



Local kids find their legs, and take a walk to school

By KATE BLEASDALE

Thousands of young feet beat the streets last week as part of a nationwide campaign to get kids out of cars and walking to school.

Students at Papakowhai School were just some of many who took to the pavement last week for Feet First Walk to School Week.

An annual event held by Land Transport NZ, the aim was to boost the number of children walking to and from school.

With the percentage of students being dropped off at school and picked up in the afternoons increasing over the years, it is an initiative to bring those numbers back down.

Papakowhai School principal Kevin Win says while it's impossible to get every student walking to school, having a majority walking would be beneficial.

"Like all other schools there really is that problem with congestion at the school gate so it's not always safe."

He says their cul-de-sac location means it's harder for cars to pass by the school easily or turn around after dropping their kids off.

Last Wednesday was the official Walk to School Day, held around the country. As Papakowhai School students arrived at the gate they were given stickers and spot prizes.

Groups walked to the school from various starting points with parents and teachers, and carried balloons to mark the event.

Student Kate Foxall, 10, said walking to school was a good idea because it's exercise.

"If you're using cars you're putting holes in the ozone layer. You can

talk to your friends on the way."

Fellow student Tessa Gardner, 10, said it was a good way to "get fit and healthy to keep your body moving".

Encouraging kids to make their own way to school is something Papakowhai School has promoted for a couple of years now, says Mr Win.

In 2006 a group of parents started walking school buses, which are still going strong.

Recently when the number of students coming to school on foot was surveyed, Mr Win says it was about 45 percent.

"That's better than in the past."

Last Wednesday he observed there were fewer cars dropping students off and parents were keen to participate in the groups walking to school.

Part of the Feet First

Walk to School Week initiative is to encourage students to keep walking to school at least one day a week for the rest of the term.

Greater Wellington chairperson Fran Wilde says she hopes the programme will encourage more schools in the region to promote alternative means for children to get to and from school other than in a car.

"Greater Wellington staff are keen to help schools set up travel plans which may include walking school buses, cycling, carpooling and establishing safe drop-off zones."

Other local schools taking part in the programme are: Corinna, Maraeroa, Ngati Toa, Porirua East, Rangikura and St Pius X.



Getting to school the environmentally-friendly and healthy way: Papakowhai students (from left) Tessa Gardner, 10, Georgia Comeskey, 9, and Kate Foxall, 10, all participated in Walk to School Day last Wednesday.