

ICGS Episode 21:

The Girls School Advantage

[00:00:00] **Student:** In the process of choosing a high school, parents and guardians are really gonna be some of your biggest supporters and being able to lean on them to like, ask them questions, making sure that they have that same information as you. So like going on tours with them, uh, looking at websites with them, things like that.

[00:00:18] **Student:** Doing research together is something that really was helpful in the process to me, making sure that we have that same information, communicating with counselors together. Also just having them on in that space really removes a lot of those like power dynamics that can come up and so that was something that was really helpful for me.

[00:00:37] **Student:** However, I also, my parents gave me the space to be able to make my own decision and it was more of me asking for their advice rather than them telling me where I should go. Uh, because it's really the next four years of your life and not the next four years of theirs.

[00:00:54] **Trudy Hall:** So, let me ask you: have you been wondering about your daughter's education lately? Perhaps she is ready to transition to the next grade level, perhaps your family has a move on the horizon and she will need to change her school, perhaps you have a parental sense that she might need a very different school environment. Perhaps you are just looking for guidance to ensure she is already being well served by her current school.

[00:01:17] **Student:** So the process of choosing a high school can be a little bit confusing and tough sometimes, and really there's just a lot of things to think about. But one great piece of advice that I really got during the process was just like at, after every single tour of all the schools that I looked at, my dad would really look at me and ask me whether or not this was a place that I could see myself.

[00:01:37] **Student:** And I feel like that's something that I hope that like everyone can kind of take with them and see if this is a place where you can see yourself at every school that you tour, because that's just such an important thing. As a person who considered multiple schools, I think something that I wish that I had thought more carefully about was more the character of the school rather [00:02:00] than just the opportunities that were going to be given to me while I was at that school.

[00:02:04] **Student:** Essentially, all of these schools are going to have those amazing opportunities, and it's so important that you look for the opportunities that are right for you. However, it's also just as pertinent to make sure that like the people who are surrounding you are people who you can either look up to or people who are similar to you in the ways that matter to you.

[00:02:25] **Trudy Hall:** As you begin your wondering, do you have a list of questions at the ready? How much, if any, research have you done? And, perhaps the hardest question of all: is this your decision or is this a decision in which your daughter will have the final say? I am Trudy Hall, your host for On Educating Girls, a podcast produced by the International Coalition of Girls Schools for parents of all girls everywhere.

[00:02:50] **Trudy Hall:** Today I have the pleasure of hearing wisdom from two professional educators, both of whom know the process of searching for a school home for a girl well, both of whom know asking the right questions can make all the difference in making the right choice. Liz Schmitt, the Chief Enrollment and Student Affairs Officer at Miss Porter's School,

[00:03:08] **Trudy Hall:** and Naomi Bartholomew, the Prep School Headmistress at St. Catherine's Bramley will share perspectives from their different universes, on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. These two women have been through the search process with dozens upon dozens of girls, what they know might just be what you need to know.

[00:03:27] **Trudy Hall:** Given that this is my universe—I spent my career in girls' schools—I may be tempted to add my own insights along the way! I would love to offer a warm welcome to both Liz and Naomi.

[00:03:38] **Liz Schmitt:** It's so good to be here, Trudy.

[00:03:42] **Naomi Bartholomew:** I'm really delighted to join you too, Trudy. Thank you.

[00:03:45] **Trudy Hall:** I love that you both bring wisdom from several continents to this topic. For starters, uh, could you share the background that you bring to working with girls and parents who are on the search for the right high school? And then perhaps as a quick follow up is some of the questions and [00:04:00] concerns on their mind when you first engage with them. Liz, let's begin with you.

[00:04:03] **Liz Schmitt:** Yeah, absolutely. So I began my career actually in college admission. Uh, and then I became the director of college counseling at Ms. Porter School, uh, which is a wonderful girls boarding school in Connecticut. Um, and that's

where I was really able to partner with students and families as they planned for their lives beyond Porters.

[00:04:23] **Liz Schmitt:** Uh, soon after that I became our director of admission, and now I oversee the entire student experience from entry through graduation. So really for the past, um, 20 years now, I have been singularly focused on the experiences of girls as they imagine what their high school careers and ultimately their college careers could hold.

