

Xi'an

I spent the past three days visiting our twin school in Xi'an, central China. St. Paul's signed a letter of friendship last year with the High School Affiliated to Xi'an Jiaotong University. Those of you who have been at the College a few years will recall that we signed a similar agreement with the high school affiliated to Shanghai Jiaotong University. My visit was a great success and paves the way for many exciting opportunities for greater exchange between our schools.

The first impressions one has on arrival in Xi'an are the feelings of space and pace. The buildings are lower, the roads are wider, and the people are in less of a hurry. This is a city of over two million people but certainly less frenetic than Hong Kong. What we might have in common, however, is a driving style that borders on madness and with a total disregard for pedestrians, cyclists and other motorists!

Our twin school is located on the same campus as Jiaotong University and close to the city centre. There are two campuses, one catering students in Junior High School (that is Forms 1,2 and 3) and one for those in Senior High School (Forms 4, 5 and 6). This is a similar structure to the NSS except that their students are split across the two sites.

There are a number of differences between our schools, the first being the number of students. There are 2400 students in the Senior High School and 4000 attending the Junior High School. They come from all over the Province with the majority of those in the High School living in dormitories during the school year.

There are two semesters in a year with each semester divided into two terms. The first semester runs from 1st September and finishes at the start of the Chinese New Year. The second semester runs through to the end of the school year in the first week in July. The duration of the first and second semester will depend, of course, on the timing of the Spring Festival. There is no Christmas or Easter break but rather a holiday at the end of Term 1 in November and Term 3 in early May.

The school day starts at 7.40am and finishes at 5.50pm with a two hour break for lunch. Teachers must be at school no later than 7.30am and attend on alternate Saturdays when special classes are held. Class size is high with 50 students per class not uncommon. However, the students behave perfectly in class and focus on their teachers and the lessons being

conducted. There is a strong desire to learn and great respect for their teachers – two qualities that ought to be the norm at SPC.

A negative aspect of the being in Xi'an was the high level of pollution on two of the three days. I was told that the smog was particularly bad in autumn due to local farmers' burning the stubble left after the harvest. It did not take long, however, to see the real cause of such pollution. The city is surrounded by large electrical power stations that burn coal. The amount of smoke coming from the chimney stacks of those power stations was alarming and far exceeds what we notice at our electrical power plants in Hong Kong.

I was accompanied on this visit by four members of the Chinese Department: Mr. Ngan (the Head of Department), Mr. Chan, Miss Chau and Miss Chan. The purpose of their visit was to discuss arrangements for closer cooperation between our schools. It is our plan to organise not only student-teacher visits to Xi'an and Hong Kong but also the possibility of SPC students and teachers spending one month or longer in Xi'an with a similar arrangements for Jiaotong to visit Hong Kong.

In the meantime, we will be hosting a party of 20 students and 10 teachers from Xi'an next March. We are looking forward to their visit and building on our new relationship.

Dr. J.R. Kennard