Life does not keep boys and girls separate. Your child will one day move into a co-educational workforce.

CO-EDUCATION

Life is co-educational. Many – if not all – schools claim that they "prepare children for life". Given that we live in a co-educational world, this preparation can only really be possible in a co-educational school.

Life does not keep boys and girls separate. Your child will move into a co-educational workforce. They will spend time with, and live closely to, members of the opposite sex. It is our responsibility, as educators, to prepare children for the world in which they will live. Fully co-ed schools, such as Oakham, are a mutually supportive environment. The girls and boys learn from each other. They begin to understand how different people think and act, as well as learning to appreciate that there can be more than one way of tackling a problem.

Learning styles

Children (not genders) have different learning styles. A good school is one that enables all of its pupils to thrive. There will be a wide variety of learning styles in any school, regardless of whether it is co-ed or single sex. To say that all girls prefer to learn the same way, or all boys, is an oversimplification. There are different learning styles that suit different children, regardless of their gender. Good teachers make lessons accessible, engaging and challenging to all pupils. Good schools have systems in place to allow teachers and tutors to understand what makes every boy and girl tick and to be able to tailor their teaching methods to get the very best from them.

Similarly, all children need to build their confidence. It is wrong to suggest that only girls suffer from low esteem or confidence. There is a hormonal war raging inside most teenagers but excellent teachers and schools understand their pupils and how to direct their energy. This is not gender specific, nor can it be tackled in a "one-size fits all" approach. In general terms, children need to find activities that they enjoy and from which they can be inspired. They will gain confidence from their successes.

Growing together

Learning is not confined to the classroom. The successes that they enjoy on the pitch, in the theatre, arts studios or music rooms will then help them to gain the confidence to tackle subjects of which they may be less certain. Ask the schools you are looking at how they tackle the total curriculum to build the confidence of its pupils. The world is a distracting place and you need to teach children how to cope with it.

Some parents think that their children may flourish while away from the distractions of the opposite sex. Children today have more distractions available to them than any other generation. These distractions, such as social media, are omnipresent and however much you may want to shield your children from them, I just do not think that this is possible anymore.

At a co-ed school, pupils grow up together. Boys and girls are friends first and foremost. Later on, if relationships do form, there is a mutual respect. Being a part of a co-ed school demystifies the other sex. It is certainly true that relationships can be a distraction to pupils. What I don’t accept is that relationships at school are somehow more distracting than those conducted outside of school. Often, these can be more stressful and time-consuming. In a co-educational environment, staff are on hand to help students to deal with their friendships, in a sympathetic way.

Most importantly, it is the nature of the co-educational ethos that parents should consider. As at Oakham, truly co-ed schools are gender equal environments that enable all pupils to choose and excel at their chosen subjects and activities.

Nigel Lashbrook is Headmaster at Oakham School, Rutland – a co-educational boarding and day school for pupils aged 10-18 offering both A Levels and the IB.