

The state's high-achieving NAPLAN schools for 2024 revealed

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December 4, 2024 — 5.00am

When Fairfield West Public School principal Genelle Goldfinch walks around the playground on the first day of term, she asks her students how they spent their holidays. Their responses typically do not include visits to the beach or other Sydney landmarks.

More than 90 per cent of Fairfield West Public students have a language background other than English, while about a third of those enrolled are refugees.



Year 5 students at Fairfield West Public achieved well-above average results when compared with students of a similar socio-educational background. *Credit: James Brickwood*

Until this year, some of her students had never seen the ocean, despite the fact it's only an hour's drive away. "Even the children who were born in Australia have not always been to the beach," she said.

While trips to the coast might seem unrelated to reading and writing skills, Goldfinch said those experiences were critical for developing background knowledge – a core factor in comprehension.

The primary school, where two-thirds of students are in the lowest socio-educational quartile, rolled out a “building background knowledge” program this year. This involves students taking once-a-term excursions to different parts of Sydney, including to beaches, the Art Gallery of NSW and the zoo.

“How can students infer what the sand might feel like if the sun’s been on it all day, when they’ve never even touched the sand or been to the beach?”

Fairfield West Public is among 53 schools across NSW identified by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority this year as high-achieving in their 2024 NAPLAN results.

The selected schools have above-average scores in reading, writing, spelling, grammar and numeracy – across every year group tested – when compared with students of similar socio-educational backgrounds.

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This year’s NAPLAN results will be released on the [MySchool website](#) on Wednesday, along with individual school attendance and enrolment figures.

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National and statewide NAPLAN results, released in August, showed [one in three students in NSW performed below expectations in the literacy and numeracy exams](#).

At Fairfield West, Goldfinch lists myriad factors behind the school's success, including explicit teaching of reading and maths and ensuring teachers constantly evaluate their own performance.

"I say 'if you all agree with me, well, I may as well be in the room by myself'. I encourage rigorous debate and discussion and the teachers and leaders work extremely hard," she said. "That's why we get the results, because of their moral purpose, they're driven to make that difference for the children."

The school, which achieved well-above average scores in all domains tested, provides breakfast five days a week and treats behaviour management as a classroom priority. "The students are comfortable. They want to be here," she said.

"We're not this or that. We are one as Fairfield West public school to do the best. We try and get the kids to move forward. And we're proud of being here."

Teacher knowledge underpins progress

A similar approach of explicit teaching and deepening teachers' knowledge of the syllabus has underpinned John the Baptist Catholic Primary School's NAPLAN clean sweep, according to its principal, with well-above average scores for years 3 and 5.

The Bonnyrigg Heights school improved scores in reading, writing, spelling, grammar and numeracy from 2023.

"It's been three years of intensive improvement," says principal Brendan O'Connor. "We use high-quality formative assessment and have daily review practices, which is a fast-paced 10-minute recap of the previous day's content at the start of each lesson."



Year 5 students at John The Baptist Catholic Primary School in Bonnyrigg Heights on Tuesday. *Credit: Dion Georgopoulos*

“We are assessing students in real time,” explains O’Connor, who said the release of new English syllabuses several years ago sparked a major review of the school’s approach to teaching and learning.

“We have targeted intervention, and no child is left behind,” he says. The more than 40 teachers at the school moderate tests and assessments collectively, so “they know what is happening across the school and are more aligned”.



John The Baptist Catholic Primary School invites parents into the classroom about five times a year. *Credit: Dion Georgopoulos*

All students take drama and public speaking, lessons that are woven into the timetable to support the English syllabus. Parents are invited into the classroom about five times a year to see classroom teaching, but next year a program of “parent learning” will delve deeper into explaining how subjects are taught.

“Every day we are on the phone to parents, we invite them in, talk to them. It is so important parents clearly understand what’s happening in their child’s classroom.”

‘Gold for maths’

A daily 10-minute review before every primary school maths lesson at St Catherine’s School is among the recent changes made to teaching practices at the all-girls private school.

“The daily review has been gold for maths,” said junior school head Elizabeth Worsley. “We started it last year. The students spend that time at the start of the class to make sure they’ve remembered what they’ve learnt in previous lessons.” The mini-revision sessions helps with building fluency in maths, she says.

The high-fee school achieved well above average results for all domains, improving results in spelling in years 3 and 5 significantly. Year 3 maths scores also improved to be well-above average, compared to close-to-average in 2023.



St Catherine's improved results in spelling in years 3 and 5 in 2024. Three years ago, the school embedded an explicit, direct instruction approach. *Credit: Edwina Pickles*

"It's been a systematic approach and calculated in the way we've changed our approach over the last three years," said Worsley. "All the teachers are doing things similarly, which creates consistency."

Years 5 and 6 have an hour-long maths lesson as the first period of each day, while kindergarten to year 4 students have English lessons at start the day, says Worsley. "This is when they are most alert and excited to learn."

The school has embedded an explicit and direct instruction approach across all years, while also introducing InitialLit, an evidence-based literacy program, and Spelling Mastery, a six-stage structured program to teach spelling skills.

For maths, Worsley said the school concentrates on identifying where students were more likely to slip behind in the move from year 6 to year 7. "When you start high school, learning maths can be like learning a new language," she said. "Once students gain confidence, that breeds success."

Nicole Jones, the school's year 6 co-ordinator, pinpoints decimals, fractions and percentages as the maths topics the school has zeroed in on to help ease the transition into high school.

“Getting the students into a routine with homework has also been helpful, it’s only about 10 to 15 minutes each day for maths, but it always recaps what they’ve learnt in class,” said Jones.