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MEET THE (NEW) HEADS



St Margaret's School, Bushey, is a 'hidden gem', says its new head

Few better understand the needs of students than the heads of Britain's best schools. Vanessa Berridge speaks to some recent arrivals...

There can be few more testing or worthwhile jobs than becoming the head of a large school. Constant governmental tinkering with exam syllabuses, tidal waves of paperwork, parental expectations and social media are just a few of the problems any head now faces. We talk to four heads who have been in the post since September 2014 to see what they are making of their new jobs.



DAVID LAMBON is in a unique position. He is the first lay headmaster of Ampleforth College in Yorkshire in its 200-year history; all his predecessors have been Benedictine monks. The decision to appoint a layman is, in a way, a sign of the times.

'The community has handed over

a big responsibility,' says Lambon. 'The school has been run very effectively by monks, but the community's role is pastoral and faith development. In this current era of targets, it seemed better to appoint someone from outside to look at the professional running of the school.'

Lambon spent his first three or four months in the role just listening. 'The student voice is very strong,' he says, 'and the pupils have a deep affection for the school. Uniquely, we offer 24-hour parental retreats and forums. That gave me an opportunity to listen to parents as well.'

This is Lambon's 15th year as a head (he was previously at St Malachy's College in Belfast). 'The pace of change is greater than it was when I took on my first headship,' he tells me. 'There are more bumps in the road than there were even seven years ago, so the biggest challenge now is to teach young people resil- ▷



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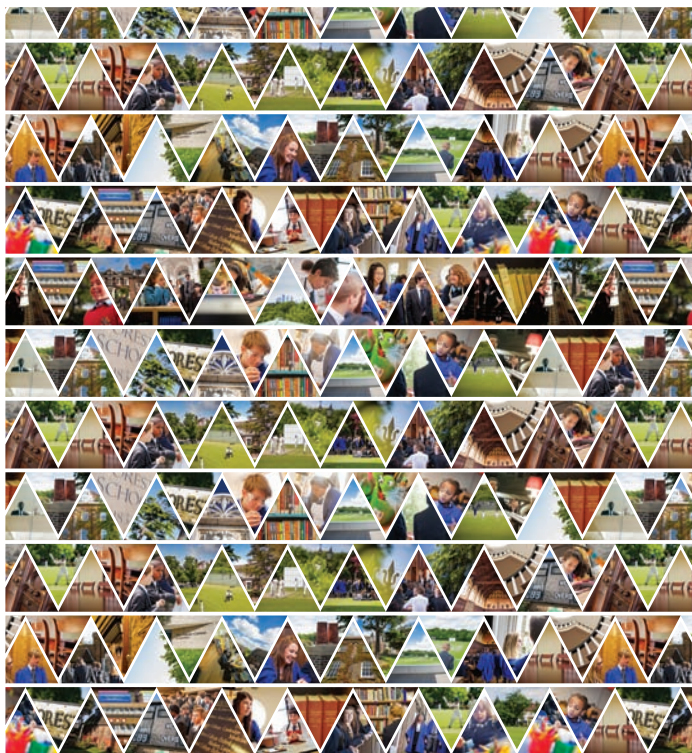


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ience. We are trying to produce leaders with a strong moral compass who will change the world for the better because of their faith and the way they have been taught.'

The worst part of the job is the CEO aspect, he claims. 'The best part is contact with pupils. Of course, you have to focus on the bottom line, but anyone who forgets to filter decisions through the perspective of a 14- or 15-year-old is getting things wrong.' It's the first year in 15 in which Lambon hasn't taught, but the advantage of Ampleforth being primarily a boarding school is that he can drop in on the children in the evenings. 'I can help them with their homework.' He adds with gentle humour, 'I'm a maths teacher, so they aren't always pleased to see me.'



