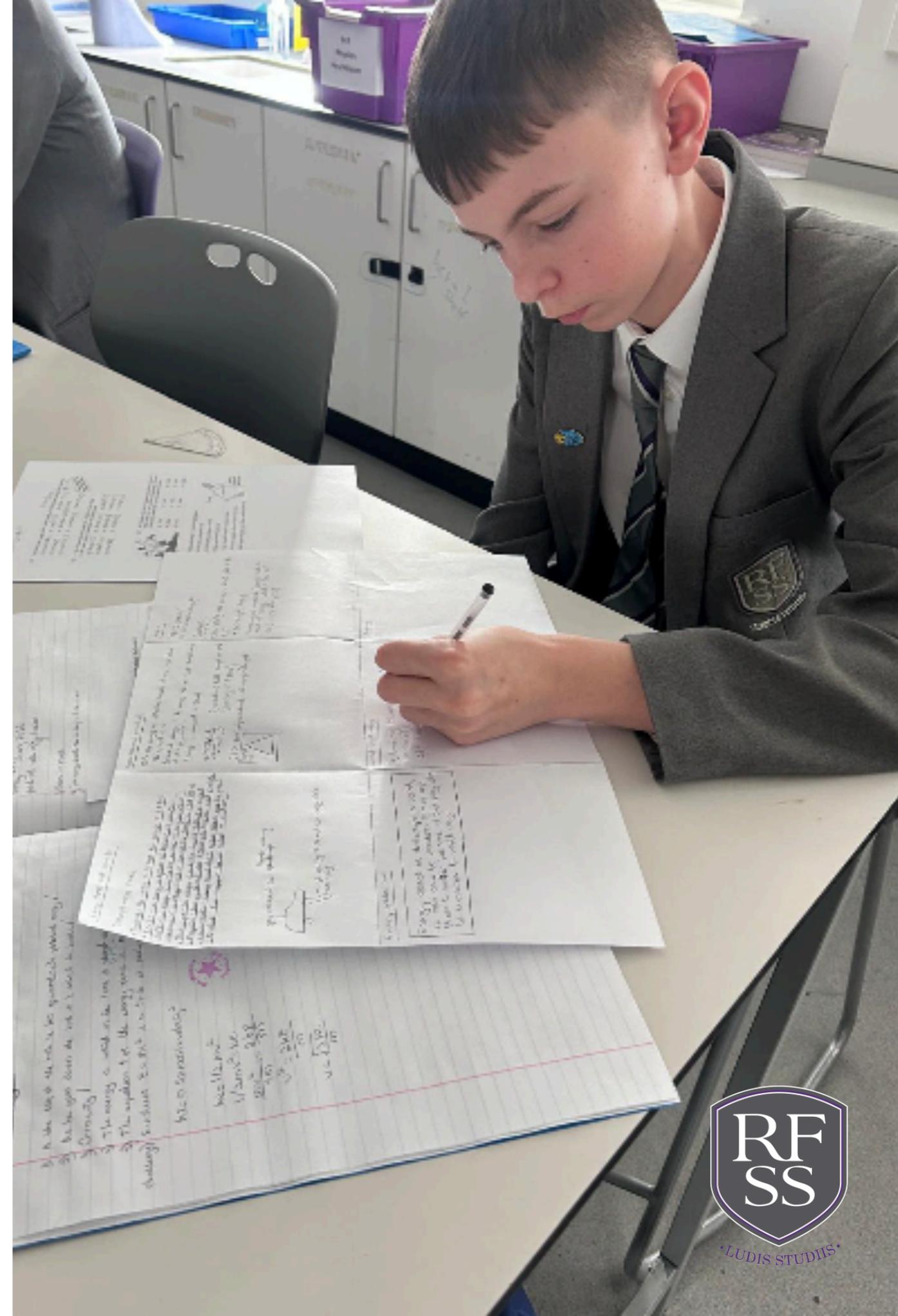
Behaviours:

- In Lesson:
- Talking over the Teacher
- Inattention
- Answering Back (Lack of Respect)
- Inability to Sit Still
- Poorer Quality Books
- Persistent Disruption
- (DfE, 2025)



Behaviours:

- Out of Lesson:
- Defiance
- Verbal Abuse
- Physical Aggression
- Theft
- Group Culture
- (DfE, 2025)



What We've Done So Far:

- Boys' Achievement Groups.
- Motivation Matters.





The Research States:

Impact Ed

- The most common time when male students begin to disengage from learning is between 12 years of age to 14 years of age. The patterns suggest that *motivation as a broader construct* (e.g. believing that learning matters and feeling that success is important) is crucial in sustaining male engagement through adolescence.

The National Impact Group

- For teenage boys, as for all learners, feeling that school is meaningful, enjoyable, and connected to future success strongly influences motivation. Boys tend to engage more with activities and content they see as directly relevant to their interests or identities, especially when traditional academic tasks feel disconnected from their daily lives or aspirations.



