My two weeks at the Konan Elementary School made for one of the most interesting cultural experiences of my life. To call it an internship fails to capture the broad scope of all the things which Catherine and I saw and did in our time in Kobe.

Inasmuch as our work with the children is concerned, the task was neither too difficult nor disappointingly basic. The children we taught were aged between 6 and 12, and displayed a very wide range of ability in speaking and understanding English.

This meant we were always kept on our toes, having to adjust our approach, as we tried to encourage the children to engage with us and to muster up the confidence required to show us what they knew.

Overcoming the pupils’ lack of self-confidence was always the most challenging and interesting part of the work. The English teachers at Konan (the children too for that matter) had done an immense amount of work to prepare for our visit, and the whole programme ran very smoothly. I never felt over-worked, nor at a loose end.

The children themselves were invariably delightful and a pleasure to teach, and their sincere excitement about our visit was heart-warming to see.

Aside from the teaching, the school had prepared various cultural activities for us to get involved with, such as a sake brewery tour, a chance to try the martial art of kendo in one of Japan’s oldest dojos, and showing us around the wonderful city of Kobe.

Not to mention practising calligraphy and Japanese drums at the school with our pupils.

It really did feel like we were given an exclusive look into aspects of Japan which tourists simply couldn’t hope to encounter. And it was a great deal of fun besides.

It was the first time I had visited Japan, and the school’s staff were friendly and welcoming to an extent far beyond any expectations I had held.

The country is without a doubt quite intimidating for someone with no prior experience of it and no knowledge of the language, but thanks to the thoroughness of the preparations made by Matt and the other English teachers at Konan,

I felt comfortable and confident every step of the way. Their efforts and their generosity were remarkable - Matt even went as far as accompanying us on our first trip to a Japanese supermarket, an experience for which I was very glad to have a guide.

With the travel grant (and my own funds), I travelled to Kyoto, Nara, Tokyo, and to a picturesque lake in the far north of the island of Honshu. People tell you that Japan is an expensive country to travel around (which is true, relatively speaking), but with decent hostels costing a little over 2000 yen/night (around £15), the £500 went much further than I’d expected. The Japan Rail Pass was an invaluable purchase.

All in all, I spent 31 days in Japan, and I found it to be an exciting, beautiful and very hospitable place to explore.