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Metro

BEST SCHOOLS in Auckland (and the worst!)

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THE OBITUARY



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Academic results, the life and culture of the place, the ability to hold on to students – how do you measure the quality of a school, and how do you work out how well it will serve your child? We've been talking to principals, teachers and students, reading the reports and cranking the numbers.

BEST SCHOOLS IN AUCKLAND

STUDENTS FROM SOME OF THE BEST HIGH SCHOOLS IN AUCKLAND
Back row (from left): Maria Alimoti, Southern Cross Chaplin, Darius Apulu, De La Salle College, Virginia Douglas, Diocesan School for Girls, Madison Line, Paritene College, Magdalena Houli, Waikato High School, Wairua College, Dilworth School, Grace Micaia, Carmel College, Kaitiaki, Eirene Phipps, ACE Senior College, Susannah Waters, Auckland Girls Grammar School, Lily Sheffield, Epurou Girls Grammar School, Sharnita Teburu, St Katerina College, Jack Jaggat, Auckland Grammar School.
Second row (from left): Sean Gasnow, King's College, Hannah Buterworth, St Mary's College, Cayula Tompkins, McAlley High School, Maheta Eyo, Maxwell College, Taylor Brown, ACE Hannah College, Sohuu Abubala, McRessell Grammar School, Eileen Garcia, Mania College, Scarwell Leight, Gessendrop, Xosy, Jax, Auckland International College, Sophie McIntosh, Western Springs College, Meredith Jernu, St Catherine's College, Victoria Hauser, Annandale College, Kelly Tomlinson, St Dominic's College, Lusha Frank Edwards, Margaret College.

STYL: SIMON WILSON; DATA COLLECTION: CATHERINE MCGREGOR; PHOTOGRAPHS: ADRIAN MALLOCH

Every morning, not so long ago at a school in South Auckland, principal David Hodge and his deputies rostered themselves, two by two, to stand at the gates and greet every student as they arrived. By name. They weren't doing it to guard the school. They were doing it to reinforce a culture of communication and care. And it wasn't just about the kids: "We knew the kids, and we knew their families," says Hodge. "We'd ask after them, 'How's that new puppy?' and 'Is your mum's cold better?'"

So the kids came to school knowing they were part of something big and inclusive, and that the men and women who ran the school — who were important role models for those kids — cared about each one of them.

This in itself did not make it a good school or guarantee good grades for the students. But it did create an environment where teaching and learning would be easier. When the culture of the school is based on its relationship not just with the students but with their whole families, that's a strong platform for achievement.

Hodge has moved on now, swapping those few hundred low-decile students for a few thousand high-decile ones at Rangitoto College, the largest school in New Zealand. He can't know them all by name, and he certainly can't greet them all every morning. So integration with families takes other forms: getting the students involved in some of the enormous wealth of extracurricular options, for example, in which parents can also become engaged.

Catholic schools know all about a commitment to families, although it is not usually the first thing they point to when asked about their success. Their levels of academic achievement are almost universally higher than those in other comparable schools, and they like to tell you the reason is their religion.

Chris Rooney, principal of Liston College, a decile 5 Catholic school in Henderson, says quite fervently his school does well because it is dedicated to making the most of every student's "God-given abilities".

Brian Evans told me it was "the faith" a few years ago, when he was principal of De La Salle College, a decile 1 Catholic school in Mangere East. His students were achieving way above the norm. But a couple of years ago, Evans moved to Kelston Boys High, a state school, where his students are now also recording some startlingly good grades.

Clearly, it's not just the faith. Malaea Evile, a student at Marcellin College, a co-ed decile 3 Catholic school in Royal Oak, told us something revealing: "My mum is ambitious for her children," she said. "The teachers smile when they see her coming with her notebook. She demands excellent effort, homework and achievement. So she records every bit of advice from parent-teacher evenings and repeats it to me and my sister for months."

Parent-teacher evenings as the cornerstone of a family/school/student plan for progress? And how it's monitored? Now there's some revolutionary thinking.

Every parent knows how desperately farcical those parent-teacher evenings can be, when we shuffle dutifully from pillar to post, queuing in the corridors in the glumly remote hope the next five-minute interview might reveal something useful. Wondering if all the families not represented at all on such evenings are making things worse in the school, or are they the only smart ones?

It shouldn't be like that. If a school tells you that's the best they can do, they really don't understand one of the basics of modern education.

So what do Catholic schools have over many other schools? Perhaps it's not so much the faith itself, as the mechanism that faith provides for the schools to integrate into the lives of their families. They share not just their religion but so many of the significant events of their lives — cultural, social, sporting, celebratory, commemorative. The things that give shape to who they are.

For other schools, doing all that in other ways can be much harder. And that raises the first of our big questions. All schools love to talk about their "community", so when you're out there choosing, ask them about that community.

What is it you will belong to? Ask them: How are we — school and family — going to share in the frequently frustrating, occasionally shocking, often entertaining and deeply rewarding (you hope) process of helping your anxious newbie adolescents become fine young adults?

HOW GOOD ARE THE TEACHERS?

What's the biggest influence on success in school? The quality of the teachers. Which means looking for a good school is about looking for a school with good recruitment policies, good professional expectations for its staff and a good record of retention.

But what does good even mean? It hasn't got much to do with personal style. Old-fashioned non-nonsense types are just as likely as down-with-the-kids young thrusters to be good teachers, or bad ones.

It's a handy question to ask a principal, though: what do *they* look for in a teacher? As some American studies have suggested, a key predictor of teacher quality is past performance. If a prospective teacher has a record of academic success and of running something successfully, they'll probably have a valuable aptitude for the job. Wanting to teach and being happy with their lives as teachers are also important, and so is perseverance.

Ask the principal, do they ask their teachers if they are enjoying their work? And if they're not, do they help them find something else to do?