[00:04:42] **Naomi Bartholomew:** I have been the prep school head teacher here at St. Catherine's in Bramley. Now in the UK we call this a through school. So it's a model where we have a prep school and a senior school, and we're kind of two schools in one. So I oversee the prep school girls and they are an amazing group of 250 [00:05:00] young women, um, who by the top end of the prep school are thinking about their next destination.

[00:05:04] **Naomi Bartholomew:** So their high schools, um, I have spent year on year over the last 10 years advising parents on where is the next best fit for their child. Um, and I absolutely love that part of my job. It's very, very rewarding. It's a little bit like the Harry Potter sorting hat in terms of where is the next best school.

[00:05:23] **Naomi Bartholomew:** Um, I always say to parents that it's about where is the next best school rather than can I get my child into? It's not about molding your child, it's about finding the very best place, uh, where she's gonna thrive and have opportunities to lead, study the subjects that she wants and go on beyond high school, um, to go and conquer the world no doubt.

[00:05:45] **Trudy Hall:** Well, as you talk about the next best school, um, what if both of you just offer up then some of the questions you hear first from parents.

[00:05:51] **Naomi Bartholomew:** I often talk to parents about that we start possibly with the, the logistics, the physical size of the school, the [00:06:00] location. Um, think of the school's reputation, and I very quickly try to get beyond that, you know, beyond the facilities and the listed opportunities to the value and the ethos of the school.

[00:06:11] **Naomi Bartholomew:** Um, what's behind that website or, you know, the, the, the marketing that you initially see. Um, often parents will ask me about destination of leavers and see it as a stepping stone to the next part of their life and their education. Um, But yeah, I will always try to encourage parents to think about ethos and values.

[00:06:32] **Naomi Bartholomew:** Who's gonna inspire your daughter or your son to be the very best version of themselves? Who's gonna get alongside them when they have trips or falls, and need that encouragement along the way? Um, so I'm a great advocate for meeting the people who are gonna shape your child's education. Um, be beyond necessarily the facilities, um, which is the initial draw often to a great school.

[00:06:55] **Liz Schmitt:** I also have parents, um, who, who ask and are focused on, you know, the [00:07:00] programs and opportunities that various different schools can provide. I also always encourage parents to consider the non-negotiables, um, that they may have as, as parents. Um, certainly distance from home being one, uh, cost and affordability being another, maybe a very specialized academic offering or athletic or or arts offering that a school must have in order for their student to have access to everything that they dream of.

[00:07:24] **Liz Schmitt:** Um, I also talk very often about the advantages of an all-girls school, um, and, and help parents sort through whether or not their daughter is ready for a boarding environment and, and how do they know when their child is ready for a boarding environment or not? Um, certainly we spend a lot of time talking about, uh, what a typical day is like, what a typical day, what a typical weekend might look like in our environment, um, so that students can really get a feel for, um, what their day-to-day life on our campuses could include.

[00:07:54] **Trudy Hall:** You know, we talk about this in our world as a process, um, and I think parents might be surprised to [00:08:00] know how long that process takes and when that process starts. Um, Naomi, do you wanna talk a little bit, because you were actually working with those who, you're the launching pad, if you will. When do you start that process?

[00:08:12] **Naomi Bartholomew:** Yes. Well, here in the UK I've certainly met parents with children as young as four and five with their Oxford University sweatshirt and their aspirations for the future but in, in real terms, when we're looking for high school places or senior school, as we call it in England, we are really looking at the penultimate year of their prep school education.

[00:08:29] **Naomi Bartholomew:** So the year before they're going onto their next school. Um, I'm a great believer in not closing doors, and you absolutely see those children might hit their benchmark right at that last kind of six months of looking. Um, so here, here we advise to look in the penultimate year when you know enough about your child's potential and the things that they really enjoying, their hobbies, they're interests, their style of learning, um, and definitely endorse what Liz says.

