

# Blind can swim

By CASEY NEILL

BLIND or vision impaired students have dived into free, specialised swimming lessons in Dandenong.

North Lodge Swimming Academy with support from the Rotary Club of Dandenong South East will hold weekly classes for students from Berwick school Insight Education Centre for the Blind and Vision Impaired.

Pool head coach and managing director Leanne Byron said the swimmers at an introductory session on Saturday 29 August were "so inspirational and extremely responsive".

"They loved the smell of the pool, the feel of the water and the sounds of happy people," she said.

One girl said the pool reminded her of a pool in Italy.

"And she thought the mini pool filter sounded like a piano," Ms Byron said.

"The squeals of delight and the splashing and swimming around in the pool made it all worthwhile.

"How exciting for these children to have the opportunity to enjoy the water and its relaxing qualities."

Ms Byron said the children had other challenges in addition to their vision problems, including autism, fragile X syndrome and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

"These children gave us such joy - they are caring little souls, full of life, inquisitive, at times cheeky and extremely courageous," she said.

"Our introductory day was a great success.

"We are all looking forward to continuing our work with these children.

"Exploration in the water is so important for children learning to swim - if it's not fun they're not always willing to give new things a try."

Insight principal Timothy Hemphill said there was an atmosphere of "celebration and excitement" during the class.

"Parents and helpers delighted in the sheer joy and fun the students were having in the pool," he said.

Ben, Josiah, Noah and Christian donned new



Swimmers do the hokey pokey splash around. 143720



Ben floats on by. 143720



Noah takes a dip. 143720



Josiah learns to use a kickboard. 143720



Ben makes a splash. 143720

caps and goggles and teamed up with their personal instructors for individualised lessons.

"Ben was our navy seal," Mr Hemphill said.

"He was diving into the deep end for submerged rings and celebrated every catch he made with his mum nearby, as he burst through the water again and again holding his prize above his head."

He said Noah had a grin from ear to ear as his instructor took him on swimming activities up and down the pool.

"Josiah got stuck straight into his lessons and was soon doing breathing exercises and practising his swimming strokes with a kickboard," Mr Hemphill said.

"Christian managed to scope out every inch of the pool, eager to know every angle and architectural feature of the pool itself - the diving blocks were particularly fascinating for him."

Dandenong South East Rotarians cooked up a sausage sizzle after the lesson that lured the kids out of the pool.

"When the lessons finished and time in the

pool came to an end, none of the children wanted to get out," Mr Hemphill said.

"They had all developed quite an appetite, managing to wolf down more than their fair share of sausages in bread with copious amounts of tomato sauce."

He welcomed inquiries regarding participation in the program.

Insight Education Centre for the Blind and Vision Impaired is at 120 Enterprise Avenue, Berwick, and can be contacted on 9707 1585.

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