



# YOUNGSTERS HAVE ABANDONED CHEAP AND CHEERFUL SCHOOL LEAVING PARTIES

In the sprawling grounds of Shearsby Bath, one of Leicestershire's most luxurious wedding and corporate venues, a crowd of parents and children have gathered to watch as a huge, Barbie-pink limousine pulls up.

Cameras are whipped out of handbags and there's lots of ooing and aahing as the doors open and a group of girls in posh frocks step out, giggling and complimenting each other on their outfits.

It's Kibworth High School year nine prom and proud parents have gathered to see their children arrive in style for what will be, as one mum tells me, "a night they will remember forever".

More cars - limos, Hummers, tractors and even a red-flamed monster truck - arrive.

Out step even more girls in fancy dresses, as well as groups of dapper young men, looking cool and unfazed while the girls exchange excited hugs.

Saucer-eyed, two younger sisters gasp at 200 glammed-up 13 and 14-year-olds outside the beautifully decorated marquee.

Seven-year-old Molly Clifford is waiting to see her big sis, Jessica.

"I think it's really cool," says Molly. "I'm looking forward to when I can go to the prom, I'm really jealous."

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OF THE PROM, SEE  
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The scene resembles an American high school movie, yet it is something that is becoming more common this side of the pond.

Gone are the days of the end-of-term disco in the sports hall, with the boys lined up on one side munching Space Raiders and drinking Panda Pops, and girls on the other, teetering in their mum's high heels.

These days, it's all about saying goodbye to school in style.

Annette Little's daughter, Rainy, is on the prom committee.

"I think it's lovely to see all the girls dressed up," says Annette. "When I was at school, we just had a disco, which was great at the time, but now it's much more of an occasion."

Inside the marquee, the music has started.

Teenagers wave goodbye to parents and head straight for the dance floor.

The eight members of the prom committee have spent months organising the big event, and just as long deciding on their outfits.

Olivia Whittle, who is wearing a cream dress with black piping, says they've included all the things every respectable prom should have, including a king and queen.

"We wanted to make it original, so we've got the decorations

# Before you can leave school, you have to arrive in style

and colours of our school," says Olivia.

"It's quite Americanised, like in the film Mean Girls. A prom is different from a disco - you get more dressed up."

Friend Fern Bushnell chips in: "We've been excited about everything."

"It's taken ages to organise and it was really stressful, but I'm proud. We can say we did this."

It seems the boys are having just as much fun as the girls.

"I've been to this place for a wedding once, it's well good," enthuses a hyperactive Jono

Lockwood. "It feels well weird getting dressed up, though. I got all my stuff from River Island."

Some girls' mums and dads have paid hundreds of pounds to ensure they look like perfect prom princesses.

One picked up her outfit on a holiday to Los Angeles, seven months ago.

With the high street awash with prom dresses at the moment, many have bought outfits in stores such as Topshop or Warehouse, while others have borrowed from big sisters.

Eleanor Hall made the 170-mile

round trip to Cirencester to pick up her bespoke ball gown.

"We went there because it was recommended by a friend. It was fitted for me, so it feels really nice," she says.

Richard Phillips is channeling the Justin Timberlake look, in a cool grey waistcoat and white plimsolls. He says: "I bought my tie from Tie Rack and my waistcoat is from Primark."

"I went shopping with my sister's boyfriend because I wanted to look cool. I wanted to wear my white trainers instead

of shoes 'cos I didn't want to look too smart."

Next to the dance-floor, a screen displays a slideshow of photos of the teenagers during their time at Kibworth.

Year nine form teacher and prom co-ordinator Liz Newington looks on proudly as students gather round and reminisce.

"The girls on the prom committee have worked so hard. It really is young enterprise at its best," says Liz. "I know it's very American, but the reason we called

it a prom was because we wanted the dressing up.

The girls



PICTURES: ALEX HANNAM/02098 21

**WE'RE LIVING LARGE:** A swish pink limo allows Kibworth High School students to make a dramatic entrance to their school prom at Shearsby Bath Hotel



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**BIG WHEELS:** You don't need a limo when you have a monster truck, say Jess Hickey, Fern Bushnell, Flo Court, Hollie Corbett, Harriet Mullis and Olivia Whittle

## RITE OF PASSAGE: Ashby School pupils say farewell to the classroom

IF YOU were passing the Hilton Hotel near East Midlands Airport a while back and saw limos, posh frocks and young men in black tie, there was no need for worry - the Oscars hadn't relocated to Castle Donington, it was the sixth formers at Ashby School on their prom night.

It wasn't all that long ago that A-level students did their exams and drifted quietly away from their school life to find jobs or university courses.

Not any more. These days, they

bid farewell to school with a prom.

In the past few years, students at the school have celebrated their end-of-term school leavers' ball at some of the smartest venues in Leicestershire.

This year, it was the Hilton's turn.

The right venue helps to add a sense of occasion to what is an important rite of passage.

It the closing of one chapter and the beginning of another, Kevin MacDonald, assistant

director of post-16 education at Ashby School believes

"Our leaving balls have been impressive showpiece events," said Mr MacDonald.

"It's self-funded and the students organise it themselves. I have to say, they do a very good job."

"We've been doing this at Ashby for a while now. For years, there was an end-of-term party. What has changed is the scale of that party."

The prom, it seems, is the one

American import everyone likes.

"The students love it," said Mr MacDonald. "They love the opportunity to sign off in style. It's a much more fitting way of closing your school career."

"I have to say I enjoy it, too. One of the great challenges for staff is to make sure their dancing styles don't conflict with those of the students, but, no, in all seriousness, it's good. A great atmosphere, very convivial."

It so good, in fact, that it's

spreading. Prom parties - the American phenomenon that didn't seem to work over here - are now common even for students of all ages.

"We have this ball for the sixth formers, but there's a year 11 prom party for the 16-year-olds - and I know of some primary schools that stage prom parties for their year six pupils," says Mr McDonald.



SHOOTING STARS: Posing at the prom