



Gunnersbury Catholic School

Proposal For Gunnersbury Catholic School To Become Coeducational

Generalised Frequently Asked Questions/Themes

Why are you proposing to become coeducational?

The local coeducational Catholic schools are exceptionally oversubscribed with 'first choice' applicants. 100s of families are currently unable to gain their first choice of such education at these local schools. In contrast, first choice preferences for our single-sex Catholic educational provision have declined to levels considerably below our Pupil Admission Number. Through transitioning to coeducation, Gunnersbury would be responding to the overwhelming demands of local families for a mixed Catholic secondary education for their children i.e. should Gunnersbury become a mixed school we can assist in meeting the significant deficit of mixed Catholic secondary school places locally.

My son is currently at Gunnersbury, will he have girls joining his class if Gunnersbury becomes coeducational?

Were Gunnersbury Catholic School to transition to coeducation, all boys joining Year 7 – Year 11 before September 2025 would continue to be educated in classes only comprising boys (until sixth form).

Do students learn better in mixed or single-sex classrooms?

Studies such as those of the NFER (2002) and the Smithers Report (2017) detail that there is no clear evidence indicating that achievement is better in single-sex schools compared to coeducational environments or vice versa. Regardless of gender intake, key aspects of successful schools include: high expectations; clear pupil guidance; excellent teaching; quality pastoral support.

Some families seek a single-sex education for their children

We of course understand that some families wish for a single-sex education for their children. As such we are proposing to transition to coeducation year-on-year starting from Year 7 – thereby ensuring that the boys of those Gunnersbury families whom specifically sought a single-sex education will not be taught with girls (until the 6th Form). For those families seeking a 'Boys only' education from September 2025 onwards –irrespective of faith –were Gunnersbury to become coeducational there would be two remaining 'Boys schools' within the borough. Beyond Gunnersbury there are two other Boys Catholic schools in West London. As these Catholic schools have a 'lottery' admissions system applicants are not disadvantaged by virtue of their home location. Furthermore the future likelihood of an applicant gaining a place in any West London school (assuming schools' Pupil Admission Numbers remain the same) will increase as the pupil population in this area of London declines (LA/GLA forecasts).

What are the admission plans of other local schools?

Gunnersbury is unable to comment on the plans of governing bodies at other schools beyond acknowledging that each is responsible for determining admission arrangements that they consider most appropriate for their school and local community

Will behaviour and the ability for students to concentrate on their studies decline if Gunnersbury becomes coeducational?

Our high expectations, clear pupil guidance and quality pastoral support would continue were we to become coeducational. The introduction of girls should not equate to a drop in the standards of behaviour and/or application of students to their studies.

We feel that a single-sexed environment is best for pupils' personal development in their teenage years

Whilst we respect this viewpoint, we consider that there are benefits to pupils growing up attending a coeducational school. Mixed schools allow children of different genders to grow up and be educated together. A classroom reflecting society can – under the guidance of teachers – provide further opportunities for pupils to: learn and experience the value of other genders; understand the challenges faced by those of the opposite sex; develop a deeply embedded respect for those who are of another gender. At Gunnersbury, such learning would be founded upon our Catholic values.

Would Gunnersbury's success at educating boys be compromised by becoming mixed?

Our staff are skilled educators, trained to teach all genders: many have significant experience in teaching both boys and girls. Were we to become coeducational, we'll continue to enable boys to learn to the highest levels whilst combining that expertise with effectively enabling excellent learning by girls - as exhibited in successful coeducational schools. Our outcomes reflect our expertise as educators, furthermore the success of our boys and girls in the Sixth Form reflect our capability to secure the very best achievement within a mixed setting. Through our individualised approach to guiding our students, we would continue to be able to implement successful learning strategies based on the needs of each specific student - regardless of gender.

Were Gunnersbury to become coeducational, how will it be ensured that there is a smooth transition; including the effective preparation of those sitting public examinations in 2025?

By initiating the consulting of stakeholders in 2023, we have sought to ensure that there is appropriate time for change management processes to be put into place well in advance of possible changes in 2025. If a transition to coeducation were to be agreed, Gunnersbury Catholic School will continue to implement all that we're doing with Year 11 pupils including: an increased timetable with two extra lessons a week compared to the rest of the school; Saturday lessons; intervention/revision lessons during the half-term and Easter holidays; a comprehensive series of mock examinations undertaken by Y11 pupils over the course of the year. Overlying these provisions; the changes that we made to the school routines and timetable, following the Covid pandemic, added a further 4 lessons to the individual timetable of each pupil in every year group.

How would a change to coeducation at Gunnersbury impact the admissions at other local schools?

