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# SCHOOL OF THOUGHT

Is a single-sex or co-ed school best for your child? Melonie Clarke explores the pros and cons of each

**F**inding a school to suit your child's academic ability and temperament can feel like a momentous task, especially as there is so much to consider - facilities, extra-curricular activities, the school's reputation, its distance from your home. Add to that the choice of a single-sex or co-ed school, and the decision is positively daunting.

The arguments in favour of, and against, both co-ed and single-sex schools are age-old, and there are very much two camps - and strong debate surrounding each.

With girls and boys responding differently to each learning environment, the argument to teach them separately may seem clear cut. Equally, many argue there is a need to integrate students at a very young age so they thrive and learn to respect each other and their differences.

Clearly, it's a minefield, and if you find yourself not knowing which way to turn, hopefully we can be of assistance.

When it comes to exam results, recent statistics show that

single-sex is the key to success. Seventy-five per cent of pupils at single-sex schools achieved five good GCSEs compared with just 55 per cent in mixed schools. A quick look at the league tables when it comes to GCSE and A-level results reveals that single-sex schools dominate, suggesting that if your child is academically minded and dreaming of an Oxbridge future, then this type of school may be best.

There are many reasons why this is the case. Research shows that girls and boys learn in different ways, so splitting them up is best. Girls are said to respond better when learning is collaborative and discussion-based, while boys can dominate discussions

and thrive in group-based teamwork. By teaching students separately, the most efficient learning style for each sex can help them fulfil their potential.

There is also the argument that by removing the other sex you remove the distractions associated with being around the other sex. There can be no

*'There is also the argument that by removing the other sex you remove the distractions'*

denying that growing up - especially when children reach puberty, with hormone levels high - thoughts of potential boyfriends or girlfriends can dominate, taking minds away from exams and schoolwork. However, despite being able to potentially give 100 per cent of their attention to learning, there is also the argument that single-sex environments can create an unrealistic and dysfunctional attitude towards other genders.

Research has shown that even something simple, like room temperature, can affect a learning environment. It is suggested that



girls prefer to work in warmer classrooms and boys in cooler ones. By separating them, achieving this is easy.

Gender stereotypes can be challenged when children are educated separately. Single-sex schools give pupils the freedom to explore subjects, sports or activities that may otherwise be discouraged at a mixed school, thereby eliminating gender boundaries. This freedom means pupils are not hindered by peer pressure and therefore more likely to take part in what might be perceived as a 'girl' or 'boy' subject. This makes pursuing what is typically considered a male or female-orientated subject or activity much less daunting.

Studies reveal, for example, that girls who are educated at single-sex day schools and academies are much more likely to opt for science or engineering degrees at university compared with girls who study at mixed schools - although co-ed schools are working to put an end to barriers such as these.

It is also believed that being in a single-sex environment can create a greater sense of camaraderie among pupils, and good sportsmanship, with firm friendships being forged that will last a lifetime.

Looking at co-ed schools, a recurring argument is that teaching children in a mixed environment makes it easier for them to relate to the other sex when they go on to further education or enter the workforce.

As well as education, schools have a duty to prepare children for adult life, which includes the kind of basic life skills that come from interacting with the other sex in an everyday setting. Some parents and educators argue that segregating children can give



*'Many argue there is a need to integrate students at a very young age so they learn to respect each other'*

them a skewed view of the other sex. Despite boys and girls learning differently, good co-ed schools and teachers will be able to bring out the best of each child's ability, even in a mixed environment. Good teachers

will encourage pupils to play to their strengths, and provide learning that can help girls and boys thrive.

Many single-sex schools have begun to mix pupils at sixth form, and the number of single-sex schools in general has halved in the past 20 years. Because of the increasing trend towards mixed-sex education, many now see there is success to be had with co-ed learning environments.

Whatever side of the debate you find yourself leaning towards, there are certainly advantages to both single-sex and co-ed schools. The main thing to remember is that the right educational environment for your child will be the thing that helps them thrive, so be proactive and visit plenty of schools with your child on open days - it should soon become clear where their natural habitat will be. ■





# Lifelong Learning for Lifelong Benefits

Thought your school days were over? You can enjoy the many advantages of adult learning and discover something new at Marlborough College Summer School



**W**hen you think about learning something new, does the saying you can't teach an old dog new tricks immediately spring to mind? While it's true that children have more 'flexible' brains, it's never too late to learn. In fact, even if you don't have fond memories of your school days, or struggled with exams, you can still enjoy the experience and rewards of being an adult learner.