Ask how many inspirational teachers your child will have over



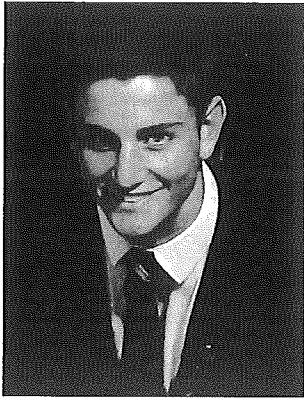
I love the feeling of success and the confidence it gives me. Mentoring Year 11 students on how to aim for excellence in NCEA has enabled me to assist other students to feel confident and motivated and aim for excellence. The school expects that I accept ownership of my learning and I encourage others to do the same.

CAYLAH TONGOTEA, YEAR 12,
MCAULEY HIGH SCHOOL



Our music teacher, Mr Weeks, has been fantastic in encouraging the formation of our band. We performed at the formal Friday assembly and the thrill of appearing in front of 2500 students was a magical moment. Mr Weeks also encouraged us by arranging a professional CD recording. His care has shaped our lives.

LUKE HEATH-EDWARDS, HEAD PREFECT,
MACLEANS COLLEGE



Something that stands out is the annual rugby game against Kings College. The excitement of being part of such a special occasion is contagious. As each year passes, the urge to outdo the chants and support of last year's seniors grows and it is inspiring to see that Grammar boys past and present can come together to celebrate their rich history.

JACK LEGGAT, AUCKLAND GRAMMAR SCHOOL



I vividly remember sitting in a top scholars' assembly that very first week at school (in year 7) and being in absolute awe of their achievement. I was determined to be one. In this — my final year — I was able to stand up the front as a scholar, and see the same spark in the eye of the year 7s, their fire to learn ignited just as mine was. Full circle.

GRACE MASON, PREFECT, CARMEL COLLEGE

five years in the school. Ask what's expected of teachers in their own development. Post-graduate study? Regular upgrades for their teaching skills? Professional activity away from the school? Good schools have programmes of such things for their staff.

What do schools do to keep their best teachers? Private schools can offer whatever incentives their resources allow, but state schools are tied to nationally established pay scales. Some state schools get around this with trust funds that allow teachers to be paid for "extra activities", take "sabbaticals" and the like.

For many teachers, though, the issue isn't just money. It's also a question of opportunity. So how does the school help good teachers to advance?

Often, the best judges of teachers are the students. They know who gets them doing the business. The website ratemyteachers.com provides insights on this, although it's susceptible to peer pressure and not as good as talking to students directly.

CAN THEY EXPLAIN THEMSELVES TO YOU?

Teachers — well, the entire education industry, really — love jargon. They call what they do "pedagogy". They use "formative assessment" if they're good, and rely entirely on "summative assessment" if they're not. They can, if you let them, go on and on about it.

You might not want to hear that stuff, but unfortunately many teachers are not good at using their words to explain themselves in simple language. Ask them to try. See if they can walk you through a typical lesson, tell you why it happens the way it does, and make it sound interesting.

What you're looking for is this. At the start, they will set out in writing the goals for the lesson. Throughout, there will be a two-way engagement: the teacher will give students feedback on an individual basis, and they will give the teacher feedback too. The lesson may well be based on the outcome of a recent test, and if there is to be another test, the results of that will be used to plan the next round of teaching.

In simple terms, this is the widely accepted best method, or pedagogy, of teaching. A "formative" approach emphasises the two-way nature of learning, where teachers must be attuned to student needs and ready to modify what they do, as they go. It also emphasises the diagnostic role of testing.

The alternative, put crudely, is to teach a bunch of stuff, have a test at the end, and then move on to something else.

One of the fundamental reasons most teachers dislike league tables and the prevailing emphasis on pass rates in end-of-year exams is that they can easily push classroom practice towards summative learning. As long as the students know what they need to know on the day of the exam, that's all that matters. Getting an A on a report becomes more valuable than whatever comments the teacher might provide.

Of course, good teachers and good schools will help their students to achieve beyond their own expectations, and end-of-year grades are the ultimate measure of that. So there has to be a

balance. Ask about that. A good teacher should have some pretty interesting things to say about all this.

THE LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

Choosing a school should be about finding a place where your child is likely to be happy, to gain the confidence to take risks and the judgment to act wisely, to push themselves beyond what they might have thought possible... a school, in other words, where they are likely to thrive.

All sorts of things can affect this. At Macleans College in Bucklands Beach, the large roll of 2500 is broken down into smaller house rolls, and much of the organised life of the school — even classes — takes place within the houses. The students' affinity to the school is complemented by a very strong affinity to their own house, all of which are named after famous New Zealanders.

At Rangitoto College in Mairangi Bay, which has an even larger roll of 3000, they don't do that. Instead, they're very proud of the opportunities that belonging to the whole school brings: they have 42 cultural clubs and dozens of sporting code options.

Some schools have vertical form classes, so that at the start of each day everyone is in a room with kids of all different ages. They say it helps build collegial life throughout the school. Other schools don't feel the need for it.

Some schools have frequent formal assemblies. A few have no uniform. With all such things, there's little evidence we know of to link them to quality of outcome. Personal preferences are important, of course, but it's worth remembering they don't have deeper weight.

All schools are strong on cultural activities, although, like sports, they fit well into extra-curricular life and don't need to become classroom subjects. Most also offer a good range of sporting activity, although if your child is an elite competitor there may be just a few schools that will suit, and you will probably know about them anyway.

As for values, all schools say they are strong on self-respect and respect for others, compassion, personal responsibility, setting high goals, friendship and loyalty, the value of traditions, and encouraging students to contribute to the school and the wider society. For the most part, it's true; although it's also true that no school is able to control every emotional meltdown or rush of blood to the head in every teenager under its care.

David Hodge at Rangitoto says parents should look for signs the school knows how to channel "the natural urge to rebel" into something positive. He also stresses the importance of helping students with their resilience and self-reliance.