No doubt in part due to our location directly abutting the boundary of Ealing local authority; only 39% of our pupils reside in the borough of Hounslow. In fact our intake is drawn from 15 different Local Authorities and over 170 primary schools. As such; we consider that any redistribution of student applications, were there a change to coeducation at Gunnersbury, will likely be spread across a number of boroughs; minimally influencing the applications at any one particular school.

Would Gunnersbury be unique were it to transition from a single-sex school to become coeducational?

Over recent years four state secondary schools in the Diocese of Westminster have embarked on the transition from single-sex to coeducation. Such transitions have also taken place in a number of non-Catholic state schools in England. Furthermore the move to coeducation has also occurred within the independent sector with schools including; St Benedict's, Westminster School, Wellington College, Charterhouse School; all moving from single-sex provision to coeducation.

How have you communicated the proposal for coeducation to stakeholders?

As appropriate and necessary, Gunnersbury has observed the statutory guidance setting out the communication requirements associated with proposals to make a 'significant alteration' to a school. Following extensive dialogue with the Diocese of Westminster and their subsequent approval for Gunnersbury to seek to become coeducational, the governing body took the decision to initiate the pre-statutory consultation. This is the first element of the prescribed method by which such a proposal must be communicated and stakeholders' responses received; prior to making a formal decision to proceed further or otherwise. We value the opportunity afforded by the pre-statutory consultation to share our proposal with all stakeholders and to learn of their considerations. Through setting aside a full four weeks for the pre-statutory consultation, Gunnersbury has sought to ensure that sufficient time has been set aside to appropriately engage with our stakeholders. The proposal was communicated widely to best ensure all stakeholders were informed. In addition to the facilities established for stakeholders to share their responses with Gunnersbury, opportunities were enabled for stakeholders to engage in direct dialogue and communication with Gunnersbury leaders. Such opportunities included the 'on-line' consultation stakeholder meeting (6 December 2023) and the 'in-person' stakeholder consultation meeting (4 December 2023). The pre-statutory consultation is followed by a 4 week period of formal consultation (Representation) whereby Gunnersbury's Statutory Proposal/Notice on transitioning to coeducation is published and distributed. Interested parties have a further period of 4 weeks to share their considerations on the matter with the decision maker, the London Borough of Hounslow.

Will Gunnersbury's sporting provision need to change?

In recent years Gunnersbury has been seeking to add further options and opportunities to the sport and extra-curricular provision for our students e.g. the addition of dance to the PE lessons. Some boys and girls like the traditional sports such as rugby and football, whilst some do not. Ultimately it is important that we continue to work to establish a good mix of sports and physical activities which will provide enjoyment and opportunities for all students to fully engage in this key part of our curriculum.

Will further emotional support be required by a mixed student population?

We have always recognised that high quality emotional support and care for individuals' mental health are essential components of a quality education: undoubtedly these are elements critical to the wellbeing of both girls and boys. As such, over the last few years considerable work has taken place to raise the profile of these areas and to provide the necessary support at Gunnersbury – including the appropriate utilisation of external agencies. New initiatives include: the establishment of a mental health lead; training of mental health first aiders; commissioning of external mental health support such as CATE+. Furthermore, in the New Year all staff are being trained in a 'Trauma informed approach' to pastoral care. The boys in Years 7-11 along with the 6th Form boys and girls have utilised and benefitted from our efforts in this area. Regardless of a change to admissions, emotional support and mental wellbeing are aspects of our care that we are continually seeking to further.

What new facilities will be required within the school to enable girls to join?

Our new sports facilities, in common with such Department for Education builds, were constructed with changing areas and toilets for each gender. Similarly our Sixth Form faculty was built for occupation by both girls and boys. Further bathrooms for girls use will undoubtedly be needed - these would be installed in stages to reflect an increasing population of girls as the mixed years move up the school.

Would all lessons be taught together in a mixed format at a coeducational Gunnersbury?

Almost all subjects would be taught in a mixed capacity. However, PE (and possibly some elements of PSHE) would likely be taught as single-sex classes.

Would the gender balance of the school be 50:50 for boys and girls if Gunnersbury were to become coeducational?

This would solely depend on the nature of applications to Gunnersbury i.e. how many girls and boys apply; their preference that they apply to our school; how these students relate to the criteria within the admissions policy.

How will the proposal be shared with students and their views collected?

All students were provided with a copy of the Prestatutory Proposal. Accompanying the proposal, the students received a joint letter from the Chair of Governors and the Headteacher advising them of: the proposed plan; the importance of their views; how to share their views. Further to this each year group were met with by the Deputy Headteacher. The Deputy Headteacher explained the proposal, answered questions and encouraged pupils to share their views through the online response form. In addition to our whole-school communication to students, we sought to ensure that our SEND students were suitably informed of the proposal and their voices heard. To achieve this, at appropriate opportunities the SENDCO met with different SEND students to advise them of the proposal and to capture their views.