

5 Generations of Prep Education for Girls

IN AN era where we continue to grapple with gender and equality issues there has been a recent rise in interest in girls only schools. The 'Everyone's Invited' campaign and other high-profile examples are shining a light on the benefit of girls only schools which build self-belief in young women.

Whilst images of stern school mistresses and stark classrooms may seem draconian, the reality is that hidden in the archives at girls' schools are stories and accounts of visionary women providing forward looking approaches.

Girls' schools were seen as fairly radical in the 1880s when a number of prestigious schools were opened for the first time. At the time, some were focusing on delivering an education which would ensure that middle class girls grew into successful wives and mothers. One parliamentary report said girls should be educated to be 'decorative, modest, marriageable beings.' The curriculum included needlework and domestic studies. But alongside that, if you dig a little deeper, there are inspiring tales of school mistresses campaigning for women to enter university and take up professional roles. Pioneering headmistresses at the early schools for girls switched the focus from domestic accomplishments to academic excellence.

Founders at St Catherine's spoke of their wish to develop in pupils a strong sense of corporate unity and obligation to the community, and

'to kindle a flame that would be passed from generation to generation.' Revd Joseph Merriman, addressing sponsors at one of the early meetings promoting the school, spoke proudly of the public spirit.

Educating primary aged girls during this period was less common and we are very proud that here at St Catherine's we have been educating primary aged girls since 1896 and can now celebrate five generations of girls having been educated here. Since those very early days, it was clear that headmistresses and governors were committed to transforming young lives, promoting curiosity and learning across a range of subjects. Elocution and House music events are listed as favourites in the school magazines of the time. But alongside their brothers in other schools, girls were learning Mathematics and Science.

During the First and Second World Wars, women's roles changed significantly and again there is evidence that some of the innovative work done in girls' schools helped educate the many women who flew unarmed aircraft, drove ambulances, served as nurses and worked behind enemy lines in the European resistance in the Special Operations Executive. Many schools had to relocate or diversify. St Catherine's welcomed 30 evacuees from Brighton and remained open during the school holidays. The School bought Church House in Bramley in 1949 and the current Prep School opened due to the growing number of junior pupils.



BELIEVE.
ACHIEVE.
SUCCEED.

St Catherine's is a place where your daughter will develop a lifelong love for learning, in a supportive and homely environment. Both in and outside the classroom, she will experience a range of opportunities, and discover her strengths and passions.

From this foundation, she will grow in confidence and develop a curiosity about everything around her. She will leave our Prep School believing in her abilities and ready to embrace new challenges in senior school.

OPEN EVENTS from 9.45am

Wednesday 13th October 2021

Friday 12th November 2021

Friday 4th February 2022

Thursday 10th March 2022

prepadmissions@stcatherines.info



St Catherine's Prep, Bramley

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Tensions in the 1950s around women's roles continued and once again girls' schools were forward looking and embraced a myriad of subjects and activities that had traditionally been studied by boys. Sports and opportunities for competitive team games also brought an important dimension to girls' education.

Not until 1975 with the Sex Discrimination Act was discrimination banned on the basis of sex or marital status in the areas of employment, education and training. Welcomed by those who continued to champion girls' education, this also brought a change for many single sex schools which became co-ed. The research shows that this did not achieve benefits for girls but did improve boys' results.

The value of a girls only experience at primary is well documented and we know that gendered views are apparent in children as young as 5 or 6 years old. Many may have seen the experiment where young children are asked to draw a scientist, doctor and firefighter and those in co-ed settings are more likely to draw men than girls in a single sex school. Why? Role models and pioneers remain in girls' schools inspiring young women to pursue their strengths and talents and believing that

nothing should be 'off limits' on the grounds of gender. Girls are now 35% more likely to attend university than boys and yet the gender pay gap and differences across sectors remain. We have come along way with promoting chances from the age of 4-18 at St Catherine's and are immensely proud of the diverse range of careers that young women pursue. It is the spark that is lit in those earliest years which makes a fundamental, life changing difference.

For further information about the experiences of pupils at St Catherine's visit our digital archive via: <http://www.stcatshistory.info/default.aspx>

Naomi Bartholomew – Headmistress

St Catherine's Prep School, Bramley, Surrey • www.stcatherines.info

