

Marchants Hill Reflections 2024



Monday

We are officially down and out for night one at Marchants Hill! After a departure that would put any airport to shame, thanks to the organisation from Mrs Holmes, Mrs Mori and Mr Castell, and a wonderful send off from parents, we started off our week in the best way possible. The coach journey was full of laughter, songs (of course some 'Wheels on the bus') and classic journey games of eye spy and rock, papers, scissors.

On arrival, the children spent some time sorting their spaces out, making sure to be tidy and prepared for the coming week, before making their way into the Chapel to meet with our PGL leader. With a short introduction, and an agreed group call, we were taken on a tour of the site. The expressions on the children's faces could only be described as awe and wonder at finally seeing the activity bases that they had been imagining for so long, materialising in front of their eyes. Once the tour had concluded, we had some downtime before dinner. There were card games being played, Jenga towers being built (and collapsing), and the Jenga blocks were even used to create some unique domino trails along the floor.

It's safe to say that dinner for tonight was a huge success, with children leaving the dining room with sparkling smiles and satisfied stomachs, desperate to recommend their meal of choice to their friends. The most popular choice, it seemed, was the turkey meatballs in tomato sauce with pasta, although many also sung the praises of the fish fingers, and Lauren named the potato puffs 'the best thing ever'.

Their energy newly replenished, it was time for our evening activity: Passport Around The World. In their groups, the children were tasked with searching around an area of the site to locate a country flag. Each flag had a series of questions, one of which the children had to answer before returning to the 'Arrivals Gate', where their passport would be checked and verified. Once verified, the children were given their next country to find, and the team with the most correct answers would be crowned the winners. The competitive nature of everyone, children and staff alike, came out in full force tonight, coupled with strong synergy amongst all groups. There was the slight controversy of Miss Devonshire's group supposedly cheating by stealing the answer sheet, even though they were initially unaware of it being in their possession, as well as Mr Marshall's best friend being Google. The team that came out on top was Mr Castell's, winning by a single point. There was a chorus of celebrations from the team, as well as congratulations by the other teams, showing true sportsmanship across the year.

With the events of the day beginning to take its toll on the children, all rooms were keen to get showered and ready for bed - even Miss Whyte and Miss Devonshire were quick to put on their oodies and head in for the night! The children are already looking forward to what tomorrow holds, as they have had a teaser about what activities they are doing in the morning.

Tuesday

Our first full day has come to an end, and the children have already collected numerous memories to add to their Ranvilles Junior album. We have zipped down wires, conquered Jacob's Ladder and completed challenge courses, finishing off with a chilled campfire evening.

The house woke up bright and early, ready for our first breakfast of the week. The canteen was filled with the smell of sausages, hash browns and baked beans, with the children loving every single crumb. There were some interesting breakfast combinations, with Archie and Harrison attempting the meal choice of sausages and hash browns dipped into Coco Pops (a very nice taste, according to both boys - though many children sat around them were mildly concerned).

The groups were speedily taken to their morning activities, with Group 1 taking on the Zip Wire, and Group 2 enjoying Rifle Shooting, before they switched halfway through the morning. The main conversation topic following these groups, was the event of Payten making a new nemesis in her harness, after becoming stuck once she had had her go on the Zip wire, before being freed moments later. Group 3 took on the Jacob's Ladder, where they had to work as a team to climb a series of horizontal logs that rose high into the sky, each with a growing gap between them. They could only rely on each other and an additional rope to help them - with many children pulling themselves to new heights and impressing themselves. Group 4 were on the Challenge Course, attempting a range of obstacles in pairs and groups, whilst also completing a series of extra challenges. These two groups also switched over at the midpoint of the morning. Group 5 spent the first session of the morning in Survivor, as they learnt how to create tents out of tarpaulin and logs, and many other survival skills.

