

# Uni chances can depend on choice of school

## Divided by class



**Success story:** Former Donald High students Luke Bouchier (left), Chelsea Hawkes, Katie Shaughnessy, Laura Green, Annalie Gilmore and Nat Clark. Picture: ALEX COPPEL

## Small, but standing tall

BIGGER is not always better when it comes to schools that guide their students to university.

Ranked among the top Victorian schools in the percentage of university applicants offered courses are two of the state's smallest secondary schools.

Donald High School and Boort Secondary College, both in northwest Victoria, rank 23 and 31 respectively from 422 schools covered by the latest measure of excellence.

Donald principal Ron Corrie was delighted with his school's performance, but not surprised.

"We encourage the kids to do their best and have a go," Mr Corrie said.

But what is the secret to continued outstanding academic success?

"It's a combination of factors: the community, the parents, good kids who have an expectation to do well, good role models, excellent

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staff, and co-operation between the local schools," he said.

Cherie Andrews has three children at Peter Lalor Secondary College and two more she plans to send there.

The school has ranked lowest in Victoria by the percentage of university applicants who are offered courses.

The northern suburban school has been criticised for its comparative lack of academic success, but Ms Andrews believes it is doing its best, and improving.

She says the school is suffering as a result of unfair government funding policies.

"If we had the same resources as the private schools, we'd come up to par with them," she said.

### TOP FIVE PERFORMERS

SCHOOL	SUCCESSFUL UNIVERSITY APPLICANTS (AVERAGE %)
MacRobertson Girls' High School	98.7
Melbourne High School	95.3
Presbyterian Ladies' College	95.3
Fintona Girls' School	93.7
Bialik College	93.0

### BOTTOM FIVE PERFORMERS

SCHOOL	SUCCESSFUL UNIVERSITY APPLICANTS (AVERAGE %)
Fawkner Secondary College	15.3
La Trobe Secondary College	13.3
Doveton Secondary College	11.3
Ferntree Gully College	9.7
Peter Lalor Secondary College	8.3

A MASSIVE gulf in opportunity separates students at Victoria's best-performing schools and those at the worst.

Students in the top secondary schools are 11 times more likely to receive a university offer than students from the state's lowest-performing schools.

Research shows that at the best schools, up to 98 per cent of students who apply for a university course receive at least one offer.

In the worst-performing schools, university courses are offered to only 8 per cent of students who apply.

The new data highlights a chasm in university prospects between students at the best schools and those in the worst performing schools.

At Victoria's top 20 schools, at least 86 per cent of students who applied for a university course received at least one offer in the past three years. In the bottom 20 schools, fewer than 22 per cent of university applicants received an offer in that time.

"Choice of school can make a significant difference to a student's chance of receiving a university offer," said education consultant Russell Boyle, who compiled data from the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre statistics.

Opposition education spokesman Victor Perton said students at the top schools would be up to 100 times more likely to be offered an elite university course, such as medicine.

Mr Perton said he believed the data inflated the real performance of poor schools because many students received "low grade" offers.

"Is it even a course that the student wants to get into?" Mr Perton asked.

"These courses in many cases have ENTER scores below what we called 'failed' 20 years ago."

Mr Perton said greater accountability was needed in schools with poor results.

"There is no consequence for failure," he said.

"If students cannot read or do maths they get pro-

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moted year after year with no intervention and then, when they compete against others in VCE, they find their school has let them down."

Mr Boyle said salaries of up to \$110,000 a year should be used to attract the best teachers to difficult schools.

"Many students in struggling schools come from homes where little importance is placed on education," he said.

"They have to tolerate regular interruptions by unruly students. Conscientious students should be given free access to after-school tuition so they may better compete against more privileged peers in private schools."

Free school-holiday coaching courses should also be offered to disadvantaged students, Mr Boyle said.

"Students in our struggling schools are no less intelligent than other students, but they will often not know what's required," he said.

"People from some poor-performing schools say their students don't aspire to university, but many students haven't opened their eyes wide enough," he said.

Mr Boyle's analysis found of the top 50 schools for university offers, 43 were private. Four of the top 50 were government schools, while three were Catholic schools.

The best-performing schools in Victoria were two select-entry government schools, MacRobertson Girls' High and Melbourne High.

The bottom 50 schools are all government schools.

"Less than 29 per cent of applicants in these schools received a university offer," Mr Boyle said.

An Education Department spokesman said schools should not be judged by the number of students who attend university, but by the options they provided for future careers.