

Computers widen gender gap for boys

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Computers are widening the gender gap in schools, as boys spend their spare time playing games while girls use them for homework, new government research has found.

The report, carried out for the Department for Education and Skills by academics at Leeds and Sheffield universities calls on schools to try to 'redirect' boys' use of computers towards school work.

It found that pupils who used computers for their school work scored higher grades in their GCSEs and national tests than those without access to computers at home.

But children - mainly boys - who regularly played computer games achieved significantly lower grades.

The research comes as the latest GCSE figures showed boys are still lagging behind girls in many key subjects.

The academics, working with BMRB market researchers, said their findings reinforced the view that computers are 'boys' toys'.

'Girls were more likely than boys to use home computers for school work, reflecting their more conscientious attitude to study rather than a preference for ICT,' they said.

'This pattern has implications for the gender gap, given that high leisure use was a negative factor for progress.'

Computer games were played every day or at least once a week by 61% of boys compared with 44% of girls. And 70% of boys said they use games consoles every day or at least once a week, compared with just 32% of girls.

The report added: 'Some children pretended they were using the home computer for educational purposes when they were using it for fun.'

Teachers and parents feared pupils would use computers to cheat by cutting and pasting text from the internet.

The academics researched computer use among pupils aged 11, 14 and 16 at 12 English schools, interviewing a sample of 111 children and their parents. They found 89% of pupils had access to computers at home and English was the subject pupils used computers for most often.

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