

# Highland Journal

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## Exchange deal brings bilingual success



Anna Gautier of Rennes in Brittany, left, and Naomi Russell of Newtonmore, who have been taking part in an exchange visit.

THERE will be no hesitation when the question "Parlez vous Francais" is asked of Badenoch lass, Naomi Russell.

For at the tender age of 10, French has become a second fluent language for the Newtonmore primary six pupil.

And likewise, her classmate for six months, Anne Gautier, whose home is in Rennes, can now happily chat away in Anglais, albeit with a slight Badenoch accent.

The girls' fluency is thanks to an international exchange scheme which has seen the two of them spending over six months in each others home.

Naomi returned to Newtonmore in the spring after spending six months living with the Gautier family in Rennes under the European

Union backed En Famille International scheme.

While there she attended school in Rennes, being taught totally in French, and living with the Gautier family where there was a total ban on the use of English, apart from during the occasional phone calls home. On her return to the Highlands, Naomi was joined by 11 years-old Anna, who has enjoyed a similar experience, attending the village primary school and becoming part of the Russell family. She returns home later this month. "French tuition at the village school was minimal," said Naomi's father, John. "But she is now very fluent and has promised to teach myself and her mum French during the winter." He added: "Naomi found it very tough in the early weeks but once she got over her homesickness she thoroughly enjoyed her time in France. The two girls have

also become great friends having now spent almost a year with each other."

The En Famille scheme has been operating since 1978, establishing representation in France, Germany, the UK, Ireland, Ontario and California and arranging exchanges involving more than 1,000 children.

However, last year, Naomi was one of only three youngsters involved in Scotland. Mr Russell, who runs a joinery products company and can be contacted on 01540-673648, says: "It is a wonderful opportunity for youngsters to absorb a new culture in the context of a family environment."

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