

Au revoir to our French exchange students

On Tuesday 27 February, we farewelled the group of exchange students from our sister school in France, Saint Jacques de Compostelle: nine girls and eight boys (hosted by Trinity families) and their teachers.

Despite their short stay in Australia, the French girls had truly become a part of our Meriden school community. When I look back at the many things they managed to do and see in Sydney, it is hard to believe they were only here for thirteen days.

The group arrived in Sydney on Thursday 15 February, just in time to join our Swimming Carnival. Still jetlagged, the girls met students across all year groups and had a taste of the excitement and warm welcome they would receive at school.

On their first day at school, the girls made a visit to the Uniform Shop where Mrs Elizabeth Smith and her team transformed the group into Meriden-looking girls in less than half an hour. The exchange girls had mixed feelings about wearing a uniform as they do not wear one in France. However, once they overcame their initial reticence, they enjoyed how the uniforms helped them blend in with the rest of the school.



Farewell dinner with Meriden families



At Featherdale Sydney Wildlife Park

During their time at school they shadowed Meriden girls, attending lessons in a range of subjects, some of which are not offered in France. They went to assemblies, chapel services and even cocurricular clubs. Assemblies are not a common event in the French school system, and the French girls and teachers remarked how they were student-led—and were especially impressed that the girls were very comfortable speaking in front of such a large audience. At their first assembly, they were introduced to the school community and by the last one, they were able to stand on stage and make a wonderful speech.

Another highlight was visiting the Junior School. In groups of three, the students visited French classes where they introduced themselves, explained to the Meriden girls what their school and area looked like back home and answered many questions the girls had. It was a great opportunity to see the collaboration between the Languages team across both Junior and Senior campuses, and I would like to thank Dr Michele Benn, Mme Emmeline Parent, and Mme Owen for making this possible.

Toward the end of the trip, the French girls and their peers had a day off school to enjoy some Australian fauna at Featherdale Wildlife Park. Looking through the photos of the day, the visit was clearly a highlight for them.

That evening, we organised a dinner at the Drummoyne Sailing Club, and I was pleasantly surprised to see all families and students were there. We heard from Meriden parents about the many trips and events they had personally organised for the French students: visits to Sydney beaches, trips to the Blue Mountains, and surfing lessons, just to name a few.

This student exchange was a success for all involved. It does hopefully mark the return to a time where students can participate in life-changing experiences beyond our borders. It is also a chance to reflect on the unique opportunities that speaking another language can bring.

Thank you to all the Meriden families, students, and teachers for making the journey of our French Exchange students such a memorable one.

Merci!

Ms Teresa Alonso-Lasheras
Head of Languages

