The Benefits of Co-education

In co-educational schools, girls and boys share in the joy of learning together, developing mutual respect and understanding for each other. They are working and learning together in a natural setting.

Working together in the classroom and playing together in the playground and on the sport fields, provides boys and girls with the opportunity to learn from each other intellectually, as well as socially and emotionally. Girls and boys work collaboratively, exchange ideas and debate issues. Importantly, the presence of both genders adds to the richness and diversity of thinking and learning that fills all classrooms in our school.

Co-education improves the ways students think, learn and collaborate; children can develop confidence, empathy, understanding and leadership, among both genders, as they navigate the challenges of social and emotional growth, while encouraging mutual success in one another.

Our coeducational school challenges sexist attitudes. Many subjects allow for considerable classroom discussion and debate; boys and girls often have different perspectives on the same issues, and they acknowledge that each approach has a great deal to offer the other.

We live in a world that has long recognised that women and men work alongside each other in almost all areas, more effectively in partnership, than segregated from each other. Coeducation is inclusive and essentially a more natural reflection of society; our schools better reflect the diversity of our culture. Outside the classroom, girls and boys stand side-by-side in leadership positions, play sport, attend outdoor education camps, combine in music groups, perform in plays and musicals and share recreational spaces.

Friendships develop in a very natural way in co-educational schools. This happens because there are so many activities, societies and clubs in the school in which girls and boys take part in a pleasant, well-supervised environment. Girls and boys interact with each other as contemporaries in all aspects of everyday life. In doing so, they build a sound platform for personal growth, peer connectedness, relationships with other people and the development of appropriate value systems.

Co-education provides a more realistic way of training young people to take their places naturally in the wider community of men and women. It helps to break down the misconceptions of each sex about the other and provides an excellent foundation for the development of realistic, meaningful and lasting relationships in later life.
Co-educational schools better prepare students to succeed in post-Secondary education and to transition to the workforce properly prepared for the social dynamic. Collaboration between girls and boys in the classroom helps develop confidence in students for their life after school, especially at university and beyond.

**Co-education; it is a natural choice.**

**Question:** What do Plato, some eminent professors and our students all have in common?

**Answer:** They are all advocates for Coeducation.

Throughout history, numerous academics have expounded on the benefits of educating both genders alongside one another. The ancient Greek philosopher, Plato, believed that coeducation creates a feeling of comradeship. He advocated teaching of both the male and female sexes in the same institution without showing any discrimination in imparting education.

Professor Simon Baron-Cohen, Professor of Developmental Psychopathology at the University of Cambridge and Fellow at Trinity College Cambridge asserted that “*a strong reason for coeducation is that separating children for a number of years means they will not be mixing and learning about each other*”. Professor Alan Smithers, Director of Education and Employment Research at the University of Buckingham stated that “*there are no overriding advantages for single-sex schools on educational grounds. Studies all over the world have failed to detect any*”. Educating the genders together means that students can be grouped in relationship to their abilities and learning styles, as opposed to differing curriculum by gender alone.

Much of a person’s early socialisation occurs at school. Positive development and preparedness for the realities of life as it occurs outside of the school can be very naturally and ‘normally’ fostered through coeducation. In fact, early leaders in the American woman’s movement during the late 1800s deemed mixed gender classes as ‘equal schooling’, promoted respect between the genders and female emancipation. As David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot assert in their book *Together: a history of coeducation in American Public Schools* proponents of coeducation stressed the whole-person merits: “*through their complimentary abilities and qualities, boys and girls would improve each other’s characters and minds.*”

Outside of the academic realm, I believe our very own St Andrew’s Cathedral School pupils add their own validity to coeducation. They are the ones who experience it daily. I asked some students...
what it was like to have the other gender at the school. Their answers speak of daily interactions. They are frank and to the point. Here are some of our favourites:

**Year 4 girls:**
- Boys can be sweet, that are not mean, and they are really nice.
- Boys can be fun, they make us laugh.
- You get more friends.
- Boys can look after us, they care about you.
- Boys are good to chase.
- We have more friends.
- There are more activities to go to.
- Boys can help you.
- We can have cool things like rock bands.

**Year 4 boys:**
- Girls can be fun.
- Girls are nice and they are really kind.
- Girls have a great imagination.
- Girls are really good at helping people.
- Sometimes they can chase us around.