Lunch was the always-popular burgers and fries, with the children making the most of their refuelling opportunity, before starting their afternoon activities. This was the chance for all of the groups to complete the rest of the day's activities. Marley-May impressed all by being a key member of her team when completing 'The Floor is Lava', crawling through tyres, shimmying her way over and under poles, and truly throwing herself into each and every obstacle. Bradley and Thomas also both made their team proud by conquering the Zip wire.

Dinner offered choices of Chicken Katsu curry, Macaroni Cheese, or Veggie fingers and the children's appetites were as expected, desperate to fill their plates, with a variety of salad as well as their main meals. The macaroni cheese was so popular that it was all gone within, what felt like, minutes!

After dinner, was our evening activity of Campfire. The children were treated to a selection of songs and dances, as well as some stories from our PGL leaders, before the luxury treat of marshmallows around the fire. The tiredness became apparent by the end of the activity, and many were looking forward to a warm shower and pyjamas. All ready for bed within minutes, and preparing themselves for the fun that awaits them tomorrow.

Wednesday

It was another fun-filled day at Marchants Hill for Ranvilles - with a new selection of activities being completed, new food being tasted (and critically reviewed for some), and new memories being made.

The children woke up easily, following a restful night's sleep, and made their way to breakfast. Today's meal choices saw sausages switched out for bacon, with the rest of the options remaining the same. The reaction continued to be as positive as yesterday, despite the fact that Jamie was unable to acquire honey to accompany his oats, in addition to his cereal and cooked breakfast. The canteen was buzzing with beaming children, filling their faces with fuel, knowing only a glimmer of what awaited them for the rest of the day.

The morning meeting included the tragic event of children's shoes going mysteriously missing, having been swept up by the 'shoe hoover' at Bethany House due to being left out in the corridor, instead of being packed away on the shelves. This meant that some children, as well as Mr Castell, were all to be shoeless for the day! Fortunately, the store room for the hoover was located, and all shoes were returned prior to the first session. This saw Group 1 face the challenge of the Abseiling tower, which involves the children walking themselves backwards down a 12-metre tower - this activity was the one to push many children today, and so many of them faced their fear and made themselves proud. Group 3 were facing a similar obstacle with Climbing, where they were ascending a tower, using foot and hand holds to help them, before having to abseil their way back down. Groups 2 and 4 completed activities that resulted in a bit more mud and mess, with Tunnel Trails (the children navigate their way through a series of underground tunnels, working on navigation and communication skills) and Survivor. Group 5 were the first to attempt Fencing, which allowed the children to develop their hand-eye coordination, reflexes and decision making skills.

Lunch today offered the choices of beef bolognaise, ham carbonara or vegetable ratatouille, with the very popular side choice of garlic bread. The kitchen must be appreciative of the lack of leftovers because the appetites of the children continues to impress, as well as their manners and conversation with the staff when requesting their lunches.

The afternoon included the same activities, in differing orders, as all groups showed their determination and bravery when conquering challenges. Chloe showed her natural climbing ability, when she was challenged to a race up the climbing wall by a PGL leader, only narrowly missing out on the win, potentially due to a minor slip on the stones at the start. Mrs Mori and Mr Marshall had a serious sprint through the tunnels, with Mr Marshall coming out on top, being a gracious and fair winner. Jacob and Morgan used wonderful problem-solving strategies in Tunnel Trails during one of the games, when they were even able to go unspotted by Mr Castell through the web of tunnels. Mrs Williams, one of our special guests for today, even impressed many by showing her abseiling skills amongst Miss Whyte's group, before being the glamorous assistant with harnesses for Miss Devonshire's.

Chicken Tikka Masala, Vegetable Korma or a Jumbo Sausage roll were on the dinner menu for tonight, and the children's spirits remained high into the evening, as they spent some downtime in the Chapel space, playing cards and board games, creating a variety of electrical circuits and colouring prior to their evening activity.

