

# Gender war helps no one, warns private school head

Nicola Woolcock Education Editor

The head of a leading private school has warned against "gender wars" in the light of thousands of stories of sexual abuse from present and former pupils of dozens of schools.

Jane Lunnon is the new head of Alleyn's School in Dulwich, whose south London neighbours Dulwich College and James Allen's Girls' School have been caught up in the controversy of Everyone's Invited, the website carrying 13,000 testimonies about "rape culture" in schools.

Lunnon, the former head of a girls' school in Wimbledon who took over at the co-educational Alleyn's in January, said: "No one can read the posts on that site without feeling profound dismay and sadness. It is clear that girls and young women in this country have been growing up for many years in a climate in which a casual, power-based, porn-fuelled attitude to sex is coupled with verbal or visual harassment.

"Children are living large parts of their lives online and invisible to the adults in their lives. There is a huge national problem and we have a lot of work to do to resolve it."

Of efforts to tackle this, she said: "It is clear to see that an immense and nationwide effort is needed to ensure the right messages land properly and effectively. Critically, boys and young men need to be part of the conversation

## Behind the story

**A** 2017 survey of the sexual health of Dutch teenagers found that 11 per cent of girls and 2 per cent of boys had been forced to have sex against their will (Adam Sage writes).

It was a marked improvement on five years before and is lower than the UK, where 31 per cent of girls have suffered sexual abuse, according to the NSPCC.

The Netherlands has achieved these results by taking sexual education seriously, according to Yuri Ohlrichs, a sexologist at Rutgers, which provides materials and activities for teachers and carried out the survey. The subject is taught to children as young as five.

Ohlrichs said gender norms and awareness were central. "We start addressing these questions at five or six using appropriate language for children of that age: what is a girl? What is a boy? Is it really true that boys cannot wear pink or play with dolls? These are really important issues because awareness of gender, power dynamics and peer pressure awareness is at the heart of harassment."

and part of the solution. A gender war helps no one, and pitting girls against boys or 'othering' the opposite gender is no solution. Our young people must learn how to tackle these things head on; how to listen to each other generously and with respect."

She added: "We have spent a lot of time in the senior school, over the last fortnight, discussing what gender equality and mutual respect should look like in our school and beyond it."

It comes as a dossier has been sent to *The Times* about King Edward VI Grammar School, a state boys' selective school in Essex that takes girls in sixth form. Two alumni of the Chelmsford school, Kezia Mbonye and Imogen Greenwood, have compiled 130 testimonies from "victims of misogyny, sexism, harassment, abuse, assault and rape". The letter called on the school to reform sex education to include grooming, sexual exploitation, coercive and controlling behaviour and consent.

A spokesman for King Edward VI said: "We are extremely saddened and horrified by the content of these testimonies. It is totally unacceptable that misogyny, harassment and abuse in any form take place — and it is also not sufficient for anyone to be a bystander on these issues. As a school we are committed to doing everything we can to change these appalling attitudes."

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