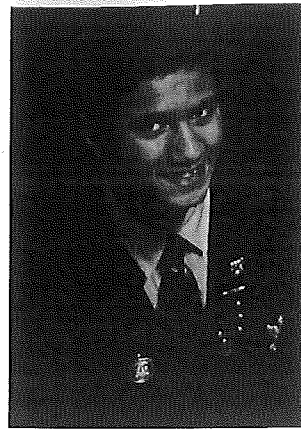
Which raises the question of bullying. It's in every school, or very easily can be, and a surprising number still seem to regard it as a semi-acceptable part of growing up. But if your child does not feel safe at school — or is threatening the safety of others — it's the most important thing you have to deal with.

When you're choosing, ask the school what happens to lonely



I believe that not being required to wear a uniform highlights the uniqueness of each student. It encourages a mutual respect between students and faculty as they trust us to make appropriate and responsible choices about clothing. It does not make us un-unified. Our unity comes from our attitude, which is one of acceptance and encouragement.

SOPHIE McINTOSH, WESTERN SPRINGS COLLEGE



I never thought that I would get the chance to build my very own robot but my dreams became a reality at MRGS. The technology department enabled me to develop my Robotic Glass Cleaner and it has opened up many doors for my future.

SOHAIL ABDULLA, PREFECT,
MT ROSKILL GRAMMAR SCHOOL

kids. How does the school help new students make friends? Who do the students go to for help? When bullying is reported, what happens? The process should be firm and clear.

And here's another question: at the school, is your child likely to become friends with people whose values you admire, and at the same time, with different sorts of people?

One of the magnificent things about the schools of Auckland is that they offer students the most ethnically and culturally mixed experience they may have in their whole lives. And, on the whole, schools of all types are very good at embracing that experience. School is when your kids can learn the confidence and pleasure of living in a genuinely diverse society, and that's going to be one of the most valuable life skills they can have.

THE ACADEMIC OPTIONS

At Auckland Grammar, they don't teach Media Studies. Or Electronics. Or Cooking. The syllabus would be completely recognisable to a student from 100 years ago, and they're very proud of that. Grammar offers a classically rounded education in the belief that it is the best basis for further study and for life.

At Rangitoto, on the other hand, they offer just about every course that's been approved. And they, in turn, are proud of that. Whatever your passion, they like to say, you'll find yourself a home at Rangitoto.

Which one of them is right? How about both, or neither? Rangitoto's approach is followed by most schools, to the extent their roll size and resources allow, in the belief that the more options they provide, the greater the chance they have of keeping students in school.

Grammar's approach works in part because there are many other schools that have not limited their offering in the same way. Both schools get a lot of out-of-zone applications.

Northcote College, with a roll of around 1200, offers a variation on the Rangitoto approach: proud of its historical strength in English, it offers nine different English options to senior students, and at year 13, when English is not compulsory, a very high 70 per cent of the students are enrolled in an English course. Many schools have special strengths like that.

One of the advantages of NCEA is that it is designed for multi-level work. This means students can be accelerated or given catch-up attention, as required, in individual courses and parts of courses. Ask the schools about their policies on this.

Ask about streaming too. Grammar, famously, ranks its students with a number, and teaches them in strictly streamed classes that are "targeted to their potential".

That's a phrase to conjure with. In some schools the students are organised into "achieved", "merit" and "excellence" classes, reflecting the grades available in NCEA. Where that happens, beware: there's a view that students in the achieved stream "are doomed". At least, that's what former Grammar principal John Morris told us three years ago.

His school doesn't do it like that, and his argument is that schools which do may be lowering the expectations of their kids. The Grammar approach is to test regularly and move the students up and down. There's a built-in incentive to succeed.

Is Cambridge better than NCEA, or is International Baccalaureate better than both? It's not easy to get good answers to this — you can ask, but remember: *everyone* is a partisan.

A few factors, to take from what you will:

- All the elite private schools, and a few of the more traditionally focused state schools, have turned their back on NCEA, at least for many of their higher-achieving students.
- Those schools are now evenly split between Cambridge and IB.
- The vast majority of state schools continue to use NCEA, despite the crusading efforts of the Cambridge organisation to attract more of them to its ranks.
- Catholic schools have stuck with NCEA.
- This is largely an Auckland dispute. Very few other schools in New Zealand have forsaken NCEA.

And what about gender achievement? There's a lot of hokey theory around this. Girls, generally, outperform boys at school. But 10 years later, among people in career-focused jobs, boys on the whole do not find it hard to catch up. Even though boys often don't knuckle down and do the work as well as girls in school, it doesn't follow they will miss out later on.

The group that does miss out, though, are those who don't qualify, or barely qualify at all: the least academically able, among whom boys are terribly over-represented.

Data on gender achievement in schools is readily available, and some — like Macleans College — have been successful in doing better with boys than other comparable schools. Ask what they do and why.

HOW TO READ OUR TABLE

There's a big table on page 50. What follows here should be read in conjunction with it.

DECILES

As a rule, the higher a school's decile, the more likely the kids are to do well academically. There are lots of reasons for this, and lots of arguments about it too. But the simple fact is inescapable.

However, it doesn't follow that deciles provide a de facto ranking of schools. If you look at the decile groups in our table, there's quite a range within each one. Students at Otahuhu's decile 1 McAuley College are twice as likely as an average decile 1 school to get UE, and four times as likely as the students at Manurewa's James Cook High. The McAuley pass rate, in fact, is bang on the average for a decile 7 or 8 school.

Similarly, students at St Mary's College in St Mary's Bay, which is decile 7, are three times as likely to get UE as those at Waiuku College down south, although it is also decile 7.

Decile levels will tell you some things about the likely resources in a school, and will give you some clues to the nature of school trips and other “add-ons”. But they don’t have a lot to say about how good the teachers are or how well your child will prosper.

SCHOOL LEAVER QUALIFICATIONS

We’ve stopped reporting pass rates for NCEA. It’s not because we think NCEA is a bad system — on the contrary, we think it’s based on a curriculum that on the whole offers teachers and students a wealth of opportunity.

But things have changed with NCEA: pass rates are rising, there are more options for internal assessment, many schools are changing their focus between achievement standards and unit standards, and NZQA (with the support of most schools) now favours data based on participation rates not roll rates, as we used to report. Basic comparisons have become unreliable.