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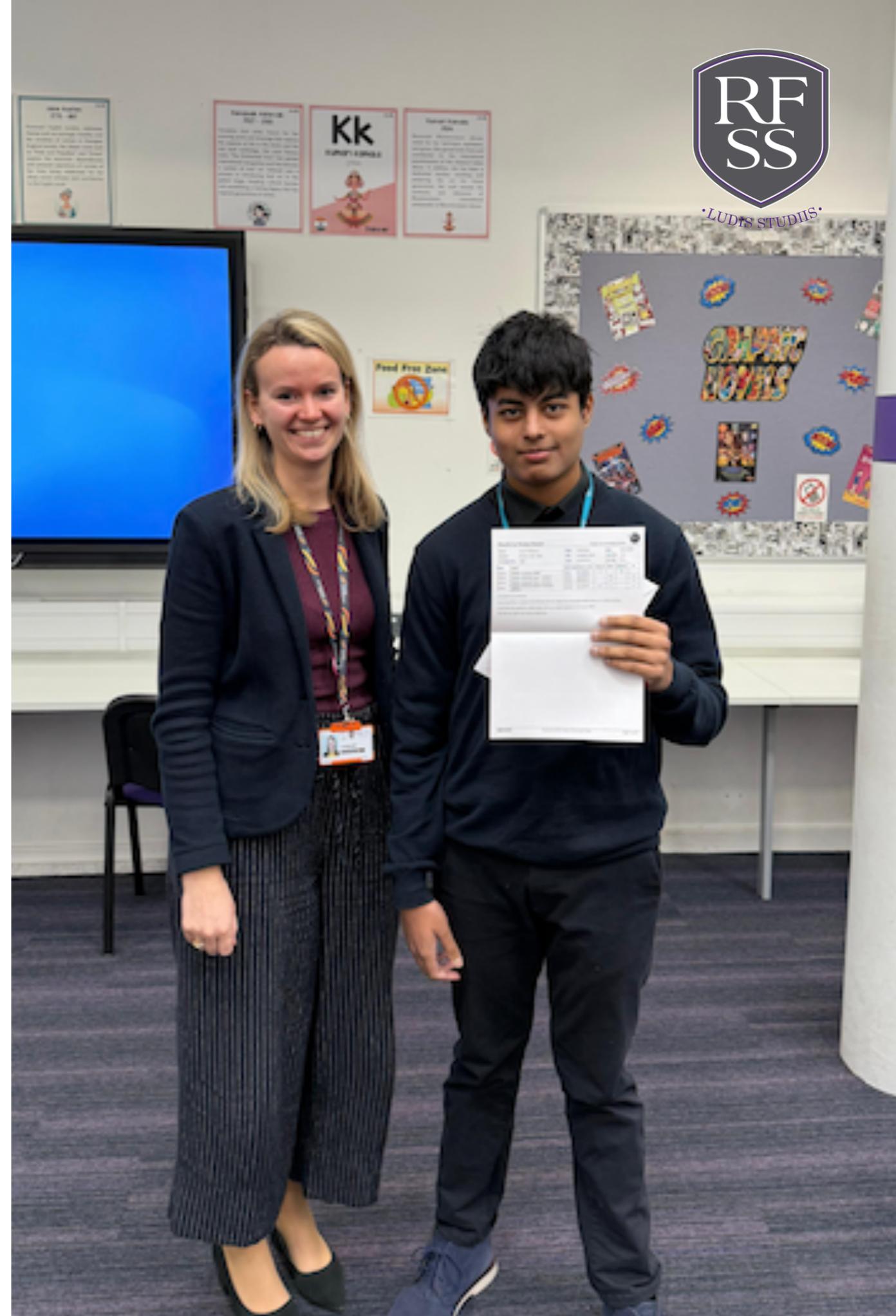
University of Manchester

- Found that boys' motivation to engage with learning was not simply about ability, but closely linked to several contextual and social factors:
- **Peer norms and gender perceptions:** Boys' attitudes towards education were shaped by beliefs about what activities were seen as 'masculine' or respected by peers.
- **Relevance to interests:** Boys were more motivated when the learning material related to their personal interests or had real-world relevance.
- **Socio-cultural influences:** Wider influences (e.g. peer pressures, school cultures linked to boys' achievement) impacted engagement.
- **Connections:** Connection to teachers/peers underpins male motivation.
- **Consult:** Boys appreciate being spoken to and consulted, rather than things just happening to them.

The Science:

- During childhood and adolescence, boys' brains often develop emotional regulation and impulse control slightly later than girls'. Clear, immediate praise reinforces positive behaviours, and supports motivation while these skills are still developing.
- Praise and rewards trigger dopamine release, which supports motivation and engagement. For some boy, particularly those with high energy levels or attention difficulties, this immediate feedback loop can be especially effective in sustaining focus.

(Andersen, 2000)



The Science:

- Boys rely heavily on external motivators (teacher praise, rewards, competition, recognition) to engage. This must be specific, task-linked, and effort-based.
- Extrinsic motivation is particularly effective in triggering situational interest, which can lead to improved effort, behaviour, and engagement.
- Boys are more 'transactional', and need to know what they can gain from an experience.
- [\(Renninger, 2006\)](#)



The Psychology:

- Bowlby's work explains why boys in particular often seek to please their mothers.
- He showed that children are biologically wired to seek closeness and approval from their mothers, and that this was especially prevalent in boys.
- (Bowlby, 1982)

