

Single-sex schools 'are the future'

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Differences in how male and female brains work mean single-sex schooling will make a comeback, a leading headmistress says.

Vicky Tuck, president of the Girls' School Association, which represents the country's top independent girls' schools, told her association's annual conference in Winchester: "Far from living in the dying days of single-sex education, I am confident that as understanding of the brain continues to evolve, what is obvious to us will become obvious to everyone: girls learn in a different way to boys and it is crucial to cater for their separate needs.

"I have a hunch that in 50 years' time, maybe only 25, people will be doubled up with laughter when they watch documentaries about the history of education and discover people once thought it was a good idea to educate adolescent boys and girls together."

She cited evidence in support of her argument showing that neurological differences between the sexes meant girls' brains worked differently to boys' and added it would reverse a 40-year trend towards co-educational schools.

A study by Harvard Medical School in the US showed that parts of the frontal lobe of the brain, which controls decision-making and problem-solving functions, were proportionally larger in women than men. The area of the brain which regulates emotions is also larger than in men.

Researchers have revealed that girls are more likely to be stimulated to read by classical romantic tales such as Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, while boys are likely to be wooed by action stories. Girls are likely to be more methodical in their learning and cope better with a modular approach to GCSEs, while boys can put on a spurt to do better in examinations.

"These neurological differences are pronounced in adolescence," added Mrs Tuck, the principal of Cheltenham Ladies' College. "You have to teach girls differently to how you teach boys." She added that girls said "it helps not having boys there mucking about or making them worry about their appearance".

2,500

Number of single-sex schools in 1966

400

Number of single-sex schools in 2006

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