

Smashing the glass ceiling is part of the learning

By Nina Hendy

Gender inequality has been permanently banned from one of Sydney's independent Catholic school for girls.

Monte Sant' Angelo Mercy College has enforced a stern policy around gender inequality.

Monte Sant' Angelo Mercy College principal Nicole Christensen.

The school's inspiring principal Nicole Christensen has her sights set firmly on ensuring "that the next generation of women know how to smash the glass ceiling by smashing the stereotypes that perpetrate it".

Christensen, who has dedicated her career to working in girls education, is working particularly hard to ensure the students understand the importance of equal opportunities for both genders in workplaces commonly dominated by men.

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"There is a powerful maxim, *When I see her, I can be her* – and it is this resolute affirming influence of high-achieving females, of women enabling other women, is what we want for all our girls," she says.

The school's Industry Partnerships Program takes this premise one step further by partnering with leading companies to address the critical under-representation of women in industries such as construction and engineering.

Together, they hope to address the imbalance, as Christensen provides guidance and leadership on how the imbalance can be resolved once and for all. Quite simply, she's determined to ensure that companies understand how the patriarch has been constructed so that it can be broken down.

"It is clearly evident when our girls experience mentorship by extraordinary women in industries such as engineering, construction, film and theatre, all uniquely enabled by our Industry Partnership Programs," she says.

Christensen has even gone as far as telling external parties pitching for the current school building tender that they would not be considered unless they had equal gender representation present during meetings at the school. “Without women on the team, they aren’t welcome to be part of the tendering process,” she says.

The program has resulted in work placement offers and internships, but more broadly, it has opened the students’ eyes to career pathways they hadn’t considered.

“Construction and engineering isn’t just about hard hats and hi-vis. It includes a number of important leadership roles such as project management and construction engineering, and these pathways need to be opened up to young women,” Christensen says.

According to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, gender bias is pervasive at work and in organisations, creating inequalities at each stage of the employment cycle. Gender-based stereotypes affect which candidates get recruited for certain roles and which do not, how salaries are negotiated and how managers provide feedback to their employees.

These factors compound across women’s careers, producing and sustaining gender inequality from recruitment to selection to promotion.

Christensen, for one, isn’t having it. “Our belief in innovation extends to the belief that we need to educate women to be entrepreneurial to be able to navigate these skills.”