

## Why you should choose a single-sex school, particularly for girls

Positives can be found in every type of education, but there are just so many *more* positives for girls in a single-sex school.

If co-ed environments produce better student outcomes, why are so many schools introducing single-sex classes or parallel education in order to improve academic results, especially in English for boys, and maths and science subjects for girls? Why are bullying rates of girls and boys so much higher in co-ed schools? And what are co-ed schools doing about the endemic gender bias and sexual harassment girls so often experience in their care?

There is simply no doubt that single-sex education benefits girls. Research shows unequivocally that girls thrive in an all-girls environment — they do better academically, socially and emotionally. Not just a single study but a plethora of data from across the world supports these findings.

Research aside, you only need to visit a girls' school to see the difference. Girls in co-ed schools tend to be more self-conscious and less confident, they are less likely to speak up in class, ask questions or take on a leadership role. They are also more likely to have a negative body image, and to experience sexual harassment or bullying. In contrast, girls in girls-only environments feel empowered to be themselves. They participate more freely in discussions, and are more competitive and take more healthy risks with their learning — skills that are advantageous for life success.

One of the oft-heard laments of parents is that their children are growing up too fast and are too sophisticated for their age. Girls' schools provide a safe haven from these social pressures — at least for the school-day, girls can just be themselves.

The factor that distinguishes single-sex schools is that every aspect of teaching and learning is tailored to girls, every program for wellbeing, healthy development, leadership and learning caters to the needs of girls and this purposefully develops their confidence, empowering them to pursue any direction their talents lead them. The same can be said for boys in all-boys schools. And for girls, the absence of boys and lack of gender stereotyping at a girls' school allows them to happily be whatever they want to be, whether that is a data analyst or medical researcher, a politician or an artist.

Moreover, with research showing that girls are more likely to feel the need to be perfect and to struggle with confidence when they make even small mistakes, it's particularly important to cultivate their resilience, as Rachel Simmons, author of *Enough As She Is*, explains: "What we want is for girls to have the capacity to move through a setback without beating themselves up." Developing resilience, confidence and fearlessness is what girls' schools do best.

This is why girls from single-sex schools buck the trend when it comes to girls' participation in areas that have been traditionally male-dominated, such as STEM and economics, opening the door for girls to pursue tertiary studies and careers in the highly skilled and more highly paid areas of engineering, computing, business and entrepreneurship.

The reality is that, beyond school, women still don't live in a world with gender equality. The statistics are appalling and the rate of change glacial. Men still earn more than women, and women are sorely underrepresented in senior leadership positions, on boards and in government. Women often experience discrimination in their careers while girls often experience gender bias and stereotyping in co-ed learning environments.

Girls' schools are at the forefront of gender equality, deliberately challenging gendered norms and purposefully building girls' confidence, conviction and self-belief, making sure that girls have the skills and knowledge to speak out and to break down those barriers.

However, perhaps the strong evidence favouring single-sex schooling is that so many co-ed schools are trying to replicate the benefits of single-sex schools by implementing single-sex classes or introducing parallel/diamond models that separate the sexes — all the while claiming that co-ed schooling is preferable because it replicates the real world — and it does — but co-ed schools replicate a world where women are not yet equal, where gender stereotypes are reinforced, and girls' voices are often unheard.

**Loren Bridge**

**Executive Officer – Alliance of Girls' Schools Australasia**