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### ***Why Single-Sex Schools Work***

It's an emotive subject that's come under intense scrutiny in the wake of Everyone's Invited. So just what are the benefits of an all-girls' education? Clare Macro, Headteacher at Edgbaston High School for Girls (EHS), sets out the case.

It may sound obvious, but at an all-girls' school the motivation and priority is always the girls. Countless studies show how in mixed settings, it is often boys who absorb the lion's share of teacher time and attention. At a girls' school, everything is focussed on the needs of the girls: what motivates them, what inspires them and what helps them thrive.

Detractors insist that all-female settings are unrepresentative of the real world and 'overly protective'. I would argue that in an age where stress, anxiety and depression among teenage girls are at an all-time high, same-sex schools can be a safe-haven where girls can grow into their skin, at their own pace and in a secure and supportive environment.

Another clear advantage of single-sex education is the dismantling of gender discrimination. Studies show that unconscious bias plays a key role in reinforcing gender stereotypes in mixed settings with even very young girls becoming self-conscious and less confident in their abilities when learning alongside more confident and dominant male peers. At EHS all our school leadership positions are held by girls and many of our senior leadership team, including our Head and Deputy Head, are women. Strong, female leadership is in our DNA and female role models are the norm for our girls. Similarly, research proves that the absence of 'boys' and 'girls' subject labels results in more girls opting for STEM subjects like maths, sciences and engineering in girls' schools than they do in co-educational settings.

Last but by no means least, this summer the Everyone's Invited movement exposed the alarming scale of sexual harassment experienced on a daily basis by girls (and some boys) in school. At their annual conference last month, the Girls' School Association (GSA) cited the movement as the impetus behind a marked increase in parents opting for all-girls settings in the wake of the scandal. It would be reductive to present it as a binary for and against argument, but without the backdrop of appearance pressures, sexist 'banter' or sexual harassment, girls in single sex settings do report lower incidences of bullying, less pressure to conform and less gender stereotyping. Without these distractions occupying valuable time and energy, girls can focus their full attention on what matters most: making the most of all the opportunities available to them and getting a good education.

Who wouldn't want that during those crucial developmental years?

Clare Macro, Headmistress  
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