

# Schools rise on back of passion and support

Nicole Prezel

The aim may be to educate students who make a difference in the world, but teachers who are always available to answer questions and analyse VCE exam data to deliver the best results have led Lowther Hall Anglican Grammar to higher academic scores.

The P-12 school of 900 students in Essendon has shown gradual improvement in its VCE results over the past 10 years. Its median study score has hardly shifted from 35, while the percentage of students with a study score 40 or above has surged to 26.3 – arise from 17.5 per cent in 2013.

It's why *The Age* has named the girls' school its 2023 Schools that Excel winner for non-government schools in Melbourne's west. The annual series celebrates schools that achieve outstanding advancement in their VCE results.

The *Age* has gathered VCE results data going back 10 years for every secondary school in the state and turned it into an easy-to-use dashboard to show how each one fared over the past decade, what its graduates do after finishing, and more.

Lowther Hall Anglican Grammar principal Elisabeth Rhodes credits a few initiatives for the school's success, including a tailored program that covers the science of learning, how to take notes, discovering academic passions and pinpointing any areas where students need extra support.

Teachers and co-ordinators also examine VCE exam papers in detail, finding questions the students struggled with to ensure there is enough early focus on those issues.

Year 12 student Elleni Habibis says teachers connect with students on a personal level. "[My teacher] will reply back to our emails, they are all ready to offer their undivided attention."

Habibis says students bond regardless of ages or year levels, which sets them up for support in later years.



Lowther Hall Anglican Grammar students (from left) Isabella White, Niyati Eranki, Madeline Shore, Elleni Habibis, Lucy Simonetta and Shayana Perera, and (below) Victoria University Secondary College assistant principal James Dowle chats with some year 12 students Photos: Justin McManus, Joe Armao



Rhodes says the school has a strong focus on professional learning programs for teachers, with weekly meetings to assess student data. "The heads of schools are educational experts that are hands-on... it's one of the things we've worked hard [on] over the last 10 years," she says.

The standout government school and Schools That Excel winner in Melbourne's west is Victoria University Secondary College, which has been so successful in its approach that other schools are coming to observe how they get it right.

In the past 10 years, its median

study score has gone from 25 to 28, and the percentage of students getting a study score of 40 or above has increased from 0.2 in 2013 to 5.7 in 2023.

Assistant principal James Dowle attributes their success to a suite of approaches, including a consistent lesson structure weighted in

educational research. "No matter if it's English, maths, science or food class, the way the lesson is delivered is very predictable with kids," he says.

Dowle says each class begins with outlining what students are expected to learn and how they will measure their success. Classes end with a reflection on what students have learnt and whether they felt it was successful. Teachers also collect data on lessons, analyse it and feed that back into the class.

"We aren't a secondary school

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where kids are sitting in rows," he says. "We have high expectations of our kids, both in the academic sense and behavioural sense. We have a very consistent behaviour support program. Expected behaviours are very clear."

Dowle says the school has strived to create a culture that supports effective learning. "We've worked very hard to ensure that as a staff we are all on the one page and we are all working hard to ensure the best results," he says.

Year 12 student Kyle Marshall, who travels from Melton to attend the school, says he achieved a study score of 40 in one of his subjects thanks to his teacher putting all learning materials online, so he could go at his own pace.

"All the teachers have a good understanding of all the students in the class, where they are at. They can help them troubleshoot and make sure they can get up to speed with everything," he says.