

Taking the Plunge: Life in a British Boarding School

I remember the day explosions woke Ukraine up in 2022. While scrolling through frontline updates and stuffing a suitcase, a phrase from my favourite show, 'Doctor Who', kept echoing in my mind: "...Be kind." That hope stayed with me. My anti-war painting travelled across fifteen countries as part of the 'Golden Easel' Forum's peace exhibitions. Eventually, I traded brushes for words, working as an English-Ukrainian interpreter. After two years of going deeper into languages, I became a Ukraine Global Scholar and an HMC scholar, opening the door to a British boarding school education.

Godolphin. A place where flowers bloom even in February, and people get genuinely excited about the sun showing up in autumn or snow in winter. It's the kind of school where competitive interhouse singing and science quizzes transport you straight into a Hogwarts scene—whether you're yelling song lyrics or rattling off the digits of pi. There are memes taped to walls, Jane-Austen-style winter balls, and guest speakers ranging from a football commentator to a neuroscientist. Oh, and just ten minutes away stands the cathedral with the tallest spire in England. I still haven't got used to how magical it all feels.

As a proud Ukrainian and a full-time linguaphile, I can say this multilingual haven feels like home. English surrounds us daily—and this accent is captivating! I speak Ukrainian on the phone with my parents and with the only two other Ukrainian pupils here. French comes out in class (though I once accidentally called an abbey a bee—'abbaye' vs 'abeille'—oops). Over lunch, you might hear various Chinese tones or someone patiently teaching you how to say "my name is" for the seventh time. The Head of Sixth Form might suddenly break into German. One housemistress speaks Spanish, another shares Welsh phrases, and a classmate from South Africa even taught me Zulu clicks over supper. Polyglot paradise!

Then, there's the language of academics. I was initially unsure if I'd be allowed to take French A-level without formal schooling in it, but after an interview with the department and heaps of teacher support, I not only caught up but flourished. Business A-level introduced me to a whole new world of terminology. Psychology A-level, meanwhile, gave me the joy of linking cognitive theories to language learning while bringing a Ukrainian perspective to the 'Social psychology' module. Beyond the classroom, I play classical guitar in the school ensemble and practise diplomacy in the MUN club—languages of music and negotiation.

As an Academic Scholar, I've shared my love for language through adapting my TED-Ed Talk for school clubs. But Godolphin has taught me other languages too—like British politeness (yes, I now say sorry to furniture I bump into), layered humour, and cultural curiosities like the Christmas crackers I once only saw on 'Doctor Who'. I've also given back, singing Ukrainian folk songs at hot chocolate concerts and sharing translated war poetry at our Written Word celebration.

One of the most meaningful languages, though, is that of charity. With staff support, I organised a fundraiser for Ohmatdyt—Ukraine's children's hospital, damaged by bombings. In just a few hours, we raised £205.70 by selling cards featuring 'Golden Easel' peace paintings, including one of mine. Our Head of Sixth always ends callover with "Be kind"—the same words from 'Doctor Who' that comforted me back in 2022—and here, those words turned into action.

Next academic year, Godolphin celebrates 300 years of shaping scholars, change-makers, and true Humans, and I am forever grateful for this remarkable journey. Sometimes, it feels like I've stepped into a TARDIS, travelling from home into a vibrant boarding school life beyond wildest imagination.