

The making of a Prom princess

Many GCSE students across the country will be celebrating leaving school with a glittering Prom event. Liz Burcher talked to six very excited girls from Hardenhuish School in Chippenham as they prepared for their big night to find out more about the increasingly popular rite of passage



ANN DAVIES: 'I've never dressed up like this'



SARAH WARDLE: 'This is so amazing'

EVERY girl walked into Hallmark's Calne studios almost rigid with excitement. For many, if not all, they had expectations of this being the best day of their young lives. And the five hours of the Prom itself - from 7 to midnight - is just the tip of the iceberg for the 15 and 16-year-old party-goers. Before came months of preparation, and many children also had after-Prom parties planned.

And as for the £25 ticket, that was only a fraction of the cost of a very expensive night out for Chippenham's 15 and 16-year-old young scholars.

I spoke to six girls as they had the professional finishing touches applied by make-up artist Sarah Brock, before Hallmark Studio photographer Kevin Kelly took their final pictures. I used to do two or three schools - this year we're doing nine. It must cost parents a fortune. We have six girls coming this afternoon for the Hardenhuish Prom, but in a couple of weeks time it is John Bentley School Prom and we have 14 girls that day."

I express surprise that 15 and 16-year-olds are having professional hair and make-up. But Sarah, who is celebrity make-up artist Daniel Sandler's number two, is used to it: "Obviously every girl wants to look their best - and there is a bit of competition. If you're going to be spend all that money on a dress, you might as well make sure everything else is right. Teenage skin should look fresh and pretty. The trick is not to try and make them look older. You have to be a bit more light-handed and go steady with darker colours. But teenagers can carry off sparkly make-up that maybe you couldn't use on more mature skin. It's a chance to have a bit of fun, really."

Kevin added: "It can be a real confidence booster. Girls can come in here really quiet and shy and hardly say a word, then after some time in the studio come out buzzing with it."

One hundred and seventy five school leavers were set to head for Grittleton House to enjoy an evening of dancing, a buffet spread and two casino tables. Two photographers from Hallmark Studio in Calne had been booked to record the event.

Apart from the lack of alcohol - children will be checked to ensure nothing is being smuggled in - and the fresh-faced young faces, it would be difficult to distinguish the event from a glamorous and sophisticated wedding party or New Year ball.

I caught up with some girls getting ready for the event on Friday afternoon, just hours before they were due to climb into a variety of stretch limousines to whisk them away to the party of the year. Without exception they all came straight from having their hair professionally styled and many had also had a professional manicures, pedicures and all carried their all-important dresses, along with new shoes and jewellery.

Kelly Stewart along with fellow pupil Tom Goodsir chaired the Prom Organising Committee. Perhaps one of the most impressive things about the Prom is that it is all organised by students. Like the other 175 students



SABRINA COKER: 'There is definitely a sense of competition'



STUDIO SESSION: Sarah Brock does Sabrina's make-up. Above: Kevin shoots pictures of Megan

Casey Brain came to the studio with her hair curled, her nails done and not just a new pink dress, but new shoes, jewellery and underwear. Having finished her GCSEs she is off to study childcare next year at Chippenham College. She came with mum Karen, who had spent the day ferrying her from having her nails done, to a hair appointment and finally to the studio for her make-up and photographer.



I WENT shopping with my friends and found the dress. I love it. It's so pink and pretty. That was in February. I can't believe the day is finally here. I love my make-up, I'm so pleased. Twelve of us are going in a red Hummer.

Mum's view: Casey's always been into pink. I was at work when she rang and said: "I've found the dress!" She was so excited. It's a bit like a wedding - with the added benefit of there not being a groom! I think it's lovely. I'd have loved to have something like this. I've just done everything for her that's girly - you live through them, don't you? If I had more daughters I'd probably wouldn't do so much. But if you're going to

going. Kelly has just finished her GCSEs. She is set to go to a college in Swindon to start full-time dance training. She came to the studio with mum Elaine.

WE'VE been organising this since about November when we provisionally set a date. It's hard to think that today's the day.

Every detail of the event was down to us. We've organised everything from invitations to sorting out landing permission for the two groups of people arriving by helicopter. We've chosen a colour scheme - so everything in gold and cream. In fact it's been the little details that have taken the time. Wrapping ribbons round each invitation was pretty time consuming.

And Tom's gone shopping today to buy presents for all the members of the organising committee to thank them for their work. They have been brilliant.

I've definitely learnt a lot by doing this. I'd be really interested in going into wedding planning or event management. I've felt quite grown up - making decisions that will affect so many people. So many people are so excited and it's great to think: "I've done that." You do feel a lot responsibility though. If something doesn't go right...

I plan to enjoy today now. I got my dress in New York while I was on family holiday. And today I've had my nails done and a pedicure, as well as my hair.

It's our prom just as much as everyone else's, so now I'm just going to make sure I enjoy it.

Mum's view: It's been great seeing it all come together. They seem to have thought of everything. They even had some money left in the kitty and so have organised to have a group picture taken so everyone gets a memento to take home. It's a very American thing. Kelly has worked really hard to do this. I'm very proud.