CAROL CHANDLER-THOMPSON

Keeping students at the heart of everything is also the mantra of the new headmistress of Blackheath High School in southeast London. It's her first headship in the UK, but not her first headship: she previously led the Girls' School at NLCS Jeju, an international branch of the North London



There is an aspirational culture at Blackheath High School

information, of statistics and regulations by which she is daily submerged. She is also re-acclimatising to working at a single-sex day school in London after her time at a boarding co-ed establishment in a rural area of South Korea. But, she says, there are similarities: each student needs to be treated as an individual.

'It was so challenging working for three years in Korea,' she says, 'that I have come back believing that nothing is insuperable. It has also made me realise that we shouldn't put artificial limits on children. One of my Korean students could scarcely speak English when she joined the school three years ago. I've just heard that she's won a place to read history at Cambridge.'

Like the North London Collegiate School, Blackheath High School was founded, says Chandler-Thompson,

uncertain and volatile world. 'I'm not just interested in producing a set of exam results,' she claims.

She enjoys working within the Girls' Day School Trust (GDST). 'It's good to have other heads to talk to and to have the financial and legal back-up,' she says.



HEATHER HANBURY

has moved to The Lady Eleanor Holles School in southwest London from another GDST school, Wimbledon High. She notices the difference, especially as she has been arranging one-to-one meetings to meet all her teaching and support staff. 'This is endlessly fascinating, but time-consuming,' she says. 'More happens on site here and there are a lot more people to understand and manage. But I feel much closer to the decision-making process.'

Hanbury and I spoke when she first became head of Wimbledon High School, and it's interesting to see how she is adjusting to the role the second time round. 'I foolishly assumed it might be easier,' she laughs. 'But I know now what I don't know. I stepped in here and I didn't know anything. It's been a shock to the system and I realise I have to approach the job as though I hadn't done it before.'

A management consultant before becoming a teacher, Hanbury believes in taking the staff and the girls with her. She is working with them on her plans for the next five years, ranging from larger issues such as curriculum changes down to the minutiae of improving the lockers. 'I like to build a strategic view from below,' she says. 'And it's an effective way to find out the key issues.'

She is changing the grey senior-school uniform, a process in which ▷

'I'm not just interested in great exam results - we shouldn't put artificial limits on children'

Collegiate School on the island of Jeju in South Korea. She had liked the idea of living in a different culture, but taking with her an ethos she believed in from the mother school in London. What she has been surprised by at Blackheath is the constant flow of

'in the era of brilliant 19th-century women's education. They created an aspirational culture that still exists.' Her aim is to provide an inspirational, exciting and relevant education for her girls, and to make them flexible, adaptable and confident in an



Ampleforth College in Yorkshire instils a strong moral compass in its pupils



Juniors at The Lady Eleanor Holles School in southwest London

she is again involving the girls. 'They will meet designers before the end of the summer term,' she explains. 'If the girls are going to have to wear a uniform, it might as well be colourful and smart, rather than just comfortable and casual.'

We talk about the changes that social media have wrought over the past seven years. 'When I started at Wimbledon, we were still in the age of trying to control the students' use of mobile technology and IT. We had a protective wall around our internet system in school, so we could honestly say that, whatever was happening on social media, it wasn't happening in school. We still confiscated mobile phones and didn't allow their use during school hours.'

'Nowadays, any student with an iPhone has access to entirely unrestricted internet use and so we can't protect them from social media. We are in fact planning *more* use of the internet through iPads and laptops. Along with this goes ever more work to educate young people on how to protect themselves online and how to find their way through the maze of (mis)information online.'



ROSE HARDY is facing similar issues in her first year as headmistress of St Margaret's School, Bushey. Her previous job was as 'second master' of boys' school



The new head at The Lady Eleanor Holles School is involving pupils in her plans for the future

St Albans, which only has girls in the sixth form. 'Social media affects girls more,' she says. 'Boys can fall foul of it, too, but it's an aesthetic problem for girls.'

