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SCHOOLS RUSH TO JOIN LAW WEEK SLEUTH CHALLENGE

What began as a low key competition to get Lake Macquarie school children interested in the law has grown into one of the most popular events on the National Law Week calendar, involving 13 schools in Australia.

“The Clued-Up Kids competition puts gifted year 5 and 6 students in charge of solving a fictional crime mystery, with the children drip fed clues over a three week period,” said competition creator and Belmont Court Deputy Registrar Catherine Piper.

“The competition, now in its fourth year, has expanded mainly through word of mouth within school networks.”

This year’s case involves three boys who stole their maths teacher’s car and crashed it into a telegraph pole. The student sleuths are investigating which of the boys was driving the vehicle.

“The competition is based on the premise that children find it easier to learn when they are having fun and the experience is interactive,” said Mrs Piper.

“The students are given a police statement of facts, witness statements and forensic evidence and are encouraged to ask questions about the incident.”

Mrs Piper said the exercise teaches students about the law and encourages teamwork and lateral thinking.

Due to the popularity of Clued-Up Kids, the competition has been split in two: schools in the Lake Macquarie district are competing in a local challenge, while schools from Sydney, the Mid North Coast and Western Australia are facing off in a correspondence challenge.

Teams from Lake Macquarie schools will present their findings at Belmont Courthouse on May 17. The schools in the correspondence challenge will send their entries by email or by post.

“The entries will be judged by expert panels that will include a retired magistrate, a police officer and representatives of the Department of Attorney General and Justice,” said Mrs Piper.

“The students are encouraged to be creative in their presentation and in the past we have seen role plays, re-enactments, rap songs and even a mock current affairs program,” said Mrs Piper.

The participating schools will also submit an artwork based on this year’s Law Week theme: Law and Justice in Your Community.

Members of the winning teams will receive a book and a certificate. Competing in this year's challenge are students from Lake Macquarie, Floraville, Wallsend, Jewells, Hillsborough, Valentine, Bexley, Smithfield, Dural, Nowra, Port Macquarie, Hornsby and Albany in Western Australia.

Clued-Up Kids is part of Law Week, an annual event aimed at increasing awareness of the law and improving access to legal services within the community.

Other events in New South Wales during Law Week include open days at courthouses and seminars on drink driving, family law, domestic violence, mental illness and how the law affects senior citizens.

The incoming Attorney General, Greg Smith said he was looking forward to taking part in Law Week activities.

"Law week promotes the rule of law and what lawyers do to serve the needs of the community," Mr Smith said.

For further information about Law Week and what is happening in your area, visit: www.lawweek.com.au.