In particular, at several schools pass rates have risen so sharply it’s pretty obvious that more is going on than simply “better teaching”.

This year we’ve approached academic achievement from another direction. Instead of looking at how well the year 11 students did, say, we’ve examined the leaving qualifications of students. Under “School Leaver Qualifications” (the blue columns in our table), we show the proportion of school leavers who had no qualifications when they left, and the proportions who had qualified at NCEA Level 1, 2 or 3.

We have folded Cambridge schools into this exercise by reporting data for “equivalent” qualifications (for details, see Guide to the Table, page 52). The new headmaster of the Cambridge-aligned Auckland Grammar, Tim O’Connor, has told us we “simply cannot create valid comparisons between two different qualifications”. In fact, our data comes from the ministry, and is based on guidelines they have negotiated and agreed with the New Zealand branch of the Cambridge schools organisation itself. We believe this makes the comparison valid. It’s similar for IB schools.

School leaver data is a very good guide to achievement in schools. Under the normal approach, a school might tell you about its high pass rate for, say, NCEA Level 3, based on participation. But you will have no idea if it happily shed most of the students who might not pass before they got to year 13.

In the four blue columns in our table, good schools have a sequence of numbers that runs from low to high, left to right: very few students leave with nothing; lots get a high qualification. This pattern will be evident for the best schools in all deciles: the decile 1 star, McAuley High School, has the sequence 7, 11, 18, 64; Takapuna Grammar, decile 10, has strikingly similar numbers: 7, 6, 20, 67.

Many of very low decile schools argue that Level 2 is their realistic target for most students. They’re not sending many kids to university, but they do want to set them up to enter the pathways for trade training, which Level 2 allows. This is also the level identified by the government as the basic achievement.

Fifty-two per cent of the kids at Papakura High don’t get there, and it’s the same for 50 per cent at James Cook High.

At the other extreme, private schools get over 90 per cent of their students to Level 2 or beyond, and so do several others. Three schools (Carmel College, King’s College and St Cuthbert’s College) had a 99 per cent pass rate at this level, while the school that punched furthest above its weight (with 93 per cent) was decile 6 St Dominic’s College in Henderson.

A school might tell you about its high pass rate... But you will have no idea if it shed most of the students who might not pass.

And take a look at St Mary’s College, decile 7. They don’t have a rising sequence so much as a set of tiny numbers followed by an explosion: 1, 3, 3, 93! Most impressive.

School leaver data also fits with the Government’s own Better Public Service Targets, which include a specific target for secondary schools: 85 per cent of 18-year-olds having NCEA Level 2 (or its equivalent), or higher, by 2017.

That’s a tough ask: right now it’s the mark achieved by the best-performing decile 8 state schools.

Note that our school leaver data is for 2011. The 2012 school leaver data is not yet available.

UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE

University Entrance is the most universal measure available in our school system, because every student who leaves school is judged either to have reached or not reached this level.

In fact, 70 per cent of school leavers do not go on to university, so UE is not the best overall measure for all schools. But it is an excellent measure of general academic competence, and schools with high achievement rates in UE are clearly encouraging their students to aim high.

UE is not an exam system, but is calculated in relation to passes in NCEA, Cambridge and IB. These levels have been agreed among all the relevant parties, although the Cambridge level has been under review and is now being raised. The UE columns in the table are coloured green.

As with our NCEA data (see above), the first UE column in the table shows UE passes as a proportion of all school leavers — not just of year 13, as many schools may presuppose. We use school leaver figures for the reasons implied above: they provide a better gauge of overall achievement in a school and they can’t easily be manipulated.

The UE school leaver data is for the three years 2009-2011,



I remember feeling so touched when I had desperately emailed a piece of writing to my French teacher the Sunday afternoon before my final exam. He not only replied to my email with detailed corrections at 11pm, but had also prepared a printed, corrected copy for me on the following morning.

YOUNG LU, DUX, AKLD INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE



I love being a member of my boarding house. For each student, our house is our home, creating a family-like bond among the members and fierce rivalry between the houses. In my house, I enjoy mixing with students from Auckland, other regions of New Zealand, the Pacific Islands and beyond.

SEAN GLASGOW, HEAD PREFECT, KING’S COLLEGE

which is the latest available. However, we believe UE is such a valuable measure we have also given the 2012 UE pass rates, expressed as percentages of participating students. These 2012 figures cannot be compared with the 2009-2011 data.

SCHOLARSHIP RESULTS

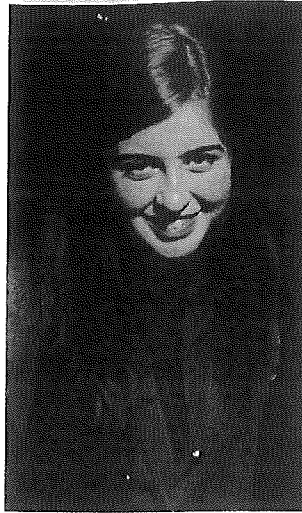
Scholarship is an extra set of NZQA exams usually sat in year 13. It provides a good universal measure of elite academic achievement, although there are a few points to note about that.

The first is that some schools select students for scholarship while others allow anyone to enter. We report Scholarship success as a proportion of the year 13 roll, to show how well the school did across the whole cohort. Tim O'Connor at Grammar has pointed out that some schools have students from year 11 onwards sitting Scholarship, and that's true. But the numbers are small and we do not believe they have much bearing on our data.

Scholarship is a good fit with NCEA, both in the approach to the curriculum and the timing of exams, but can be harder to dovetail with Cambridge and IB. For that reason, some otherwise high-performing schools have fewer students than you might expect sitting it. However, it's notable that many of the top Scholarship schools in our table offer Cambridge or IB. Clearly, it's not too much of a problem for those that want to commit to this exam. (AIC, whose academic year meshes with that of the Northern Hemisphere, doesn't take part in Scholarship.)

