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Virtual Adventure in healthy living for Te Hapara School kids

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Young and healthy: Te Hapara School is taking part in the Zespri Young and Healthy Virtual Adventure programme. With Young and Healthy team member Libby Twiss are students (from left) Tia Cooper, Camryn Smith, Jahzahriah Henare, AJ Joseph and Jarge Stafford. Picture by Rebecca Grunwell

Te Hapara School students have embarked on a journey of health and fitness that is taking them around the world.

The students are doing the Zespri Young and Healthy Virtual Adventure, which started nationwide on November 1 and runs to November 30.

Virtual Adventure is a programme aimed “at inspiring, motivating and encouraging Kiwi kids and their whānau to develop healthy habits for a lifetime of good physical and mental wellbeing”.

The Zespri team visited the school last week and gave away sports shoes and kiwifruit.

Students have also taken part in fitness drills run by the Young and Healthy team.

Programme founder Kim Harvey said the programme gave students the chance to virtually visit countries around the world, sometimes with a sports celebrity.

“It’s a website so each class acts as a team,” Ms Harvey said.

“Students make their own unique avatars. Each day they track their steps with a pedometer watch and record eating habits and sleep on the website at the end of every school day.

“This way children spend less time on devices and enjoy their leisure time outside. Daily tasks of this sort have a really big impact on well-being.

“Points they earn gets them around a virtual course . . . they go to places like Greece and Italy.

“At the moment they are doing a New Zealand League. Along the way they meet sporting heroes and ambassadors Ardie Savea, Amelianne Ekenasio, Kane Williamson and Samantha Charlton,” Ms Harvey said.

“We have sports stars who have had a really big impact on the kids. Some of them come with me to visits in schools to help inspire children.”

Te Hapara teacher Gabe Perano said the programme was motivating the kids to eat healthier.

“The kids are drinking heaps of water to get moving, they put their watches on in the morning and they are forever checking to make sure they are achieving the thousands of steps which they need to do.

“We gave them a bit of blast this morning because we are still on League 1.”

Teacher Meg Parsons said the programme was proving a success.

“Our kids are excited to put their watches on. The first couple of days some students did extra laps around the field to get their steps up.

“Now they are beginning to ask questions about the map of the world.”

The kids were thinking about what they were eating and their sleep habits, she said.

“We are beginning to have discussions with kids about why water is good for them and the importance of eating vegetables and fruits.”

Zespri director of external relations Michael Fox said the company had a focus on helping the community thrive.

“The Zespri Young and Healthy Virtual Adventure challenge is a really nice fit.

“It encourages young people to eat well and exercise which will help them grow into healthy individuals.

“It's also interesting because they are not only learning it for themselves but they are helping their teachers learn about it, too.”