

Girls encouraged to take leadership risks

WHEN Marie Wilson asked students at an Adelaide girls school about the issues that concerned them, typical answers were: being thin, how they look, being beautiful and men.

It's a common response, says Ms Wilson, founder of the nonpartisan White House Project, which promotes women in politics and leadership in the US. Later, the issues become "being wives and mothers" and "rising in a male-dominated world".

"The situation won't change until there is a critical mass of women in

leadership roles in governments and companies," she says. "They will be able to change laws and regulations, then work on the culture so that it's more acceptable and possible for women to have real power."

Schools can play a big role in this, she says. One way is to study heroines so boys and girls learn about what women have done. They should also encourage girls to take more risks and leadership roles.

Ms Wilson, who spoke at the recent Alliance of Girls' Schools annual conference hosted by



Marie Wilson

deputy prime minister because she was "deliberately barren".

"Historians could have visited schools and spoke on the history of the cultural role of women as wives and mothers," she says. "It was a

Lauriston Girls School, refers to the recent "Gillard incident" when Liberal MP Bill Heffernan said Julia Gillard was unfit to be

17th century notion of how women would be made 'full' citizens."

She says young women often don't go into politics because: "I don't know how to penetrate it" and "I only see old, white men".

Ms Wilson has asked girls at schools throughout Australia to name their role models. Most nominated overseas women, such as Oprah Winfrey, Hillary Clinton and Mother Teresa. "It's an indication that they don't see enough Australian women in leadership positions."

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