The culture in schools, she suggests, has changed even in the last 12 months, so she is bringing with her a determination to talk to parents about supporting their girls and making education enjoyable rather than focusing on league tables. 'Parents in 2015 are lacking in confidence,' she believes. 'There is confusion about the academic landscape with the latest exam reforms, so parents are looking to school heads for reassurance.'

She admits it is a big leap moving from being a deputy to the one in charge. 'You can always take a problem to the head, but now I'm the one

making the decisions,' she says. 'I was very ready and it's very enjoyable, but a school is a huge operation. You're looking at everything from child-related issues to curriculum reviews to bat boxes. It's rather like being the dean of a cathedral.'

Her main aim is to improve the academic experience of her girls while remaining inclusive. 'A new head has to come in sensitively. There's a loyal, committed staff and it's about making sure that people have the opportunity to build their portfolios. For instance, I've created the role of deputy head of sixth form, which gives a young staff member the chance to move towards senior management.'

St Margaret's, she believes, is a 'hidden gem. I want to start shouting about it.' ■



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King's College School, Wimbledon, has been admitting girls to its sixth form since 2010

BETTER TOGETHER?

Is co-education beneficial? Or are boys and girls better off apart?
Vanessa Berridge investigates

In most countries, boys and girls are educated together and there's little discussion. Here, the debate rumbles on. On the whole, the girls-only brand seems to have held up better, with many leading boys' schools, such as Westminster and, more recently, King's College School, Wimbledon, admitting girls in the sixth form, and others, including Rugby and Lancing, becoming co-educational throughout. Eton, Harrow and Winchester are now among a relatively small number of all-boys schools. ▶



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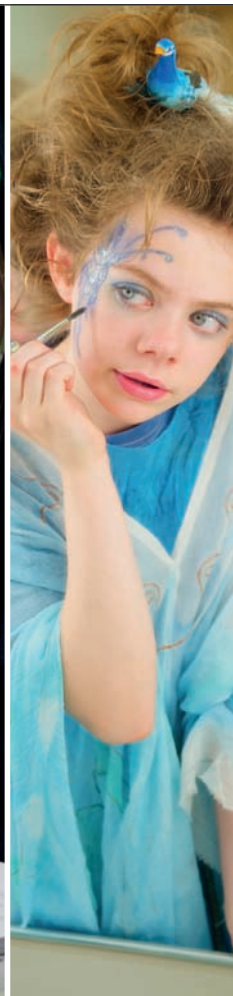
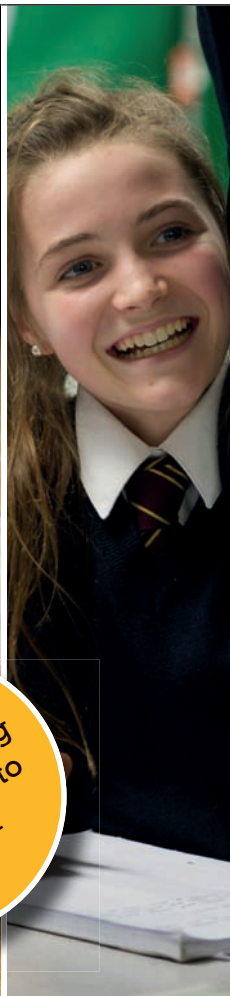
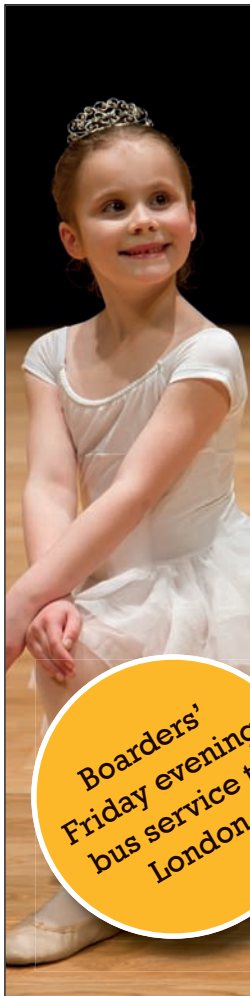
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Broadening admission and admitting girls in the sixth form makes financial sense, with staff and facilities costs ever on the increase. This is acknowledged by Andrew Halls, headmaster of King's College School, Wimbledon, which admitted its first sixth-form girls five years ago. 'We had enough staff and classrooms, so it was cost-effective and we could make a better surplus to invest in the fabric of the school.'