Second place in the Scholarship rankings went to the co-educational state school Macleans College. Macleans principal Byron Bentley has told *Metro* more than once that he's aiming for the kind of results people associate with the "elite" schools, and this result shows he's doing pretty well.

Not that Macleans will be getting to first place any time soon.

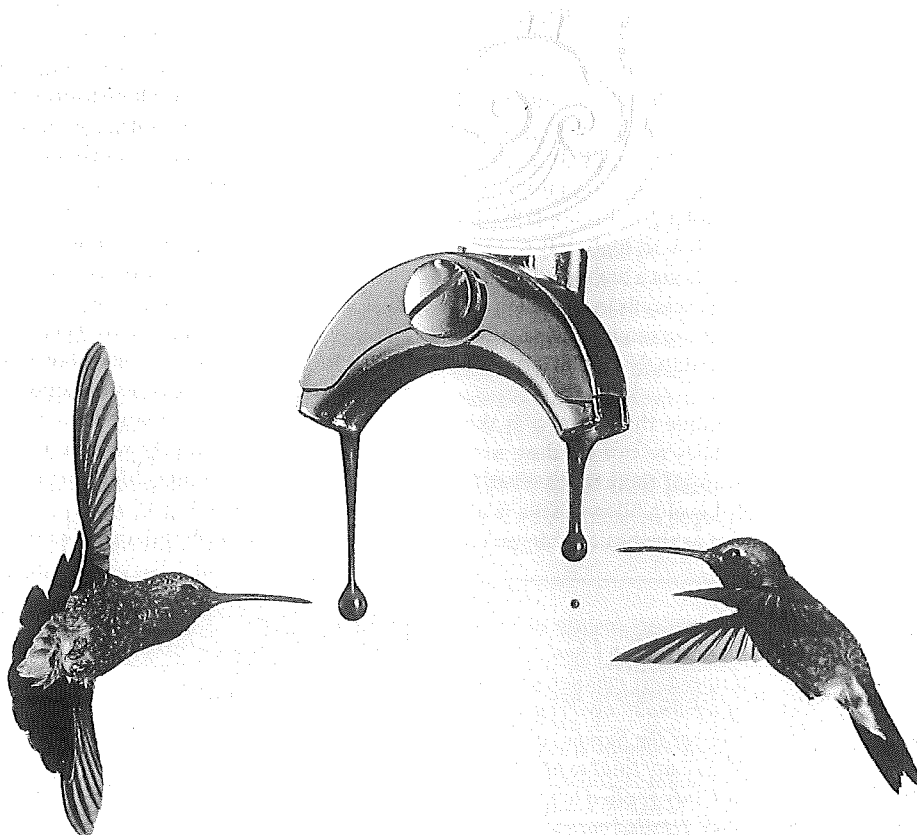


My hopes and dreams for the future had been frustrated for years in my previous private school. I was itching for some sort of recognition that I wasn't an average student, and that my interests and needs didn't always fit into the generic framework. For about the first month at Senior, I'm sure I must have walked around with an expression of utter amazement and joy on my face. Individuality and independence weren't just accepted – they were encouraged and nurtured.

KATY EICHELBAUM, ACADEMIC PORTFOLIO LEADER,
SENIOR COLLEGE

At St Cuthbert's College, an astonishing two-thirds of the students in year 13 last year passed this exam. Macleans and the other high-achievers on this measure did roughly a third as well.

Good Scholarship marks can be revealing in other respects. Some mid- and low-decile schools regularly show up in the Scholarship lists — while their most able students may not be learning in a Cuthbertian environment, with whole classes full of students aiming for the top, they are clearly still getting the support they need. Schools in this category include Selwyn College in Kohimarama, McAuley High School, Alfriston College in Randwick Park and Mt Roskill Grammar.





The thing I'm really loving about school right now is that the senior girls have been given the opportunity to lead. We came up with a theme of "Embrace It" and have been able to implement a whole range of events and challenges across the school. It just feels so cool to see it all fall into place — we come up with ideas, everyone applies themselves to make it happen and the rest of the school really seems to be responding positively.

GINNY DOUGHERTY, HEAD PREFECT,
DIOCESAN SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

However, it's dangerous to gauge the worth of a school on Scholarship alone. Some schools focus their best teachers and other resources on the elite, while others miss out.

Our table shows up schools with an unusual disparity between the achievements of the elite and those of the rest. They include Alfriston, where despite some Scholarship success, 35 per cent of students left school without gaining NCEA Level 2. At Otahuhu College, Scholarship wins were tempered by the fact 39 per cent failed to gain a Level 2 pass, and at One Tree Hill College, some students passed Scholarships but 40 per cent did not get through Level 2.

STAYED IN SCHOOL

As leading New Zealand educator John Hattie has observed many times, "The best predictor of health, wealth and happiness in later life is not achievement, it's the number of years in school."

We offer this data as a quick guide to school popularity. If students like a school, they're more likely to stay the full five years. If they do that, they're more likely to get a deeper and more rounded education, not to mention higher qualifications.

Our "Stayed in School" figures compare the size of the year 13 roll last year with the size of the same cohort of kids when they started in year 9. It's a rough guide: as Birkenhead College principal Jim Mathewson points out, many students in year 13 now were not in the same school in year 9.

This most obvious anomaly occurs with King's College, which has a 147 per cent "retention rate" simply because it takes in girls for years 12 and 13. Epsom Girls Grammar and several other schools also have a larger cohort in year 13 than in year 9, because so many students see them as a desirable place to finish off their schooling.

Conversely, private girls schools lose students from the senior years. The expense can be difficult for some families, while others simply want a change, and head for EGGs, or King's, or perhaps a co-ed state school. Although the fact that Otara's Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate has less than half its year-9 students left at year 13 should ring alarm bells about that school, the loss by St Cuthbert's of one in five should not.

Rural and semi-rural schools — the likes of Waiuku College and Kaipara College, both decile 7 — also shed around half their students. Principal Thomas Vanderlaan says this is because so many of them head off on a "vocational pathway" or look for opportunities in local businesses as soon as they can.