Marlborough College Summer School in Wiltshire will take place from 8 July to 4 August 2018 and host an amazing array of more than 500 courses suitable for all ages, abilities and interests. Whether you wish to learn a new skill or spend time enhancing an existing one, there's a course that's just perfect for you.

The eclectic course programme is refreshed annually, and this year is no exception, with traditional Summer School favourites including watercolour painting, ballroom dancing, languages and politics, running alongside a wide range of inventive new titles encompassing everything from needle felting to sustainability, the history of food to mindfulness, meditation and Taoist yoga. You can even learn to fly!

The exercise of learning stimulates the brain, helping to keep your mind sharp and contributing to good mental

health. Research shows that adult learning can help reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety; there is also evidence to suggest that staying mentally active can help reduce the risk of dementia. Besides health benefits, lifelong learning can also do wonders for your confidence and social life.

With its small classes and holiday atmosphere, Summer School provides a relaxed and friendly setting in which to learn for a week under the support and guidance of an expert tutor.

Getting your head around a subject or discovering that you are good at something new can be a great boost to your self-esteem and give you the



confidence to overcome challenges and make decisions independently.

Many Summer School students cite the opportunity to form friendships as a particular highlight, and return to Marlborough year after year to enjoy exchanging ideas and the company of people with similar interests. In the words of one student, 'Have no fear of coming on your own, as there will always be someone to talk to and share experiences with. I first came alone and now we are eight ladies who meet up every year.'

For students wishing to really make the most of their time at Summer School, booking a stay in one of the College boarding houses is thoroughly recommended. As a resident, you can not only indulge in the excellent cuisine and leisure facilities, but also enjoy a wealth of fascinating lectures, recitals and entertainment.

The 2018 programme features a photographic journey with Chris Packham and an evening with Lord Robert Winston. Musical treats include the hilarious Rainer Hersch Orchestra, the Classical Brit Award-winning group Blake, and a celebration of Barbra Streisand by Liza Pulman. ■

◆ For further information and to request a brochure, call the Summer School team on 01672-892388 or visit [www.summerschool.co.uk](http://www.summerschool.co.uk)



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# FUN AND GAMES...

Team sports help foster good ethical practices, and nurture both teamwork and leadership. Lisa Freedman explains why sports are so essential to the curriculum

It was the Duke of Wellington who is famously thought to have remarked that the Battle of Waterloo was won 'on the playing fields of Eton'. While few today would suggest the primary goal of school sport is to prepare pupils for the rigours of war, most still believe it offers excellent preparation for the battles of life, and one of the undoubted advantages of an independent education is the starring role that sport continues to play in the curriculum.

Millfield School in Somerset, for example, perhaps the country's most illustrious sporting school, argues that 'go, fight, win' (which it notably does) is only one of its multifaceted benefits. 'Sport has always provided the opportunity to learn. Through sport, pupils learn more about themselves, especially when under pressure,' says headmaster Craig Considine. 'They learn about others when playing in a team or against an opponent, and sport can also be a great release, allowing pupils to focus and work that bit harder and smarter in the classroom.'

Millfield offers more than 30 sports and activities, and participation in sport plays a central role in the school's mission to support and nurture outstanding athletes, an outcome amply demonstrated by the fact that it has produced multiple Olympians for every Games since 1956, including six members of Team GB in 2016.

Not every school, however, will apply the same energy to training athletes who can participate at national and international level, but independent schools in general are particularly fortunate that they continue to provide the facilities and

coaching to deliver sporting excellence, and most consider it an integral part of what they offer.

'The primary commitment to sport is participation and enjoyment,' says Angela Drew, headmistress of GDST Bromley High School, an all-girls day school in Bickley, in Greater London. 'Schools are not fundamentally driven by a desire to create a small number of elite athletes, but to provide opportunities for all pupils to participate as a foundation for a healthy lifestyle.'

Like times tables or French verbs, this involvement is intended to ensure that children and

environment, where collaborating and networking are increasingly valued.'

Active involvement in a sport also helps to instil more traditional virtues, like playing within the rules and dealing with both triumph and disaster with equal grace. In addition, sport can help students develop resilience and perseverance, qualities as essential to exam glory as life-long success - a win-win for both teachers and pupils.

*'Friendships formed on the games field make youngsters happier in the short term'*

adolescents learn skills and attitudes that will immunise them from our increasingly sedentary lives. This has meant that for many schools, the sports curriculum now strays well beyond compulsory biweekly rugby, netball or cricket, offering opportunities to entice even the most reluctant - from yoga and Pilates to golf and sailing.

