

Modern Languages

French Exchange

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It has been four years since the last French Exchange with the Collège St Joseph in Dijon, so when a trip was announced for Year 10 pupils at the start of September, it was with excitement and anticipation that we decided to take part. Even though somewhat daunted by the prospect of having a French pupil living in our homes for one week, then subsequently having to do the same in June, we knew it would be a fantastic opportunity to develop our language skills and learn a lot more about the French culture and lifestyle.

At the start of October we received our French partner's profile and everything was full steam ahead from that point onwards. We made contact via email or text and it was no time at all until the 23rd March, when we met our partners in person for the very first time. On Thursday afternoon, we stood nervously in the Lecture Theatre as Mrs McCullagh introduced us to our partners and we performed the habitual kiss to each cheek or handshake. The Lecture Theatre was full of English and French chatter as we began to get to know everyone, then we left with our partners and helped them settle into what would be their new home for the next week. All of the Banbridge Academy pupils and their families had worked hard to make sure that the French pupils would have a fantastic week, exploring the sites of N.Ireland, tasting some local dishes and most importantly learning as much English as possible whilst living in our

homes. The French pupils had brought lovely gifts for each of their host families and it wasn't long before our parents were taking our pen pals to their hearts and treating them like their own son or daughter for the week.

The following day would see the French pupils heading off on their day trips and visits included: the Titanic Museum and tour of Belfast City, the Giant's Causeway and Carrick-a-Rede and a trip to the Ulster Folk and Transport museum. On Wednesday, the pupils spent a day in school with us, enjoying an Art class with Miss McCullough, cookery lesson with Miss Jess, and they even got to try on the Academy uniform before going on a tour of the school and having lunch in the canteen. On Tuesday evening we all enjoyed a Social evening here in school and at the weekend took our partners to laser tag, the cinema, karting, football matches and much more.

Before we knew it, the week was over and we brought our partners back to school for a 4am departure, knowing that in about 8 weeks time it would be our turn to have a fun-packed week and meet up with our partners again.

We all kept contact with our pen pals whether it was via phone calls, or texts and we sent them many photos from their visit here. It seemed like no time until we were ready to set off to France ourselves. Although the nerves were beginning to kick in, we packed our bags, ready to leave from school at 3am on Friday 23rd June. The morning passed quickly and we landed in Lyon around 10am, before driving three hours to Dijon. We were so excited to see our partners again and they even held a drinks reception for us at school, each of them having prepared some typical French snacks and treats for us.

My pen pal lived in a 3 storey house about a 5 minute drive from school and only a 30 second walk from the local pool. She had two older brothers and they (along with her parents) were so welcoming. That evening I had my first traditional French meal and during the weekend, my host family took me hiking in the Swiss Alps, an experience I will never forget! Indeed, everyone had a fantastic



weekend with their host families, some going to Paris to explore the sites, others visiting the local attractions in Dijon, one pupil even having the chance to attend a baptism.

During the week, the school had organised so many day trips for us. These included a trip to the Citadelle of Besançon, where we had an audio tour of the city and its construction as well as a visit of the zoo. We went to the Cassisium where we sampled cassis syrups and had a guided tour of the factory, the Hospices of Beaune and the Alix BD comic museum.

On the Wednesday evening, the French pupils had organised a party for everyone, similar to the one we had organised, with food, music and dancing. It was great to do something fun with everyone on one of the last nights in France.

On Thursday we spent the morning in

school with our pen pals and played lots of team games related to the European Union and areas such as languages, geography and currencies. Afterwards, we had lunch in the canteen, then in the afternoon went to Dijon city to buy some last minute presents for everyone back home. Dijon is such a beautiful city, lined with cobbled streets, fantastic shops, coffee bars and restaurants and many squares where people like to relax around the fountains, enjoying a cold drink in the sun.

Unfortunately, on Friday morning, we had to say goodbye to our exchange partners after a week of amazing experiences with our host families. Many tears were shed amongst the group, which shows that special memories and indeed friendships were made.

We think that the French Exchange is a unique trip, one which encourages you to step outside of your comfort zone and seek out new experiences whilst making

new friends. It is a fantastic opportunity to improve your spoken French and it certainly is a great stepping stone for those pupils who would like to continue studying French at GCSE level.

À la prochaine fois !