[00:08:58] **Naomi Bartholomew:** Think about boarding. [00:09:00] Co-ed single-sex school, how far are you get prepared to travel? Um, and at that point have your kind of long list, um, of schools that you might want to physically go and visit. And that process then takes time. You don't want to shut a door too soon. You want to go and explore that opportunity, possibly visit first yourself, then decide whether it's something to take your child on.

[00:09:21] **Naomi Bartholomew:** Two. Of course, once they go, they're probably engaged with it and, and, and love something very quickly that they want to. Um, Take on when they move to that school. Um, and then that, that it's, it really does take that year to just get, get that fit. Absolutely right.

[00:09:38] **Liz Schmitt:** You know, as I think about this, um, this process, I actually, you know, have often broken it into, um, two, two distinct processes. And I think Naomi really described that penultimate year, um, really aptly. Uh, and, and, and then I think that's separate from what I call the journey. Um, you know, so there's the process of applying to schools and then there's the journey that students go on and that students go on and I think that process of applying to [00:10:00] schools is often in that year before they're about to head off.

[00:10:03] **Liz Schmitt:** And, and, you know, in, in my world, that begins in their seventh grade year as they're preparing for eighth grade, um, and would include attending admission events and, and formal tours. Also, ultimately doing interviews and, and completing their application process. But the, the journey really begins quite a bit before that.

[00:10:21] **Liz Schmitt:** Um, and that's, that's the, the journey where, where students are beginning to imagine what their high school years could include. Uh, and for us, we often see students as young as fifth grade beginning to engage in programs and opportunities that are authentic, uh, offerings at, at the schools that they may be interested in.

[00:10:39] **Liz Schmitt:** That could include leadership programs, summer camps. Weekend opportunities, even a sports team that happens to practice on that campus or may even be holding, uh, you know, a weekend tournament or, or a summer event. And that's an opportunity then for girls to engage with a campus and in a, with a school in sort of, um, an [00:11:00] unofficial way and in a way that feels authentic to who they are and allows them to feel as though they're a part of a community before they've even applied to that community.

[00:11:11] **Naomi Bartholomew:** If I could just absolutely endorse that. Liz, I think what can sometimes happen is parents get quite focused on the process, as you call it, um, the admissions or the assessments, um, process and procedure. And, you know,

if we're not careful, the child focuses on that as well. And this is the next step in their, in their education and opening those opportunities.

[00:11:31] **Naomi Bartholomew:** I was just saying exactly the same to a parent I met with this morning about do take your, your daughter along, make sure that she's visited, see all of the exciting things coming next. Yes, there's a process that's a stepping stone to that. Um, but if we're not careful, we can focus too much on that.

[00:11:47] **Naomi Bartholomew:** Um, I would also just remind parents that they are not the finished article or item at the end of their prep school. Um, they will be a small fish in a much bigger pond, most likely, but it will [00:12:00] be another seven years of growth. So will they be absolutely comfortable in every area achieving across the board in that very first term of high school or senior school?

[00:12:09] **Naomi Bartholomew:** Maybe not, but is there enough room for them to grow and develop as, as those years go, go on? You don't necessarily want them being too comfortable and cozy as soon as they arrive. It's the next part of their journey.

[00:12:23] **Trudy Hall:** You, uh, to borrow, um, Naomi's language when she talks about the next best school. Uh, maybe you both have already answered this question, but is there an overarching goal in finding that school, uh, you know, for, for example, um, you've talked about the growth curve that's necessary. You've talked about the fit. All of that's really important. But where should the parents focus be? Should they be thinking like right now this year? Should they be thinking about college prep?

[00:12:49] **Trudy Hall:** Uh, Naomi mentioned before, the people that your daughter is gonna be surrounded by. So I'd love to hear from both of you on this one again, because you do a nice job tag teaming each other. [00:13:00] I'm a parent, what should I be thinking about? Where's my focus right now?

[00:13:03] **Liz Schmitt:** Yeah. So I think, you know, this is, this is where parents get a bit tripped up. Uh, you know, independent schools are often referred to as college preparatory schools. Uh, the terms are, are often used interchangeably. So I think parents naturally think that the end result is a college outcome. What they miss though, is the preparatory piece. The preparation and independent schools are, are actually preparing students, um, to be successful in college.