Most schools would argue that, while individual exercise can make for both a healthy mind and a healthy body, regular participation in team sports furnishes the ethical and psychological foundations necessary to carry pupils triumphantly into the modern workplace, teaching both teamwork and leadership.

'Teamwork, of course, is the ultimate transferable skill,' says Mrs Drew. 'Friendships formed on the games field make youngsters happier in the short term and make young people more likely to thrive in a work

Successful participation in sport, too, particularly for the child who struggles academically, can be transformative, improving confidence, self-esteem and self-belief.

'Independent schools' commitment to sport is emblematic of their dedication to educating the whole child,' says Mrs Drew, 'providing the breadth of opportunity for every pupil to explore their interests and develop their talents.'

A victory for all! ■

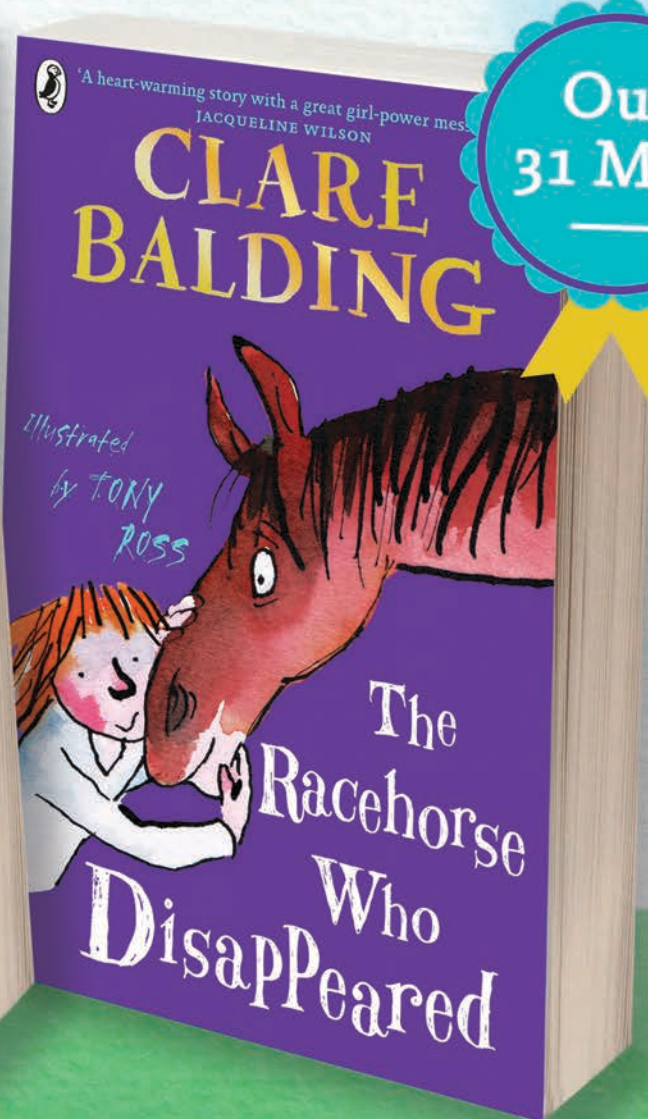
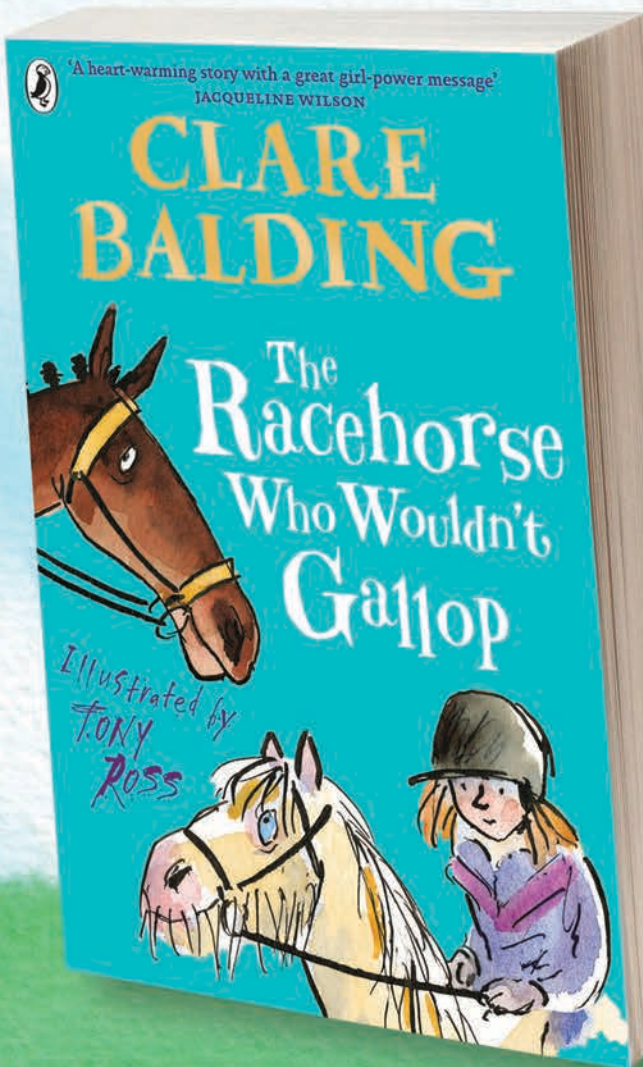




