Dr Peter Miller

“It is wonderful to be back and part of a really great school.”

United Kingdom Sabbatical

Sometimes things can be even clearer from a distance. This was certainly my experience while undertaking a sabbatical in the United Kingdom last month.

In my Term 1 2014 article for VIM, I outlined my understanding of the features of a “good school”. I described a good school as one which enables a sense of belonging and a strong connection to “place”. A good school also provides a range of positive experiences to students and staff (as well as the wider community) that shape their development. This was very much at the front of my mind while visiting UK schools.

The schools I visited had many things in common. They also differed in many ways. All the schools had boarding students, one was a government school, one was a boys’ school (the others were co-educational), three were in rural surrounds, two were in regional centres (or near a large city) and one was in metropolitan London. The history of some schools extended over 600 years with the newest one commencing in the 1850s. It was interesting to note that even though schools may have a long history, their expansion and social standing has been relatively recent and often a product of the Industrial Revolution and changes in Victorian England.

Through my visits I was reminded of the importance of individuality of schools and how each has its own character. The Head, with staff and a governing board, work together to create and maintain a particular character. This is reinforced and sometimes driven by parents and students, as well as past students. It is fair to say that each of the schools I visited are good schools. They varied but they had a shared imperative. Each school is serving its community and providing opportunities for their students in life beyond that school.

Also, visiting other schools provided a very privileged insight into their operations, problems, approaches to solutions and the personalities and policies behind all this. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to visit these schools, talk with staff and students as well as to attend lessons where I sat with students on a number of occasions.

As a result of my visits and time away, I am even clearer in my understanding of why All Saints’ College is a good school. The level of connection and community is a distinctive feature of our school and one we are always looking to advance.

Finally, I am grateful to the support of many people who enabled my time away to be a success. The work of Mr Stewart Ross as the Acting Head of College is greatly appreciated. He stepped into the role and kept things running seamlessly. Similarly, thanks to all my colleagues who filled the inevitable gaps. The support of the College Council as well as the whole school community has been generous and gracious. It is wonderful to be back and part of a really great school.