

UK-German Connection – Creative Report – James Gillespie’s High School 2024

James Gillespie’s High School has an established partnership with Hallertau-Gymnasium Wolnzach. In October 2024, thirteen pupils who studied German in S3 spent a week in Bavaria as part of our first post-pandemic German exchange programme.

While in Germany the pupils took part in a collaborative, cross-curricular project with a focus on: *Environment and sustainability – differences between city and rural landscape, and between Scotland and Bavaria*. The theme engaged our pupils, especially as they were able to experience country living in the Hallertau region of Bavaria. Pupils were “surprised by the tranquillity of the out of city life,” and observed that their host families “live such a different life out of the city.” They particularly enjoyed seeing “just how many hops and corn fields there were” in Hallertau, the world’s largest hop growing area. Likewise, their German exchange partners were able to experience city life when they visited Edinburgh in April.

To gather research and spark ideas for their project, pupils completed a scavenger hunt and survey on a day trip in Munich, where they looked for evidence of the city’s approach to sustainability and its environmental quality. Pupils put their language skills to the test by asking locals about their views on the environmental impact of *Oktoberfest*, what the local council does to mitigate environmental concerns, and what further improvements could be made.

Our itinerary also showcased the beauty of Bavarian countryside: pupils visited *Schloss Neuschwanstein*, did a boat trip through the *Donaudurchbruch*, and saw the stalactite caves of *Tropfsteinhöhle Schulerloch*.

At the end of the week, following discussion and reflection on their research and experiences, the pupils produced an informative and interactive presentation on the impact of tourism, waste and approaches to sustainability in both Germany and Scotland. The pupils worked closely as a team, which facilitated the development of lifelong connections. Pupils have commented that they gained invaluable experience in forming new friendships despite sometimes having a language barrier, that they intend to stay in touch with their exchange partner and host families, and would like to meet up with them again in the future.

The trip was supported by a grant from UK-German Connection, which enabled us to have a diverse, educational and exciting itinerary. The focus of the project encouraged collaboration, cooperation and communication between our young people in both languages. The positive impact of this visit on our pupils – culturally, academically, and personally – is undeniable. A quote from one of our pupils to summarise their experience: “Thank you for one of the best weeks, it was an amazing experience and really enjoyable!”

Following the success of our visit, we plan to continue our newly revived and strengthened partnership between our two schools.

UK-German Connection website: <https://ukgermanconnection.org/>