[00:13:29] **Liz Schmitt:** They certainly accompany and guide them through the process of applying to college or university. Um, but the aim is not to prepare them for the process. Um, the aim is to prepare them for college and for life. So, you know, in the independent school search then, um, really the focus should be on identifying the

[00:13:48] **Liz Schmitt:** Experiences that are going to serve a young girl for a lifetime. Um, and at the center of that are relationships, peers, trusted adults, mentors.

[00:14:00] And as those of us at schools know, the best learning happens in the context of relationships and positive and meaningful relationships are the greatest indicator of, of happiness and success over a person's lifetime.

[00:14:12] **Liz Schmitt:** So I think a parent's focus then really should be on the people, the program, the place that puts a smile on their daughter's face and a sparkle, um, in the eye of the girl sitting right in front of them.

[00:14:26] **Naomi Bartholomew:** Yeah, I com I completely, uh, endorse everything Liz has just said. I think one thing I often say to staff and to parents is that facilities often attract the very best team. You know, that drama teacher that wants to work on that amazing stage and thinks I can have a tech crew, I can have someone, um, helping me.

[00:14:44] **Naomi Bartholomew:** Backstage with costumes by the textiles department. So the facilities often actually attract the very best staff, teaching staff, um, as well as obviously being attractive to parents and children when they come and look at a school. But you want the very best team who are then in turn and get, they're gonna be [00:15:00] inspired by the facilities and They are then gonna use those facilities to really inspire the very best in, in the young people that they're educating.

[00:15:02] **Naomi Bartholomew:** So I would also endorse role models. Um, who's gonna influence your child, whether it be the staff, the older children, is there a prefect program, a role model, um, that they're gonna look up to? Where's she probably gonna kind of hang out? Maybe she's gonna be in the art department in some of her free time, really exploring her passions just as a hobby, not necessarily for an exam or where, where is she gonna have her downtime? Uh, and who are those people who are gonna guide her through the journey?

[00:15:35] **Naomi Bartholomew:** She's gonna have trips and falls. That is part of certainly those teen years. And who's she gonna go to? Who are you going to go to as parents when she'll say, no, you don't need to go and ask. I'm, I'm fine. I'm fine. And you need to know that as the school, there are gonna be people at the end of the phone or the email, um, who can meet with you in person or over zoom and just reassure you of your, of your child's journey through the school.

[00:15:59] **Naomi Bartholomew:** [00:16:00] So a great advocate that it's, it's people that will influence and shape your your child's future.

[00:16:07] **Trudy Hall:** I can't agree with both of you more. It's the people, um, who are those people who are going to embrace her learning, her heart, her growth. Um,

having said that, uh, for many parents, this'll be a unique opportunity to partner, if you'll let me use that word, um, with their daughter, because their daughter needs to be happy. Their daughter needs to feel like this is the right experience for her, and yet parents will have an opinion, parents have life experience. Um, so, and, and students are oftentimes driven by what their friends want to do, um, and may have a very different goal in mind. So could, um, you offer some strategies, um, what you say to parents as they enter into this very crucial partnership? Do you wanna start Naomi?

[00:16:51] **Naomi Bartholomew:** Yes, I would definitely acknowledge that. I think sometimes there may be a link at a certain school. Perhaps it's mum's old school, [00:17:00] Dad's old school somewhere grandparents are very keen on, someone in the family has a link or an association. Um, but it's very important that, you know, you're tuning into your child through this process.

[00:17:10] **Naomi Bartholomew:** They're still young at this age. To make a life decision of their own is, is a, is a huge thing. So I, I always say to parents, it's not the child's decision, it's your decision as a parent, you are trusting the school with your most precious thing, which is your child. Um, but the, the child's reaction is really, really informative.

[00:17:29] **Naomi Bartholomew:** So by all means, take them along to events and you know, as Liz said, sometimes informally before this process actually starts to sports fixtures or matches or events can be really helpful. Just see how that fit is, it's a bit like buying this brand new pair of shoes. Is it a fit? Does it feel comfortable?

