

# ► Schools

A SPECIAL ADVERTISING REPORT

## Noise levels and the great co-ed debate

FOR two principals from Sydney's premier religious schools, the debate about co-education versus single sex learning comes down to breaking down stereotypes.

But they have reached different conclusions about how to go about fighting this battle.

For Kitty Guerin, principal at Our Lady of Mercy College at Parramatta in Sydney's west, stereotypes are best broken down by allowing girls to flourish in traditionally male-dominated subjects they might have been crowded out of in a co-ed school.

But for St Andrews Cathedral School's principal, Phillip Heath, stereotypes are tackled by allowing girls into the former boys' school — although in the younger years, boys and girls are taught separately in key subjects like maths, science, English and history.

Ms Guerin says recent discoveries have proved the benefits of teaching boys and girls separately.

"Academically, girls achieve much stronger results, not just in Australia but also in the US," she says. "They get the full attention of teachers, but research shows that in co-ed schools it is the noisy boys who tend to get the teachers' attention and girls are often ignored in a noisy environment."

"Girls work better in a collaborative environment that you can create in a girls' school."

Girls also have greater opportunities to take a leadership role in a girls' school: "In a co-ed school, leadership roles have to be shared. So it's a wonderful opportunity for girls to develop leadership skills."

They also have the opportunity to see more female role models.

"They see more women on staff, particularly in leadership roles," Ms Guerin says. "They also have access to all subjects, so they are given the opportunity to star in subjects that in a co-ed school could be dominated by boys, particularly in the maths and science and technology area."

"Everything is open to them. It's really an environment that allows girls to be stretched to their fullest to achieve excellence in any field they choose."

"The girls are free to do what they opt to do regardless of peer pressure or societal influence — and they are taught in ways which are very much geared to the way girls learn."

"We have large numbers of girls who go into the sciences; physics, chemistry, biology and urban environmental classes."

"In a co-ed environment, you would find the number of girls in those classes would be reduced."

"We encourage them to go into technology as well."

And Ms Guerin has testimonies from

old girls to back her thesis. "We have this year brought in a number of our recent ex-students who have gone on to university," she says. "They have spoken about the advantages of coming from a girls' school, their greater confidence, their ability to communicate, their preparedness to stand up and ask questions and to be very involved in their learning at university."

"People have commented to them on how well they have settled into university and they say that is because of their experience of being at a girls' school."

The majority of girls learn much better in a collaborative and co-operative environment, she says.

"The research shows that the way in which girls' brains are structured is different to boys. We have structured our classes based on that latest research."

The result is girls at her school work more in groups that "don't have that teacher-directed models in the classroom."

At St Andrews Cathedral School, Mr Heath says he remains "very committed to co-education".

"It suits the institutional narrative of the school," he says. "We were a boys' school from 1885 and in 1999 we introduced co-education in our senior college in the top three years, which is a separate campus. The nine years of that experience has been uniformly positive."

The school adopted a twin model for the middle years where English, maths, science, history, geography, civics and citizenship are taught in separate or segregated classes and the other third of the academic program is taught in co-ed classes.

