

Schools that Excel western winners: Lowther Hall Anglican Grammar and Victoria University Secondary College



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Celebrating Victorian schools that improve their VCE performance over 10 years. [See all 7 stories.](#)

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 - a rise from 17.5 in 2013.



Lowther Hall Anglican Grammar School principal Elisabeth Rhodes (centre) and deputy principal Tracy Healy (right) with students. JUSTIN MCMANUS

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 with 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.

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.

Students from Lowther Hall Anglican Grammar School, which has won The Age’s Schools That Excel award for non-government schools in Melbourne’s west. JUSTIN MCMANUS

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 Dowie 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.

Dowie 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.

He says teachers use collaborative strategies - including sitting in groups and ensuring students are engaging with each other about what they are learning - to prevent some students going unnoticed.

“We aren’t a secondary school 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.”

Dowie says the school has strived to create a culture that supports effective learning.

Year 12 captains Rebecca Tat and Kyle Marshall with Victoria University Secondary College assistant principal James Dowie. JOE ARMAO

“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.

Students are taught to use the [Cornell note-taking system](#), with a key focus on organisation, goal setting and agency.

Weekly collaborative study groups also help students go over English or talk through career guidance.

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.”

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