

Briefing Paper 1 (Single sex schools)

The earliest examples of single sex schools can be traced to the 16th century through religious and social beliefs that boys and girls should be separated in education, though single sex schools were popularised around the 19th century before coeducation became the main way of educating young boys and girls. There have been many conflicting studies suggesting that single sex schools both advantage and disadvantage students. The University of Limerick in 2023 published a study stating that single sex schools did not offer an advantage to boys and girls in Ireland compared to coeducation schools though newspapers such as the Guardian and institutions such as the University of Queensland have in particular stated that girls benefit from single sex schools and that there is evidence to suggest that single sex schools have better academics and results than coeducational schools due to factors such as gender based distractions and tailored teaching approaches. One aspect to discuss is cultural and religious aspects as many countries such as South Africa, Singapore and Malaysia encourage single sex schools within their system of education and in particular places in Africa rely on single sex schools to boost female enrolment into education. A convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and the UN sustainable development Goal 4 both suggest that everyone should have the right education regardless of gender which is something to consider as many people rely on single sex schools to access education.

Here are some key points to think about

Should single sex schools be classed as a form of segregation?

Is it legal or morally acceptable to force students to go to mixed schools?

Should governments fund single sex schools?

How can cultural practices be respected while ensuring equal educational opportunities?

Are there any conditions in which single sex schools are acceptable or unacceptable?