

Warwick High in Australian first in vision testing

Gerard Walsh | 24th Nov 2016 5:00 AM



EYE TEST: Optometry student Emily Zhang, Warwick optometrist Tom Roger, WSHS school-based youth health nurse Denise Dixon, student Ryan Boal and Essilor Vision Foundation CEO Greg Johnson.

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WARWICK State High School is the first rural school in Australia to have the vision of students tested by the Essilor Vision Foundation.

Greg Johnson retired last year after working for the Optometrists Association in Brisbane for 12 years. He and Marika MacKenzie, who also worked for the association, were approached to launch a program in Australia and New Zealand this year to identify students with vision difficulties.

They started in Toowoomba and have travelled interstate to test the eyesight of children in the capital cities but the Warwick trip was the first to a rural area.

"The foundation has operated around the world for more than a decade, particularly in India and Southeast Asia," Mr Johnson said.

"It is funded by donations from the public and corporations.

"We started in January and have found between 30 and 50 per cent of students we test need a comprehensive examination

by an optometrist. A third of these students need spectacles."

The cost of the trip to an optometrist is covered by Medicare and the foundation covers the cost of spectacles if required.

Warwick State High School school-based youth health nurse Denise Dixon said they were testing 100 students yesterday, mainly in Years 7 and 8.

"Children took home forms and brought them back if their parents wanted them tested and our teachers recognised some students they felt needed glasses," she said.

"I found out about the work of the foundation from the school-based youth health nurse at Harristown State High School in Toowoomba.

"It was a great opportunity for our school to invite the foundation to Warwick."

The percentage of students at Warwick High recommended for a visit to an optometrist was 40 per cent.

Six students from the QIT School of Optometry and Vision Science in Brisbane helped with the testing.



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Two optometrist also volunteered their time, Warwick-based Tom Roger and Huy Ho from Inala in Brisbane who was involved with five or six school testing days in his home area before heading to Warwick High to help out yesterday.

Mr Johnson said while the work of the foundation was open to all, he was especially keen to test students from schools in low socio-economic areas.

"It is up to schools to identify themselves," he said.

"We have come across students with serious ocular issues who have been referred to an optometrist."

While the foundation team was in Warwick yesterday, they will soon head to Victoria to test 100 students. They have been to Sydney and Adelaide and tested up to 300 students a day.

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