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# PLEASURE PRINCIPLE

Literature exposes children to an exciting world of storytelling, says Mervyn Benford, which is why reading for pleasure helps inspire the imagination

**M**y four grandchildren were avid readers for pleasure. Samantha would lock herself away on returning from primary school and the latest Harry Potter, inches thick, was read in two days! Now, though, she has a phone and the potential addictive snare of that screen is worrying.

All four increasingly see screens as a priority. From Minecraft to the Xbox, it is a mental drug, despite my passing on regular news of the damage to the most precious commodity they have - their brain. It is good that big Silicon Valley tech companies are wondering - at last - if they've gone a bit overboard with social media.

Kindles and other e-readers were, of course, seen as refreshing reading - a sort of bridge between old and new - but ignored the problem of the general impact in society of technology in terms of children's reading. Heavy concentration on three Rs, test targets and exam grades has undoubtedly shifted classroom perspective and priorities. I am encouraged, however, by the Publishers Association news of a reverse shift back to the normal book, that object with pages of print, and a nice cover, easy to read without great eye strain or mental damage. After all, the book as we have known it goes back 600 years as a technology that truly changed the world.

I rarely read a book that is not directly related to something that interests me - milestones (I wrote the Shire book on them), stamp collecting (I wrote the Ladybird book on coin collecting) and, of course, education and society and related politics. There is always pleasure in referring to them to acquire knowledge and resolve questions that occur to lively minds.

Books about rocks, horses, gliding, artists, gymnastics, and holiday destinations abound in the grandchildren's house. They read them avidly because they relate to their personal enthusiasms. Books are not just words, as on a screen. They impact smoothly and unnoticed on the full range of intellectual emotions - curiosity, fear, habits, experience, affections, carving a route into memory and other more enduring perceptions, not least the sheer tactile power of the hands, opening the covers, finding the contents page, turning the pages.

Curriculum in the future - in whatever forms schools survive when the need for exam qualifications fades before workless life on universal incomes - will reflect much more individual negotiation, including parents, about what is worth learning and what a child wants to learn.

*'Books are not just words on a screen. They impact smoothly on the full range of intellectual emotions'*

I predict with confidence that books will remain a prized asset. There is something magical and alluring about print on a page. I can still look at the front page of a Victorian copy of The Times and be fascinated by the hundreds of adverts that constituted front page news in that august newspaper. Google can tell me of Napoleon's awesome retreat from Moscow, but the book I found in a box at an auction that had been written by someone on that trek is so much more alive for the personal story.

Maybe I should be writing about standard fiction as a source of pleasure - which undoubtedly it remains. Our village book club is oversubscribed

with would-be members, and they eagerly discuss each month's book not just for its impact on their perceptions and awareness but the quality of the writing - plot, characters, narrative and conclusion. Those are the pleasure factors. We are still born with our true technology - language. Screens are resulting in many children arriving in school at five barely able to talk.

Language is how children discover communication. Learning that what is heard can be wonderfully and excitingly extended to characters and plots and imaginative surroundings, as well as the challenge and intrigue of the everyday world, is a powerful incentive to take print on board as soon as possible.

