



Daniel's story...

## From passive pupil to outspoken, independent advocate



**Daniel was awarded a bursary to study at Merchiston Castle School in Scotland. He is now studying Law at Newcastle University.**

Daniel has been looked after by his Auntie since he was 3 years old. He describes Dingle, where he is from, as 'not exactly a treasure of a place.' He was proud of his secondary school but says the regular shortage and turnaround of teaching staff made learning a struggle sometimes.

Daniel had a good relationship with his Head of Year who knew about his home situation, and it was she who first suggested that he consider a boarding placement. 'At first I didn't think that I'd want to do it - I didn't think I'd be smart enough. I wasn't doing that great at GCSEs and I always thought I was just an average student. But after visiting Merchiston I decided it was definitely what I wanted to do. I knew it would help me to get where I wanted to get to in life.'

The whole atmosphere on my visit was really amazing and I realised that, although I'd miss my family, the experiences I would have, the connections I would make and people influencing me would make it much easier for me to achieve my ambitions.'

He made friends quickly despite initially feeling as though he was really different to others in the school. He had always had an interest in athletics and with access to Merchiston's facilities and coaching staff was soon able to take this interest more seriously.

"My achievements in athletics helped me to fit in quite quickly. If I hadn't gone to Merchiston I wouldn't have pursued athletics but sport is such a big part of boarding school life. Being there meant I could get a really good balance of focusing on my school work at the same time as my running! He soon excelled - becoming School Captain for Athletics and participating in the Scottish Nationals and Scottish Schools' relay championships. The experience at boarding school helped him to appreciate how important having a healthy balance is, which he is hoping to continue at Newcastle.

'Since being at Newcastle University, keeping athletics going is something I really value - being able to keep healthy, and have sport as a way of making friends and relaxing is really important to me and I hope I can carry on with it at a decent level!'

Daniel achieved ABB at A-level and credits his academic progress to the 'fantastic' teachers at Merchiston. 'I enjoyed all my subjects from day one. The learning environment was just great - the small class sizes, the amount of contact you have with the teachers, both face-to-face as you're living in their same community, but also the culture of them responding to emails meant I could be constantly in contact with teachers, which really helped my learning.'

'My English teacher in particular really stood out for me - he was engaging, funny, had a huge passion for his subject, and he really helped me to excel. If I look at what others achieve in the 6th Form Colleges near where I'm from, I don't think I would have achieved the grades I did!'

Daniel says he would recommend a boarding placement to anyone thinking of it. 'You think initially that it might be lonely, but with the House system you become really close to people. With the House staff it felt like a little family, and I know I'm going to stay in contact with them now I've left - they've become such an important part of my life.'

Driven from a young age to become a lawyer, Daniel secured a place at Newcastle University to read Law and hopes to become an advocate or a barrister. He's benefitting from many of the skills he learnt at boarding school. 'It's enabled me to adapt to anything that comes my way. Before I was a really passive student, but now I feel a lot more outspoken, and independent. I'm used to living in a dorm room and being responsible for my own studies and I can see that this has been a bigger step for other students at Newcastle than it has been for me.'

'Boarding school has really set me up. Not only what I experienced when I was there, but also now I feel confident that nothing can stop me from realising my dream to become a lawyer.'

