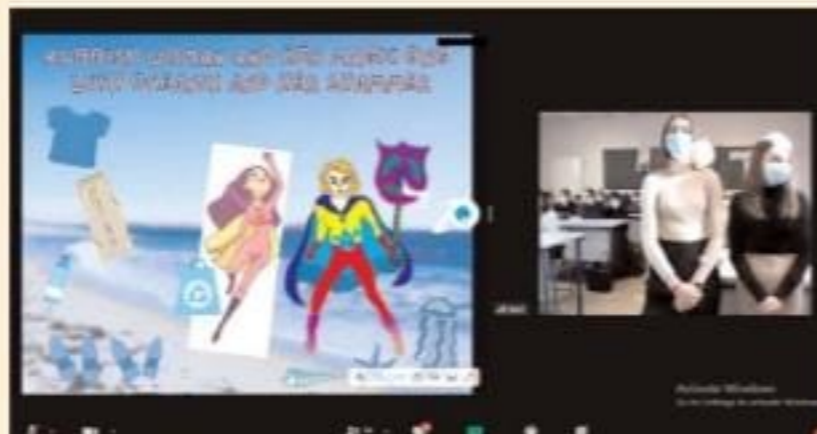


# Sushila Birla Girls' School holds virtual cultural exchange programme



Sushila Birla Girls' School commenced its international outreach programme 14 years ago when a partnership was forged with a school in the United Kingdom. Since then, our school has entered into partnerships with schools in over a dozen countries. These partnerships involved collaborative projects on the various modes of the digital platform and exchange visits with the partner school of teachers and students.

The philosophy behind the outreach programme was to introduce our students to not only the education systems of different countries but also their social norms and cultural practices. This is in keeping with the school's mission and vision of preparing our students to be global citizens.

The involvement of even junior students in the exchange programmes reflects the school's commitment to its students having a global dimension to their education. The projects the students undertake help to develop their creative and collaborative skills while working with students in different countries, thereby enhancing their confidence in dealing with their peers abroad and in the future.

To assess the impact of these programmes on the students, it would be illustrative to analyse the collaborative projects they have undertaken. A project undertaken by our stu-

dents of class V during the current pandemic (details of which are described below) emphasises the benefits of such collaborations.

The project in question relates to a pressing and topical subject engaging the attention of the world today - proactive action against climate change.

Thirty of our class V students were engaged in a three-month long collaborative project with their counterparts of our partner school in France, Collège Sacré-Coeur, Lamballe, Brittany. The project titled 'We are the Superheroes of the Environment' was conceived with the aim of making our students aware of their power as future global citizens to have an impact on the restoration of the damage to our home, Planet Earth. The project (in consonance with the UN Sustainable Development Goals 13 Climate Action) emphasised our responsibility to reduce the carbon footprint and protect the environment.

The project was undertaken in three stages. 1. Getting to know the collaborating partners. 2. Understanding the environment damage and the steps to be taken for restitution 3. Producing multi-lingual comics to highlight the dangers to the environment and the steps to combat it.

The first stage commenced with the familiarisation process which was titled 'Ice-breaking activity: Discovering your Partners'. The students collaborated with their peers in



France and discussed their hobbies using the web app Padlet. This helped them understand the personalities of their peers and learn about each other's culture. The French students being fascinated by pictures of our students in ghungroos points to how effective such collaborations are in introducing cultural practices of one country to another.

The second stage involved analysis of the causes of pollution and its harmful effects on the environment. The young students of both nations donned the mantle of eco-warriors and sought to create awareness through posters on ways to reduce wastage of resources. They adopted the phrase 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Responsible consumption' to emphasise the importance of a healthy and

sustainable lifestyle. Using the web app Padlet, they exchanged views on ways to save the environment and measures to reduce the greenhouse gas effect.

The third and final stage was creating the collaborative 12-page trilingual E-comic on Canva App. Students worked in groups of four (two each from India and France) to create their own Superhero in each country who takes it upon himself to stop pollution and save the environment for future generations. The comic books were designed jointly by the students of both schools in English; two pages each were composed with the dialogues in their respective mother tongues of French and Hindi/Bengali (with English translations). The comics end with the superheroes

of both countries uniting and taking a solemn pledge to save the planet together. In each of the 14 booklets, the students provide detailed bibliographies. This was an essential learning process for them on the importance of acknowledging their sources of research/information.

An interactive session using Zoom was organised for students to exchange their experience on the project and develop further understanding and mutual respect for each other's culture. A Kathak dance performance by one of our students and a musical performance by their French peers rounded off for the students a valuable and highly educational experience.

The benefits of the project are encapsulated in the words of headmistress Vidisha Panja, "It allowed our students to experience different cultures and perspectives including new traditions and culture and meeting new people. It was overall an enriching experience for the students."

Outreach co-ordinator, Purnima Ravindran, who has helmed the Exchange Programme since its inception, pointed out that this project only reiterates the benefits of such programmes. These programmes provide a unique and strong platform for developing multiple skills which form one of the cornerstones of our country's New Education Policy, she added.