

## focus

# Single sex schools

The number of places at single sex schools in the UK has increased in recent years and both girls' and boys' schools have much to offer international students.

Overall, places for all students at single sex schools in the UK have risen over the last 10 years, although trends show marked differences between boys' and girls' schools. According to annual statistics by the Independent School Council (ISC), the number of independent boys' schools in the UK has decreased by 26 per cent since 1996, while the number of boys actually attending boys' schools has increased by four per cent. In contrast, attendees at girls' schools have increased by 13 per cent over the same period of time, while the number of girls' schools in the UK has decreased by six per cent.

While figures are not available for the number of international students studying at single sex schools in the UK, many schools report that international interest in single sex education has stayed strong. Janine Graysmark from St Leonards Mayfield girls' school in East Sussex believes that a single sex education is particularly important for girls being sent overseas to study. "We use this factor combined with our Catholic status to attract [international] students," she asserts. "The parents are happier to send daughters to single sex rather than co-ed. In most year groups we get more [international] applications than we have places."

Emma Campbell from Bruton School for Girls in Somerset agrees. "We believe that girls thrive in a single sex environment," she says. "Self-esteem, confidence and levels of achievement flourish... Girls are more likely to choose to study [subjects such as] mathematics, physics and chemistry at an all-girls school and overall academic results are excellent."

At boys' schools, too, one of the principle attractions for international students and their parents is the reputation for high academic attainment. Tony Binns from Dulwich College in London says that the boys-only school offers an "academic focus and less self-conscious atmosphere".

However, while all single sex schools emphasise their academic credentials without the distractions

that the opposite sex can create, it is in girls' schools that the benefits of a concentrated academic focus are more pronounced. "Girls' schools dominate the top of the examination league tables [in the UK]," asserts Henrietta Lightwood from Badminton Girls' School in Bristol. "Perhaps because girls and boys develop in different ways. Girls benefit from being in a school that recognises the differences between the sexes and here at Badminton we don't limit girls at all, [either] professionally [or] personally."

When it comes to the nationalities of students choosing to study in single sex schools in the UK, Asian students tend to predominate, although this is starting to change. "Hong Kong is the largest [nationality] group [at our school] but Mexico is rising in numbers," says Graysmark, while Lightwood adds, "Our biggest nationalities are from the Pacific Rim – mainly Hong Kong and China, although we also have a large amount of girls from Nigeria and increasingly Russia. We have always welcomed girls from different parts of Africa – Nigeria and Kenya – and the Far East. Newer interest is from [students in] Russia, Spain and Germany."

While looking to develop wider student markets, many single sex schools in the UK are also looking at ways to support international students studying at their schools, either through study centres that offer language tuition throughout a school career or by offering preparation programmes. "We have an Esol department and do a three-day short course for new students," says Graysmark, adding that international students must stay for at least one year at the school.

At Dulwich College, the school has teamed up with a language school, Our World English Schools, to offer a junior summer EFL school on the premises. For students enrolled at the college, "[we offer] some EFL support but students must already have good English; our GCSE and A-level courses are the same for UK and overseas students", says Binns.