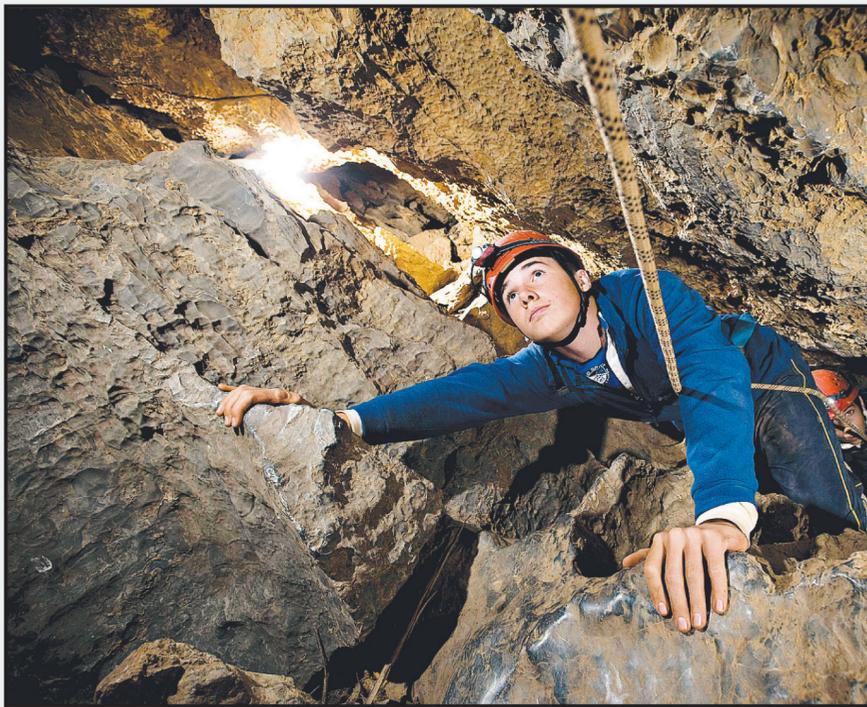
"We have bought a little bit into the debate about teaching styles and maturation rates that speak to gender differences then we have done it in an age appropriate way in the more senior years where everyone learns everything together," Mr Heath says.

Why go to all this trouble?

"There are very powerful socialisation merits for boys and girls," he says. "The nature of gender difference can be lessened in a co-ed environment and the presumption of stereotype is challenged. You are working with and growing up with each other."

"We feel that because we are offering a full co-ed experience from kindergarten to year 12, there is a deeper awareness of the different minds and mentalities of the different genders. It makes school a more rich experience."

It has also led to a decline in the school's "blokey" culture, according to Mr Heath: "We have been able to validate a wide variety of experiences — not just from a boys' point of view. It has been a lot of fun."



## Growing and learning in Kangaroo Valley

AT the Scots College in Sydney, year nine students spend two terms at a rural campus, where they arrive as boys and emerge as young men.

The school's Glengarry campus spans some 1000 acres at Kangaroo Valley, two-and-a-half hours south of Sydney.

During the coming-of-age experience, students complete a mix of academic studies, domestic and social responsibilities and outdoor education including abseiling, caving, high and low wires courses, bush walking, mountain bike trekking, canoeing, rafting and cross country running.

"There are a lot of symbolic moments for boys as they enter and leave the Glengarry program," says Scots College principal, Dr Ian Lambert.

"On arrival, the boys break into small groups and make their way down via winding tracks to the campus. Along the

way, they stop to talk about what the program involves and think forward to the day they leave.

"Upon leaving, the students walk through a long formation of Glengarry staff, and one or two boys will play the bagpipes as they come up the hill."

"On their returning to the main campus in Bellevue Hill, the students are met by a formation of senior boys who pipe them back into the college."

Founded in 1893, The Scots College was established at Brighton-le-Sands on Botany Bay and moved in 1895 to its present Bellevue Hill site. It has 1600 students, of whom 225 are boarders.

"The Glengarry experience is one thing every boy at Scots shares," says Dr Lambert. "Scots is a very diverse community. We have boys from country properties, boys who have rarely walked off carpet, boys from south-east Asia and

boys from beach suburbs." The highly-qualified staff at Glengarry combine teaching and outdoor education skills with significant role modeling, important to boys of this age. "The staff know they have had an enormous impact and know they are changing lives," says Dr Lambert.

He also stresses that the Glengarry experience equips boys with new personal strengths and a sustainable set of values, which guide them in their dealings with others.

"These teamwork and leadership skills, vital to the boys' personal development, encourage them to develop their individual talents," he says.

The boys are also encouraged to develop self-reliance, independence, high levels of self-motivation and leadership skills.

## Helping hand for the disadvantaged

BRISBANE'S Moreton Bay College (MBC), is putting its ethos of inclusivity and social justice into action by providing fully-funded bursary places for disadvantaged students.

