

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE STUDENT ALLIANCE NETWORKING GROUP, NSW

In 2014, under the umbrella of the Alliance of Girls' Schools Australasia, a Student Alliance was formed with the vision of connecting girls from girls' schools across Sydney to share their thoughts and discuss issues of concern to them. Our aim is to challenge and enrich the knowledge each student has about her world, as well as to empower her in knowing there are others in the community with shared views who are willing to work together and support each other to make a difference in their schools, their communities and the world. We had a fantastic start with over 90 students from thirteen schools participating in the Student Alliance in 2014.

The success of the Student Alliance is reliant on student engagement through actively participating, voicing opinions and setting the direction for each meeting. It was evident as the year progressed that the group was growing more and more cohesive. A

consistent following of girls attended each term and the bonds of strong friendships were forming between them.

The Alliance liaison staff from each school also played a crucial role in establishing the Student Alliance. They worked hard behind the scenes at their schools to create awareness, build connections and prepare for meetings.

At the end of the year the girls were given the opportunity to provide feedback. The main points raised were that they wanted more time to discuss issues, more speakers and more activities.

With the girls' feedback in mind, our first meeting for 2015 was hosted by Dr Amanda Bell at The Women's College, Sydney University. We had over 115 girls attend from fifteen schools across Sydney listening to eight inspiring young women talk about their social justice work. Five of the girls were past students from participating Alliance schools. Amelia McCarthy (PLC) spoke about starting her own business while studying, Hannah Cheese (Brigidine St Ives) asked girls to "give to others", Sarah Cohn (Ascham) spoke about the need to "be passionate", Kate Durnell (Catherine McAuley) argued that we should "fight for the equality of women in the world", Casey Thomas (Loreto Normanhurst) conveyed the message that "doing something small can make a huge difference". Three women representing the Women's College gave the girls the message that social



(LEFT) STUDENT ALLIANCE MEETING AT ROSEVILLE COLLEGE DISCUSSED THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY

justice does not have to be raising money, it can be raising awareness through other means, stepping outside your comfort zone and volunteering for organisations.

The Student Alliance has a wonderful line-up of speakers and events planned for 2015 and we encourage Alliance schools to send their students and join this empowering group of young women.

**GEMMA MCDERMOTT, STUDENT ALLIANCE CO-ORDINATOR AND DEAN OF PASTORAL CARE, LORETO NORMANHURST**