



SENIOR SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEW

Agapi Chatzigianni

Tell me a bit about yourself and your background.

I'm an IB2 student. I'm taking *HL Psychology, Dance, English, and SL Greek, Math, and Environmental Sciences*. I've lived in Thessaloniki my whole life and attended public school in Panorama before coming to Pinewood in 2022. *Moving to Pinewood was a big change*—it was very different from public school, and at first, I was a bit shocked by all the new options and environment. But it turned out to be a really positive experience. *The supportive community helped me become more social and confident!*

You have an English scholarship for Pinewood based on a poem you wrote, right?

Yes! I actually find it interesting because *I learned English mostly by reading books and watching movies*—I never took formal classes. When I was young, I'd read a book in Greek and the same one in English side by side to compare. *The poem that got me the scholarship was called "The Call of Change."* I don't remember it word-for-word, but it was about change—how life shifts and evolves.

What does change mean to you?

Change can be internal—like a shift in mindset—or external, like moving to a new school. For me, *coming to Pinewood was a big life change that helped me become a happier, more confident person*. Pinewood has been a big part of my positive transformation.

What are your favorite classes and why?

Psychology and dance are my favorites. I've danced since I was 11, so it's a big part of my life. *Dance helps me feel confident and energetic*. I mainly do hip-hop, which is more like a burst of energy for me, but I've also tried other styles here at Pinewood. *Psychology* fascinates me because it *helps me understand why people think and behave the way they do*.

You did you Extended Essay on Psychology, what was it about?

I researched *how growing up with a caregiver who has substance abuse issues affects a child's well-being*, looking at both the risks and how some children develop resilience. I picked the topic because I find it very interesting and there's a lot of research available. It also ties into my interest in psychology.

What extracurricular activities are you involved in?

I'm on the *Prom Committee* and part of the *National Honor Society*. For CAS, I *volunteered at elementary school clubs* like soccer, science, art, and a "friend buddies" group where kids talk about their feelings and socialize. It was actually so much fun! *I really enjoy working with children* and often babysit my friends' siblings. This is something I'll probably consider when deciding what I want to do in the future.



What hobbies do you have outside of school?

I love baking—cookies, bread, pizza—you name it! *I also like sketching portraits and human figures.* My dad owns an art gallery, so I was encouraged to draw from a young age. I don't have formal art classes; I just sketch whenever I feel inspired, often while doing homework. *Sketching is really therapeutic and relaxing for me.* It's like a wave of creativity that just comes!

How do you manage stress and balance your schedule? Do you have a strategy?

I try to keep a social life and get outside regularly, going for walks or coffee with friends, even during busy times. I think *it's important to balance everything so I don't burn out.* Sometimes when I'm feeling nervous or overstimulated, I turn to sketching as a calm outlet. I also learned the importance of starting my IB work early—I did a lot over the summer, which helped me relax during the school year. *Studying early and having a planned system really helps!*

Tell us about your university plans.

I'll be studying *Liberal Arts and Sciences at Utrecht University.* The program lets me explore a range of subjects, especially social sciences, and choose my focus over time. I really liked that *it gave me this flexibility—I find it very important, especially coming from an educational system that has such a holistic approach.* I also applied to Leiden and Maastricht Universities but chose Utrecht! I haven't been to the Netherlands before, but I plan to visit the campus in August before starting.

What are you most excited or nervous about in this new chapter of your life?

I'm mostly excited but also a little nervous about university life. I'll be living in dorms and sharing a room with someone, which is new for me. I'm very social and love meeting people, so *I'm looking forward to making new friends,* but I'm also a bit scared it might not always click. Here *at Pinewood, I've built strong friendships, so it's a bit scary thinking about starting over.* But I'm hopeful it will be a great experience.

How has Pinewood shaped you beyond academics?

Pinewood taught me that school isn't just about grades. The community, extracurriculars, and support have *helped me build confidence and feel valued as a whole person.* I've had great teachers who were very supportive and made lessons engaging by encouraging discussions and relating the material to our own experiences. That kind of teaching made a big difference for me. I also *learned to be persistent and manage my time better* after struggling a bit at the start of IB. I really appreciate how much *Pinewood cares about mental health and supports students beyond just academics.*



What's your favorite memory from Pinewood?

I'll always remember *exploring the new campus when we first arrived* and having no idea where we were going! I also loved the *dance rehearsals* where about 50 girls would gather and just enjoy dancing together. *It feels special to share that passion* with so many people.

What advice would you give to younger students just starting high school?

Start preparing early but pace yourself. Don't try to cram everything at once. Be patient and *learn how to manage your time realistically*. Also, *don't be afraid to take breaks and maintain a social life*—it really helps mental health and efficiency.

If Pinewood were a person, how would you describe it?

I think Pinewood would be *a social, open-minded, and non-judgmental person* who *embraces diversity and encourages trying new things*. It's a place where different people with different styles and personalities feel accepted.

Have you faced any challenges? What's something people might not know about you but you're proud of?

Yes, I've dealt with anxiety and epilepsy. It was tough, but *I've learned resilience and how important it is to balance all parts of life*. These experiences also deepened my interest in psychology. *I'm proud of how I've managed my health challenges and learned to balance everything*. I wasn't always this confident—I used to be very introverted, a very shy introvert who barely talked to anyone. But now I'm much more outgoing and I love talking and meeting new people. I realized that most people don't really care about your insecurities as much as you think, which helped me be less afraid to be myself. *It's been a big transformation*. Changing schools and *coming to Pinewood played a big role in that*.

What's a dream or goal you have for the future?

I'd really love to travel a lot. Seeing new places and experiencing different cultures interests me a lot. I think traveling is *a great way to learn about the world and yourself*. I'm also considering *working with children in some way*, since I really enjoy spending time with them.