

Bialik College Enjoys Strong Ties With Israel

BIALIK COLLEGE

Most international twinning relationships are with adults or older children but at Bialik College, their relationship with Israel starts in the Pre-School. In an exciting initiative that is helping to strengthen Bialik's ties to Israel, the College's Kinder 4 students have developed a unique friendship with children from the Arava region. Two kindergartens in the Arava, Gan Tamar in Sapir and Gan Saliit in Moshav Tsofar, have committed to an ongoing relationship with Bialik kinder students that involves Skype sessions and the exchange of festival greetings by personalised cards, books of drawings, electronic presentations and videos.

Students look forward to receiving communication from their friends in the Arava and there is great excitement when creating videos and artwork that will be shared. The children are able to understand, through this relationship, what it's like to go to kindergarten in Israel and the differences and similarities in our cultures. As a cross-communal Jewish Zionist school, Bialik welcomes the opportunity for its students to develop a feeling of kinship with their Israeli friends.

Bialik's Year 6s are also creating a film that they will share with their Year 6 counterparts at the Acacia school in the Arava.

A strong relationship between Bialik and the Arava is fostered in many other ways – notably via student exchange. Every Winter, a delegation of high school students from the Arava region visit Melbourne and immerse themselves in Jewish Life around the city. Bialik hosts these students, giving them a true taste of life and schooling in



Skype session with Bialik's kinder children and Israel's Gan Tamar kinder children

Australia, with many varied activities run by the College's Informal Jewish Learning team. The students spend time in their peers' classrooms, as well as in the Early Learning Centre, participating in special activities with the youngest Bialik students. They also visit Jewish landmarks like the Holocaust Museum and engage with the greater community. Last year, they were invited to lead cooking classes at the Beth Weizmann Community Centre as well as many other community opportunities whilst their base remains at Bialik College and the homes of their Bialik host families. Strong bonds are forged between the students, many of these resulting in friendships for life.

The December-January Year 10 Chavayah trip to Israel is an opportunity for the Bialik and Arava students to reunite. The first Jewish school globally to send

a year level to China, which is part of the Asia Agenda at Bialik, students go on to enjoy a 5-week academic program at the Alexander Muss High School. There they learn about the land, the people, the culture and the beauty of the Jewish State. The students have the opportunity to spend time in the Arava region as one of their Experience Week options. Bialik students also board with an Israeli family for a few days during Chavayah, giving them the full Israel experience. Chavayah is aimed at being a total immersion program, giving Bialik students a real taste of living in Israel as members of a community, not simply as visiting tourists.

Bialik works with agencies such as the Zionist Federation and the Jewish Agency for Israel to develop new and inspiring ways to connect with its Zionist ethos and the land of Israel. Bialik teachers also

have the opportunity to get involved with these community-building activities. Since 2012, through the 'Partnership 2Gether Teacher Exchange Program', some of the Bialik teachers have spent time teaching in kindergartens and schools in the Arava, while the College has hosted Israeli teachers, who teach in our classrooms for around four weeks at a time.

In its mission statement, Bialik College states: "We are a Zionist school that inculcates a love of Israel." College Principal Jeremy Stowe-Lindner told the Melbourne Jewish Report that "by participating in these programs and developing strong personal relationships with the people of Israel, our Jewish Zionist identity is nurtured from the kindergarten level and radiates throughout the Bialik community."



Luka Federman and Archie Rosenberg enjoying the drawings and messages from Gan Tamar kinder children in Israel