



Reasons why you should support Millais School's determination to remain a single-sex girls' option for Horsham and West Sussex

and

Reject the WSCC proposal to change Millais from a single-sex girls' school to a co-educational (both boys' and girls') school

On behalf of the Governors of Millais School, Horsham, we write to seek your support in maintaining the school as a girls-only educational environment. West Sussex County Council have recently launched a consultation proposing that Millais become a co-educational establishment from September 2026.

This proposal does not have the support of the Millais School Governing Body and we wanted to explain why.

1. Protecting choice and diversity across the Horsham schools

Horsham is incredibly popular with young families, in part because of its national reputation for educational excellence across the primary, secondary and post 16 provision. This is a unique position within the UK because it offers real 'choice and quality' for all. High standards across all the secondary schools in Horsham, mean parents can select the learning environment which they consider best suits their child's needs - either at one of the three co-educational schools or they can choose Millais, the alternative single-sex girls school option.

We believe passionately that there is crucial space in Horsham for both co-educational and single-sex options to co-exist, so choice is maintained, and excellence can thrive. Supporting single-sex education does not negate the value of co-education, it is about respect for the educational approaches and recognition that different students thrive in different environments.

2. Preserving a unique offer with a proven track record

We have a unique heritage as Millais has been a girls' school for 80 years in the town. Our ethos, beliefs in the value of educating girls in a single-sex environment have sustained high outcomes over the many, many years. Consistently we have contributed significantly to creating the educational excellence which is celebrated and cherished not only by students, parents and staff but also is recognised by West Sussex County Council "as providing a high-quality education offer" which has emerged from to its unique ethos, and culture.

3. Loss of opportunity to the detriment of current & future generations of girls & women

Our fundamental objection to the West Sussex County proposal is that it removes the important choice of a girls-only education from families in the Horsham area and beyond. This loss of opportunity is significant and will be to the detriment not only of the current students but also future generations of girls and women.

4. 'Wider, deeper & longer' impact of a single-sex girls' school on outcomes

The West Sussex consultation attempts to prove that there is little or no difference in the academic outcomes for girls in co-educational versus single-sex option. They compare Millais's single year of data in 2023 to schools in the Horsham district, across the county and nationally. The outcomes from Millais are strong but in reality, a more statistically relevant measure is 3–4-year trend.

GCSE Data for Girls* (2018-2019 & 2022 - 2023)

	Millais	West Sussex Local Authority	National
Percentage of entries for all English Ebacc	85%	41%	45%
Average Ebacc APS scores	5.25	4.36	4.36
Attainment 8	56.15	49.83	48.33
Progress 8	0.47	0.27	0.16
4+ English and Mathematics	82%	71%	69%
5+ English & Mathematics	60%	49%	49%

*We have not compared ourselves to individual schools within the Horsham District due to the differences in curricula and cohorts but have used larger groupings

Our success is much more than academic achievement. Millais leavers and alumni consistently say that the one of the biggest benefits of their experience at the school was the opportunity to grow and pursue their interests without feeling the pressure to conform to gender stereotypes. And their experience is backed up by academic research. For example, a 2019 study from the University of Queensland found that girls leaving single-sex schools were on average more confident than those leaving co-educational schools. The study also found that "as there's not the social pressure to be quiet in class.... girls are allowed to learn and develop in their own space... have an opportunity to try out things that aren't thought of as feminine or female strengths" which builds confidence" and "it ends in a better life outcome". One interviewee who moved to a single-sex school in Year 10 said that her girls' school gave her the confidence and freedom to pursue maths, science and sports, pursuits she did not feel as supported in at her co-ed school.

And there is also an abundance of evidence that there are huge social and emotional benefits of single-sex schooling, particularly for girls, which when coupled with academic success leads on to better life outcomes. Whilst it is true that the academic research base on the benefits of a single-sex education is mixed, it is undoubtedly the case that Millais students recount time and again the benefits they feel and experience day to day of attending a girls' school.

5. Promoting gender equality in the wider world

Advocates of the co-educational model argue that schools should reflect the society in their gender composition. But at Millais we have always sought to challenge rather than reflect and reinforce the gender inequalities which still remain within our society. And our singular focus on creating opportunities for girls to excel within and beyond the classroom is a philosophy which supports the experience of many women who have risen to top of their professions in sport, business and academia.

For example Arsenal's Leah Williamson, the England Women's captain said that schools need to be far more active in offering girls the 'choice' to play football because it "changes the stereotype of what they do and what we believe a girl should be". Following the Lionesses's monumental victories in 2022-2023 she said "there is much more work to be done, especially to changing views on girls participation in the sport". Single-sex girls' schools remove the first major barrier of the bias against girls playing football or cricket or rugby. Many of our students excel at huge range of sports because they are encouraged to pursue their interests and supported to achieve. And they do without the very real pressure that so many girls experience when boys are watching or are present.

