



EDUCATION CORNER PODCAST WITH HEADS



**Mr. Simon Barber**

FROM LUDGROVE SCHOOL, BERKSHIRE

**Mr. Bart Wielenga**

FROM BLUNDELL'S SCHOOL, DEVON

**Mr. Richard Jones**

FROM BRYANSTON SCHOOL, DORSET AND

**Mr. Gary Hickey**

FROM HABERDASHERS' ADAMS SCHOOL, SHROPSHIRE

**A panel discussion about the differences between single-sex and co-educational boarding, the benefits of boarding and the future of boarding schools.**

Mr. Simon Barber, Headmaster of Ludgrove School, Berkshire, believes in the power of both all-boys' and prep boarding: *"You can have a childhood for a bit longer in Year 7 and Year 8. Certainly, our Year 7 and 8 boys are still climbing trees, charging around, getting covered in mud and playing football every moment of the day. I think children haven't changed a great deal in 50 years, but society has."* Ludgrove benefits from plentiful outdoor space and pupils are encouraged to enjoy time in nature and retain their childhood for longer. Simon also spoke about the importance of finding what's best for the individual child: *"I'm not*

*going to come down and say single-sex is the way forward the whole way through, but what I would say is a happy school is the way forward and we've got a very, very happy school."*

Conversely, both Blundell's School and Bryanston School offer co-educational boarding and day provision. Mr. Bart Wielenga, Head at Blundell's School, has experience of both single-sex and co-education and agrees with Simon on the importance of finding the best school for the individual. He told us: *"I've taught in all-boys' education and in a co-ed environment; both have advantages and disadvantages."* At Blundell's, pupils are in co-educational boarding houses in Years 7 and 8 and again in Year 13, with single-sex boarding in between: *"You want boys and girls to feel comfortable interacting with each other, but at*

***“I’m not going to come down and say single sex is the way forward the whole way through, but what I would say is a happy school is the way forward and we’ve got a very, very happy school.”*** LUDGROVE

*the same time, there is a space for boys to be boys together and girls to be girls together.”* Mr. Richard Jones, Head at Bryanston School, agrees on the importance of preparing older pupils for life beyond school: *“Ultimately at the senior end, we are there to help prepare them for when they leave and [we provide] the opportunity in our setting for pupils to navigate interactions with members of the opposite sex and those relationships that they have.”*

Haberdashers’ Adams is one of only about 35 state boarding schools in the UK, Mr. Gary Hickey, Headmaster, explained: *“This is where the families pay for boarding, but the government pays for the education as it would any other state school in England. So this makes boarding a much more affordable option for families.”* At almost 400 years old, Haberdasher’s Adams recently introduced girls to their senior schools, although the Sixth Form has been co-educational for decades. Whilst the boarding remains all-boys’, Gary believes that this will also become co-educational in the future: *“I would have no doubt that, in the future, there would be no hesitations to becoming a co-ed school in terms of boarding, simply because I think that just reflects society.”*

Family life has changed rapidly in modern times, yet boarding remains a key part of education for many. Simon shared: *“I think boarding works because parents are time poor: lots of them are working very hard and certainly we’re seeing the majority of our parents both work. I think they realise that their*

*children want quality time with other children, rather than commuting.”* Bart concurred: *“Families are busy and often boarding schools are able to provide the flexibility that many families need.”* Richard also acknowledged the ways in which boarding allows children to make the most of the wonderful opportunities on offer: from homework prep, to clubs and activities: *“It’s such an amazing experience for them, to be able to immerse themselves in their passions.”* This also allows families to truly relax and enjoy the time they spend together: *“I think you get really good quality time when your pupils come back from boarding - you’re actually really excited to see each other.”* This is particularly significant to military families or those who may be based internationally, Gary highlighted: *“Boarding schools offer a sense of stability and security.”*

Many boarding schools are particularly proud of their international community and the many opportunities it provides boarders. *“Our kids have this amazing opportunity to learn about other cultures that can only be good,”* Bart told us. At Blundell’s this extends beyond just pupils’ friendships, with many local families forming friendships with and supporting international families, such as when they play in sports fixtures:

*“Those local families also take an interest in these kids who have arrived from different parts of the world, [which is] an amazing thing.”* Richard also acknowledged the importance of pastoral care and support for international boarders in particular: *“There’ll be times when there are events with other international pupils who they can share experiences with, which is really important as well.”* Bryanston also has Pupil Leaders dedicated to looking after international students, to ensure they have opportunities to share their experiences and feelings.

For many parents considering boarding schools, the emotional

support and wellbeing of their child is of utmost importance. *“Trust is absolutely fundamental,”* Simon stated. All our guests also emphasised that building this trusting relationship begins from the first step of the admissions process. Bart described the importance of *“[...] building their relationships with parents and with pupils in anticipation of their arrival, so that when they come to school the parents feel confident that their child is known.”* At Bryanston, Richard also emphasises the ongoing relationship and communication between staff and parents to reassure them of their child’s wellbeing: *“They can go to their house parent for anything to do with the pastoral care, that really helps and it’s really reassuring you know there are two members of staff who have complete oversight of your child.”*

Following the recent introduction of VAT on school fees, schools are conscious of the need to support families who may be struggling with these changes. *“We need to recognise that and we need to be sensitive to it,”* Bart commented: *“We need to ensure that the product remains something that is worth it and we work hard to make sure that we continue to invest in our facilities, that we keep on delivering something that is of such high quality that parents will continue to make the sacrifice.”* Richard also shared that at Bryanston: *“We’re doing all we can to support those parents who are in school at the moment who are finding it difficult to take on the additional cost.”* For Richard, remaining adaptable and hopeful are also key: *“There’s big decisions to be made and as schools we’re going to have to be really, really flexible as to how we respond to that, but I’m confident that*



Bryanston School



Haberdashers’ Adams School

***“Our kids have this amazing opportunity to learn about other cultures that can only be good.”*** BLUNDELL’S

*whenever there’s challenges there’s always opportunities as well.”*

The world beyond education may also seem unsettled, however Gary remains confident that boarding schools can weather the storm: *“We used to say frequently during the COVID times that ‘this too shall pass’ and we can only hope that that is the case. History has told us that there is turmoil and there is calm, hopefully in equal measure.”* The aim of all our guests remains focused on the children: *“We are going to have to be reassuring children that their place in the world is going to be just as important and just as secure as it always has been and that they are going to have massively bright futures ahead of them.”* The role of boarding schools in this also seems secure, owing to their dedication to providing the best opportunities they can to families and

children of all backgrounds. The many options for boarding allow this, as each family and child can find a school where they will thrive and *“Happy children are easier to teach,”* Simon believes. Gary concluded: *“A lot of what’s going to happen in the upcoming few years is about reassurance, it’s going to be about offering stability and making sure that we can send out the very best young men and women into society as we possibly can and I think that’s exactly the role of a boarding school.”*

*We would like to thank our boarding school panel for giving up their time to speak to us.*

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Ludgrove School



Blundell's School