

“What is best for my son? Should he be educated with only other boys or should he go to a mixed co-educational school - after all it's more like real life?”

Why boys only?

The question of single sex education has for many years often been the subject of heated discussion. It would be possible to answer this with theory and educational evidence such as the indisputable fact that the vast majority of top schools in annual league tables are single-sex points strongly to the fact that boys and girls are better educated separately. Why is this the case and how do single sex schools provide more successfully for their pupils? It would also be possible to refer to recent reports containing statistics showing large differences between girls and boys in attainment at a young age. An average 20 month old girl is likely to have twice the vocabulary of a similarly aged boy, consider the girl is most likely to talk to her toy whilst the boy will make noises with his. This trend continues across all assessment areas throughout Nursery and Reception causing marked differences in social and emotional development, knowledge of letters, reading, creative development and, most notably, writing. The government recognizes that this pattern that continues up to GCSE, when boys outnumber girls by 20% as low achievers.

I was the headmaster of an academically successful co-educational school for ten years prior to my time at Campbell College. The variation between boys and girls was marked. The focus for professional development of the teaching staff was often upon raising educational achievement of boys, through improvement of our teaching techniques. Quite simply, boys are barometers of great teaching and as we focused upon engaging with the boys better, the academic achievement and associated improvement in behaviour occurred.

In a recently Government (DCSF) study, it is stated that generally speaking, girls tend to be more ‘compliant and passive recipients of new skills and knowledge’¹ – these are characteristics that lend themselves ideally to a normal classroom environment. The following spreadsheet illustrated the variation between boys and girls, I found within my previous school at age 11/12 years, I have coloured a row for a girl pink and for a boy blue. The arrangement is in rank order of the average performance in the pupils’ first examinations upon entering the senior school:

¹ [Confident, capable and creative: supporting boys’ achievements: Guidance for practitioners in the Early Years Foundation Stage, DSCF, 2007](#)

Yr 8 summer overview : Year 8

Gender	Ar exam result Yr 8 Summer	Dr exam result Yr 8 Summer	En exam result Yr 8 Summer	Fr exam result Yr 8 Summer	Gg exam result Yr 8 Summer	He exam result Yr 8 Summer	Hi exam result Yr 8 Summer	Ma exam result Yr 8 Summer	Mu exam result Yr 8 Summer	Re exam result Yr 8 Summer	Sc exam result Yr 8 Summer	Ti exam result Yr 8 Summer	Mean for each pupil
F	94	96	92	95	95	94	94	93	99	99	92	90	93.1
F	92	95	89	92	94	91	84	92	99	96	91	93	92.3
M	89	96	79	93	88	92	94	90	99	89	94	94	91.4
M	83	87	88	95	99	96	91	88	100	97	86	87	91.3
F	91	80	84	93	90	93	91	92	98	94	82	97	90.4
F	99	95	91	89	98	94	74	84	96	88	74	91	89.4
F	92	83	81	94	88	95	91	85	97	91	84	93	89.3
F	90	87	79	94	99	89	78	91	94	91	83	93	89
F	90	95	79	89	83	93	88	83	95	84	84	100	88.4
F	85	83	80	97	90	91	97	85	100	88	80	79	87.8
F	98	94	89	95	85	92	71	76	97	84	88	84	87.8
F	98	95	86	90	91	93	78	84	76	94	73	85	88.9
M	89	88	76	88	94	87	83	87	78	91	87	92	86.8
M	95	86	83	88	94	93	74	75	88	96	78	97	86.8
F	92	80	85	88	94	94	77	82	95	91	82	73	85.9
F	93	92	82	88	87	91	70	82	98	96	85	90	85.3
F	96	92	87	89	85	88	73	79	90	89	82	93	85.3
F	95	82	78	90	90	84	87	73	99	79	72	87	84.7
M	86	77	81	82	90	83	81	79	98	87	78	89	84.3
F	88	83	73	87	82	90	85	84	87	85	88	94	83.8
F	95	80	77	88	78	93	85	80	97	83	72	82	83.8
M	73	78	70	91	88	93	74	86	95	89	81	84	83.5
M	92	84	73	90	79	88	83	78	94	82	83	78	83.5
F	86	72	72	91	89	95	87	88	100	89	82	83	83.5
M	88	64	72	87	89	90	87	78	93	92	76	78	82.8
F	78	77	70	91	87	92	83	83	98	93	78	84	82.7
M	74	83	76	90	85	95	76	81	74	92	81	82	82.4
F	86	85	75	82	89	95	80	80	71	80	80	78	82.4
M	83	57	70	85	88	89	87	85	93	89	88	79	82.4
M	91	68	66	87	82	87	89	87	97	81	88	84	82.3
M	86	88	73	90	80	84	81	70	89	79	81	84	82.1
M	83	78	77	84	88	84	95	78	71	91	78	81	82
M	72	87	70	74	82	86	75	87	92	85	84	87	81.8
F	85	80	79	82	81	82	90	71	90	77	76	75	81.5
M	89	73	81	91	92	84	73	93	78	91	78	73	81.3
F	88	74	69	91	87	88	80	76	95	80	84	82	81.2
M	89	83	73	95	85	79	77	90	84	65	74	78	81
M	74	78	88	90	78	85	89	82	97	81	91	58	80.9
M	75	60	72	85	78	81	94	85	89	92	87	90	80.9
M	73	83	73	84	83	90	66	79	93	80	88	78	80.8
M	88	70	81	83	90	82	87	83	90	85	69	82	80.8
M	85	86	63	86	80	82	73	68	89	82	84	88	80.5
F	91	70	73	82	75	83	79	77	98	77	69	82	80.5
M	73	87	74	82	88	90	89	88	90	83	69	72	80.3
F	80	82	83	82	80	87	78	85	95	94	82	85	80.3
F	85	75	62	85	80	80	71	83	95	67	77	82	80.2
M	88	68	73	83	88	90	80	68	95	81	75	75	80
M	92	82	64	82	83	89	72	88	77	74	69	87	79.9
M	97	87	63	84	80	87	64	76	92	81	73	75	79.9
F	77	78	71	80	84	84	71	74	95	78	84	82	79.8
M	77	79	67	94	82	88	82	81	88	75	81	61	79.6
M	77	62	77	82	82	88	66	82	88	83	79	87	79.4
F	84	95	71	81	75	81	80	81	83	73	75	90	79.1
M	81	66	64	78	75	91	85	68	95	86	83	73	78.6
F	80	79	71	72	78	90	66	89	86	71	76	75	77.8
F	88	82	73	79	79	85	85	76	73	83	58	78	77.8
F	89	83	68	77	82	87	79	89	97	81	59	87	77.3
M	86	76	83	79	89	83	80	66	70	76	66	73	77.3
M	83	89	89	78	81	83	82	83	79	83	81	78	77.3
M	89	77	65	82	73	89	71	82	74	73	84	60	76.6
F	88	75	89	83	77	90	73	87	80	80	68	72	76.5
F	91	93	88	79	84	88	82	80	97	83	65	88	76.5
M	85	71	67	77	87	81	89	75	90	71	74	50	76.4
F	88	87	82	73	74	81	82	82	77	72	79	78	76.3
F	88	88	89	77	72	89	89	72	97	80	61	70	75.8
M	77	75	68	77	64	76	81	77	83	79	59	87	75.3
M	91	88	85	83	71	87	75	68	83	70	68	98	75.3
M	84	84	71	71	68	80	88	73	80	82	70	92	75.3
F	88	88	65	75	71	88	66	75	76	66	57	87	75.2
M	78	91	82	78	80	83	80	68	89	79	71	84	74.9
M	83	80	83	84	71	88	78	81	90	89	81	55	74.9

