

# Victorians top in school attendance

Emma Koehn

Victorian students achieved the best attendance record in the country, but schools are still struggling to fully bounce back after years of pandemic disruptions.

New student attendance data released by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority yesterday shows that overall student attendance rates have declined over the past decade and the gap is widening between our most and least advantaged schools.

Victoria recorded an overall student attendance rate of 89.3 per cent for 2023, with public schools sitting at 88.6 per cent, Catholic schools at 90.1 per cent and

independent schools at 91.5 per cent. The “attendance rate” is defined as the number of days of school attended by students in years 1 to 10, as a percentage of the total number of possible days that they could have attended.

Victoria’s overall attendance figure was the highest of any state or territory. New South Wales came in second with 89.2 per cent across all school sectors, followed by the ACT with 88.8 per cent.

A Department of Education spokesperson said the numbers were a result of the “exceptional efforts of principals, teachers and school support staff” to focus on student engagement.

The nation’s overall attendance rate improved on last year, hitting

88.6 per cent compared with 86.5 per cent in 2022. But the numbers are yet to recover to pre-COVID-19 levels and are 3.9 per cent lower than in 2014.

In 2019, the years 1 to 10 attendance rate was 91.4 per cent, while in 2014, it was 92.7 per cent.

There are also signs that the attendance gap between the most well-off and most disadvantaged schools is growing.

In 2023, Victorian students from schools in the lowest quarter of socio-educational advantage had an attendance rate of 84.8 per cent, compared with 91.5 per cent for schools in the highest quarter – a gap of 6.7 per cent.

In 2018, the gap was 3.9 per cent. Declines in attendance rates in

2021 and 2022 were largest for students in the lowest quarter of advantage, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority said in a report.

Monash University professor Nicole Rinehart said students from less-advantaged backgrounds often found it harder to access help for issues that could impact school attendance, such as anxiety and neurodevelopmental conditions.

She said families of students with severe anxiety, which could result in school refusal, needed more support after the pandemic. “Through the pandemic, when children were experiencing high levels of anxiety around school, we had 20 Medicare sessions under clinical psychology ... now that

has been reduced to 10 sessions.”

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority said in its report that the while all states reported higher attendance in 2023 than in 2022, there was still a downward trend in rates since 2014 and more work needed to be done to determine the reasons behind this. “Further analysis of reasons for absences is required to determine whether there has been an ongoing impact of COVID on attendance rates,” it said.

A Department of Education spokesperson said it had a range of programs in place to help keep students connected to their learning, including through the Navigator Program and investments in student mental health.

## HIGH-PERFORMING NAPLAN SCHOOLS IN METROPOLITAN MELBOURNE

Schools on the list are displayed here in alphabetical order for each region. The list is not ranked in order of achievement.

### NORTH-WEST

Glenroy Central Primary School	Government
Glenroy West Primary School	Government
Hume Anglican Grammar	Independent
Pascoe Vale Primary School	Government
Strathmore North Primary School	Government

### NORTH-EAST

Doreen Primary School	Government
Mill Park Primary School	Government
Preston West Primary School	Government
Reservoir High School	Government
Viewbank Primary School	Government



Fintona Girls' School principal Rachael Falloon. Photo: Luis Enrique Ascul

### WEST

Braybrook College	Government
Kings Park Primary School	Government
St Albans Secondary College	Government
St Peter Apostle School	Catholic
Taylors Lakes Primary School	Government

### INNER MELBOURNE

Academy of Mary Immaculate	Catholic
Melbourne Indigenous Transition School	Independent
South Melbourne Primary School	Government
South Yarra Primary School	Government
St Catherine's School Toorak	Government

### INNER SOUTH

Bentleigh West Primary School	Government
Christway College	Independent
McKinnon Primary School	Government
Valkstone Primary School	Government

### SOUTH-EAST

Dandenong North Primary School	Government
Lighthouse Christian College Cranbourne	Independent
Wellington Secondary College	Government
Whealers Hill Primary School	Government

### INNER EAST

Beverley Hills Primary School	Government
Doncaster Gardens Primary School	Government
Fintona Girls' School	Independent
Presbyterian Ladies' College	Independent
Serpell Primary School	Government

### OUTER EAST

Ruskin Park Primary School	Government
Templeton Primary School	Government
The Knox School	Independent
Vermont Primary School	Government
Wandin North Primary School	Government



Ruskin Park Primary School principal Andrew Moore with grade 3 students. Photo: Joe Arnao



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# The keys for high-performing NAPLAN schools

Emma Koehn

Ruskin Park Primary principal Andrew Moore says there are two key focuses that help students relax, and excel, when faced with tests like NAPLAN.

“Our emphasis here is on attitude and effort ... when [students] are doing those tests, they are happy to go in and try new things,” he said.

The release of individual schools’ 2023 NAPLAN data yesterday showed the Croydon school’s reading, writing, spelling, grammar and numeracy results were once again classed as either above or well above average compared to students from similar backgrounds.

The school is one of five in Melbourne’s outer east that were iden-

tified by the Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority (ACARA) as achieving consistently strong results in NAPLAN, the annual standardised test given to students around the country.

Moore said that while Ruskin Park Primary was proud of its results and happy to share them with the community, “it’s not something that’s a top priority”.

He emphasised the focus was more on overall academic outcomes at the school, beyond the results of one test.

“I think our community just want our children to be happy – after that, the results tend to flow,” Moore said.

Students sit NAPLAN (National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy) in years 3, 5, 7 and

9, and their results and progress in the standardised test are compared to students across the country.

This year, ACARA analysis has identified a list of schools – up to five from 17 geographical regions across the state – that have continually produced a strong NAPLAN performance.

The list of high performers has been compiled by looking at NAPLAN results relative to a school’s socio-educational advantage from the past three years, to determine schools that continue to achieve high results.

Hoppers Crossing primary school St Peter Apostle was noted as a high-performing school in Melbourne’s west.

Principal Karen Wilson said her school was extremely proud of its

results and students’ growth, but the standardised test was just one part of a broad range of assessment information that St Peter Apostle collected throughout the year.

“As a school, we have many forms of assessment, and our students are used to the collection of data to inform teaching,” she said.

NAPLAN data is used as a diagnostic tool within the school, but there are a number of other ways that progress is assessed.

“Our focus is on keeping that NAPLAN data in perspective,” Wilson said.

Secondary school Academy of Mary Immaculate, located in the heart of Melbourne’s CBD opposite Carlton Gardens, was identified as a strong performer for inner Melbourne.

Deputy principal of learning and teaching Lucy Neil said the school did very little preparation for NAPLAN. She attributed the school’s success to its strong community and engaged students.

“I think the reason that we do well is that we are focused on learning and there’s a good environment for students to learn,” she said.

The school looks at NAPLAN data to evaluate which students may need extensions or extra support, but Neil emphasised the tests were only one measure of student achievement.

“While it’s great that we’ve got great NAPLAN results, we also measure ourselves on the whole student and the whole person. We want to educate the whole student.”