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 to make its students and teachers 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 Lachieve said SMART also encouraged a sense of “school ownership” among the students.

“We’ve had kids create an animation and document it,” Ms. Lachieve said.

Relocating 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 Khodaei 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.

“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 more easier to understand and there was greater emphasis on exchanges between teachers and students.

“Before SMART, there was more diversity in what was allowed,” he said.

“You’d say, ‘It’s SMART!’”

“That was a way of saying, ‘It’s SMART!’”

“Now I want to do something, I ask, is it SMART?” he said.