Mentors make life easier for Penrith students

By Jade Wittmann
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Helping hands: Penrith High School peer support mentors Amber Walker, Cayla Nicholson, Madi Gellini and Jarrod Ruchalski. Their mentees still approach them in the playground to talk, though the official program has ended. Picture: Gary Warrick

A peer support program has added value at Penrith High School, where it is not uncommon for year 7 students to arrive without knowing another person in their grade.

Peer support co-ordinator Rick Lopez said this was because the selective school enrolled students from as far as Blackheath, the Hawkesbury and Parramatta.

"A school which was not selective would have a few main feeder schools, so the kids who come into that school already know each other," he said.

"Some schools have a few more than others come here, but ... about six or seven is a high number."
“Usually they’re pretty dispersed.”

About 40 year 10 students were selected to mentor the new students in term one.

Three mentors were allocated to groups of up to 10 students based on where they live, so they could help with public transport links as well as in-school information including orientation, study skills and stress management.

Mentor Madi Gellini said her own experience of peer support in year 7 was an example of how to be an effective mentor.

“We weren’t going in blind,” she said.

“It’s less scary going to high school when you have a helping-hand.”

Fellow mentor Jarrod Ruchalski said it was a challenge to get students in his group to talk, but they soon overcame any shyness.

“We had the quietest group ever, but once they got to know each other more they were comfortable,” he said.

“Age-wise a lot of students are more comfortable talking to other students than teachers.”