The admission of girls was phased in at Lancing, with the first sixth-form girls arriving in the 1970s. 'It was a very competitive entry, with 200 applicants for 40 places,' says Hilary Dugdale, senior deputy head. 'There was blue water between the girls and boys then. The girls were self-determined, completely grown-up and feisty, interesting individuals. At one point, Lancing's academic success was resting too much on the girls' achievements.'

A VISIBLE DIFFERENCE

There is more of a level playing field now that girls are integrated throughout the school, something Dugdale oversaw. 'It involved two years' preparation. We had to consider the house structure, different learning and teaching styles, and whether to introduce new subjects, such as drama, at GCSE and A levels. Should we change the uniform at 16? Boys don't care, but girls like to observe these physical rites of passage.'

Ninety per cent of the planning was unnecessary. 'Girls arrived naturally with the boys from their co-ed prep schools,' Dugdale recalls. 'Siblings could come, and, as there is a

At Forest School, London, reception to year two and the sixth form are co-educational



lot of local weekly boarding, being co-ed helps with family cohesion.'

Andrew Halls, meanwhile, believes there were good reasons - besides economic ones - for introducing girls to the sixth form at King's. 'At this age, it offers a better education for boys and girls, who will be off to university interviews in the upper sixth, often to be interviewed by bright women. It's good socially and the boys accepted the girls very easily. It's important that the sixth form feels different from the rest of the

of boys and girls are awkward, and that awkwardness shouldn't be allowed to get in the way of education. If you are highly academic as a woman, you are going to be told you are bossy and aggressive. I don't want the will to lead knocked out of girls at school.'

The other advantage of single-sex education, believes Phillips, is that there is no problem with subjects - or instruments - being perceived as the preserve of one gender. Matthew Burke, headmaster of all-girls St Mar-

'In mixed sixth forms, subjects such as maths and physics are not perceived as just for boys'

school. Girls certainly make a visible difference.' King's has no plans, however, to go co-ed further down the school, and indeed the number of sixth-form places for boys has not been reduced, while the girls' places are usually capped at about 45 in academic years of 200 pupils.

Alice Phillips, headmistress of St Catherine's, Bramley, emphasises that she's 'a great friend of single-sex for both genders'. 'It's always trotted out that such schools are not a real preparation for being grown-up. But children are not real grown-ups. They make all sorts of mistakes and it's best to do so where it's least damaging.'

'We are still enmeshed in stereotypes and girls come off worst. Speaking as a sometime plain Jane, we live in a society that doesn't like plain Janes. There is an exacting national standard of good looks. The majority

tha's, near Barnet, agrees. 'There is a substantial take-up here of maths and physics, partly because there is no perception that they are boys' subjects.'

The counter-argument is that girls in an all-boys school get the chance to flourish at traditionally male subjects. Andrew Halls argues that the seriousness with which King's takes sport has rubbed off on the girls, and, because the cohort is smaller, more get the opportunity to play for school teams. At Felsted School in Essex, the director of cricket, Jason Gallian, has successfully promoted girls' cricket over the past few seasons: one Felsted pupil, Nancy Hebron, recently scored three consecutive centuries for Essex girls' under-13s and is playing for the England under-15s. 'It was a new challenge introducing girls to cricket,' explains Gallian. 'Boys ▷



At Felsted School, Essex, girls' cricket is encouraged



Co-education makes pupils more confident at Forest School



Social skills are improved at King's College School's mixed sixth form

tend to play a traditional game the traditional way, but girls employ different skills and tactics they bring from other sports. They listen better and pick up things faster. Many of them will have played cricket with boys at their prep schools, which helps when they continue in co-education.'