CONTINUED PAGE 52 ▶

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This table should be read in conjunction with the main article. For a guide to each numbered column, see page 52.

1	2	3	4				5		6	7	8	9	10
SCHOOL	DECILE	C/E/IB	SCHOOL LEAVER QUALIFICATIONS				UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE		SCHOLARSHIP	STAYED IN SCHOOL	ERO	SCHOOL TYPE / YEARS	ROLL
Listed alphabetically within decile groups		Some or all of the senior roll	No quals	NCEA 1	NCEA 2	NCEA 3	3-year average 2009-2011	2012 pass rate	% year 13 roll	5 years to 2012	Frequency of visits		years 9-13
			%	%	%	%	% all school leavers	% year 13 participants					
ACG Parnell College	private	C	0	0	0	0	96.5	93	17.2	41	n/a	Private co-ed 1-15	425
ACG Senior College	private	C	1	2	3	94	94.7	unavailable	9.8	n/a	n/a	Private co-ed 11-13	291
ACG Strathallan	private	C	1	6	17	76	77.7	unavailable	3.4	72	n/a	Private co-ed 1-15	542
Aklid International College	private	IB	8	2	2	88	91.5	100	n/a	142	n/a	Private co-ed 11-13	324
Diocesan School for Girls	private	IB	1	4	3	92	92.5	93.9	21.9	86	n/a	Private girls 1-15	864
King's College	private	C	0	1	6	93	93.8	94.1	7.4	147	n/a	Private co-ed 9-15	941
Kristin School	private	IB	3	1	10	86	87.7	88.2	3.6	97	n/a	Private co-ed 1-15	872
Pinehurst School	private	C	4	5	2	89	83.7	92	0	77	n/a	Private co-ed 1-15	274
Saint Kentigern College	private	IB	1	1	10	88	84.1	91.6	12.5	99	n/a	Private co-ed 7-13	1426
St Cuthbert's College	private	IB	1	0	4	95	91.1	99.3	65.8	82	n/a	Private girls 1-15	842
Albany Senior High School	10		11	9	31	49	(1 year) 49	69.6	5.5	n/a	3	State co-ed 9-15	743
Auckland Grammar School	10	C	4	6	13	77	74.7	89	20	92	4-5	State boys 9-15	2509
Baradene College	9		0	2	11	87	86.2	92.3	16.5	92	3	Integ. girls 7-15	757
Botany Downs Secondary	10		6	8	21	65	60.8	77.9	10.4	107	4-5	State co-ed 9-15	1830
Carmel College	10		1	0	5	94	89.3	88.7	11.3	96	4-5	Integ. girls 7-15	742
Epsom Girls Grammar School	9		3	4	15	78	79.1	84.3	13.9	113	4-5	State girls 9-15	2206
Glendowie College	9		5	4	26	65	61.3	80.3	16.4	86	4-5	State co-ed 9-15	984
Howick College	10		10	12	29	49	47.2	61.5	6.3	67	3	State co-ed 9-15	1808
Kingsway School	10		7	6	17	70	75.3	80.5	2.7	71	4-5	Integ. co-ed 1-15	526
Long Bay College	10		6	9	28	57	58.9	76.8	9	97	4-5	State co-ed 9-15	1684
Macleans College	10	C	4	5	17	74	72.8	84	26	100	4-5	State co-ed 9-15	2488
Orewa College	9		7	11	34	48	55.5	75	3	75	4-5	State co-ed 7-15	1441 (AE)
Rangitoto College	10		3	4	20	73	70.9	81.8	12.3	105	4-5	State co-ed 9-15	3000
Rosmini College	9		2	4	21	73	65.4	82.6	21	80	3	Integ. boys 7-15	695
Takapuna Grammar School	10	IB	7	6	20	67	66.3	82.3	10.7	103	4-5	State co-ed 9-15	1566
Westlake Boys High School	9	C	1	3	18	78	75.2	78	16.2	92	3	State boys 9-15	2290
Westlake Girls High School	9	C	3	3	19	75	69.2	80.5	8.5	95	3	State girls 9-15	2203
Whangaparaoa College	9		8	13	27	52	45.3	69.7	3.4	81	3	State co-ed 7-15	1033
Elim Christian College	8		2	6	14	78	67.2	86.2	11.8	89	3	Integ. co-ed 1-15	370
Glenfield College	7		15	10	36	39	36.1	62.7	2.1	91	3	State co-ed 9-15	768
Green Bay High School	8		15	15	30	40	37.5	70.3	3.5	65	3	State co-ed 9-15	1358 (AE)
Kaipara College	7		15	14	36	35	32.8	67.7	1.2	55	3	State co-ed 9-15	572
Lynfield College	7		8	10	27	55	51.7	64	8.6	90	4-5	State co-ed 9-15	1765
Mahurangi College	8		8	15	23	54	48.5	69.7	4.9	67	3	State co-ed 7-15	854
Marist College	7		2	2	13	83	79.3	75	12.5	78	4-5	Integ. girls 7-15	546
Mt Albert Grammar School	7		8	12	30	50	65.3	74.2	17.8	92	3	State co-ed 9-15	2681 (AE)
Northcote College	8		10	10	26	54	54.3	68	8.1	112	4-5	State co-ed 9-15	1182
Pakuranga College	8		8	16	26	60	55.5	67.1	5.6	92	4-5	State co-ed 9-15	2094
Sacred Heart College	8		0	4	21	75	75.8	79.3	12.9	90	4-5	Integ. boys 7-15	999
Santa Maria College	8		3	5	9	83	73.8	94.6	11.6	83	3	Integ. boys 7-15	692
St Mary's College	7		1	3	3	93	88.5	94.3	16.7	78	4-5	Integ. girls 7-15	602
St Peter's College	8	C	9	6	21	64	59.5	97	15	78	3	Integ. boys 7-15	885
Waiuku College	7		17	13	38	32	29.6	49.2	0	50	3	State co-ed 9-15	831
Western Springs College	8		8	6	24	62	64.4	92.2	16.3	81	4-5	State co-ed 9-15	1277

