



international STUDENTS



Freyberg High School proudly welcomes many international students from around the world to experience education and school life in New Zealand. This year, the International Department has over 30 students, ranging from short-term visitors staying a few weeks, to long-term students - such as those from Vietnam - who are completing their NCEA qualifications and the remainder of their high school journey here at Freyberg.

Clarissa Wang, Year 12



Throughout 2025, Freyberg High School once again welcomed a diverse group of international students from around the world - including Japan, Brazil, Germany, China, and Vietnam - all eager to experience life and learning in Aotearoa New Zealand. Many students commented on how much they loved New Zealand's environment, the friendliness of its people, and the opportunity to learn about Māori and Kiwi culture. Each international student was paired with a Freyberg buddy, giving them a chance to build friendships and explore life beyond the classroom. This year's highlights included a trip to Wellington, where students enjoyed sightseeing and visiting national landmarks. It was a year full of connection, adventure, and growth for our international community.

Olivia Persson, Year 13



Leading the International Portfolio this year was a rewarding experience. Our team of five student leaders worked hard to make sure the International Department was celebrated and visible within the wider Freyberg community. We organised several language weeks - from Vietnamese to Portuguese to German - each featuring a mix of online and in-person events such as colouring competitions in C7, language quizzes, and assembly presentations. My personal highlight was the Sentence of the Week challenge, where students had to piece together words from social media posts to form a hidden sentence - with a lollipop prize for those who figured it out! Seeing so many students engage with new languages and cultures was awesome. I've really loved working alongside such a passionate team, and I hope the portfolio continues to grow next year.

James Cole - Senior Council International Portfolio 2025

“student reflections”



SUZY LE

“This year at Freyberg has been a truly special journey for me as an international student from Vietnam. When I first arrived, I wasn’t sure how quickly I would adapt, but Freyberg has given me so many opportunities to explore a new culture and make friends from all around the world. From playing badminton to joining various school activities, I’ve enjoyed every moment of being part of the Freyberg High School community. One of the biggest highlights has been life with my homestay family. We often bake together, and those moments have made me feel genuinely at home here in New Zealand. Their kindness and support have helped me settle in and experience Kiwi life in such a warm and welcoming way. Looking back on this year, I feel incredibly grateful - not only for the knowledge I’ve gained, but also for the friendships, experiences, and confidence I’ve built along the way. Freyberg has shown me that learning goes far beyond the classroom, and I know the memories I’ve made here will stay with me for the rest of my life.”

Suzy Le (Vietnam)
Year 12 International
Student 2025

MARY KIM

“Kia ora! My name is Mary, and I am a Year 11 international student at Freyberg High School. This is my first year here, and I already feel like Freyberg is my second home. From the very beginning, I received so much support from Ms. Nicola, Ms. Kate, and Ms. Angela O’Connor - they were always there to help me and make sure I felt safe and cared for. The teachers at Freyberg are very kind and always give us great support. The school also has amazing facilities, which make learning easier and more enjoyable. One of the best things about Freyberg is how friendly the students are. They always smile, talk with me, and are happy to help whenever I have a problem. Because of that, I never feel lonely, even though I am far from my family. I am truly thankful for this year. Freyberg is such a warm, welcoming place, and I am proud to be an international student here.”

Mary Kim (Vietnam)
Year 11 International
Student 2025

MILAN POPPE

“My year at Freyberg High School was an incredibly musical one, filled with exciting opportunities, performances, and unforgettable experiences. I joined the school choir, Bella and the Fellas, where we performed on many occasions and had the amazing opportunity to compete at both The Big Sing Competition and the Cadenza Festival. In addition to singing, I was also part of the band for Freyberg’s musical theatre production of Mary Poppins - a truly fantastic experience and definitely one of the highlights of my year. Performing live and being part of such a big production taught me so much about teamwork and the joy of music. It has been a wonderful time here in New Zealand, and I’m so grateful for all the friendships, memories, and experiences I’ve had at Freyberg. I’ll be very sad to leave, but I’ll always carry these moments with me.”

Milan Poppe (Germany)
Year 12 International
Student - Three Terms

RYO BEKKI

“In my experiences here I did many things, such as going around Palmerston North and going to the Te Papa Museum in Wellington. I also enjoyed taking classes with my friends and doing the work. My highlights were when my friends gave me a ring and when I went to Wellington - it made me feel so happy and included. At first, I was worried about whether I would make any friends, but I did, and now I don’t want to go back. Thank you! ありがとう!”

