First of all I wanted to thank you once again for the money your trust gave me so that I could do this year. This has been the biggest year of my life and I will never forget it, or the generosity you showed which allowed me to get here. Hopefully I can tell you everything you are wanting to know about what I did on my gap year and the way that it has truly changed me as a person.

I have spent the last year teaching in Peili School in Huanan, Heilongjiang, China. I spent the first 6 months teaching the senior students of the school speaking and listening, trying to get them to form stories, full sentences and conversations. Also, since the furthest any of them had been away from home was to the next city an hour away, I showed them that there was a whole world outside their small town. Even if they never leave China, I hope I inspired them to at least see the rest of China. I would tell them everywhere I visited over long weekends and I hope this left an impression on them.
 I spent the other half of the year teaching the nursery students in the school. They had not learned any form of English yet so I taught them to read, write, hear and say different English words and how to put them into basic sentences, for example, "I eat cake." A lot of the time, to teach them in a way that they enjoyed, I would teach the nursery classes an English nursery rhyme such as Old MacDonald which would help them with the words we had learned during the week in a way that many of them really loved.

While the teaching was the most significant part of this year, the gap year also involved a few other things. Firstly, I learned the very basics of Mandarin. I learned enough that I was able to survive in the rural town that I was living for the year and can have a very basic conversation in Mandarin. I remember when my parents came to visit and – because we were the first foreigners they had ever seen – this group of Chinese people approached us and I was able to have a conversation with them and tell them about myself and my family.

The Gap Year also gave us a significant amount of time to travel. For Chinese New Year, my fellow teachers and I travelled around China, seeing some of the big cities like Shanghai and Nanjing but also the natural wonders of China such as the Jiangxi River and the Floating Mountains. We were also given a month's holiday at the end of the year. This allowed me to explore the surrounding countries to China, such as Japan, Vietnam and Cambodia. While this was a lot of fun it was also very important in my personal development during the year as it was me looking after myself, on my own for a month with no-one to act as a back-up if I made any mistakes. This increased my independence and self-confidence. One of the best things I saw was Angkor Wat, an ancient Cambodian temple. I went with a few people from my hostel to see it as the sun rose, it was very beautiful and the temple itself was fascinating as it was held up not by mortar or cement but purely by the positioning of the stones and gravity.

I learned a lot from this year, but what I learned most was that a lot of things are far easier than I thought they were. Before going away, I would have thought that the idea of booking a holiday or teaching a class for a forty-minute lesson were a gargantuan task and would have been impossible for me. Now, I know it is all a matter of booking a flight and a hotel or just finding the right activity and words

to teach. Things that seemed like Herculean tasks now come really easily to me. I never thought I would be able to survive without my parents for the better part of the year when the longest time I had previously spent apart from them was maybe a week yet throughout the whole year, I only got really homesick once near the beginning. I am now far more confident in what I can do and have become more independent from surviving on my own for so long.

Overall, this year has been a colossal achievement for me and I am so happy that I got to experience everything I did. Thank you once again for your generosity.