Look in the blue columns for overall pattern of achievement (numbers should run from low at left to high at right)

Look in the green columns for good academic achievement across the whole school

Look in the yellow column for elite academic achievement

Look in the pink column for a measure of expert confidence

1	2	3	4				5		6	7	8	9	10
SCHOOL	DECILE	CIE/IB	SCHOOL LEAVER QUALIFICATIONS				UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE		SCHOLARSHIP	STAYED IN SCHOOL	ERO	SCHOOL TYPE / YEARS	ROLL
Listed alphabetically within decile groups		Some or all of the senior roll	No quals	NCEA 1	NCEA 2	NCEA 3	3-year average 2009-2011	2012 pass rate		5 years to 2012	Frequency of visits		years 9-13
			%	%	%	%	% all school leavers	% year 13 participants		% year 13 roll	%		
Auckland Girls Grammar	5		3	12	32	55	53.2	73.7	2.8	79	3	State girls 9-15	1433
Avondale College	4	C	20	11	21	48	46.3	66.6	6.5	88	1-2	State co-ed 9-15	2615
Birkenhead College	6		16	11	29	44	39.2	64	2.8	75	4-5	State co-ed 9-15	750
Dilworth School	4		0	7	34	59	58.2	78.3	10	83	n/a	Priv/free boys 5-15	385
Edgewater College	4		13	15	32	40	34.3	48.3	0.6	83	4-5	State co-ed 9-15	871
Henderson High School	4		21	11	25	43	40	51.7	0	71	1-2	State co-ed 9-15	600
Kelston Boys High School	4	C	16	14	37	33	25.7	36.8	5.3	66	3	State boys 9-15	941
Liston College	5		10	6	17	67	55.9	84.2	0	75	3	Integ. boys 7-15	589
Massey High School	5		15	14	30	41	42.6	52.9	4.8	67	4-5	State co-ed 9-15	2183
Mt Roskill Grammar School	4		10	9	28	53	55	70.5	9.3	99	4-5	State co-ed 9-15	2209
Onehunga High School	4		16	14	35	35	34.2	45.5	1.1	76	3	State co-ed 9-15	1390 (AE)
Pukekohe High School	6		16	18	27	39	38.4	61.4	1.7	57	3	State co-ed 9-15	1549 (AE)
Rodney College	4		6	6	30	58	49.2	70	4.7	58	3	State co-ed 9-15	350
Rosehill College	6		13	14	35	38	34.3	63.8	2.3	62	3	State co-ed 9-15	1770
Rutherford College	6		20	12	24	44	34.3	50.2	3.2	68	3	State co-ed 9-15	1386
Saint Dominic's College	6		4	3	22	71	59.8	77.2	1.8	65	4-5	Integ. girls 7-15	614
Selwyn College	4		16	13	34	37	34	76.2	13.7	64	3	State co-ed 9-15	671 (AE)
Waiheke High School	6		11	10	24	55	50.2	75.6	3.8	82	3	State co-ed 7-15	336
Ak Seventh-Day Adventist	2		17	19	25	39	46.6	50	0	52	1-2	Integ. co-ed 9-15	215
Alfriston College	3		24	11	32	33	28.7	41.5	2.3	61	3	State co-ed 9-15	1376
Aorere College	2		21	15	38	26	26.9	44	0.4	68	3	State co-ed 9-15	1473 (AE)
Kelston Girls College	3		21	9	30	40	36.6	44.3	0.8	76	3	State girls 9-15	684
Manurewa High School	2		20	20	28	32	25.2	38.5	1	63	3	State co-ed 9-15	1819
Marcellin College	3		9	7	27	57	46.7	48.6	0	95	3	Integ. co-ed 7-15	553
One Tree Hill College	3		21	19	32	28	26.8	49.4	1.5	88	3	State co-ed 9-15	793
Papakura High School	2		41	11	26	22	17.9	23.6	0.7	53	1-2	State co-ed 9-15	917
Papatoetoe High School	3		11	17	39	33	31.2	46.7	0.3	85	3	State co-ed 9-15	1705
St Paul's College	3		18	14	17	51	37.7	62.5	0	117	3	Integ. boys 7-15	202
Waitakere College	3		27	17	30	26	25.9	55.9	1.1	64	3	State co-ed 9-15	1354
Wesley College	2		17	13	35	35	37.9	36.3	0	98	1-2	Integ. co-ed 7-15	307
De La Salle College	1		11	11	42	36	36.5	39.2	0	75	3	Integ. boys 7-15	763
James Cook High School	1		37	13	36	14	13	21.4	0	53	3	State co-ed 9-15	1374
Mangere College	1		23	16	39	22	15.5	26.7	1	71	3	State co-ed 9-15	834
McAuley High School	1		7	11	18	64	57.1	73.6	2	77	4-5	Integ. girls 9-15	690
Otahuhu College	1		24	15	33	28	28.9	30.5	1.3	78	3	State co-ed 9-15	1420 (AE)
Sir Edmund Hillary College	1		29	17	30	24	28.2	62.2	0	45	3	State co-ed 9-15	548
Southern Cross Campus	1		25	18	29	28	29.4	53	1.1	48	3	State co-ed 1-15	720
Tamaki College	1		24	17	38	21	18.8	42.3	0	59	3	State co-ed 9-15	615
Tangaroa College	1		26	14	27	33	28.9	32.6	0.7	65	3	State co-ed 9-15	959



Who would have thought I would be dressing up as Big Bird while my Bio teacher was a yellow Teletubby, dancing in front of the junior classes. Mrs Waddell's attitude is typical of an EGGS teacher – they will go out of their way to help you achieve your goals – in this case raising money for World Vision.

LUCY SHEFFIELD, DEPUTY HEAD GIRL, EPSOM GIRLS GRAMMAR SCHOOL



While at AGGS, the music block has become my second home. I love the sounds of ensembles practising for chamber music competitions, girls strumming guitars as they write original songs and singers belting out Alicia Keys or playing Saint-Saëns. There is always infectious laughter mixed in with it all.