The long-awaited Ambush was tonight's evening activity, and the children were excited to get involved as soon as we entered the forest area. Split into three groups, one had to hide somewhere in the forest, expertly picked out and hidden from the usual pathways, and the other two had a set time to search, with the aid of torchlights. With the main challenge of remaining hushed for the entirety of the hiding period, travelling around the forest in darkness, cringing and flinching at every snap of a twig or rustle of leaves; it was an amazing activity to witness. At the end of the evening, Group 1 were successful in hiding, using strong decoy plans to distract their seekers, as were the group made up of Groups 4 and 5.

On returning to the house, it was time for a quick shower (with many children still slightly covered in mud from the events of the day), before getting ready for bed. Pyjamas on and lights off, all children were soundly asleep within minutes, ready for their last full day to come.

Thursday

Today has been a rather wet and windy day at Marchants Hill, but the children were never going to let a little bit of rain dampen their spirits, as they completed their final full day. Even with the less than ideal conditions, the children managed to face fears, try new things and create some very entertaining memories.

The day started with the normal shuffle down to the kitchen; bleary-eyed and still in the comfort of their pyjamas, the children made their way in for breakfast. The interesting combinations of food have become relatively normalised throughout the week, blending in to the array of cooked breakfasts, cereals, and fruit and yoghurt that line the dining room tables. The key opportunity for fuelling for the day has become a symphony of chatter and laughter, as the children share stories of who said what in their sleep, and who is still the last to wake up in their room.

The morning meeting flew by and, before they knew it, the children were making their daily journey across the cricket pitch to the main centre, ready for their first sessions. Group 5 became the final group to conquer Jacob's Ladder, with Sam and Chloe making names for themselves for their impressive climbing ability, as they managed to reach the highest log of the ladder. Group 4 took on Sensory Trail, where the children were tasked with travelling through a simple obstacle course - the challenge being, they were blindfolded. They were eased into this by completing a series of mini challenges in pairs first, using their communication skills to support their partner to travel through an area of the forest. The puddles around the course made an already difficult task, that bit harder, as the teams had to be even more specific in the messages being delivered down the line, to ensure safety, as well as understanding of what was to come. Group 3 had their lesson in Fencing, with many children enjoying it, to the point of using their skills and stances around the shared areas

during downtime. Groups 1 and 2 completed an Archery session and had their chance to conquer the Trapeze.

Lunch was chicken chunks or vegetable nuggets and, Lauren's favourite of potato puffs made their return to the menu. The children also had the choice of chicken and tomato fried rice and some of them went for the option of tomato soup. The chance to replenish their energy was well used, before heading back out into the weather, many children, and adults, with an extra layer or two, and a new pair of shoes, for the rest of the day's activities.

The afternoon, once again, saw the same activities as the morning, with each group completing the activities that they did not do in the morning. Lauren enjoyed Fencing, despite discovering that it did not include putting up orange fences around the outskirts of the field. Eadie and Dexter showed themselves to be natural, modern day Robin Hoods, with Eadie even managing to shoot three bullseyes in a row in her Archery, resulting in the instructor asking whether she might want to lead the rest of the session. Mrs Holmes showed herself to be a pro fencer in the making, when she was chosen for a demonstration (over Miss Whyte) due to her exemplar stance for the jab and lunge move. Group 5 became the first of Ranvilles to experience the phenomenon that is the Giant Swing, which still had the same impact, regardless of the weather conditions. All children showed incredible determination and resilience through every activity, not letting any weather stop them from accomplishing their personal goals, and venturing out of the comfort of the waiting huts to encourage and support their peers.

Lasagne was for dinner, with the option of vegetable lasagne also available, as well as garlic chicken. The popular side dish of garlic bread also made its return, and was on most of the children's plates, accompanied by another side choice of garlic potatoes, allowing the distinct smell of garlic to gently waft around the dining room, not that this deterred anyone from choosing these as part of their meal.

