

Single-sex schools – a choice to embrace.

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Millions of students have started the new school year with the vast majority at their local state co-ed school.

And so we face the perennial question of which type of school is best. There's no right answer because every child is different. Despite this some people continue to offer strong opinions that one type of schooling is better than the rest rather than encouraging more options.

Educational choices are increasing for many parents. Some choose the academic environment of a selective state high school; others will favour a school with an outstanding music or sports program. Some will prefer a faith-based school offering small-class sizes or a government school offering technical and trade subjects; others will prefer the supportive environment of a single-sex school where students aren't limited by traditional gender stereotypes.

In some countries, most notably the US, single-sex education is back in favour and on the rise, while [Iceland has been empowering girls](#) through all-girls preschools for 20 years. Graduate teachers need better digital skills, according to a new report.

In Australia last year, five boys' schools announced that they would move to co-education and proponents of co-ed schooling were quick to denigrate single-sex schooling as out-dated and not reflective of the real world. In particular, girls' schools bore the brunt of the criticism questioning whether they prepared girls to live in our "co-ed" world.

The reality for girls is that the real world is not yet a fair and gender-equal co-ed playing field. It has been demonstrated in a [2016 British Parliament inquiry](#) that girls in co-ed high schools are the victims of implicit bias by teachers who steered girls away from 'hard' subjects like advanced maths, physics and computer science, and that they are subjected to [daily sexual harassment](#) (including 29 per cent of girls aged 16-18 who experienced unwanted sexual touching).

In contrast, girls' schools provide a unique environment where girls don't have to compete with boys for leadership positions or their teachers' attention. They thrive in subjects typically dominated by boys, and learn their own worth, beliefs and value without social pressure from boys. Vitally, they provide a safe space for girls to learn to combat the gender bias and sexism that still exists within universities, workplaces and our broader communities – so that when girls leave school they know they are equal to their male peers and will accept nothing less.

Those advocating against single-sex girls' schools would have you believe there should be just one standard model of schooling, a one-size-fits-all co-ed approach. With the small number of boys' schools announcing their conversion to co-ed, advocates were quick to suggest a trend. However statistics do not back this up, and definitely not in relation to girls' schools. In fact, since 2000, only one prominent girls' school has converted to co-ed, while a handful have amalgamated with boys'

schools or introduced parallel education (where boys and girls are separated for certain lessons and together for others). To put this in context, according to the [ABS](#), [Australia currently has 9404 schools, and girls' schools converting to co-ed or parallel education representing less than 0.1 per cent.](#)

The truth is that single-sex schools change to co-ed for a multitude of reasons: economic; demographic; new leadership; and the pressures of educating increasing numbers of students on existing school sites in our growing cities.

Working with more than 160 girls-only member schools, the Alliance of Girls' Schools Australasia knows that support for single-sex girls' education is strong both here and overseas. Girls' schools are an integral part of the British, Irish, European, Asian and New Zealand school systems and interest in single-sex schooling is growing for both boys and girls.

There will always be voices for and against different types of schools – it can be a very emotive topic – because we have all been to school, and our educational experiences have shaped our lives – some for the better, some for the worse.

For parents, making the right choice for their child can be challenging and pressure filled – it is their child's future, their foundation, their compass for life. Shouldn't we be embracing choice?

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