

## What Norwich School did for me – *Caitlin Obee*



Back in early 2016, I was set to take my GCSE exams at a local state school which I had attended since year 7. Knowing I had prepared well and was predicted strong grades, I had spent all of the previous Autumn looking around sixth forms across Norfolk, trying to find somewhere that would be able to give me the A level experience I wanted. At the time, I knew that I was going to pursue music; I had achieved my flute diploma in 2015, was set up with an established and knowledgeable teacher in London, and had my eyes set on a conservatoire place. I had eventually chosen a sixth form with the best music department I could find, attended their induction days and was ready to get through two last years of school the best I could.

Neither my family or I would have ever considered applying to Norwich School. In a sequence of events, through teachers knowing other teachers and being heard in local

concerts, I was contacted by Norwich School who asked us to look around. Curious, my parents and I came in for a tour, I played for the music staff and spoke to the Head Master. We could clearly see the amazing opportunities and facilities on offer were unmatched by anywhere else, but were expecting to be disappointed by a reality of little financial help. Reassured by the admissions team and with nothing to lose, I sat the entrance exam and music scholarship audition.

Two weeks later a letter arrived in the post. Norwich School awarded me the music scholarship and were able to offer a bursary.

Fast forward to the following September; I arrived in the Close, dressed in my smart suit and with no idea how I was going to fit in or what my school life had become. I was scared that I wouldn't be able to deal with the pace or pressure, that I wouldn't fit in and I did not know anybody. In the end, I can honestly say that I had the most amazing two years at Norwich School. Within three weeks of arrival we had the annual House Music Festival where I won the Bernard Burrell Memorial Prize solo competition and my House won the overall cup! I was part of the Chapel Choir, Gateway Players' Orchestra, Senior Concert Band, Flute Choir, all of which had the resources and like-minded pupils which enabled us to produce concerts like I had never experienced before. I also joined the maths team, travelling to competitions in London.

Throughout my time in the Close, I had so many experiences that I am extremely grateful for. To name but a few – the Chapel Choir trips to London to sing for the Dyers and to sing evensong in Cambridge, the rewarding choral outreach scheme I assisted as part of community service, playing the flute in Norwich Cathedral recitals, at the Norfolk Show Bandstand and in old peoples' homes. Perhaps the biggest highlight of my time was in Spring of my Upper 6 year where I was lucky enough to play the Chaminade Concertino with the

renowned London Mozart Players in St Andrew's Hall, an opportunity I could never have even fathomed two years previous.

In my studies, I felt supported by all my teachers from the start. They were all so welcoming, actually looking out for my wellbeing, considerate of topics I may not have covered in my old school and very quickly I felt like



I had always been here. At Norwich School you are not a grade on a sheet of paper to bump up their statistics, they know you for your individual talents outside of just exam results. My eyes were opened to a whole new way of thinking, and for the first time, I actually began to enjoy academic music. Having essentially tutored myself in GCSE music, it was refreshing to be taught by experts and it captured my attention so much that it changed my entire plan. I decided I wanted to go to university, with my eyes now set on Cambridge and a choral scholarship which I had witnessed in action on our Chapel Choir trip.

After interviews and entrance exams, much hard work and revision, all whilst keeping up with my extra-curricular music commitments, I made it through my A level exams, and with Cambridge offer pending I nervously awaited August 16<sup>th</sup>. I was utterly thrilled to pick up 3 A\*s in Music, Maths and Geography.

So far my Cambridge University experience has been intense, inspiring and highly rewarding. It is amazing to be taught by people who are world-leading experts in their fields, and I am so glad that Norwich School opened my eyes to a discipline I had previously discounted as a career 'not for people like me'. I have found a home in the Choir of Clare College, incredibly excited to venture on four international tours in 2019, especially as I have never been out of England before!

As cliché as it may be, Norwich School did change my life. If you had told me three years ago I would have achieved the results I did and be attending one of the world's most prestigious universities, I would have thought you were insane. But here I am, looking forward to the next three years of intense academia and on to a life which I hope will be incredibly rewarding, thanks to the career path I only discovered I wanted whilst in the Close.

Norwich School really does welcome all, regardless of social or financial background, and if you can contribute to school life and enrich the community here, they try everything possible to make you a pupil who can thrive.