[00:17:48] **Naomi Bartholomew:** Is there enough, um, opportunity there? And I think listening to your child, I often talk about the back of the car conversation. So you're driving away from the school as your child's suddenly gone, very quiet and [00:18:00] is contemplating everything. Are they full of beams and chatting away about all the things they'd love to get involved in?

[00:18:07] **Naomi Bartholomew:** And you will, you'll know, you'll, you'll judge as a parent about that reaction from them. It's not their decision, but I feel they should be involved in the choice and also, as we said earlier, to make sure that they see this as an opportunity rather than just an assessment or a process that they've got to get through.

[00:18:23] **Liz Schmitt:** You know, it's, um, I think, a really hard moment, um, that the high school, uh, search process for parents, because this is really one of the first moments for parents where they are allowing their daughter to be in the driver's seat. Um, and it's, it's, it's a critical moment and I think it's really critical that parents, um, recognize that it's their daughter who's conducting the search.

[00:18:47] **Liz Schmitt:** And what they are doing is co-creating the shape of the search. They're creating the boundaries for the box and allowing the girls to really pursue everything inside that box. And I think for, for parents, you know, [00:19:00] there are four areas that I always encourage parents to do a little bit of a self-assessment.

[00:19:05] **Liz Schmitt:** Um, you know, the first is a, a needs and wants assessment. Um, you know, consider your daughter's needs and her wants, what's vital to her experience, what's a must have at any school that you're looking at. Um, what's a highly desirable thing for a school to have, what's a should have?

[00:19:22] **Liz Schmitt:** And then what's just a, what's a nice to have? And once you've identified some of those wants and needs and done that basic assessment, um, you, you've at least created a bit of an outline. Next, you need to do a bit of a mirror test, right? You need to look in the mirror as a parent and say, What am I ruling out based on my own assumptions about schools?

[00:19:42] **Liz Schmitt:** Um, what am I ruling out based on my own experiences or the biases that I'm bringing to this process? The world has changed. Schools have changed, kids have changed, and there are a myriad of educational options to choose from. And, and as Naomi has said, you know, you owe it to your daughter to explore all of the possibilities, [00:20:00] whether those are public schools, independent schools, specialized schools, boarding schools, and, certainly girls schools.

[00:20:06] **Liz Schmitt:** I think, and, and as I said earlier, you really do also need to next define your non-negotiables. Um, you know, what are the non-negotiables in terms from of, of distance, from home, um, maybe class size a, a program offering cost. Then look at that list again, and why are those things barriers, right? And really be able to clearly articulate to yourself and to your child why they are barriers.

[00:20:32] **Liz Schmitt:** And then finally, and this is the hardest part for parents, you have to accompany and observe, right? Let your daughter take the lead on the search. You'll be amazed, absolutely amazed at what she's capable of and behind the scenes, you know, you're also paying really close attention to what's going on at that school.

[00:20:51] **Liz Schmitt:** Who are the people in positions of leadership? Whether they're students or they're adults, um, who's on the teaching faculty? Who are they highlighting as their prominent [00:21:00] graduates? Um, who are they highlighting as, uh, you know, their, uh, most accomplished students? Who's on that list? Who's missing from that list in terms of representation?

[00:21:12] **Liz Schmitt:** And that will give you a lot of information as you navigate your search and begin to understand the people who are gonna have the most influence on your daughter.

[00:21:22] **Naomi Bartholomew:** And if I could just come back to, um, what Trudy asked as well, that, that notion of friendship, you know, what about if she wants to stay with her very best friends, and of course peer groups are very strong by the top end of prep school before they're looking for high school or senior school.

[00:21:37] **Naomi Bartholomew:** And I would use the same sort of check as Liz has just mentioned, who's friends? Is this your friends as parents and the other families that you like to be alongside? Um, or is it really your daughter's friends that are the driver here, uh, we know now, um, more than ever that these friendships will last and they will survive different schools, different pathways.

[00:21:57] **Naomi Bartholomew:** Um, true friends remain. It can be [00:22:00] actually a brilliant thing to have good friends not in your own school, um, to have that. You know, kind of support when you are going through your school. To have friends outside and beyond that immediate community is great. But I would also say that you are still gonna be parenting, um, alongside other parents.

