

Bialik's Connection to Israel

BIALIK COLLEGE

Four-year-old students at Bialik College learn about Israel by 'twinning' with children from the Arava region. Two kindergartens in the Arava, Gan Tamar in Sapir and Gan Saliit in Moshav Tsofar, are in regular contact with Bialik kinder students through Skype sessions and the exchange of festival greetings with personalised cards, books of drawings, as well as electronic presentations and videos.

The children love receiving communication from their friends in the Arava and their excitement is palpable when they're creating videos and artwork to share with each other. 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 from the very earliest age.

As the children get older, a relationship between Bialik and the Arava is strengthened 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 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. Whilst their base remains at Bialik College and the homes of their Bialik host families, they also visit Jewish landmarks like the Holocaust Museum and engage with the greater community. 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. Bialik is the first Jewish school globally to send a year level to China, which they do en route to Israel. Once in Israel, the students live as Israelis, attending a 5-week academic program at the Alexander Muss High School where they learn about the land, the people, the culture and the beauty of the Jewish State.

The Bialik students spend time in the

Arava region as one of their Experience Week options and board with an Israeli family for a few days during Chavayah, giving them the full Israel experience. Bialik's Chavayah program provides a total immersion experience, ensuring that Bialik students get 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 the school's central 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."