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### ‘Not better or worse but different’

“You’ve changed”, they often tell me when I go back home. Have I? I haven’t really noticed. Wait- is it in a good or a bad way? Am I supposed to say ‘thank you’, or do I just say ‘mhm’, nod and smile? It seems like the possibilities are endless, but the more I get told this exact thing by various people, the more I ask myself: Are they right? Have I changed?

I try to think about everything that happened in the past six months, starting with August 28th, my first time travelling alone and my first ever journey by plane. I think about my first days in Ryde, so sunny that I got sunburnt on more than one occasion. Having my first 6 o’clock supper in the boarding house and the excitement of meeting all the boarders. Going to school the following days and realising that it’s actually quite nice to wear skirts, shirts and jackets instead of plain jeans and hoodies like I’m used to. Meeting more new people in school, which later turned into knowing every Sixth former and also some of the younger years’ students.

Truth be told, the social aspect of the new school was one of the most challenging things to overcome. I was known as the “social butterfly” back home, never shy and always wanting to meet everyone and talk to everyone. However, coming to the school in the UK and living in a boarding house has reminded me that every culture is different and not everyone is used to the same approach. Thus, I learnt how to adjust and be understanding, how to control my emotions even when it’s not easy, and, most importantly, be patient. Nothing can happen overnight, and even though it took my peers a couple of weeks to open up, afterwards, it was like we had known each other for years.

Having friends’ support was especially important during exam weeks. After the first mocks, I remember calling my mum and telling her that the exams almost drove me mad. Who would’ve thought that one week could be so long and exhausting? Considering the amount of work I had while studying 17 subjects, I thought studying 6 IB subjects would be a piece of cake (particularly raspberry flapjack- my new favourite). Oh boy, I was wrong...The concept of revision was something entirely new for me. I never knew I could remember what I did in September in April, but here I was, revising for my mocks and remembering all of the biology and chemistry practicals we’ve done so far. Those practicals were the highlights of our lessons. We would either do the experiment first and then talk about the theory behind it or vice versa. I haven’t done anything similar in my previous school, which made the experience even more enjoyable. Revision, revision, and some more revision later, I finished the exam week with 7s (IB equivalents of A\*s) in *almost all* of my subjects. We won’t talk about Higher Level maths. That is a story for another day.

I also think about all the other things I have experienced since becoming a student at Ryde, because school is so much more than “just school” here. I think about the ones that made me happy and those I’d never even imagined doing before, such as learning how to play squash during Wednesday games sessions even though I had never held a racket in my hand. Joining the school orchestra and the string ensemble. Performing film soundtracks and jazz pieces at school concerts, despite being more of a “classical musician”. Attending a Christmas carol service. Taking part in the school theatre production and proving to myself that I could act in my second language. Being

chosen as a Round Square prefect of Democracy and Head of School Council. Participating in the house song competition and becoming Hannover House Captain. I think about all the activities we did as a boarding community, from going to the water park in the middle of October and mountain bike riding to organising a fashion show, cheese board competition and many more.

All these experiences inevitably change a person, but now I realise that change doesn't have to have an adjective in front of it. It doesn't need to be specified whether a change is positive or negative because a change is simply a change- the most natural thing happening around us. It has a purpose, like when chameleons change their skin colour in a new environment and caterpillars become butterflies. I can't describe my life in the boarding school as better or worse. The best and the only valid explanation would be: it is different. In every possible way. So even if I have changed, I will fully embrace it and enjoy all the opportunities this new life has to offer me.