

# Meriden students immerse in French culture and language during exchange trip

In December last year, eight students from Years 10 and 11 who are studying French, set off for three weeks of language and cultural exchange at the small town of Dax, in the South-West of France.

It was a pleasure to accompany these students on this trip and visit our sister school, St Jacques de Compostelle. Meriden has had this partnership with St Jacques for eight years, however this was the first year that we were able to recommence our visits in person after the COVID-19 pandemic. We set off on the journey with much excitement and some trepidation. After thirty hours we arrived at Bordeaux, where we were met by the school's English Language Coordinator, Madame Omblin Sauvage and the girls' host families.

The students benefitted greatly from the experience of staying with a host family during the exchange, where they were immersed in French culture and language. The first two weeks were spent attending lessons with their host sister, attending subjects such as Politics, Society and Economics, Philosophy, Spanish and French - all in French, of course! The school day began at 8:00am and finished at 6:00pm, so it was a big adjustment getting used to arriving at school in the dark and leaving in the dark.

We received a lovely welcome from the school and the Australian flag was flown throughout our stay in the playground. Our students also enjoyed the experience of eating every day in the school cafeteria, where they were provided with a sit-down hot meal and spent time with their new French friends in the senior students' common area. As a teacher, I also very much enjoyed the chance to eat in the staff cafeteria, enjoying a three-course meal, complete with a selection of French breads and cheeses to finish! Délicieux!



Students at the playground of sister school St Jacques de Compostelle



Students outside La Fontaine Chaude in Dax, a town well known for its thermal activity

The third week of the exchange was the first week of the Christmas holidays in France. Our students enjoyed spending this time with their host families, and many enjoyed trips around the Dax region, as well as to Bayonne, Biarritz, Bordeaux, Lourdes, the Pyrénées, Paris and even across the border to nearby San Sebastian in Spain. It was a wonderful experience to enjoy Christmas in France, celebrating around the table with traditional French food and extended family.

I would like to commend the eight students who attended – Ivy Askew, Ingrid Benz, Molly Grogan, Zara Gupta, Tara Kalantar, Jodhi Kanthan, Olivia Lee and Cordelia Xie – for their enthusiasm, good humour and resilience throughout the trip. It is not easy to spend three weeks in a new country with a family you have never met before, attend a full range of classes in another language and to deal with the inevitable feelings of homesickness. The girls dealt with both the positive and the challenging aspects of this exchange with great maturity, and it was a pleasure to watch them improve their language skills, support each other and push themselves out of their comfort zone in order to take full advantage of the opportunities afforded to them.

As Zara expresses so well:

*"I would definitely recommend [the Exchange].*

*It was more than a trip; it was an amazing, immersive and cultural experience that has helped me in all aspects of my learning. My French speaking skills have improved, I have grown significantly in confidence, and I have managed to forge close relationships. This trip was very rewarding in many different ways. I highly recommend it to future language students."*

We look forward to welcoming the French students and teachers to our School during Weeks 3 to 5 of this term, when the students will have the chance to extend their hospitality to the same student who hosted them in France.

I would like to thank Ms Teresa Alonso-Lasheras, Head of Languages, for all her support and hard work that enabled this exchange to recommence. We are very appreciative of the support of the School.

**Ms Priscilla Curran**

French teacher and Dean of Lateral Learning



Students enjoying crepes at a local cafe