



# Are single-sex schools still relevant?

Single-sex schools have a long and proud tradition, but some argue they no longer have a place in modern education



**Loren Bridge**

Executive officer

Alliance of Girls' Schools Australasia

"Single-sex schools are often depicted as anachronistic institutions that don't prepare students for the real world. However, multiple studies show unequivocally that girls benefit from a learning environment free from gender stereotyping and unconscious bias.

Girls are more self-assured in discussion, select more challenging subjects, take more risks with their learning, are more competitive and achieve better academically than their co-ed counterparts. Simply put, every aspect of a girls' school is tailored to girls and how they learn, without competition and social pressure from boys, and this is enormously empowering for girls."



**Dr Lise Eliot**

Professor of neuroscience  
Columbia University

"It's hard to see any value in single-sex education for today's youth. Gender employment and pay gaps are a matter of social grouping, not hard-wired differences in ability or interests. I study the influence of gender on brain development and can say with confidence that most of the gaps in cognitive, emotional and leadership skills are learned, not inborn.

Girls and boys start out only a little bit different, but grow increasingly apart the more we label, distinguish and divide them into separate tribes. Although societies created excellent single-sex schools in the past, it's time for them to open their doors to all students."



**Mark Merry**

National chair  
AHISA

"Having been principal of both a boys' school and now a co-educational school, I find cause for celebration in the diversity among Australia's schooling models. Maintaining that diversity is vital: When rapid social and technological changes are driving transformation in schools, it would be counterproductive to seek a 'one size fits all' education solution.

Instead, to support innovation and to achieve the best for students, we need to acknowledge that we have much to learn from our differences. Of course, the primary consideration for parents and the ultimate worth of any school is the quality of the teaching and teaching program."

## THE CASE FOR SINGLE-SEX SCHOOLING

Australian research shows that there are positive effects of single-sex schooling in relation to numeracy and literacy testing (NAPLAN) and tertiary entrance scores (TES). In 2014, Dr Lucy Lu and Karen Rickard of the NSW Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation studied the test scores of students at 45 single-sex government high schools in NSW. Their analysis found that "the effect associated with single-sex schooling ranged from 0.08 standard deviations for junior secondary students to 0.2 standard deviations for senior secondary students".