

# *Why girls' schools succeed at producing women who lead*

**By Loren Bridge**

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1 A new chapter in Australian politics began with our recent federal election, a chapter that a record number of independent female MPs will get to write.

2 Much has been said about this exciting “teal wave” of forthright, trailblazing, smart women. Five out of the eight female independents who will take their place on the crossbench of this parliament – Dr Monique Ryan, Dr Sophie Scamps, Dai Le, Allegra Spender and Zali Steggall – are graduates of girls' schools.

3 Girls' schools remove some of the obstacles that can limit opportunities for women.

4 This would be no surprise to anyone familiar with the benefits of single-sex education for girls, but for those who aren't, it's important to put this figure into perspective — girls' schools make up just 2 per cent of schools in Australia.

5 Clearly, there is something inherent to the girls' school environment that better prepares women for high-level leadership.

6 So, what is it about a girls' school education that ignites in young women the determination, inspiration and motivation to lead? What gives them the courage and grit to be change-makers in a world that continues to squeeze women onto the edges of the centre stage positions that men carve for themselves?

7 In girls' schools, students are intentionally equipped with the knowledge and skills required to overcome social and cultural gender biases, and in doing so, actively break the stereotypical norms that define women in society. This is achieved through an education that rewires the implicit biases that so often limit women.

8 Women are expected to walk a tightrope between exhibiting the characteristics society expects of women and being seen to have the “strength” to lead. They are in a double bind. The obsession with former prime minister Julia Gillard's empty fruit bowl in her kitchen illustrated this perfectly.

9 To resist this concentrated pressure, girls must be encouraged to take a leap of faith. They must leap from the tightrope and defy gendered pressure. To do this, they need the confidence to lead and be disruptors.

10 A [study by the University of Queensland](#) found that confidence levels for girls in single-sex schools matches that of boys, while girls in the general population consistently demonstrate lower confidence levels than boys.