Can a male principal be the right role model for an all-girls school?

Tanya Chilcott
Andrew MacDonnell

A GENDER debate about who should lead all-girls schools is set to ignite.

Leading Queensland principal Dr Amanda Bell questioned the continuing ‘phenomenon’ of men being appointed as headmasters of all-girls schools just days after Ipswich Girls Grammar School announced Dr Peter Britton would become its first male headmaster.

‘Dr Bell, principal of Brisbane Girls’ Grammar School, believes women should be principals at all-girls schools when possible to provide students with strong female role models.

‘Dr Britton, currently head of Brisbane Boys’ College senior school, will become the third male principal of an all-girls, or partly all-girls, independent school in Queensland next year when he takes up the IGGS principal and CEO role.

‘There are no female principals at all-girls independent schools in Queensland.

‘Dr Bell questioned why the gender reversal was happening in girls schools and said debate over why females weren’t being chosen needed to be raised.

‘“Following the announcement in Brisbane this week of the appointment of yet another male principal to a major independent girls’ school…there is cause to reflect on how this could happen and continue to happen — not because there is anything wrong with non being principals or a particular man being considered worthy — but because of the larger question of why the governing authorities of some independent girls’ schools would want their principals to be anything but strong female role models for the young women in their care”, she warns in a paper.

‘The reverse certainly does not happen — independent boys’ schools are exclusively led by headmasters, presumably because they are seen as strong role models for their students.’

Yesterday, Dr Bell said she personally preferred to see women at the helm because they provided inspirational role models at a time when female leadership was encouraged.

She said her concern was not meant to be a criticism of anyone in particular and the IGGS decision had simply re-ignited her concerns on the issue.

But IGGS Board of Trustees chairman Greg Floetos said gender had played no role in their decision over who should be principal.

“We chose the best person for the job.”

He said Dr Britton had been part of a team that had secured fantastic academic results for SRC students and had taught at IGGS for more than a decade previously.

Parents overwhelmingly backed the decision yesterday, Kate Clarke said she believed a way important girls had strong male and female role models.

Deborah Purser said she was “looking forward” to Dr Britton’s appointment.

Carly Overton said she sent her daughter to IGGS because it was a good school and not because a female was in charge.

Dr Britton did not respond to requests for comment.

Our Julia’s a fair dinkum Australian

THE Australian Prime Minister arrived in the South Korean capital last night but a Julia Gillard wearing a puffed-sleeved dress and pink apron has been dominating a Seoul street for some time.

The larger-than-life figure of Ms Gillard stands in the city centre with representations of other leaders taking part in the G20 summit of the top 20 world economies starting today.

But someone in the Seoul municipal council, which set up the figures, has confused Australia with Austria and the Prime Minister is shown holding the correct flag, but in what resembles the traditional dress of a country usually associated with the Sound of Music.

The summit will be dominated by the US and China, and policies to speed recovery from the global economic collapse.

Expect big floods more often

QUEENSLAND will be battered by more intense flooding more often, according to a new report.

Climate Change Minister Kate Jones told the Local Government Association of Queensland’s environment conference on the Gold Coast yesterday the Government’s Inland Flood Planning was forecasting a 1C temperature increase within 40 years, which would bring a dryer rain season in the intensity of flooding events.

She said the report found the amount of land considered to be flood-prone over time would increase.

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Thursday, November 11, 2010 The Courier-Mail 3