



The Girl Element

Bright ideas for girls who dream differently

GILL OLIVER meets entrepreneur Kate Haddon, the forward-thinking woman behind female pyjama business The Girl Element

KATE Haddon remembers the lightbulb moment she dreamed up the idea for her business The Girl Element.

It was bedtime in the family's Oxfordshire household, when one of her young daughters posed a simple question.

Mother-of-three Kate recalled: "My youngest, then six, has never been into pink, pretty things.

"She looked at her brother's pyjamas and asked: 'Why can't I have pyjamas like Nat's?'"

"That made me stop and think." The more she thought about it, the more Kate realised boys' nightwear tended to feature strong, powerful designs and slogans such as cars, tractors or rockets with words like 'Active' or 'Action'.

In contrast, nightwear aimed at girls was almost universally associated with 'pretty', 'cute' and 'fluffy'.

After searching fruitlessly for girls' pyjamas with some type of adventurous theme, Kate decided to design and make her own.

She explained: "We could have shopped in the boys' department but the fit wouldn't have been right

and anyway, why should we have to?"

With no background in fashion or retail – she studied music and English at Leeds university – it's been a steep learning curve to get The Girl Element off the ground.

But two years down the line, she has created three different styles of girls' pyjamas, retailing at £22-£25 a pair.

Designed by Kate with help from a production company in Nottingham, they aim to inspire and arouse curiosity among 2-13-year-olds.

There's the option of short- or long-sleeved tops and full-length or short bottoms.

But it's the striking and unusual designs which catch the eye – a selection of the most common chemical elements from the periodic table, basic maths symbols, test tubes, lab flasks, shooting stars and slogans such as 'Invent', 'Create' and 'Think'.

There's also a colourful 'Let's get curious' poster with fun maths, science and tech facts, which can be ordered separately for £2.50 and which was put together with support and input from Oxfordshire scientist and The Curiosity Box



The Girl Element's Kate Haddon

business founder Renee Watson.

"If girls grow up seeing these symbols and numbers every day, it becomes part of their lives," Kate pointed out.

"It makes it easy for parents to have little conversations about what each of these things mean."

Kate, whose children are now 15, 11 and 9, works part-time in employment communications at an engineering company, so is well-aware of the gender imbalance.

It's thought the problem starts young, as research shows even by the age of six girls believe they are less intelligent than boys.

Attention to detail has been crucial when it comes to making the pyjamas, with a lot of sending samples back and forth to get the product exactly right.

Manufactured in Portugal, the clothing is 100 per cent organic cotton and there are no itchy labels or seams to irritate sensitive skin.

They are mailed out in a compostable bag which biodegrades in six months and an inner wrap which biodegrades in a year and the company works with ethical suppliers.

Now Kate, who has also previously worked for Royal Mail and Vodafone, is busy marketing her PJ's on social media and through her website.

She's also started work designing a winter collection from her home office in Harwell.

"I've given both my daughters a pair of the pyjamas.

"They're off on a school trip in a few weeks' time, so that's a photo opportunity", she joked.

For more information see thegirlelement.co.uk