

New PISA analysis shows girls' school students outscore co-ed girls

A new report analysing Australian and New Zealand PISA* data from 2015 and 2018 reveals girls at single-sex schools outperform girls from co-ed schools on academic measures, social and emotional outcomes, and other aspects of students' well-being.

Girls' schools excelled on measures of academic achievement in science, mathematics and literacy; academic engagement; teacher effectiveness; involvement in and enthusiasm for science; measures of school belonging; and lower prevalence of bullying.

Commissioned by the Alliance of Girls' Schools Australasia and conducted by Macquarie Marketing Group (MMG), the analysis included a total of 314 individual measures comparing the responses of girls from single-sex and co-educational schools. Of these, girls from single-sex schools reported a positive difference on 227, or 72 per cent, of measures.

Compared with girls from co-educational schools, girls from single-sex schools outscored girls at co-educational schools on every academic measure and reported higher academic aspirations.

Girls from single-sex schools:

- Have 35% higher intentions of completing a degree or doctorate.
- Scored up to 10 percentage points higher on academic tests of science, mathematics and literacy.
- Scored 10 percentage points higher on measures of science knowledge and confidence.
- Scored up to 7 percentage points higher on measures of reading evaluation and reflection, and locating and understanding information.

'Strong academic results have always been a hallmark of single-sex schooling, but this report also reveals, crucially, that girls' wellbeing benefits enormously from an all-girl environment,' said Ms Loren Bridge, Executive Officer of the Alliance of Girls' Schools.

'In addition to confirming academic advantages, the data shows that girls at single-sex schools generally enjoy school more, experience less-bullying, have fewer disruptions in class, make friends more easily, and feel more like they belong at their schools compared to girls from co-educational schools.'

The analysis established that girls from single-sex schools are more likely to report:

- Never or almost never experiencing bullying (79% vs 71%).
- Never or hardly ever experiencing disruptions in science classes (30% vs 21%).
- Never or hardly ever engaging in non-attendance behaviours like skipping school (74% vs 66%).
- Making friends and feeling that they belong at school (74% vs 70%).

‘While most studies tend to compare single measures of schooling, this analysis looks at over 300 measures. The cumulative effect of so many positive scores for girls’ schools proves that a single-sex environments for girls creates a strong foundation on which to build not just school success but career and life-successes,’ said Loren Bridge.

Ms Bridge concluded that, ultimately, girls’ schools create learning environments and experiences that shape girls’ self-concept and self-confidence, helping them to overcome gender biases and stereotypes and believe in themselves and their potential.

‘Women are still hugely underrepresented in STEM careers, so the data that girls from all-girls schools demonstrate notably higher engagement and interest in science and mathematics is an important finding from the analysis. Girls can so easily be cut off from opportunities when they opt out of STEM,’ said Ms Bridge.

‘The report reaffirms what we already know: that tailoring every lesson, every programme and every opportunity — from leadership positions and girl-centric wellbeing programmes, to science and sporting activities — to suit girls, is enormously beneficial,’ she said.

*OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA goes beyond assessing whether students can reproduce what they have learned in school. PISA assesses students’ ability to extrapolate and apply their knowledge creatively and demonstrate effective learning strategies. It looks at the learning opportunities and academic and pastoral support provided to students. (PISA, 2019).

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