[00:22:16] **Naomi Bartholomew:** And the values and shared values of the school are likely to create this feeling of community. And you'll want to make sure that you are probably parenting alongside some parents who you feel you have some commonality of values and ethos with. They may not be your friends, but. Boy, when you know they're 14, 15, they want to go off to that party and they say everyone else is gonna be staying the night.

[00:22:37] **Naomi Bartholomew:** And you're thinking, no, I'm not comfortable with that. You are still gonna be parenting alongside other parents. So it is important to have that sense of shared ethos. Um, but for your daughter or son's friends, those friendships are gonna remain regardless of which school they then go on to go to.

[00:22:53] **Trudy Hall:** So, you know, I have to ask this next question. Just have to ask it. You know, uh, you are both at girls' schools [00:23:00] and isn't the notion of, uh, educating girls in a girls' only environment a bit dated? Um, if a parent is considering such an option, what should they know about girls' schools in these modern times?

[00:23:12] **Naomi Bartholomew:** So yes, I mean, I personally think that, that the girls only model has never been more relevant than it is today. I think we have, um, moved our research forward considerably. We are no longer just talking about the academic achievement and success of girls schools, which has, is proven and often

referred to. Um, the research has moved on much more to, um, this idea of girls educated in girls schools making, um, very good co colleagues in diverse teams.

[00:23:42] **Naomi Bartholomew:** Um, lots of other qualities that come through the experience of a girls school. And it's, it's great to see that research bit really pushing forward. Um, certainly in, in the UK we have had, um, you know, I don't want to call it safety concerns, but we have had [00:24:00] something called 'Everyone's Invited', which has been calling out, um, sexist and, and sort of misogynistic behavior in schools.

[00:24:07] **Naomi Bartholomew:** It's a, it's a massive movement. Um, and it's, I think probably taken a veil off some very kind of difficult behaviors in some of our co-ed settings that really need to be addressed. Um, and, uh, you know, we would obviously hope that girls schools are at the forefront of giving young women a voice and an identity of their own to go on and, and take those opportunities beyond school.

[00:24:31] **Naomi Bartholomew:** Um, and in many ways, I think there's, there's never been more relevant a time for the girls only setting.

[00:24:37] **Liz Schmitt:** Yes, I absolutely agree with, with Naomi. And, um, you know, girls schools have never been more relevant than, than they are today. They were founded to address, you know, systemic barriers, uh, for girls and women and those systemic barriers still persist even today.

[00:24:54] **Liz Schmitt:** Um, and I think that the, the social challenges for girls, um, have, have only continued to mount. There's a [00:25:00] lot of research out there that shows that from the early middle school years, all the way through the high school years, teen girls experienced so much social pressure that they actually put aside their authentic selves and display only a small portion of their gifts.

[00:25:15] **Liz Schmitt:** Um, and, and when you ask girls, you know, have you, um, have you experienced judgments based on your appearance? Have you felt pressure to feel, um, uh, beautiful or even sexy? Uh, have, have you experienced a tension between being smart but not so smart that boys feel less important? Um, have you experienced social, uh, social exclusion if you don't conform to some of these, these beauty standards?

[00:25:40] **Liz Schmitt:** And, and do you have a feeling of being less than in the classroom or even through an activity or a leadership role because of your gender? And, and most girls in their middle schools, in their co-ed middle school have experienced that. Um, you know, the research coming out of the International

Coalition of Girls Schools clearly indicates that girls who attend girls [00:26:00] schools are ultimately more self-confident.

[00:26:02] **Liz Schmitt:** They're more self-aware, they're more politically engaged and culturally aware. They invest more time in their passions and they aspire to greater heights than their peers elsewhere. Um, they also experience greater support from their teachers and create more meaningful relationships with their peers over time.

[00:26:19] **Liz Schmitt:** Um, and I, you know, I've always said that a girls' school frees girls to be uniquely themselves. And, um, there's just, there, there's so much power in that, you know, in the admission process I'm often asked, you know, who are the girls who choose a girls' school? And what I've found is that, that some girls choose a girls' school because they want to develop their voice and their confidence.

