



PIMLICO
STATE HIGH SCHOOL

Making a world of difference



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PIMLICO STATE HIGH SCHOOL VIETNAM STUDY TOUR 2016

VISIT TO BONG TRANG PRIMARY SCHOOL

Each year Pimlico State High School undertakes an international study tour to commemorate the sacrifices made by Australian service people from the Boer War to Vietnam. The school has visited Gallipoli (twice), The Western Front, Vietnam, Sandakan (Malaysia), England, South Africa, Greece (twice), Singapore (three times), Japan and South Korea.

The focus of each tour is to research and commemorate Australian service people, with a focus on people from Townsville and North Queensland. All students and teachers are required to adopt a number of service people and research their stories.

After our first tour, our students realised that it would be appropriate to give something back to the people and the countries we were visiting, particularly those that had experienced the horror of war and where many people were still facing disadvantage. Since our first tour to Vietnam we have supported a number of schools, orphanages and charities and donated over \$50,000 in cash and materials over an 8-year period. Each tour has undertaken fundraising for a range of organisations but each year we set aside some of the funds for schools in Vietnam. Our aim was to make a significant donation when we returned to this fascinating and friendly nation.

In 2016, 21 students and 3 teachers from Pimlico State High returned to Vietnam to commemorate our service people from the Vietnam War and to mark the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan.

It was also the chance to give something back to the children of Vietnam when we donated \$10,000 to the Australia Vietnam Volunteers Resource Group (AVVRG). We chose the AVVRG as they had the expertise and experience to use the money effectively and ensure the most benefit for the children. We donated the money with no strings attached, or expectations, as we strongly believed that the people on the ground in Vietnam knew what was needed most urgently.

After some significant leg work by the AVVRG it was decided the money would be donated to the Bong Trang Primary School. Bong Trang is a commune/township, in the district of Xuyen Moc, which has an agriculture base and very poor infrastructure. The Primary School has 185 students (Grades 1-5) and 18 teaching staff to support the Headmaster Mr Phan Thanh Tam.

When we visited Vietnam in September 2016 we had the opportunity to visit the school and interact with the students. We brought with us a pile of sporting equipment, art supplies and stationery items to donate to the school. We organised a range of activities to do with the kids including painting, drawing, boomerang throwing, singing and various games.

However, soon after our arrival we threw the plans out the window as we realised that our visit was going to be a very special occasion and the school welcomed us in the most spectacular fashion.

We arrived to find the school grounds packed with students, teachers, parents and members of the local community. We were then welcomed with a concert put on by the students of Bong Trang Primary School and the local high school. Students as young as five, danced, sang



and performed a range of traditional and modern dances. The concert highlighted the many talents of the students and the importance of education. We reciprocated the welcome with one of our students, Camille Catelan, performing a number of songs. Throughout the concert and speeches, the students sat patiently in lines, looking immaculate in their white shirts and red ties supervised by the teachers in their traditional yellow dresses

After a few presentations and gift giving, the real fun began with a range of activities in which the Pimlico and the Bong Trang kids worked together. The activities included tug of war, ball games, sack races and traditional Vietnamese games. We had also brought along a large play parachute which everyone enjoyed and which will no doubt be put to good use in the future.

The happy looks on everyone's faces captured the fun and friendship of the day. Language was no barrier as smiles, hugs and laughter became the main form of communication.

We also had the opportunity to visit the students in their classrooms, where we were able to hear many of the children's stories and learn about education in Vietnam. This emphasized the importance of education for the students' future success, especially for those in rural communities. For the students of Pimlico "It was a valuable experience for everyone on the tour as it made us appreciate our education and our school facilities back in Australia".

Our tour of school allowed us to appreciate the good work being done and the students and parents commitment towards education. It also highlighted that the fact that many of these rural schools can do with extra support, resources and infrastructure.

We arrived at Bong Trang Primary School with no expectations but left with many great memories. As two of our students Emma and Hannah said 'It was so hard to say goodbye'. As visitors to Vietnam, our donation is small compared to the hospitality and genuine friendship we received, not only from the people of Bong Trang, but also from the Vietnamese people we meet throughout our travels. We encourage all Australian to support the AVVRG and doing so, give a bit back to the Vietnamese people.

We would like to thank the students and staff of Bong Trang Primary School for their warm welcome and hospitality. We would also like to thank the AVVRG for their work in making our visit possible. We look forward to a continued strong relationship with the AVVRG and the Bong Trang Primary School. Our aim is to donate a minimum of \$3,000.00 per year for as long as we do our Study Tours. We know the funds will be well used to help and support the education of Vietnamese children and we look forward to the day we can once again visit Bong Trang.