**Report on our Erasmus + Meeting in Germany 9th-15th December 2018**

This was our first meeting with students and everyone was really excited. On **Saturday 8th** **December** the Scottish arrived at 6:30 pm and thus managed to spend all Sunday with their host family. The teachers discovered the German Christmas market. All other partners arrived on **Sunday,** **9th December**, starting with Finland at 2pm, followed by Austria at 3 pm and finally Spain - who had to fend for themselves as Deutsche Bahn had problems and just cancelled all of their trains.

**On Monday** morning we all met in our games room at school and our headmaster Mr. Norkowski greeted all guests from 4 countries. 32 students and 9 teachers had travelled to Germany to spend one week at our school. Following some speeches by coordinators and teachers, students had a guided tour around our school, and German students tried give their best and speak fluent English. Then it was time to play games in our *games room*, try out the slide, the climbing wall, our pool and table football. Everyone got on really well, and we soon had international football, pool and board games going on. We were very impressed with this, as fun and laughter were seen everywhere and regardless of age or nationality, there was teamwork and harmony.

Everyone had lunch in the school canteen and this led to astonishment: There is and there will never be any water or other drinks in our canteen. That is due to hygienic rules, as water dispensing machines would be potential grounds for bacteria.

In the afternoon we had a fantastic *singing lesson* with Mr. Tegeler, who got everyone to relax and stretch and feel their inner voice. We all loved the humming exercise - s.th. to try on a stressful day in the future. After the initial singing practice we soon realized that we would need to reduce our intended range of songs and narrow it down to one or two traditional Christmas songs.

We chose "Silent Night" and "Feliz Navid" as it was everyones favourite and easy to sing along to.

Next we had a *logo workshop* with Mrs. Riechert and Mrs. Janas. They had prepared all types of paper and different pens to choose from, so that we could all get really creative. And the first thing that happened: It was snowing! Unbelievable but true. We suspect that Finland has something to do with this nice weather.

Feeling rather wintery and Christmassy everyone went to work on designing logos in international groups - we had to come up with a good logo for our project! And we were not disappointed, the results were stunning. Really amazing. From very simple and clever to very detailed and arty designs, everyone had worked hard and was fully concentrated.

Finally at 3:30 pm it was time to go home to the host families. We had had an eventful first working day.

**On Tuesday, 11th December**, we all met in the assembly hall to practice our *Christmas songs*. Mr. Tegeler managed to wake up all of us by getting us to do some physical exercises that are supposed to be good for singing. It opens up your vocal cords and stretches your chest muscles. Again, we had lots of fun. We were singing and dancing and had to practice our performance on stage, which proves rather difficult when 64 pupils have to sing and work together and all purely by using our project language English.

Soon it was time for more creativity: Decorating and creating *Christmas decorations*. Mrs. Gündüz and Mrs. Moser had prepared two rooms for all students and soon one could watch intense work and tons of glitter and stars covering all work surfaces. The treasure chest group was very busy, because they had to paint their wooden chests before they could decorate it. The group working on Christmas baubles had a more peaceful time and were listening to Christmas music while working.

Both groups came up with stunning results-our students certainly know how to turn 90 minutes into unique great products.

Soon it was lunch time and by now everyone knew what to do: Get your tray and queue up, find some cutlery and choose between 2 menus, one of them vegetarian.

Fairly full up we had a work session in *Santa`s kitchen* - Mrs. Milfeit had done some magic and prepared lots of recipes and ingredients for all of us to get started and make wonderfully tasty specialities.

All partners had brought recipes and ingredients too, so it was a mega big and loud baking event.

In the history of the THS we have never had so many people in one kitchen before. Soon we were allowed to taste the first biscuits and it was heavenly. So many cookies and designs - glitter and colour and fancy shapes and sizes. The atmosphere was so good that some of our students started to dance in and around the kitchen. Music and singing and a big mess- but it was certainly worth it.

In the end the kitchen looked nearly back to normal- after all, we don`t want to upset the head of the kitchen, Mrs. Schilp, who was kind enough to let us use the facilities.

On that day we had a really long day and we all walked to the bus stop and managed to squeeze into one bus, followed by filling up nearly one compartment of the tram, which took us into town to *Dr. Oetker.* 2 groups had a guided tour in English, interrupted by a muesli and pudding tasting session and followed by a big buffet with pizza, cake, pudding and yoghurt.

**Wednesday** morning was very exciting: We all took a train at 7:58 am to get to *Essen* to Zeche Zollverein, a UNESCO World Heritage site. In Essen we had to find the right tram to get us to the Zeche and this was probably the smallest tram any of us had ever been on. At our destination we walked across the grounds and it was freezing cold. Finally we found the mega steep escalator, one of the biggest and highest in Germany, and entered the UNESCO site. We had some spare time and decided to have a short break for a snack. 2 groups than had a tour in English and 1 group had a German guide. It was amazing to see all the tools and sites where people had worked not so very long ago. And who knew that the British had invented most of the tools and machines? And that the Germans had been a bit hesitant about trading and exchanging goods? And did you know that a typical worker never really got older than 35 years and therefore was advised to find a wife and have kids very early on? And we found out how important coal was to everybody's life. The interactive films and displays were fascinating and will also stay in our memory.

