

# Single-sex success

**Academic success, combined with a secure environment, are key reasons why single-sex schools in the UK are popular with many overseas parents, and the schools themselves are becoming more aware of the advantages of cultural diversity in their classrooms. Bethan Norris reports.**

## Useful websites

[www.girls-schools.org.uk](http://www.girls-schools.org.uk) provides a searchable listing of GSA member schools, as well as giving advice about how to choose the right school to suit the individual

[www.independentschools.co.uk](http://www.independentschools.co.uk) provides a searchable database of over 2,000 independent schools in the UK, and also scholarship and bursary information

[www.boarding-association.org.uk](http://www.boarding-association.org.uk) provides a searchable database of boarding schools in the UK

[www.isis.org.uk](http://www.isis.org.uk) homepage for the Independent Schools Information Service, which provides practical information for international students and parents as well as a listing of independent schools in the UK

[www.ukprivateschools.com](http://www.ukprivateschools.com) provides a listing of independent schools in the UK as well as advice on school fees and other useful information

Single-sex schools are a British tradition. They have long been providing high quality education to both home and overseas students of all ages. "I strongly feel that we are offering something unique to students," says Sarah Stevenson, Marketing Officer at Princess Helena College in Hertfordshire. "British boarding schools were traditionally single sex and overseas parents feel that they offer a very real traditional experience for their children."

Mostly confined to the private sector, single-sex schools consistently come at the top of the UK league tables which assess academic achievement. Of the top 20 schools in the independent league table for 2000, 12 schools are girls only, seven are boys only and one is boys only, with girls in the sixth form. These results give a clear indication of the academic success of many single-sex schools in the UK, which is often a big attraction for overseas parents when choosing a school for their children.

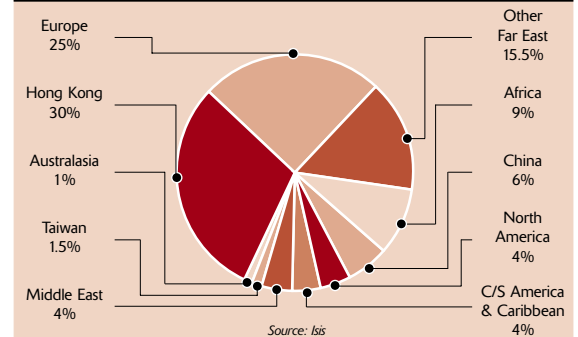
Sara Hankin, Sixth Form Admission Tutor at Shrewsbury School in Shropshire, says, "Parent's priorities are prestige – this school and British education in general – exam results, perfection of English, socialisation and preparation for international professions and business." She adds, "Single-sex schools are good for concentration in class."

While academic achievement is a high priority for any parent, the distraction-free environment fostered by single-sex schools can bring about other advantages. Research shows that girls often benefit the most from single-sex schooling. Ann Harris, Principal at Moira House Girls School in Eastbourne says, "A single-sex environment encourages development of self-confidence. Parents see single-sex schools as more secure, less distracting, and it is more likely that girls will study better."

Gina Hart, Manager of the British Team at Euro-Internatberatung Tumulka in Germany, reports that 80 per cent of their bookings for single-sex schools in the UK are for girls' schools. "Boys don't normally warm to the idea of life without girls, but girls don't always associate good fun with the presence of the opposite sex... often life without boys in adolescent years can be easier as there is less peer pressure and competition in class, and get a bunch of 16-year-old girls together in a boarding house and you can be sure that it will be far from boring!"



**International students at Girls School Association (GSA) member schools in 1999**



Single-sex schools in the UK are popular with students from a wide range of countries throughout the world, and the reasons for this vary widely from country to country. Figures from the Independent Schools Information Service (Isis) show that the majority of overseas students studying at Girls School Association (GSA) member schools last year came from Hong Kong (see above).

Helen Chung, Director of the Alliance of International Education in Hong Kong, believes the reasons for this are mostly cultural. "In our culture, parents are very concerned about the safety of their girls. They think that if they send their girls to single-sex schools, they can avoid boys taking advantage of girls."

Dick Davison, Joint Director of Isis, points to Hong Kong's historical links with Britain as another reason why schools in the UK might be an obvious choice for parents in Hong Kong. "Hong Kong spent 150 years as a crown colony and traditionally has been one of the strongest markets in the world for UK education."

Many schools are, however, looking to diversify their student base further. Princess Helena College, whose links with an agent in Hong Kong have ensured a steady stream of Hong Kong student enrolments in the past, plans to target student markets a bit closer to home in the future. Stevenson says, "I want to get cracking on the German market. There is a great demand for A-level courses from German students. German universities accept A-level qualifications instead of the *Arbitur* and the students gain language experience as well as experience in studying in a foreign country."

Hart also points out that German students save a whole year in their education as in Germany they sit the *Arbitur* at 19 rather than 18, when UK students sit A-levels. "Some [German] students only intend to stay in Britain for one term," she says, "but having been exposed to the strengths of the educational system, decide to stay on and finish their entire education in Britain."

The wide ranging benefits that a diverse ethnic mix can bring to all pupils is acknowledged throughout the education world, and single-sex schools are keen to increase their share of the overseas student market. Michael Edwards, Head of Business Studies at Shiplake College in Henley-on-Thames, says, "Currently we only have around seven per cent overseas students and we would like to increase this number. They bring a breadth and diversity to class discussions that is refreshing and enlightening for both staff and other pupils."

While marketing methods vary, a growing number of schools are starting to take a more direct approach to overseas marketing by using overseas consultants and attending education fairs, instead of relying on word-of-mouth recommendations, in order to take full advantage of their niche status. Sheila Cooper, General Secretary of the GSA, says "Isis participates in many overseas fairs in order to promote their member schools. Also some girls' schools attend fairs individually, while others go jointly to market themselves in a group."

#### **Selection of single-sex schools in the UK**

##### **Girls**

Bedford High School, Bedford; Bedgebury School, Kent; Burgess Hill School, West Sussex; Cobham Hall, Kent; Kent College Pembury, Tunbridge Wells; Malvern Girl's College, Worcester; Moira House Girls School, Eastbourne; Padworth College, Reading; Polam Hall School, Darlington; Princess Helena College, Hertfordshire; St James's School, Worcestershire; Stonar School, Wiltshire; Westonbirt School, Gloucestershire

##### **Boys**

Shiplake College, Henley-on-Thames; Shrewsbury School, Shropshire; Warwick School, Warwick