

Celebration of cultures

An influx of Filipino families into the Tongala Primary School community made last month's Education Week theme especially relevant to staff, students, and families.

The theme for Education Week, held from May 19 to 23, was *A Celebration of Cultures*.

Tongala Primary now has six families from the Philippines who have arrived at the school in the past two years.

This reflects a rise in international workers bringing their families to Australia through HW Greenham and Sons' commitment to the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) program.

Principal Rob Hogan said it was fortuitous that this year's Education Week theme recognised something so close to the hearts of the school community.

"The Filipino families that have become part of the school community have given as much as they've received since arriving in Tongala," Mr Hogan said. "It hasn't been easy for them, coming into a school which doesn't communicate in their native language, but they are all working hard – and are a pleasure to have."

Prep student Maverick Rosete, his sister Maxene, Grade 6 student Ezekiel, along with Baste, Axel, Xhander, and Edward are among the Filipino students now enrolled.

"The kids are lucky to have someone like Ezekiel looking



Tongala Primary School Grade six student Ezekiel (back, centre) with Axel, Baste, , Maxene, Maverick and Edward.

out for them. He's like the big brother of the group," Mr Hogan said.

Noah and Leilani Virivirilau's family, from Fiji, were also included in the Celebration of Cultures activities.

Parents of these students work at HW Greenham and on local dairy farms. They're not the only international families at the school.

"We also have children from two New Zealand families – Skylar, Ariyah and Amelia – whose families are in the dairy industry," he said.

Mr Hogan added that a student born in India will soon be starting, with their mother working across the road at Respect aged care. The PALM program includes nine Pacific nations and extends beyond the workplace, fostering community and sporting connections, along with school engagement.

As part of Education Week, each class was assigned a country to study.

Students prepared food,

explored traditions, raised flags, discussed geographical features, and shared stories about notable people from each nation.

On the final day, students took a "trip around the world" by visiting each other's classrooms.

Australian culture wasn't forgotten. A whole-school ceremony took place in the Indigenous Garden, with the school's Koori Education Support Officer, Simone Ronnan, joined by her father, Uncle Rick Ronnan, for a special Welcome to Country.

Students are also learning Auslan as part of their language studies, embracing diverse forms of communication.

Mr Hogan said the school's international community could continue to grow, with more businesses exploring workforce options. A tomato farm developer near Tongala is considering joining the PALM program,

which may boost student numbers.

He's also been in contact with teachers at Pyramid Hill, where a similar influx of international families has had a positive impact.

"They've done it well, and by embracing these families, it's enriched the lives of everyone in that community," Mr Hogan said. He also shared that Filipino families were enjoying the open spaces and after-hours access to school facilities.

"It's been a learning curve for the families, and for our staff and students too," he said.

"But they're so grateful for the opportunities they have here compared to the Philippines. It really has been a pleasure to have them on board."

Mr Hogan hopes the lack of housing in Tongala won't hinder the program's future growth, as it remains a challenge for incoming families.