

# Japanese visitors learn from Ernest C. Drury school

By Stephanie Hounsell  
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

It's a bit chaotic in the library at the Ernest C. Drury School for the Deaf, despite the silence.

A language barrier is making communication a bit of a challenge, albeit a fun one, between school staff and a group of 13 Deaf student and adult visitors from Japan.

Students are attempting to communicate with Japanese Sign Language (JSL), while E.C. Drury folks — who use American Sign Language (ASL) — try to understand.

Both groups look to the two somewhat flustered-looking interpreters to shed some light.

Fortunately, there are some things everyone understands: smiles and laughter, and there are plenty of both.

The seven students and six teachers were visiting E.C. Drury school for the Deaf last week from Japan to learn more about Canadian culture and Drury's bilingual — ASL and English — education system. They observed the school's Grade 8 class.

Teacher Yoko Kaya, from the Meisei Gakuen School for the Deaf in Japan, explained through an interpreter that it's been great learning from E.C. Drury while also sharing about the way things are done back home.

"In our school, we have 50/50 Deaf and hearing staff, while Drury seems to have more Deaf staff. So the children are lucky to see lots of Deaf adults they can look to as



**INTERNATIONAL VISITORS:** Ernest C. Drury School for the Deaf principals Jeanne Leonard (first row, left) and Heather Gibson (first row, right) join student and teacher visitors from Japan last week, signing the words 'Japan' and 'sign language' in Japanese Sign Language. They were observing the bilingual curriculum at E.C. Drury, hoping to implement a similar one at their own Deaf school.

role models," Kaya said, adding, "The quality of teachers and the way they teach (here) is very good. It has impressed me."

Meisei Gakuen is the only JSL-focused school in Japan.

"In Japan, there's still little recognition of JSL as a language," she said.

This isn't the first time the local Deaf school has attracted international attention. In fact, it's quite common since the school is

groundbreaking in its teaching methods.

E.C. Drury is the first Deaf school worldwide to implement an ASL curriculum, first at its elementary school and then, just this year, at its high school, thanks to the efforts of ASL curriculum principal Heather Gibson.

This means that not only is ASL the students' language of instruction, it's also studied as a subject in itself — the way main-

stream schools teach in English but also study English as a subject, explained Jeanne Leonard, principal of the elementary school.

"We get a fair bit of questions on our ASL curriculum and how it came about," Leonard said.

The goal is for Meisei Gakuen to eventually implement a similar way of teaching.

Miwa Katagiri, 12, said what amazed her most during her visit — which included some Ontario sightseeing — was Niagara Falls and its sheer size.

Something that was different for her was seeing E.C. Drury students eat in a cafeteria. Back home, everyone commutes to the school and brings their own lunch, she said through an English-speaking JSL interpreter.

She added it was fun trying to communicate with some of the ASL-signing students to practise her limited knowledge of the language.

Keijun Sasaki, 13, said he observed numerous cultural differences.

"In Japan, we're never allowed to sit on a table or eat standing. I saw students eating during class, which surprised me a lot."

Making new friends was the best part of the trip, he added.

Kaya said the trip was just as meaningful for the students as it was the teachers.

"It's very important for them to realize the differences in different parts of the world and that they can be friends worldwide."

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