[00:26:40] **Liz Schmitt:** Others already raise their hands in class and they wanna be surrounded by equally motivated and engaged peers. Um, and then there are some who are already really strong leaders in their schools and they wanna continue to empower themselves and be involved in a community that uplifts others. So regardless of [00:27:00] who a girl is, there's a place for her.

[00:27:02] **Liz Schmitt:** You know, in these remarkable communities of women that that are, that are committed to ensuring that that girls school graduates live lives of impact and consequence.

[00:27:12] **Naomi Bartholomew:** Yeah, I just actually come from a meeting with my teachers on some, on some recent research about co-ed versus single sex settings and interesting, latest research, um, that one of my colleagues referred to this afternoon was that 96% of classroom interruptions in a co-ed setting are boys.

[00:27:29] **Naomi Bartholomew:** So that's staggering. That means 4%, uh, of those, uh, children in that classroom aren't okay. Interrupting you can interpret in many different ways, but that would suggest that the, the boys' voice in that co-ed setting is, is definitely, um, dominant, uh, and suggest that it's not always as easy to make sure that that voice is heard.

[00:27:50] **Naomi Bartholomew:** The other thing I would definitely endorse when you're looking at schools, um, in terms of the role models that we've been talking about is also what's celebrated by that [00:28:00] school. So I often will say to, to parents to look at the trophy cabinet, what's rewarded, um, how many girls and boys are rewarded that top sports player of the year or the top scientists of the year?

[00:28:11] **Naomi Bartholomew:** Um, because what you reward and, and recognize as a school, it says a lot, um, about the, what the school values. And obviously in a

girl setting, the girls are seeing girl after girl, young women after young women achieving these top prizes across the academic sphere, the social sphere, um, sporting sphere and it, it's a very, very powerful thing.

[00:28:32] **Trudy Hall:** Well, and I, I'm making an editorial comment here. What I love about what both of you have just said is that so much of what is going on in girls schools now is underpinned by research, serious academic research because girls schools have really seen that as the way to document the work that they do that is powerful and good.

[00:28:53] **Trudy Hall:** Um, so is there something that we haven't yet discussed that parents should be tuned into as they [00:29:00] guide their daughter through the process of selecting a school? We've talked about it, it's a journey. We've talked about the parents' role. Are we leaving anything out? Liz?

[00:29:11] **Liz Schmitt:** You know, Trudy, you just mentioned, uh, research and the research going on at, at girls schools. I think it's, um, incredibly important that schools today underpin all of the decisions and choices that they're making. Um, you know, with research and with recent pedagogy. And, and to that point, I think one of the things that parents really need to be focused on is, um, Which schools are innovating. Uh, you know, who is evolving?

[00:29:36] **Liz Schmitt:** Um, you know, we, we saw, um, a a lot of different things happen over the course of the pandemic, you know, and, and some schools chose that moment in time as an opportunity to evolve. Others chose that moment in time as a moment to pause and retrench. And I think, um, you know, those who chose to use the pandemic as a moment of, um, social [00:30:00] change, as a moment to evolve through disruption, um, have emerged.

[00:30:05] **Liz Schmitt:** Stronger, uh, and more academically focused than ever before. So, you know, um, I would say pay attention to what schools are doing, how they're changing, how they're applying, um, you know, academic pedagogy research, uh, to the work that they're doing, whether it's in academic life or it's in student life.

[00:30:26] **Naomi Bartholomew:** Yeah, I think I would go back to Liz's non-negotiables as well, and think what are the lasting things that underpin the school? So, absolutely: Are they dynamic, are they innovative? The jobs that, you know, these young people will be doing in the future probably don't even exist yet. So, uh, you know, they're being prepared for a world that's changing all the time, but, Underneath that, uh, underpinning it is a value set of values and an ethos, and you would hope that that is lasting and stands that sort of test of time.

[00:30:53] **Naomi Bartholomew:** I will often say to parents that, uh, you know, choosing a school is a kind of head and heart decision, so your head is [00:31:00] telling you, um, all of the list of things that you absolutely need and your heart is telling you whether it really is the right fit. I would also say that at each stage and phase of education, There could be a different formula for your child so that, you know, not every child changes schools at exactly the same time along this journey.