Then we hopped back on to the mini tram to get back to Essen and we continued our travels with a train to *Dortmund*. After this 20 minute ride we walked for an eternity led by Silas and Leon to the biggest Christmas tree in Europe, which consists of over 77 single trees constructed together to form one giant tree. This is where we took a group photo and people bought the first typical Christmas food and souvenirs. Soon it was free time-all students had to stay in groups of 3 or more and it was great to see that some of the Spanish and Austrian kids were already in mixed groups with the Germans. Christmas presents were bought and Glühwein/Kinderpunsch and Bratwurst tried by all. At 4:55 pm we took a train back to Bielefeld, which turned out to be punctual for once and so we all got back to Bielefeld on time at 5:58 pm. Some students had eaten pancakes at the Christmas market, not realizing they contained lactose. So we had some young people that had to go straight to bed to recover, ready for the next day.

**Thursday, 13th December**:

A brand new bus was ours for the day. During our last Erasmus project we had a few technical issues with one bus so this time Germany was well prepared: This bus was really just a few weeks old.

At 8:30 am we left school for the *UNESCO World Heritage Site Palace Corvey*. We had a 90 minute tour and just like the day before, 2 tours in English and one in German. The palace is still being renovated and restored and we saw many workmen and numerous painters, that have to re-paint or preserve the many valuable and historic sites and pictures, statues and ornaments. The variety of rooms, jewels, crowns, pictures and furniture was an eye opener. One or two of us were certainly wishing to have been a princess in those times.

Our next destination was *Lemgo*- the little town with the bewitched mayors house. The teachers had a lovely meal in a small restaurant at the market place and got on really well, listening to Finish and Scottish teachers telling us about their schools and countries. We can`t wait to visit them!

Students used their free time for some shopping and finding places for lunch (no fast food places available). At 2:30 we met at the Mayors house and had 2 guided tours in English, leading us all around Lemgo and its beautiful houses. The students asked many questions and it was great to see their interest. A day out like this can probably achieve more than a normal standard school day.

Finally we were about to visit our last location for the day, Hermann the German. And we were so disappointed: All lights were off, it was completely dark and only the car park was lit. Due to safety reasons we decided to stay on the bus and give this one a miss. it seemed that Hermann had gone to sleep-what a shame.

**Friday, 14th December**:

Unbelievable - this week has flown by. Now it was time for our end of week celebration. Students started to prepare their national *Christmas stalls* at 8am and we had another singing practice. By 10 am the assembly hall was filled up with expectant students and some parents and teachers. We heard a speech from Mr. Norkowski, thanking everyone for their hard work and empathizing our friendship across borders and countries and then saw two films with highlights of the week. Students then presented their Christmas songs and traditions with films, PowerPoint Presentations and eventually, the songs by all Erasmus+ participants. Germany presented two dances performed by Mrs. Seidel`s dancing girls and it was amazing to watch. We then had tremendous fun with the Spanish, Finish and Scottish Dances. Students and teachers were twirling and circling around the hall, dancing and jumping and singing. The Scottish managed to get everyone involved and shyness was not an excuse. Then it was time to hit the stalls and try all the food and delicacies that were on offer. Decorations were admired and leaflets of schools and countries looked at and questions asked.

Next it was time to travel into town again, using public transport and not losing one another. Not an easy task with 75 people. We arrived at the mayor`s office and were greeted by Mrs. Karin Schrader, *Bielefeld`s 1st Mayor*. She seemed genuinely interested in our Erasmus+ project and asked everyone about their impressions of Bielefeld. A great number of students asked questions and those were followed by more questions-we could have stayed there for many hours. One of the points intensely discussed was the new restrictions around our center piece the "Jahnplatz". The younger pupils were sure: If you close off one part of the town, the other parts of town will have a higher amount of harmful emission and only displace the problem.

And the question that tends to turn up repeatedly: Why does our school not have fast internet and whiteboards in each class? Our partner schools have not seen chalk and boards for many years.

Mrs. Schrader`s answers were honest and authentic and we are grateful for the reception and say thank you for taking time for our project and all our guests.

it was time to go back to school, but many students decided to stay in town for last minute Christmas and present shopping.

In the evening we met again at 7 pm, that is when the *final party* started. We had a super disco organised by Mrs. Moser and a whole van with drinks, organized by parents. Decoration, photos and films were organized by Mrs. Moser, Mrs. Janas , Mrs. Riechert, Mrs. Reckefuß and Mrs. Milfeit. Meat and barbecue were in the capable hands of Mr. Tegeler, Mr. Storck and Mr. Robrecht.

And it was a super evening! Parents, students, siblings and teachers were eating, talking and dancing. And everyone had a special photo taken in the photo booth: Mrs. Moser had prepared a surprise corner and we all posed for funny pictures. Around 11 pm it was time to say good bye and students and teachers went to their hosts and hostels. We finished clearing up around 1am and then it was time to go home for a short rest.

**Saturday, 15th December:** We met very early at *Bielefeld's main station*, at 5:30 am. Parents were hardly awake and students were tired. We were very impressed that most host students had dragged themselves out of bed to accompany their guest to the station. That was a nice gesture. Finish, Spanish and Scottish students and teachers took the train at 05:58 am to Düsseldorf. Austria had decided to stay an extra day in Düsseldorf and watch a version of the "Nussknacker". Tearful goodbyes were soon replaced by smiles: We will meet again soon in Marbella. Roll on May!

Thanks to all for making this a special and unforgettable week.