



Edward Holtom | Hertfordshire, England

Ed came to VES through the English Speaking Union exchange program after finishing his schooling in England. Despite being part of the VES community for only one year, he quickly and seamlessly found a place for himself. His talents in theater earned him respect among his peers and were only surpassed by his kind demeanour and willingness to jump into the numerous new experiences that life in an American boarding school had to offer. After his time spent in the United States, Ed returned home, ready to take the next step on his journey—he began classes at the University of Edinburgh in the fall of 2018.

“The friends that I have made are truly lifelong friends.”

Ed shares his thoughts on his VES experience.

On Creating Genuine Connections in an Inclusive Environment

From the very first day of New Student Orientation, Ed felt a sense of belonging at VES. There was an immediate connection to the values that define the school.

“It really did not take long for me to feel like part of the community at VES. As soon as I arrived, I was overwhelmed with the welcome that I received. I was offered places to stay, things to do, people to meet. Boarding meant that I bonded with people on a level that I had never experienced before. I loved that it

wasn't weird for me to get involved with things as much as possible, there were no barriers or exclusivity, and I felt that people were genuinely interested in becoming friends with me.”

On Flourishing Through Pursuit of One's Passions

At VES students are encouraged to discover, engage and grow as individuals—to find where they fit in and where they stand out. Ed quickly realized that when he showcased his passion for the arts, VES is a place where everyone's talents are celebrated by the school.

“The reception among faculty and students for my passion was really refreshing, and it gave me the



confidence to pursue musical theatre, which I had not been involved in for many years. I genuinely felt that the people around me were rooting for my success. The culture of support and kindness really allowed me to flourish and to celebrate my friends' successes and talents in a way that I had not even considered. I became involved in every school event possible because I felt invested in the school's success from very early on."

On Academics and Collaboration

At VES Ed found new and heightened curiosity through hands-on learning and engagement in the classroom.

"Classes at VES fostered an environment of open discussion and debate, allowing students to form, test and share opinions in a safe space. I found the emphasis on group work very important as it taught me how to work collaboratively and be part of a team—a skill I hope to carry through to the rest of my life. My teachers exhibited both passion and expertise in their subjects and I became more curious and willing to put in the extra effort to discover more about particular topics."

On the Gift of Celebrating Others' Success

From his time at VES, Ed is looking forward toward his future with fresh perspective. He feels the excitement of facing new challenges with a deep appreciation of the support and community provided to him at VES.

"VES has given me a different perspective on what it means to be part of community. I truly feel that the ability to celebrate others for their successes is the greatest gift that I've received from my time at VES. Looking to the future, I hope to carry the VES ethos through to my professional and personal life as I continue to make friendships and connections. I also know that the friends I made at VES are truly lifelong friends, and I will endeavour to support them throughout the rest of my life."

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Visit ves.org or email Mary Stuart Battle, Director of International Admissions, at msbattle@ves.org.