Ryo Bekki (Japan)
Year 11 International
Student - Term 3



INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Back Row: Patrick Pham, Nick Le, Danny Le, Milan Poppe, Dustin Nguyen, Mike Huynh, James Nguyen

Middle Row: Mrs Ange O'Connor (Teacher), Ryo Bekki, Luna Garcia Fruehling, Suzy Le, Kenny Nguyen, Mrs Nicola Partridge, Miss Kate Simms (Teacher)

Front Row: Emma Nguyen, Risa Machida, Charlotte Nguyen, Bill Nguyen, Hazel Duong, Mary Kim, Sachika Akuzawa

Interviews interviews interview

ELEA PAKULA (Germany, Year 13)

Elea spent six months in New Zealand and describes her time here as "pretty awesome." She says there are far more subjects offered here than in Germany, and her favourites were Fashion and Drama. She was also involved in the Mary Poppins production and says coming to New Zealand was "a good experience I'm glad I did."

"Try as many things as you can because all these memories and experiences I could have never made if I stayed at home."



FELIPE PEREZ (Chile, Year 12)

Felipe spent six months at Freyberg and says the people were his favourite part of both Freyberg and New Zealand. During his stay, he played football and basketball and embraced every opportunity to learn about local culture.

"Learn about Māori culture. That's really cool."

DAISY NGUYEN (Vietnam, Year 12)

Daisy has been at Freyberg for three years. She says she loves the school culture and enjoys racing karts in her free time.

"Don't wear expensive clothes - being Vietnamese is the fit."

MARIANA SOPHIE TRZASKOS DE DEUS (Brazil, Year 11)

Mariana spent five months studying at Freyberg and says her favourite subject was Engineering, a class not offered at her school in Brazil. She also enjoyed making new friends both in her regular classes and in ESOL.

"Explore everything. It's pretty cool."

MILAN POPPE (Germany, Year 12)

Milan spent eight months in New Zealand and says his favourite subject was Digital Technology. One of his favourite experiences was travelling to Rotorua, where he visited the hot pools and tried the Luge.

"You must try a pie at least once in New Zealand. I recommend Spinach and Feta pie."

WELL-KNOWN

It is a quiet Sunday morning in New Zealand. I sit by the wide window of my house, watching the sunlight spill across the street and dance across the rooftops. The neighbourhood is still, broken only by the sound of a bird singing somewhere in the distance. Yet my mind is not here. My thoughts wander back to Vietnam, back to the small kitchen where my mother, Truc, always seems to be waiting.

She is 49 years old, her long black hair tied neatly behind her head so it won't fall into her face as she cooks. Her eyes, dark and gentle, move constantly from the food to her family, as if making sure nothing and no one is ever left unattended. Even though I am half a world away, I can almost smell the familiar scent of fish sauce and lemongrass drifting through the air, hear the soft clinking of pans as she moves with practiced rhythm, and feel the warmth that radiates not from the stove but from her presence.

One memory of her stands out above the rest. I was about ten years old, sitting at my desk late at night, struggling with a math problem that made no sense no matter how many times I reread it. My small hands were clenched into fists, my face hot with tears, and the numbers seemed to blur on the page as frustration tightened my chest. The room was silent except for the sound of my shallow breaths, when suddenly the door creaked open. My mother stepped inside quietly, her footsteps soft on the tiled floor. She didn't announce herself. She just moved closer, carrying with her the faint scent of garlic and herbs from the kitchen.

She looked at the workbook over my shoulder, squinting a little as if searching for an answer. After a few seconds, she chuckled softly and said, "I don't know how to do this one either." Her honesty startled me; I had always thought mothers knew everything. But instead of making me feel helpless, her words made me feel less alone. She sat down beside me, her hand resting warmly on my back, and added, "You don't need to be perfect; you just need to try your best. I'm proud of you when you try."

That night, she placed a steaming bowl of chicken soup on the desk, the surface glistening with herbs she had sprinkled on top. She told me to eat and rest. Her words didn't erase the math problem, but they erased the weight pressing on my heart. I went to bed knowing the world would not end if I made a mistake.

The next morning, she woke me gently, her hand brushing my shoulder, her smile patient and warm. There was always a calmness about her in those moments, as though her smile alone could tell me: you are safe, you are loved, and you are never alone. That memory has stayed with me all these years - not because she solved the problem, but because she showed me that strength isn't about knowing all the answers. It's about giving comfort and courage when someone else has none left.