Given that many boys' schools offer places to girls at 16, is that the best age to combine the sexes? Not necessarily, says Jonathan Bartlett, headmaster of Moor Park School in Shropshire, which is fully co-ed from three to 13. 'It is very natural for small children to work and play together, and in years two and three, their best friends are often members of the opposite sex. As they get older, they do gravitate towards their own sex, but educating them together fosters healthy respect both academically and in sport. The 13-year-olds will often play football and rounders together in the evening.'

Rupert Anton has two boys at a co-ed public school. 'They both went to a co-ed prep school and so have been around girls from the age of three. There is no embarrassment, no "feeling uneasy". It has been particularly interesting seeing the change in relationships with girls for my 18-year-old. As he has developed, so have the girls, but they have done so together and it's no big deal for either.'

That leaves the vexed issue of different learning styles. It's a familiar story: boys speak out even when they don't know the answer, while girls keep quiet even if they do. Girls write screeds but won't get to the nitty-gritty of a problem; boys write less but spot the salient points. That's the case for the 'diamond structure', in which girls and boys are educated together at the beginning and end of their education and separately in the middle years. St James Schools in London and Surrey have a mixed junior school and separate senior schools. 'The younger boys and girls mix for their early-years activities,' explains Catherine Thomlinson, headmistress of St James Junior School, 'but they are taught separately in parallel classes of boys and girls. You can accommodate different learning skills within our system, yet the children socialise over lunch and on school trips.'

FLEXIBLE EDUCATION

At Forest School in northeast London, reception to year two and the sixth form are co-educational, while the years in between are single-sex. 'There are arguments to separate them from the start,' says the warden, Sarah Kerr-Dineen, 'but co-education gives flexibility in the early years to move children between classes according to their development.' The school was set up as a boys' grammar school in 1834, introduced a separate girls' school and a mixed sixth form in 1981 and has gradually developed over the past 30 years into a school with equal numbers of boys and girls.

'The diamond structure enables adaptation to difference,' continues Kerr-Dineen. 'It allows us to encourage the students not to conform to sexual stereotypes. Languages, maths and Oxbridge entrances are all 50/50 here. We can support boys and girls to feel they can do anything.'

The old adage is that you should educate your boys co-educationally and girls single-sex. The advantage of the diamond system is that you can do that. 'Our pupils are ethnically diverse,' says Kerr-Dineen, 'and some families might not be happy about sending their daughters to a mixed school, but here their girls get single-sex pastoral care.'

Kerr-Dineen has appointed directors of 'co-curriculum' and teaching and learning to give proper direction and cohesion to the teaching of both sexes. Staff teach both boys and girls, a strength in recruitment and development. 'Staff have experience of three types of teaching in one school - it could take them years to get that elsewhere,' she says. Meals, orchestras, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award programmes and other elements of the co-curriculum are all co-ed, allowing the students to build what Kerr-Dineen calls 'workaday friendships'.

Some further adaptation is needed at 16, but, she says, 'I would rather they did it here. Moving to the sixth form is a big shift in any school. We put a lot of energy into making it work.'

Peter Green, headmaster of co-ed Rugby, quibbles with the idea that, at 16, boys and girls will suddenly work together smoothly. 'It seems nonsense to me - are their hormones supposed to have died down at that point?' When girls were introduced to the sixth form while he was at Uppingham, says Green, they were seen as a reward for the boys who had slogged through a single-sex school. Andrew Halls of King's laughs at the suggestion: 'Here, at best only a third of them can get that reward!' ■



Girls are encouraged to try different subjects at Forest School

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ORGANISATIONS

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