



Why you should send your daughter to an all-girls school



Timna Jacks

SHARE TWEET MORE 107 SHARES

For girls at co-educational schools, the numbers just aren't adding up.

Female students' confidence in maths and science lags severely behind boys, according to an [OECD study](#).



Lauriston Girls School students Isabelle McIndoe, Veasna Gunawan and Zoe Parker-Nentis. Photo: Jesse Marlow

It's having a profound impact on what they're choosing to study, with figures from the Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute showing that only 6.7 per cent of female year 12 students undertake advanced mathematics and only 17.5 per cent undertake intermediate mathematics. (Participation rates were higher across the board for males.)

But there is cause for hope.

A new Melbourne University study has found that girls at single-sex schools grew more confident in maths.

Isabelle McIndoe, who is a top year eight maths student at Lauriston Girls School, said she only started to feel confident in her maths ability after she moved to an all-girls school.



The boys were more dominant and asked most of the questions in her co-ed primary school class, and she feared that she would be mocked if she asked a "dumb question".

"Now, I ask every time I'm uncertain about something," she said. "Because the boys dominated, they were always louder, so it really



MOST POPULAR

- 1 Maths plus all-girls school equals ...
- 2 The Australian's Bill Leak criticised ...
- 3 Australian film director faces 50 child ...
- 4 AMA president says woman having baby at ...
- 5 Hammerhead sharks: nature's great ...

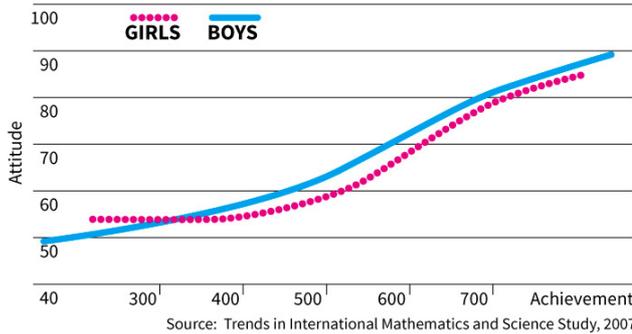
FOLLOW THE AGE

felt like they were better".

The Melbourne University study compared the attitude and achievement of girls and boys at both single-sex and co-educational schools. It found that, in year four, boys were slightly more confident in their maths ability than girls in a co-ed environment.

Grade 4 girls less confident, even high achievers

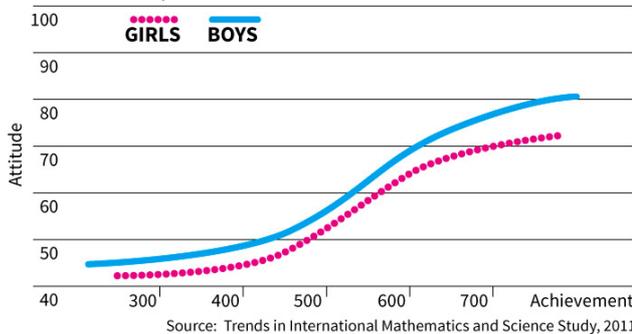
Grade 4 students' reported level of confidence in maths



But the confidence gap increased significantly by the time the students hit year eight, with the top male students proving far more confident than the female students, even if their ability was on a par.

Year 8 girls still less confident than boys

Year 8 students' reported level of confidence in maths



The paper's author, Dr Chris Ryan, said the trend reversed at single-sex schools, proving that a negative attitude to maths was not "intrinsic" to female students, but was rather a product of the co-ed school environment.

And he said it was possible that teachers at co-ed schools were unconsciously favouring boys in maths classes.

"I think it's still the case that high-achieving boys in maths tend to get told to pursue STEM-related (science, technology, engineering and maths) subjects, and high achieving girls in maths are less encouraged in that direction at co-ed environments," Dr Ryan said.

President of the Alliance of Girls' Schools Australasia, Fran Reddan, said the all-girls schools offered "an environment where girls are more confident and willing to take risks, make mistakes, ask questions and compete".

While other studies showed that girls in single-sex schools performed better in STEM subjects, critics suggest that single-sex students are generally more affluent, which might skew the results.

Director of the Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute Professor Geoff Prince is driving a \$22 million initiative funded by the BHP Billiton Foundation to boost female student participation in maths at 120 mostly co-ed schools.

In a bid to offer more female role models in maths, Professor Prince said the initiative was offering female students the opportunity to shadow women in maths-related tertiary and professional fields.

Professor Prince said he was also lobbying the national curriculum authority to broaden the maths curriculum to include biology, which is a subject popular among girls and increasingly relevant to the maths field.

Includes
nbn™
broadband

200GB Data

Includes Wi-Fi
Modem

LEARN
MORE