Downtime in the Chapel remains an enjoyable moment of relaxation and rest, as a 'Marshmallow game' seems to have grown in popularity through the week (involving children chanting a series of phrases in increasing quantities, aiming to not be the one to chant incorrectly - it sounds much simpler, and less intense than it actually is, as some staff have found out the hard way). Connect Four and Battleships have also been used frequently, with tournaments and best of three competitions going on most afternoons, with a collection of spectators for each game. Bradley O became quickly renowned for impressing Mrs Mori, Mr Castell, Mrs Holmes and Mr Marshall with some card magic tricks, using never before seen methods.

This evening's activity was the Silent Disco, in which the Chapel was transformed into a vibrant discotheque for all of the children to enjoy a selection of songs. The Macarena, 5,6,7,8, and Cotton Eyed Joe made an appearance, though it did seem at moments that it was the teachers leading the dances, with students attempting to follow along to the classic routines. There were multiple worms being performed by the likes of Layla B, Sam, Archie and Erin, and others, with varying levels of

success. It was the perfect way to end our week, with the kids using up all energy remaining from the day.

In preparation for tomorrow, the children spent some time sorting through their luggage, making sure their rooms were tidy and suitcases were packed, ready for an easy departure after the morning sessions. They were all ready for bed in good time, and were sleeping within minutes. With the last two sessions awaiting us tomorrow, the children are looking forward to their remaining time at Marchants Hill, creating some final memories.

Friday

The final day of Marchants Hill dawned, and the smell of breakfast filled the corridors for the last time. The children, having just woken up from their disco-induced slumbers, sat around the dining tables sharing each other's excitement for what the day would hold.

Group 5 were treated to Mr Marshall's adaptation of Sensory Trail, in which they had to complete similar tasks to yesterday's groups, with the embellishments of water being poured on their heads, and leaves being thrown at them from all directions - aiming for a true test of the senses. It's safe to say that the change of clothes that the children left out that morning came in very handy. Groups 1 and 3 got to experience the Giant Swing, trying their best to make sure that their big breakfasts did not make a reappearance. At the same time, Groups 2 and 4 completed Problem Solving, which involved them having to think outside of the box, or sometimes make sure they weren't overanalysing a scenario, in order to complete a series of challenges. All groups then moved around, with Groups 1 and 3 then taking on Problem Solving, and Groups 2 and 4 having their go on the Giant Swing. Each pairing of groups on Giant Swing were lucky enough to be stationed directly next to one another, so had the opportunity to showcase their teamwork skills, in helping every group that went on the swing to reach their desired height prior to release. Group 5 took on the tasks included in the Challenge course, having to complete the obstacles, whilst not spilling a cup of water - any water that wasn't spilled was allowed to be poured over their instructor's head!

Lunch was battered fish, or a jumbo sausage, with fries - there was even the treat of a fish shop curry sauce. There was a mix of emotions in the air within the dining room, with children excited to return home to their loved ones (and the comfort of their own bed once again) but the bittersweet feeling of leaving the place that they have enjoyed so thoroughly for the past four days.

Bags all packed and organised in the Chapel, the children made the most of their concluding moments in Bethany House, before the coach arrived to transport them back to school. There was a seriously impressive game of Tetris involved in order to fit all of the suitcases, sleeping bags and laundry-filled bin liners back onto the coach; it is always interesting that the luggage quantity seems to have increased by the end of the week.

The journey back was relaxed and peaceful, with the buzz of conversations and reminiscing already commencing, despite leaving only a matter of moments before. Many children took advantage of the 45 minutes of stillness to catch up on any sleep that they might have missed, the events of the week seemingly taking their toll. When returning to school, there was a heartwarming welcome from family and friends to assist in an easy pick-up of luggage before the children went back home, to recharge over the weekend. Thank you to the parents and Mr May, for helping the staff to make our return as efficient as it was.

We hope that the children will carry the memories that were made at Marchants Hill with them for a long time to come, and that they enjoyed their time just as much as the staff did. They really did do Ranvilles, and themselves, proud and were true STARS for the entire week.