

EDUCATION

OUR HIGH ACHIEVERS

COMMUNITY'S PUBLIC PRIDE



Stefanie Valakas (left) and principal Angela Lyris.

Strathfield Girls' principal credits strong community support and committed teachers and students for the public school's glowing results.

By Gabrielle Wenman

As a public school that's only criterion for enrolment is that students live in the area, Strathfield Girls High School continues to celebrate exceptional success in the HSC. It is one of only eight non-selective public schools to feature on the HSC top-100 schools honour roll for 2012.

The school ran 37 courses for Year 12 last year and garnered results significantly above the state average in 34 of them. This places it in the company of institutions that filter students with tough entry exams and extravagant school fees.

The dominance of private schools in the area makes Strathfield Girls' success even more impressive. Principal Angela Lyris admits it is hard to compete with the scholarships private schools can offer high-achieving students.

But she believes her school, which accepts "a range of students of varying abilities," is able to produce comparable results because of its strong community links and committed staff.

"We have great community support that allows us to run a number of additional programs. They help buy the resources the school needs. The P&C are instrumental in helping raise funds for whatever programs and initiatives or any major work needed," she says.

Relieving head teacher for English Garin Down says this connection also helps the school understand what Strathfield families want.

"We're aware of their expectations and aspirations because we have very good communication with them," he says.

Down believes success can also be attributed to students coming from backgrounds where education and achievement is valued.

"You have students who are receptive so, as a teacher, you do more than just relay content," he says. "We have very experienced teachers, who keep up to date. They are able to really push students. What students come to understand is that this is a school where, if you put the effort in, you'll be rewarded."

Student Stefanie Valakas scored an ATAR of 98.95 and says it was due to the support of staff and her fellow students.

"I'm extremely proud to be a product of Strathfield Girls and public education," she says. "It demonstrates that despite any student's background, we all have the same opportunity to achieve whatever goal we set for ourselves."

Valakas says a student's "result is a mirror of the hard work and sacrifice they too have demonstrated throughout the year."

Down believes having to operate on limited funding focuses financial decisions.

"Because you have limited resources you really have to think carefully about where it goes," he says, adding that it is about using initiative and being creative.

No matter what challenges the school faces, for Lyris, the main aim is that every girl who attends the school walks out of their gates knowing she can be a success.

"We all have our different paths, but our goal first and foremost, is to ensure every girl has every success with their learning."



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PLC takes to the cloud

By Joanne Tran

Books may be a thing of the past at Presbyterian Ladies' College (PLC). Just as slate boards made way for pens and paper, most textbooks and set novels are due to be replaced by ebooks.

Year 7 and 8 students at PLC have started a digital textbooks trial with ReadCloud. The school is one of about 100 using the program.

Students can access ebooks through up to six cross-platform devices, including a school laptop, home computer, tablet or smartphone.

PLC principal Dr Paul Burgis says there is a lot of new technology that can support his students' learning and this move is "inevitable".

"Everybody is thinking this is the future," he says. "Part of our role is to do it in a useful manner. We are seeking to make sure we use the tools available to us."

While lighter backpacks will benefit students,

Dr Burgis believes using ebooks will help his school's academic performance.

"According to our head of curriculum, one reason we did so well in the HSC is because students cooperate when they learn," he says.

"With this, students can annotate their work and share it with their peers."

ReadCloud allows both teachers and students to make digital annotations. Users can link videos, sound clips and pictures, as well as text.

This isn't the only technological innovation the school is implementing. Year 1 and 5 students are getting iPads this year.

"Year 1 students can use them as readers," says Dr Burgis. "Year 5 students can, for example, use it in science where they can look at a graphic of the human body and zoom in and out."

But he doesn't want his students to scrap traditional books. "We're still encouraging them to read from a regular book," he says.