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School smartens students

New focus on respect

By Roderick Shaw

RESPECT and tolerance are easy words to use, but Quakers Hill High School is determined for its students and teachers to really live by them.

"We came up with the idea that we're a SMART school," teacher Janna Xerri said.

"SMART for safe, motivated, academic, respectful and tolerant.

"It's to create a positive school culture where everything has to be positively stated."

Her colleague Melissa Lachevre said SMART also encouraged a sense of "school ownership" among the students.

"We've had kids create an animation and document it," Ms Lachevre said.

Relieving principal Mitchell Struyve said the idea grew from discussions within the school about possible improvements.

"The first step was [looking at] what we want our students to be, then where we want our school to be," Mr Struyve said.

Five year 10 students spoke about what SMART meant to them.

Ash Dixon said SMART gave students a chance to correct their mistakes.

"There used to be a list of 'don't-do' things," he said. "But with SMART, [we're told] it's not safe."

Yasmin Khodeir said SMART provided students with more consistency, and that students had struggled with conflicting versions of what was allowed at the school.

Mr Struyve said consistency had been a problem at the school.

Respectful: Back row (from left) Quakers Hill High School year 10 students Samantha Ferdous, Yasmin Khodeir and Matt Metzka with relieving principal Mitchell Struyve and teachers Melissa Lachevre and Janna Xerri. Front: Ash Dixon (left) and Alex Brozzesi.
Picture: Gene Ramirez

"A criticism was that teachers were inconsistent," he said.

Student Samantha Ferdous said: "Teachers send us a message that shows they want us to have a particular behaviour."

Matt Metzka said the school's rules were now easier to understand and there was greater respect in exchanges between teachers and students.

"Before SMART, there was more 'don't go there'," he said.

Alex Brozzesi said it was sometimes difficult to remember what was not allowed.

"But now if I want to do something, I ask, is it smart?" he said.