

## 2006 Nagano English Summer School

First and foremost, we would like to thank the Sasakawa foundation for their crucial support in helping us to get to Japan: the grant of £1000 was split equally and used to pay for our flights. The English Summer School was a fantastic success. The feed-back from the students was that they had thought it was difficult at first (because we were using only English) yet they began to learn very quickly and felt that their confidence had increased too, through constant speaking, listening and interaction. The Nagano International Friendship Club provided volunteers who were invaluable in supporting the children, Mr Koide (Chairman of the NIFC) and ourselves, organising meals and 24-hour supervision. They were also a fantastic source for us to practise our Japanese!

The summer school took place in school buildings located in a small agricultural village in the mountains overlooking Nagano city. Unfortunately, there are no longer any pupils from within the community to fill the classrooms, and though it no longer functions as an ordinary school, it provided the ideal location for our needs. There were 60 Japanese children from the ages of 7 to 15 who enrolled in the course. We had three classes (Seniors, Juniors and Primary) and created six groups. Each group contained a cross section of ages and was aligned with an English teacher or students, and then named after a place in England (for example, Team Nottingham). This turned out to be a fantastic success. Each team produced and performed a short play (including a performance of Goldilocks and the Three Bears) and it came to be that the older students helped and looked-after the younger ones in their group. By the final morning when we held a "mini-Olympics" we found ourselves really cheering for our own teams!

The event gained a lot of local publicity. The culmination of the week of language learning was "English Town", to which two television crews and a local newspaper journalist came too. Organised by Mr Ōtsuki (of Nagano Council), "English Town" went far beyond anything we had anticipated. An artist was commissioned to create landmarks, places and all quintessentially English sights, from telephone and pillar boxes to the Houses of Parliament, Nottingham Castle, a bakery, a green grocers, the occasional dry-stone-wall and many other things besides!

Each day, the mornings were spent in class and the afternoons doing activities, from aerobics to potato printing (all conducted in English). I had prepared recipes and spent two hours each day cooking – some of the scones and shortbread made each day were frozen to be 'sold' in English Town but a lot of it was quickly demolished, and the boys spent one afternoon playing football long after 'activity time' was scheduled to finish.

Although it was hard work and very intensive, our week in Japan was absolutely fantastic. To have worked with such fantastic young people was very special, and to do so in such a fantastic place made it all the more incredible.