The pleasing power of story of any kind, fact or fiction, arises

from satisfaction, and the old saying rings true: 'Give me the child before seven...' Give our children language in the finest way possible - from speech to hard copy print in all its variety - and it will always prove more satisfying, and therefore more pleasurable and enduring, than any other forms. It is possible to ensure that every child in every family, in whatever circumstances, gets that encouragement from the first day of life. Parents need only know how easy it is. In 1898, the parents of child prodigy William Sidis were determined he would be a genius, and at four he could reportedly read Homer in the original Greek! ■





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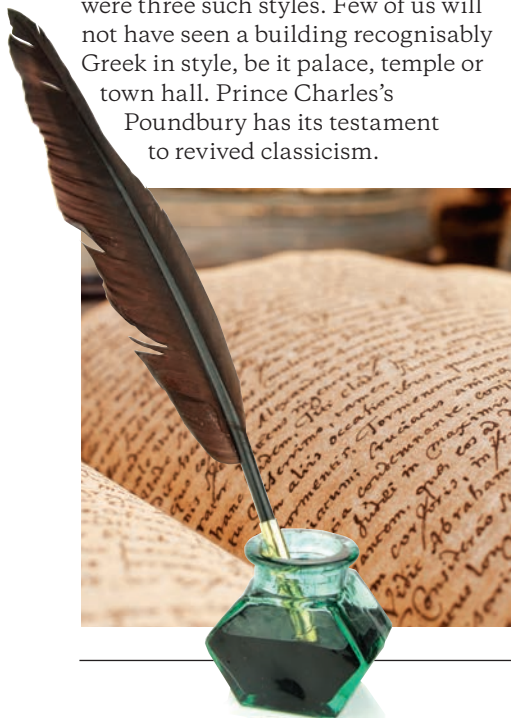
Mervyn Benford explains why ancient civilisations still offer many life lessons

I studied Latin long ago, winning the sixth form Latin prize - I was the only student and at least passed! The course included Roman history - central to understanding what the Virgil and Horace set books said about life and living at the time, not least values of the day.

Julius Caesar's writings of his Gallic wars demonstrate Roman military power but also Rome's often effective ways to tame conquered populations by persuading them they were better off - in effect, education and politics we could use today under the destructive pains of nationalism and political tribalism. Roman leaders travelled far and wide, but none so far as Greek hero, Alexander the Great, whose activities in modern Pakistan still emerge in modern TV 'discovery' documentaries and may even explain the theory that Christ survived and followed routes set by Alexander.

To architects, Corinthian capitals are not about literature but decorative acanthus leaves at the top of stone columns, something the Romans much developed. Corinthian, Ionic and Doric were three such styles. Few of us will not have seen a building recognisably Greek in style, be it palace, temple or town hall. Prince Charles's

Poundbury has its testament to revived classicism.



The blind minstrel, Homer, was a classical writer in the best literary traditions of storytelling. His Iliad skilfully wove gods and people into Trojan war history, while his Odyssey opened minds on travel - its never-ending challenge of discovery and danger - a facet of human character well explaining Marco Polo and David Livingstone setting off into the literal unknown.

Both Greece and Rome, reflecting long human traditions, have given us art, sculpture, music, dance, drama and literature. Rome's conversion to Christianity formally abandoned centuries of belief in deities inherited from the Greek world they took over politically. Yet within that Greek world lay roots of science and mathematics, not least astronomy and philosophy, argued and demonstrated by such

*'Greece and Rome, reflecting long traditions, have given us art, sculpture, music, drama and literature'*

thinkers as Aristotle and Archimedes, well-understood by Roman and later societies, often reflected by historians such as Plutarch.

Aristotle proved the Earth was a sphere; he placed it at the centre of the universe, where it stayed for centuries until Galileo and Copernicus with telescopes found otherwise - challenging Christianity's political power and opening a debate polarised between faith and science still the norm today. Archimedes remains an inspiring and influential mathematician and inventor.

Aristotle, with Plato and Socrates, among other early philosophers, sought to explain how humanity thought and behaved. Their work has much influenced social and political ideas shaping society and governance in later, allegedly civilising progress.

Plato, taught by Socrates, and with Aristotle his most famous student, significantly influenced Western



political philosophy, with his 'Republic' and 'Laws,' among other dialogues, treating still current political questions from a sharply philosophical perspective.

For Socrates, dialogue and discussion were central to teaching and learning rather than direct instruction. They reflect decades of current educational practice, sadly too neglected, wherein the views of teachers and not least pupils shape what is learned and how, in spite of consistent political motive and

effort to rule otherwise. Socrates's students would have understood what Ofsted means by 'a broad and balanced curriculum'.

Rome used Greek influence and example pragmatically. Where would we be had they discovered electricity? That Pompeii and Herculaneum reveal water piped to houses, glass in windows, dental and medical tools, art and recreation, urban planning and economics, even down-sizing - still an agenda for today - suggests that the barbaric periods following the volcano have too long closed off intellectual and socio-political development.

These centuries of Classical inspiration will remain worthy of study - more so as children today face rapid, radical change in their prospects for life. Even Bacchus, very popular in his day, and despite his historical reputation, is a god of significance for 21st-century tolerance. ■

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