

## Girls should shun celebrities and idolise politicians and mothers, says headmistress

Charlotte Avery fears pupils are being starved of appropriate role models and has advised her pupils to look closer to home for inspiration



Jo Heywood, head of the all-girls Heathfield School in Ascot, said role models such as Cyrus were leaving girls “manipulated and confused” Photo: GETTY IMAGES

The headmistress of an all-girls private school has told her students they should shun celebrities such as Miley Cyrus, and instead idolise politicians and their own mothers.

Charlotte Avery, who has been head of £30,000-a-year St Mary’s School in Cambridge since 2007, fears pupils are being starved of appropriate role models, with pop stars, models and footballers’ wives and girlfriends receiving too much “toxic” media attention.

She has advised her pupils to look closer to home for inspiration — from their own family.

Mrs Avery said: “I do think we want a variety of role models out there, not simply models or pop stars or footballers’ wives.

“We actually want women who have an identity of their own, say for example sportswomen. They are advocating a lifestyle which is one of dedication and hard work, and that actually failure along the way

is part of the route to success.

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“I think we need to look at female role models in public life, so last year we invited in Sheila Stuart, who had been mayor of Cambridge twice. I think we need to be looking at women locally, so celebrate your mother or your sister within families. Who are the role models we aspire to? A grandmother, an aunt.

“It’s important to get local role models, models within a town or city.” Mrs Avery said girls were growing up seeing airbrushed pictures of women, and there was very little depiction in the media of real body shapes.

“At the moment, there is a gross under-representation of the majority of types of people and a gross over-representation of a very false image, and I think for a society that is very toxic,” she told the Cambridge News.

Earlier this month, Jo Heywood, head of the all-girls Heathfield School in Ascot, said role models such as Cyrus were leaving girls “manipulated and confused”. Mrs Heywood said that she hoped strong role models at the London 2012 Olympics would have inspired girls.

She added: “I have long been yearning for more appropriate female role models for today’s young women to look up to.

“We knew what these sportswomen stood for — hard work, sacrifice and achievement. They were clear-cut role models for young women to look up to, and they did so.

“Now, a year on, I am not so sure that anything has really changed. I am more than a little concerned that some of the so-called role models young girls may look up to are giving them confusing mixed messages.”

Earlier this month Jim Gamble, former head of the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre, said that “sexualised” pop stars such as Cyrus were more of a threat to children on the internet than hard-core pornography.

The Telegraph