

Top marks for keeping it real

By FARRAH TOMAZIN

FAWKNER Secondary College principal Gus Napoli knows that when it comes to education, every school is different. So part of the trick is to play to your strengths, and always to do the best you can with what you've got.

As a relatively small secondary school underpinned by pockets of disadvantage in Melbourne's working class northern suburbs, Fawkner Secondary has its challenges.

Yet despite its circumstances, the school is one of this year's success stories — a government secondary college that has punched above its weight and has managed to get all of last year's VCE graduates into further education, training or work.

Figures from this year's annual On Track data show that of the 22 students who completed their VCE at Fawkner Secondary College last year, a quarter are now



Aaisha: "Changing the world."

enrolled in university and a quarter are in TAFE. The rest are doing an apprenticeship or traineeship, or have managed to find employment, despite the tough economic times.

None have fallen out of the system altogether, which Mr Napoli says is the result of the diverse paths his school offers. The emphasis, he says, is not just on academia: in addition to the VCE, students are encouraged to work towards its trade-based alternative, the Victorian Certificate of Applied

Learning, or to take vocational education and training streams to work towards an apprenticeship or traineeship.

"We get quite a variety of students, so for us to be putting all our energies into one area such as VCE is just not realistic," he says. "If we did that, we'd get a lot of kids who'd become disengaged and ultimately drop out. So our goal is to provide as many positive pathways as possible."

Aaisha Elmasri is one of last year's graduates. The 18-year-old is now doing a bachelor of social science and psychology at RMIT University.

She is glad her VCE teachers focused on more than just academic scores and university entry. "They don't focus too much on the numbers (university entry scores) but placed a lot of attention towards creating adults that can think outside of the box; adults who want to change the world. It was more about building character."



Pomp and celery: The Queen has given the royal seal of approval patch at Buckingham Palace that will save threatened seeds.
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EDUCATION

Fewer students do VCE and get a job

No improvement in graduate transition rates

By **FARRAH TOMAZIN**
 EDUCATION EDITOR

MORE than one in four VCE graduates from the class of 2008 are not at university, TAFE or training, with figures showing transition rates from Victorian high schools have barely improved in recent years.

State Government data to be released today shows the proportion of year-12 graduates who undertake further education or training has remained unchanged over the past two years, and is markedly lower than 2005 levels, despite a concerted effort to improve paths for people who complete school.

But in a sign that the gaps in education might be narrowing, more students from poorer families have enrolled in university this year, and many schools have been successful despite having a high proportion of disadvantaged students.

The latest On Track study, an annual survey following the destinations of high school graduates, shows that of the government school students going on to university, one-third are from the poorest families in Victoria, compared with 27 per cent last year.

"There's certainly been a big emphasis in reducing educational inequality in Victoria, and the data seems to be moving in the right direction," said Dr Phil McKenzie, from the Australian Council for Educational Research, which conducted the study on behalf of the Government.

TOP UNI ENROLMENTS

School*	%
Presbyterian Ladies College, Burwood	92
Isik College, Upfield	89
Fintona Girls School, Balwyn	89
Isik College, Keysborough	88
Camberwell Anglican Girls Grammar, Camberwell	88
Kilvington Baptist Girls Grammar, Ormond	88
Melbourne High School, South Yarra	88

*SCHOOLS WITH HIGHEST PROPORTION OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN UNIVERSITY

The On Track figures come eight months after Premier John Brumby and Education Minister Bronwyn Pike launched a five-year education blueprint for schools designed to tackle underperformance and make schools more accountable for their results.

But while the findings identify strengths and pressure points for the state, they may also prove contentious on a federal level because of the high rate of students who deferred their studies in a bid to qualify for the Commonwealth's Youth Allowance.

According to the data, more than 12 per cent of last year's Victorian graduates postponed their studies this year, with regional students deferring at more than double the rate of city students. But changes

announced by the Federal Government last month will tighten the workplace criteria for Youth Allowance, making it harder for many of these students to obtain the benefit.

The study also shows:

- The proportion of students enrolling in university has increased slightly, from 43.9 per cent last year to 45.6 per cent this year, while almost 30 per cent of all VCE graduates are not engaged in any form of education or training.

- Private schools continue to get more students into university than do public schools (55 per cent compared with 37 per cent), but public schools tend to have more young people enter TAFE than do private schools (28 per cent compared with 15 per cent).

- The proportion of students who entered TAFE has remained at 18 per cent across the state, while the number of students who started an apprenticeship or traineeship has dropped from 9.8 per cent to 8 per cent.

The study also found that as the economic downturn took hold, the number of students who secured a job had fallen slightly, from 14.4 per cent in 2008 to 12.4 per cent this year.

Education parliamentary secretary Steve Herbert said the survey showed the Government was "delivering real results for every student, regardless of social circumstance, or where they live".

More than 36,000 school-leavers took part in the survey.

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