Girls cluster at the top and the boys intersperse throughout. This situation was repeated year after year. As a staff we came to the conclusion that it was the nature of our education system that promoted the achievement of girls; it is not that they are necessarily brighter than the boys, the way in which testing occurs suited them better. If we introduced a system of assessment involving physical strength it would be criticized for being unfairly advantageous to boys, yet society has come to accept a system of schooling that advantages girls in the nature of the assessment. The best thing we can do to counter this is to school our boys in certain ways and to do so together.

I also hear the argument that girls moderate the boys in class, allowing them to focus upon work better. That is not been my experience. Boys are much more apt to enter into acts of bravado in front of girls than when not. The naturally competitive instinct of males rises to a different level once females are around – perhaps this is too subjective!

Campbell ensures that the educational needs of boys are met in the following ways.

- All subjects are taught in as highly practical manner as possible and significant use is made of our historic woods, games fields and other outside areas.
- Whilst girls are often motivated by the task alone (e.g. revising for examinations), boys gain much of their motivation from seeing the relevance of what they are being taught. Our curriculum has been planned with this important point very much at heart. To justify a curriculum merely by the fact that it is necessary for a future examination serves to trivialize a topic and place it very much as something that needs to be remembered temporarily rather than understood and expanded upon. The curriculum at Campbell allows for a great many trips and visiting speakers that provide the wider context that is so important to a boy's learning.
- Outstanding library provision and reading culture throughout the school – books are selected for their appeal to the reading trends of boys.
- Creative arts is highly regarded and provided for within and outside of the curriculum. Excellent art, drama and music facilities and opportunities for the boys to perform without the social pressures that can occur in a co-educational environment.
- With a multitude of extra-curricular activities on offer to boys aged from 4 to 18, the school plans every activity with boys in mind. This means that a genuinely wide variety of sports, hobbies and activities can be offered that recognize the creative and personal growth of each boy.
- Each and every boy is offered plenty of physical exercise on a daily basis. This can be in the form of playtime, PE lessons or our Games programme. Boys learn well when they are able to expend their physical energy and enjoy plenty of fresh air.
- The overwhelming majority of teachers at Campbell participate in the broader educational experience of our pupils, running extra-curricular activities, sports teams and optional trips and various other experiences.