[00:31:18] **Naomi Bartholomew:** Um, so responding to how your child is growing and developing is really, really important. The other thing I think parents often say to me is, how will I know if I've got it right? You'll know. You'll absolutely know. You know, remember as I said that this is the start of the next phase.

[00:31:35] **Naomi Bartholomew:** So that first term, of course, there may be wobbles, there may be insecurities and anxieties as they're settling into a new program. They may be very tired by the end of that first term, because every new relationship is taking time and energy and they're wanting to be their very best version of themselves, but you will definitely know that you've got it right.

[00:31:54] **Naomi Bartholomew:** And certainly here's something we do, um, and we are very proud of, is connect with alumni and see how [00:32:00] they're getting on. And I think another feature of the girls only model is there's this real network, often a global network for life. Um, people are reaching out to each other and seeing what happens next.

[00:32:11] **Naomi Bartholomew:** And certainly I'm very proud as the head teacher of the prep school to hear of stories of the girls going on to be very successful in their next schools. So we use that information, we're very proactive with gaining it from parents and from girls. And then we tweak and we change and we, we prepare the girls slightly differently if they need to, and they, they feel something else would've helped them make that really successful transition.

[00:32:33] **Naomi Bartholomew:** Um, but yeah, I, I think you, you will absolutely know your head and heart will choose the right school and your head and heart will know if you've made the right decision.

[00:32:42] **Liz Schmitt:** Um, there's a really fantastic essay that I read many, many years ago, uh, in a book called College is Unranked. And I think many of the essays apply really beautifully to independent schools as well.

[00:32:54] **Liz Schmitt:** There's one, um, called College Recruitment Night by a professor out on the west coast of, of the United States called [00:33:00] Kim Stafford. Um, And, uh, uh, th there are some really rich quotes from, um, from that essay, but

he said, uh, you know no school can anticipate fully the treasures you may bring to their community.

[00:33:12] **Liz Schmitt:** We can only guess. Your application and our admission process is a guess. A good guess probably, but a mysterious path, finally. If you apply and we don't accept you, no one has failed. Uh, if we accept you and we don't turn out to be the best place for you, no one has failed. The real thing is you, your life of learning that can be nourished, stunted, accelerated, redirected, but never stopped.

[00:33:34] **Liz Schmitt:** This life belongs to you. Um, and this essay has, has really guided me in my, in my work now and reminds me every day that at the center of every single challenge, every decision we make, um, and, and every opportunity, uh, at the center of that is the life of a girl. Um, and, and we have the opportunity to help her to be nourished, um, to get [00:34:00] through those moments of feeling stunted, to help her redirect, accelerate where needed because this life is hers.

[00:34:09] **Trudy Hall:** Um, both of you have done a nice job throughout of giving some guidance, and let me see if I can wrap us by putting some of that together. So what we're really looking for is the next best school, but it's the next best school to prepare a young woman. And in that you're going to wanna come up with as a family, the non-negotiables.

[00:34:30] **Trudy Hall:** Those things that you know as a family, you're not willing to compromise on. Always remembering that the best learning is gonna be in the context of relationships. Focus on the people as you're going through the process. Who's gonna be with your daughter at every step of the way on each day of her new learning journey?

[00:34:47] **Trudy Hall:** Remember, your daughter's in the driver's seat, but you are the co-creator of those boundaries. Um, and so pay attention to the way the schools offer up the experience to the norms and the values of the school, because [00:35:00] that's where you'll really begin to understand how your daughter will be served in that school community.

[00:35:05] **Trudy Hall:** And I think to end us, you know, it is a head and a heart decision, as Naomi said, it really, those two must come together in a way that works best for your daughter. And for you as you parent on this journey, I hope I captured all of that. There's so much more that you said, but this has been a tremendous opportunity for me to listen to two pros who really understand the process and like keeping girls at the center of it. So thank you very much.

[00:35:31] **Naomi Bartholomew:** Thank you.

[00:35:32] **Trudy Hall:** You have been listening to On Educating Girls, a podcast produced by the International Coalition of Girls Schools to address real issues that impact the lives of girls we know.

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