When asked the boys if they think the school is better for having girls, all boys were emphatic that girls made the school a better place:

*It would be pretty tough if it was just boys. More people would be getting hurt or bullied. More swearing would happen, when there are girls around the boys won’t swear. People know that girls are more delicate, so the games are not as rough.*

We asked the girls would they like to learn with just girls, they all said no. They concluded:

*At an all-girls school you would definitely miss out on so much. We are really glad we are coeducational.*

For both girls and boys, co-education provides a more natural way of training young people to take their place in life. It helps break down possible misconceptions that may exist of each gender about the other. It provides a supervised training ground for the development of realistic, meaningful and lasting relationships between the sexes. It is real life.
Coeducation is Win-Win

Coeducation is undeniably positive

Coeducation is win-win. It adds to academic outcomes by fostering confidence, appreciation and understanding of one another with collaborative opportunities not possible in single sex schools. Boys and girls complement one another educationally, developing relationships based on respect and understanding. Coeducation creates a healthy environment for flourishing hearts, minds and lives.

To date, research has failed to demonstrate that single-sex education produces better academic outcomes when compared to coeducational schooling. Research instead shows that student self-belief coupled with high quality teaching are the key factors for educational achievement and St Andrew’s Cathedral School is committed to the highest standards both academically and pastorally. We purposefully attract and retain high-quality staff and are committed to their ongoing professional development to enable high quality educational outcomes.

Our school was once a single sex school, some 20 years ago we moved to being more inclusive and introduced girls into the school. It seems more and more single sex schools are becoming coeducational (Barker, Canberra Grammar, All Saints, etc).

The positive effects of coeducation were shown in a recent study of over 17,000 high school students (from public and independent single sex and co-ed schools) which found the following advantages:

1. **Confidence** - students in co-ed schools feel more confident expressing their views in the presence of opposite-sex peers
2. **Respect** - co-ed school students are 20% more likely that students of single sex schools to agree that their peers respect members of the opposite sex.
3. **Socialisation** - Students at co-ed schools indicate that they make friends easily with members of their own sex (80%) and members of the opposite sex (72%). For these students there is a stark contrast with their peers attending independent single-sex schools, of whom only 58% report making friends easily with students of the other gender.
4. **Opportunities** - co-ed school students are almost twice as likely as single sex school students to agree that there are opportunities to participate in opportunities with opposite sex peers.
5. **Girls Engagement** - 89% of girls in independent co-ed schools ask questions or contribute to class discussions compared with 87% of their counterparts attending single-sex schools. Girls in co-ed and single-sex schools report that they voice an opinion regardless of peer approval in both environments almost equally (66% co-ed, 67% single-sex). Girls’
perceptions of their abilities in maths and science were not shown to be affected by the gender composition of their schools.

6. **Boys Engagement** - boys in a co-ed environment are as likely to be engaged in learning as boys in a single-sex environment. Working together in the classroom and on homework assignments provides boys and girls the opportunity to learn from each other intellectually as well as socially.

A 2014 meta-analysis, looking at 184 studies comprising 1.6 million students in 21 countries, found that “there is little evidence of an advantage of single sex schooling for girls or boys for any of the outcomes”. In fact, the major difference is in educational aspirations which appear to be higher in co-ed schools.

Why do advocates for single sex schooling believe that it has such positive effects when the data suggest otherwise? The meta study found that single sex schooling advantages are found in studies with inadequate methods. The meta-study argues that any perceived academic advantages of single sex schools disappear when other variables, such as socioeconomic background and parental education levels, are considered.

Associate Professor Judith Gill of the University of South Australia's School of Education states that the latest research clearly shows that differences within the population of boys or girls is much greater than the differences between them, including in terms of levels of maturity. Regarded as a leading researcher on gender and education, Professor Gill stated in the Sydney Morning Herald that the number of schools converting to coeducation, both in Australia and overseas, is public acknowledgement of this. She states, "There are still some stalwarts who remain firmly committed to single-sex schools — and there are some really good single-sex schools too. But as I have argued in my book — Beyond the Great Divide: Coeducation or Single-Sex Schooling? — their merit does not accrue because of their single-sex status but rather because of the great commitment from teachers, high-quality leadership and a highly supportive parent community. These same features are found in good coeducational schools."

When renowned educational researcher Professor John Hattie examined the effect of gender separation on student outcomes in his well-known meta-analysis of influences on learning (examining 500,000 studies of the effects of influences on student achievement), there was little to suggest that gender-based segregation offered any academic advantage. Hattie ranked single sex schooling as 179th (out of 195) as an influence on student achievement with an effect size of 0.08, regarded as ‘trivial’.

Co-education schooling prepares students for co-ed life. With academic outcomes proven to be equal in the two systems, co-education provides so much more for the development of the whole child such as increased confidence, respect for one another, socialisation skills, opportunities and engagement. At St Andrew's Cathedral School, we
support students to flourish in heart, mind and life, and research shows that Coeducation is a vital component for the whole student development.

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