Now, as I sit far away from her in New Zealand, that memory plays over in my mind whenever I feel overwhelmed. Living abroad is not always easy. There are days when the weight of homesickness presses down on me, when assignments feel impossible, and when the loneliness of being far from family seems unbearable. But in those moments, I hear her voice again - soft but steady: Just try your best. It's as if she is sitting right beside me, reminding me that effort matters more than perfection.

I miss her in ways that are hard to explain. I miss the sound of her voice calling my name from the kitchen, the rhythm of her footsteps moving through the house, and even the way she would peek into my room at night just to check if I had fallen asleep. She never said much during those quiet visits, but the small gesture carried an entire world of care.

When I return to Vietnam each year, I try to hold onto her as much as I can. We sit together at our favourite noodle stall, laughing between mouthfuls of steaming broth. We visit the spa pool, where the hours seem to slip away as we relax side by side. And often, we simply sit on the veranda late at night, talking about the past, the future, and everything in between.

To me, my mother is far more than the woman who raised me. She is my compass, the steady star I return to when I lose my way. She is my teacher - even if she never solved that math problem - because she taught me something greater: that love and effort are worth more than perfection. And she is the person I admire most in this world, whose presence continues to guide me even when we are oceans apart.

Emma Nguyen, Year 13



INTERNATIONAL BUDDIES

Back Row: Cameron Allen, Kaiah Uncles, James Cole, Bene Thomas, Nick Le, Lucy Conger, Chioma Ajomiwe

Middle Row: Miss Kate Simms (Teacher), Aliyah Noviskey, Charlotte Rouse, Derek Mok, Aimee Frank, Suzy Le, Isabelle Franssen, Alyssa-Lee Pere

Front Row: Madi Beauchamp-Blithe, Rachel van Sittert, Lucy Conger, Sophie Clince, Kaleya Moss-Tangira, Ella Michie, Aurora Grace-Davis, Zoe Jones

Absent: Makerita Kelekolio, Crystal Papesch, Patrick Pham, Sam Robinson, Josiah Wharehinga, Kimberlie Singh, Olivia Smith, Finn Bennett, Robbie Hadfield, Veronica Richardson, Riley-Jade McGinity, Jordana Ormsby, Tiaria Paul-Clarke

THEN AND NOW

Dear 13-year-old Giang,

You don't know it yet, but the life you're used to is about to take an unexpected turn. Right now, you like being alone, you keep things to yourself, and you find it hard to open up to other people. You think staying safe in your bubble is the best way to live. But soon, life will push you far beyond that bubble, and you will discover a version of yourself you never imagined.

At 15, you'll travel to New Zealand for what is supposed to be a short-term experience. At first, you'll tell yourself it's temporary - a chance to open your eyes to the world outside your country. As the weeks pass, you'll realize how much this country interests you. It's the education system and the people that capture your attention. People are very friendly, and the way they educate is very creative. The excitement will still be mixed with fear, but you will feel an urge to stay.

Your name will no longer be Giang but Emma. You don't know why you choose that name - it's just a random one you picked when you came to New Zealand, and somehow it suited you very well. Then you'll realize how long it's been since you last heard the name Giang when your international friend suddenly calls you by it. It stirs up deep emotions inside you - a trigger that reminds you of the past, of your life in Vietnam.

You'll study at Freyberg High School, where you'll quickly discover new experiences. This journey will not be as easy as you first thought. You expected a better life in New Zealand because you were struggling with Vietnam's education system. It was so stressful for you; I knew it, as you had a bad memory of it. In contrast, New Zealand's education focuses on independence, creativity, and critical thinking. You'll discover that working on your own ideas suits you far better than rote memorisation ever did. That's why you choose to stay - because you believe this is far better than your old life.

The journey will not be easy. You will struggle to communicate and to explain your feelings to others. You will feel lonely, homesick, and disappointed by failure. Then you'll find out that no matter where you study, it's about changing yourself - learning to stand up and speak for what you want. You'll start to accept failure and rise again. You'll see mistakes as lessons to learn from instead of proof that you're not good enough.

Also, when you look at yourself now, you can see how much you've changed on the outside. You still have that short haircut, but your hair will grow thicker. You will gain two kilograms - you won't like it, but it makes you look stronger and healthier. These changes in appearance mirror the growth you've made inside and are proof that you are no longer the same as the 13-year-old who first boarded that plane.

So, to you at 13: cherish and enjoy every moment. Improve yourself from the past, because you can change yourself now and in the future. Don't look back. The shy girl who boards that plane, who used to be insecure and lacking confidence, will not be the same one who returns. She will grow stronger, braver, more independent - and you'll be proud of who you've become.

With love and pride,
Your 17-year-old Giang

Emma Nguyen, Year 13