

The Economist explains

Why girls do better at school than boys

For centuries, boys were top of the class. These days, girls are scoring higher grades



[The Economist explains](#)

Mar 6th 2015

by Economist.com

For centuries, boys were top of the class. But these days, that's no longer the case.

A new study by the OECD, a club of mostly rich countries, examined how 15-year-old boys and girls performed at reading, mathematics and science. Boys still score somewhat better at maths, and in science the genders are roughly equal. But when it comes to the students who really struggle, the difference is stark: boys are 50% more likely than girls to fall short of basic standards in all three areas.

Why are girls performing better at school than their male classmates?

First, girls read more than boys. Reading proficiency is the basis upon which all other learning is built. When boys don't do well at reading, their

performance in other school subjects suffers too.

Second, girls spend more time on homework. On average, girls spend five and a half hours per week doing homework while boys spend a little less than four and a half hours. Researchers suggest that doing homework set by teachers is linked to better performance in maths, reading and science. Boys, it appears, spend more of their free time in the virtual world; they are 17% more likely to play collaborative online games than girls every day. They also use the internet more.

Third, peer pressure plays a role. A lot of boys decide early on that they are just too cool for school which means they're more likely to be rowdy in class. Teachers mark them down for this. In anonymous tests, boys perform better. In fact, the gender gap in reading drops by a third when teachers don't know the gender of the pupil they are marking.

So what can be done to close this gap? Getting boys to do more homework and cut down on screen-time would help. And offering boys a chance to read non-fiction would help too: they're keener on comics and newspapers. But most of all, abandoning gender stereotypes would benefit all students. Boys in countries with the best schools read much better than girls. And girls in Shanghai excel in mathematics. They outperform boys from anywhere else in the world.