Located in the leafy suburb of Manly West, the girls' school has a long history of teaching the value of service, encouraging students to support their community and appreciate diversity.

The MBC Foundation Bursary is available to girls in Years 8-12 who, because of their socio-economic circumstances, would not otherwise be able to attend the College.

In designing the bursary, the school worked with Yalari, a group which helps link Indigenous students from rural and remote communities to quality educational facilities as a means of breaking the cycles of poverty and abuse.

"The bursary program and its application process have evolved into a program that is accessible and attractive to indigenous students, along with other students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds," says School principal, Jennifer Haynes.

"We celebrate the fact that in the last 12 months, four girls from a range of disadvan-

tagged backgrounds have accepted bursary places here."

Bursaries are awarded to disadvantaged students who demonstrate the potential to excel if given the opportunity.

Governor General Quentin Bryce, a former MBC student, is the patron of the MBC Foundation Bursary Fund, which was established to ensure the long-term viability of the program.

She says: "I am delighted to support Moreton Bay College in establishing bursaries for capable young women whose educational opportunities are limited by circumstances."

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Dr Ian P.M. Lambert, Principal.

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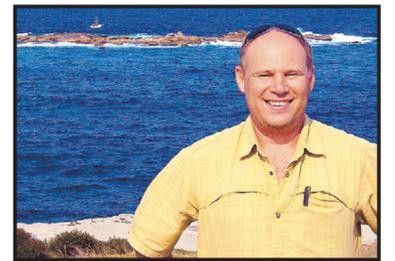
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Tara is the Number 1 Independent School in North-West Sydney.



Amos Stark: Sharing skills and experience

## Slice of real life helps students

THROUGH his program Help a Teacher, Amos Stark is encouraging business people to volunteer to share their skills, knowledge and expertise with school teachers and students.

An educationalist and senior instructional designer with IBM, Mr Stark's Help a Teacher allows people to volunteer to share their expertise with teachers in local schools by posting their interest and specific area of expertise through the program's website.

Not only does Help a Teacher pair school teachers with suitably qualified volunteers from the corporate sector to share their skills and experiences with students, it also allows teachers to post requests for specific types of assistance — be it explaining management practices or skills sharing — to attract an appropriately skilled volunteer.

"The Help a Teacher concept is designed to ease teachers' workloads and enrich children's learning," says Mr Stark.

After he founded the Australian non-for-profit, community project earlier this year, Mr Stark is delighted that the pilot program has been such a success.

He originally studied to be an industrial designer, and initially had no interest in teaching: "While I did study for my teaching diploma, I never thought I'd use it," he admits.

But after working as a designer for one of the country's largest office furniture manufacturers, a series of circumstances saw him also training staff in product knowledge, and he was hooked.

Mr Stark holds a Masters of Arts (MA) degree in e-Learning, a Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree in Technological Education, a Design Teacher's Diploma and is undertaking his Education Doctorate. He also lectures the e-Learning Technology subject at the University of Technology, Sydney and is an adjunct senior lecturer at the University of Sydney for his contributions to teaching.

While Mr Stark was convinced he had a winning idea, he resisted running before he could walk. Instead, he looked around for a school that would be responsive to the idea.

He found what he was after at Sydney's Tara Anglican School for Girls. As the first school to engage the Help a Teacher program, Tara has been actively helping reshape the format and content to enable it to evolve into a large scale national education program.

To date, the Tara students have heard from many different people talking about practical examples of managing workplace issues such as women in the workplace, team work, time management, negotiation skills, and conflict resolution.

Melissa Losco, who runs Tara's Business Enterprise Program, says Help a Teacher has brought many benefits to their students: "A recent visit from a young female IBM executive on dealing with gender issues in the work situation gave the girls invaluable advice on being the only female on an all-male team in a male-dominated industry."

"It's life lessons like these that the girls can most benefit from and it's information that you can't get from a textbook."

"By inviting contributions from real-life experts and professionals, the students learn more, are more interested and enthusiastic about the topic and take away critical life skills."