

Reading students toe the line

Finding a way into fluent reading can be difficult for people of all ages, but a programme introduced by Orewa College last year is making inroads for some students.

The programme, called Toe to Toe, is based on phonics.

Deputy Principal Anna Kenny says phonics has not always been popular in NZ, but Toe by Toe is a user-friendly programme that she has seen improve reading skills, first hand.

Mrs Kenny says she was thrilled when she trialled the programme with a Year 12 boy in 2009 and saw astounding results.

“The impact on his confidence and ability to decode letters and recognise sounds of letters was vastly improved,” Mrs Kenny says. “When he read for his mother, after doing the programme, she cried. This gave us the evidence we needed to take the trial further.”

Mrs Kenny says that despite the excellent work done by primary schools, a small number of students still come to the College in Year 7 with basic reading not in hand and some older students also struggle with reading.

Issues faced by students include not seeing print correctly or finding decoding words difficult. They may have little experience of reading at home.

A ‘reading mileage programme’ in Years 7 and 8 picks up students with these difficulties and within that group teachers identify some that would benefit from Toe by Toe.

Mrs Kenny says the biggest hurdle to running Toe by Toe successfully is that it is a one-on-one programme, where coaches work with individual students to complete a workbook.

In the past, senior students and also members of the public, including residents of retirement villages, have stepped in to help as coaches, which has been much appreciated.

The coach’s role is clearly defined and not difficult to do, but people who take it on need to be able to commit to 15 minutes with the student, four times per week.

If you would like to help, contact Anna Kenny at Orewa College for more information, phone 427 3833 or email a.kenny@oc.school.nz

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