

Header piece - High News - 28.04.2023

We hope you are feeling rejuvenated after the Easter break and feel fully ready for all of the excitement ahead, including the Coronation which is only weeks away! It has been a great pleasure to see students and staff back in school for what is set to be a very busy summer term. The school was abuzz with the voices of students returning to lessons last Thursday (first day of term); they all seem to have settled to work with focus and enthusiasm.

Excitement and admiration were also on display this week when we hosted the Spring Art Collective on Wednesday and it was fantastic yet humbling to see so many parents and guardians supporting us by purchasing the artwork produced by our students from Year 5 and above. 20% of all sales were donated to the Art and Creativity at Hope, (<https://www.northamptonhopecentre.org.uk/>), and we thank you for your generous and kind donations. The event provided an opportunity to showcase the talents of our school community and fundraise simultaneously, and I thank our Creative Arts Faculty for leading such a worthwhile event - and it was an excellent way to build community spirit!

Just a reminder about the Information and Coffee Mornings next week: Tuesday 2 May for Year 8, Wednesday for Year 11, Thursday for Year 9 and Friday for Year 12, all at 8:00am in the Ideas Room. These are excellent opportunities for parents to meet one another and also to ask any questions you may have about important aspects of school life.

Whisper it low, but summer internal assessments for Year 7 to 10 are on their way and whilst some students relish the opportunity to show off what they know, others find it daunting. For this reason, we try to keep the approach low-key but, at the same time, it is important that students get used to exam protocols and stressors. Anxiety is greatly reduced by being prepared and students can start going through textbooks and online files to ensure their work is in order. Revision lists and timetables for internal assessments will be sent out to students shortly.

We will be celebrating our school's birthday on 5 May and I have been pondering: **are all-girl schools always better for girls? Why do parents choose girls' schools?** In both the private and state sector, there has been a startling shift away from single-sex as the default; for example, Westminster School is preparing to go fully co-ed - taking girls throughout the school by 2030. Now only 12% of state schools remain single-sex; and less than half of all independent ones.

One may begin by considering the fact that there are strong modern-day arguments for single-sex education. Teenagers have never been more pressured and poked by forces beyond their control; from hyper-sexualisation to ubiquitous social media. During that frenetic transition into adulthood, there are virtues to any environments offering shelter from the outside world. In this context, the all-girls school feels comforting and valuable.

So, what actually are the differences between girls' schools and co-eds? There is plenty of [evidence](#) to show academic, social and emotional benefits single-sex schooling, particularly for girls. When girls are allowed to learn and develop in their own space, they have an opportunity to try out things that aren't thought of as feminine or female strengths. As such they rarely feel self-conscious speaking up in class and they can vigorously pursue their

interests with no concept of “boy” or “girl” subjects, and in doing so, young women can really be themselves.

Single-sex education is widely viewed as anachronistic – not a possible solution to present-day issues such as the growing gender attainment gap and the scarcity of female CEOs . So, why do single-sex schools exist? When it comes to girls’ schools, my own, very personal, answer to this question is simple. I attended an all girls’ boarding school and loved it. I have only worked in single-sex girls’ schools for the past sixteen years. Together, this has taught me first that it’s about the right school for the right child, and there are no absolute rules; and second, that the best girls’ schools are genuinely, unequivocally and uniquely wonderful places to learn and to work.

For me two things make an all girls school special and the reasons why I believe passionately in the power and importance of an all-girls education. The first is freedom. Freedom from some gender-based assumptions and expectations. Freedom from some of the anxieties that accompany adolescence for boys and girls. Freedom to be simply and wholly oneself: for each student to develop and explore and cherish their identity and individuality. In a single-sex setting, girls feel more natural, freer and more true to themselves.

As we approach our milestone 145th school birthday, I wish for every Northampton High girl to be able to grow into young women in an environment where they are free from stereotypes and are able to find and develop their talents and interests to the fullest. As such, it is important that we continue to strive hard to ensure that all our students have those opportunities, and feel confident to operate outside their comfort zones, helping them to be completely comfortable in their own skin. The research on single sex schools shows that school structure can make a difference, but that doesn’t mean it’s the only way to counter stereotypes.

The second is unity. The strength of an all-girls’ school is the way in which the whole community celebrates and moves forward together. There is an avid curiosity, a fellowship, a shared sense of endeavour, an enthusiasm, a warmth, a readiness to laughter and a generosity that I have not experienced in any other environment. It is not perfect - individuals and the whole community face challenges, as is the case for every community - but as a model for how to live and learn together, at its best it is inspiring, creative and joyous.

Our understanding of young people and our understanding of gender develops all the time, as indeed does the world for which all schools seek to prepare their students. Yet amidst this change the case for girls’ schools endures and indeed strengthens. Not to segregate but to celebrate; not to deny the reality of the wider world - but to prepare our young students to play the fullest role in it and to have the confidence, always, to continue to change it for the better. Crucially, for them to call themselves as decision makers and change makers with a ‘we can’ attitude.

In closing, while debate will continue to rage about the merits of single-sex teaching, and research will no doubt continue to support one side or the other, and single-sex education won’t suit everyone; but for many it will provide the springboard for a truly rounded and grounded education. Let a thousand flowers bloom.

All that remains for me is to say do have a restful Bank Holiday weekend and I hope that many of you will be able to enjoy the spring sunshine.