Similarly, studies show that women are less likely to work in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) than men. There is a major skills gap in the field of technology and as it stands, there will be only one qualified woman for every 115 tech roles in 2025. The Chief Executive of Code First Girls, Anna Brailsford says that "women need to be given the chance to change their minds about the stereotypes surrounding careers in STEM are just for men". Girls and women are a whole pool of untapped talent who can not only fill the labour shortage but also bring their fresh perspective to changes in technology. In single-sex schools subjects are gender-free which again removes the first major barrier that STEM is not for them. Girls select, study and achieve success in all those areas traditionally the preserve of the boys and go on to successful careers in the tech industry. Our experience at Millais supports this view with many of our former students excelling in careers related to science, technology engineering and maths.

We believe that girls should have the opportunity to be educated separately, not because they need protection but because they deserve a level playing field. Single-sex settings allows the teacher and the schools to focus more effectively on the needs of individual girls.

As studies have found, when educated separately to boys, girls in single-sex schools are less likely to conform to pre-conceived gender stereotypes, less constrained in their choices of subjects, are more willing to take risks and innovate, and importantly more likely to undertake leadership roles.

Students at Millais reflect this sense of freedom, choice and empowerment. Our aim is to nurture and shape strong minds, provide girls with the space to grow into young women and ultimately, empowers them for the rest of their lives.

6. Opportunity for Growth and Added Value

The main reason West Sussex consultation cites for their proposal to change our status is “the pressure for additional secondary places” especially for boys and the fact that Millais has not filled all its pupil places over the last three years.

This is looking back and not forward planning. It is well publicised that there is a decline in the global, national and the local birth rates which is likely to continue until the end of the century and probably beyond. Currently, there are spaces in primary schools in both the East and West of Horsham. This is evidence that the decline has started to occur and will be moving swiftly through to the secondaries who will gain some capacity. New housing has been factored into the forecasting of future pupil numbers and there is the potential to bring in extra children. But the recent economic turbulence and the constant debate around the planning, building and now purchasing of houses in the present economic climate means we are living at a time of great flux and uncertainty.

Therefore, as Millais has some capacity, there is an opportunity to consider adding value to our present offer and consider a different option. We have developed our own small provision to cater for girls with autism. It is called Blossom. This is an innovative approach within a mainstream school, especially as there is little or no specialist provision in the local or wider area. This is a unique educational opportunity for Horsham and West Sussex which not only caters for a need but is also financially attractive.

FAQ

Q. Why are you suggesting that the school should not move from being a single-sex girls’ school to a co-ed girls’ and boys’ school?

Students:

- Girls achieve well academically in co-educational settings but there is some good evidence that in STEM subjects they do even better in single-sex schools.
- Single-sex education offers girls a better opportunity to develop their self-confidence and reduces the likelihood of gender stereotyping.

- Single-sex education prepares girls for their life as adults through increased leadership opportunities and the opportunity to excel in the broadest possible range of academic and extra-curricular activities.

Parents / Carers:

- Continue to have the choice of choosing a local school which provides a single-sex environment for girls.
- Benefit from the current broad equilibrium in school place availability without disrupting the provision of places and potentially creating undesirable unintended consequences.

Local Schools:

- Avoid the inevitable disruption associated with the transition from the current situation to a wholly co-educational environment.

Q. How would you meet the needs of boys if Millais is made co-educational?

Facilities:

- West Sussex have committed that buildings will be converted to meet the needs of boys, but no assessment has been undertaken of the scope, feasibility, or cost of these changes.

Curriculum:

- The existing curriculum is specifically tailored for a single sex environment. It would need to be redesigned to meet the needs of boys and lose its unique and distinctive focus on specific needs of girls.

Pastoral Care:

- Pastoral care and support arrangements would need to be significantly adapted to meet the needs of both boys and girls.

Q. How would this change impact on the ethos of the school?

- As West Sussex County Council say the school will continue to provide an ‘outstanding education, with high-quality teaching and a nurturing school ethos that empowers each student to achieve their personal best.’
- However, becoming a co-educational school would mean a very major change to the ethos of the school away from its current singular focus on providing the best possible academic and extra-curricular education for girls.

In summary, we believe that Millais offers its students an environment where they are less likely to conform to gender stereotypes, perform better academically, have more leadership opportunities, and are better prepared to be successful in their future careers. At Millais we firmly believe in the transformative power of girls’ education and its ability to shape confident, capable and empowered young women.

If you support our vision for Millais School as a place where every girl can thrive and reach her full potential and want the choice of a girls’ only education to continue to be offered to families in the Horsham area, we would be extremely grateful if you could respond to the West Sussex County Council consultation expressing your views

for us to remain a single-sex school which will not compromise the value of girls' education. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters further with you, if you would find that helpful.

How can you have your say?

Please complete the online survey:

<https://yourvoice.westsussex.gov.uk/millais>