

Why I choose co-education.

By Mr Gareth Davies, Headmaster, Gayhurst School

The education system plays a very important role in making our world a better place for us all to live. It works towards creating gender equality in every aspect of life and it is my responsibility and that of the Gayhurst staff, as educators, to prepare the children in our care, for the world in which they will live and equip them for a rewarding and successful adult life.

A co-educational preparatory school, such as Gayhurst, helps to lay the foundations for children to learn how to co-exist as males and females and instils mutual respect and dignity for each other from a young age. Children can have very different learning styles and perspectives regardless of their gender. A good school is one that enables children to thrive no matter what their learning style or outlook. It is too naïve to say that boys learn one way and girls another. Good teachers will make lessons challenging and accessible to everyone within the class, where all contributions and viewpoints are valued and encouraged. Girls and boys learning side by side in the same educational setting enables them to develop a mutual understanding and tolerance towards each other and also value different opinions, approaches to learning and ideas. They get to know each other's strengths and weaknesses and learn how to accept each other just as they are. It also serves to broaden their perspective on how they can approach aspects of their learning differently but achieve the same successful outcome.

All children are different, no matter what their gender, and learning together helps boys and girls overcome shyness, hesitation or even fear of communicating with each other and the opposite sex. It fosters a friendly environment where boys and girls can be at ease together and therefore a 'comfort zone' is created where communication is improved and social interaction enhanced. Co-educational schools go a long way to reducing gender specific characteristics. Children learn about and experience multiple characters, different to themselves, giving them great knowledge and understanding which helps to break down gender stereotyping. It also helps to improve and develop emotional intelligence when dealing with so many varied personal and social dynamics within the classroom and playground.

Healthy competition is an essential part of a good education as it prepares our children to face the competitive challenges awaiting them in adult life. A co-educational school encourages challenges amongst all pupils in a healthy and supportive way and prepares children to succeed and fail with dignity and to hold a respect for each other in doing so. Of course, it also offers great opportunity for collaboration with boys and girls working alongside one another without any dominance from either gender.

The development of a healthy self-esteem is crucial for our children and to be educated in a way that they experience as many different personalities as possible early in their life is the best place to start the growth of high self-esteem in a child. Co-education helps both girls and boys respect each-other's self-esteem, giving them a confidence in their own. Team building activities in early years helps both genders learn how to co-exist and this can only be provided in a co-educational school.

We have to remember what schools are for. They are not factories or hot houses that churn out just an academically successful pupil; they are there to teach the whole child

and the whole child includes all the different intelligences and aptitudes that go to make up each and every boy and girl in our care. One size does not fit all; we should draw out of each child all of the different gifts and characteristics that make each one of them unique. The personal and social development of our pupils is just as important as their academic development, if not more so.

The positive atmosphere at Gayhurst is palpable to all who visit. Our inspiring teachers enthuse our children and they grow in confidence to be able to express themselves in an atmosphere of kindness and humanity where their pastoral needs, happiness and wellbeing are of paramount importance. Boys and girls begin their journey at Gayhurst as friends first and foremost and grow-up together with well-established social confidence and respect. Through co-education, we value the enhancement to the development of our children that boys and girls learning side by side offers. They blend well together and compliment one another, making for a stimulating learning environment. Gayhurst pupils are most definitely happy pupils, who thrive on the challenge to become, confident, independent and resilient in all aspects of school life.