

Why it is a mistake to remove the government single-sex schooling option in Hobart

In less than a year, parents in Hobart will no longer have the option to send their children to a state-run single-sex school as 58 year-old Ogilvie High School (a girls' school) merges with 102 year-old New Town High (a boys' school).

The decision to merge these two schools leaves Hobart with only four single-sex girls' schools and two single-sex boys' schools, while the remaining 69 schools are all co-ed. Australia will then have just three states, New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria, that provide the option of state-run single-sex schools.

Interestingly while the government is removing the state-school option for Hobart families, single-sex education is one of the fastest-growing trends in the educational landscape of the United States of America, where the number of single-sex public schools has increased rapidly since 2015.

Co-education is the dominant school model in Australia, basically it is more cost effective than single-sex schooling, but it is not a 'better' model for student outcomes.

A 2016 study by the South Australian Association of State School Organisations (SAASSO), demonstrated that demand for single-sex schools is strong with the majority (62% of parents and 83% of teachers) wanting *more* all-girls public schools. It is more often the case that co-ed schooling is thought to be better for boys, and an all-girls environment better for girls — so why are our governments willing to short change our girls?

Research consistently demonstrates the benefits of single-sex schooling for girls, including a learning environment free from gender stereotyping where girls outperform their co-ed counterparts on academic and social and emotional measures. Both NAPLAN and PISA data reveal just how positive the effects of single-sex schooling are for girls, with girls at single-sex schools up to 4.2 terms ahead of co-ed students in reading. And the positive impacts extend to leadership, self-confidence and life success.

Mission Australia's *2020 Youth Survey* found that students at girls' schools fared better than the national female average in the key areas of physical and mental health, overall life satisfaction, and educational and career aspirations. In addition, not only was bullying less of a concern for girls attending single-sex schools but they were also less likely to be concerned about coping with stress, body image, family conflict, social media, personal safety, suicide, LGBTIQA+ issues, drugs and alcohol.

Advocates of co-education frequently argue that our world and our workplaces are co-ed therefore our schools too should be co-ed. But the reality for women is that our world and workplaces, while mixed gender, are a long way from being gender-equal. You want your daughter to build resilience and self-esteem, to be happy and confident in an environment where she is able to be herself — free from gender stereotyping, bullying and harassment. You want her to grow and flourish not just at school but throughout her life, and an all-girls school may be the surest path to make that happen.

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. Vivaly, girls' schools provide a safe and supported space for girls to learn to combat the gender bias and sexism that still exist within universities, workplaces and our broader communities — a space where a deep sense of self-belief is successfully instilled. So that when girls leave school they feel confident to lead, to demand inclusion and believe anything is possible.

Ask a group of girls about their all-girls school and you'll hear a familiar story – girls' schools are places where girls can be themselves, feel supported and confident, and escape the intrusion of stereotyping and sexualisation in their lives. Girls are able to value themselves and each other. In their school environment they are not subjected to the sort of male scrutiny and gender stereotyping that can diminish a girl's identity and sense of a possible future, and for that they express genuine gratitude. As one Year 12 student put it: "You're able to be more open ... everyone has an equal chance to speak up and be heard". And on boys: "There's plenty of opportunities to socialise with boys outside of school but at school my focus is on learning".

Anyone claiming that single-sex schools don't benefit girls is simply out of touch with both the reality of today's schools and the research in this area, or has economic rather than student outcomes as a priority.

So for your child's sake, make an informed decision on single-sex education — take a look at the research, visit a girls' school in Hobart, talk to the students — you may be surprised.

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