SUSANNA LEES WATTS, CO-HEAD GIRL, AUCKLAND GIRLS GRAMMAR SCHOOL

We take the point: it's unreasonable to assume all young people should stay at school when they have valid options elsewhere. But we note that Wesley College near Pukekohe has an almost identical academic profile in our table to both Kaipara and Waiuku, yet its UE rate is much higher. Wesley keeps 98 per cent of its students all the way through, and it's only decile 2.

EDUCATION REVIEW OFFICE (ERO)

Earlier this year, the ERO's acting chief review officer, Diana Anderson, advised schools of the basis of ERO's assessment schedule. "The majority of schools are on a three-year return time. Currently 12-15 per cent are on a one-to-two-year return time, where the performance of the school... is poor, and approximately 12 per cent are on a four-to-five-year return time when they can demonstrate exceptional performance."

We have recorded the "return times" (how frequently ERO returns to assess the school) as a quick indicator of how confident the experts at ERO are about the health of the school.

But it's not the last word. Dale Burden, principal at Mt Albert Grammar School, told us: "The ERO review revisit should not be seen as a badge of honour." Burden says his school will be reviewed in August and "I will refuse to accept a 4-5 [year] cycle on principle." He believes ERO should be in schools "every three years min": it's their job to know what's going on.

Bruce Ritchie, principal of Massey High School, takes a


different position: "I like your column on ERO," he said. "ERO is an independent organisation that looks at achievement but also other aspects for which schools are accountable and the frequency cycle of reviews is an indicator of performance."

THE BEST SCHOOL IN AUCKLAND?

On academic results, what's the best school in Auckland? St Cuthbert's has the most outstanding elite achievement. St Mary's pretty much matches it more generally, and it's only decile 7. McAuley continues to perform like it's decile 7 itself. And if you've got boys? Ask them how they feel about wearing a gymslip.

Seriously, asking about the best school in Auckland is asking the wrong question. There are many very good schools, and our data this year points to progress in several schools that have struggled in recent years. Green Bay High School last year raised its UE pass rates to a level in line with its decile 8 status, while Henderson High School under new principal Mike Purcell and Kelston Boys under Brian Evans also both appear to be turning things around.

How do you find a great school? Look for one that engages well with its families, and that knows the value of attracting and keeping good teachers. Where the tone of the place seems right for your child, where you are confident they will be safe and where you think they will thrive.

Our analysis should give you good grounds for comparison. We also hope it helps with the questions you need to ask. 

GUIDE TO THE TABLE

The data in this table was sourced from the Ministry of Education (educationcounts.govt.nz) and NZQA (and in a small number of cases with input from the schools), and analysed by Metro. The table was sent to all schools for verification and comment, and many comments from schools were incorporated into the final results.

1 SCHOOL

We list secondary schools in greater Auckland with a roll size in years 9-15 greater than 200. A dozen or so smaller schools are not listed. Ormiston College is new and also not listed.

2 DECILE

Most private (independent) schools are officially part of decile 10, but we have separated them from other decile 10 schools in our analysis as their academic performance – for disputed reasons – is clearly different.

We list the schools in decile groups: groups we judge can reasonably be expected to have comparable outcomes.

3 CIE / IB

Schools offering the Cambridge (CIE) or International Baccalaureate (IB) exams, as well as or instead of NCEA, for all or a part of their senior school roll, are noted.

In the data under 4 below, we have shown data for CIE and IB results that is judged by the Ministry of Education to be "equivalent" to NCEA. NCEA Level 1 = IGCSE, 4 passes (A* to D); or AS level, 1 pass.

NCEA Level 2 = CIE AS level, 4 passes (A to E), or A2 level, 1 pass.

NCEA Level 3 (in general) = CIE AS or A level, 7 passes (A* to E, incl 3 x D or better), or other recognised AS or A qualification, or A2 level, 3 passes. (This level generally equates to UE, although the rules will be changing from this year.)

These equivalents were established in an agreement between the Ministry of Education and the New Zealand schools CIE group.

IB diploma is included in the Level 3 data: it is gained after 2 years and is at least equivalent to NCEA at this level.

4 SCHOOL LEAVER QUALIFICATIONS

Based on the most recent available data from the Ministry of Education (2009-2011). We show the highest level of NCEA (or its CIE or IB equivalent qualifications) reached by school leavers, as a proportion of all school leavers.

For Scholarship results, see separate column. For schools that offer CIE or IB exams, see 3 above.

5 UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE

The first column shows the three-year average (2009-2011) proportion of school leavers that have gained UE. This is the latest available data from the Ministry of Education.

The second column shows each school's 2012 UE pass rate as a percentage of the Year 13 participation rate. This data is not directly comparable to the 2009-2011 data. Data from NZQA and schools.

6 SCHOLARSHIP

The proportion of the Year 13 roll on July 1 that gained a Scholarship in 2012. Data from NZQA.

7 STAYED IN SCHOOL

The size of the Year 13 roll in 2012 compared with the size of Year 9 roll (the same cohort) in 2008. Data from the Ministry of Education.

8 ERO

Whether Education Review Office (ERO) visits occur every 1-2 years, every 3 years or every 4-5 years. Data from ERO.

9 SCHOOL TYPE / YEARS

For most students, years 9-13 are the secondary school years. Several schools start at year 7 (including the "intermediate" years) and

some start at year 1 with new entrants. For various reasons, some students may spend a year or two longer at school, which is why most schools officially have a roll up to year 15. Data from ERO.

Integ. = Integrated schools (mostly Catholic schools and others that have a religious character).

10 ROLL

We show the years 9-13 roll at July 1, 2012. These figures include all students and are given to indicate the size of the school. They are not the roll figures our achievement data is based on – see below. Data from the Ministry of Education.

AE = Students who are difficult to place in regular school environments are listed on an "Alternative Education" roll, and the Ministry of Education officially designates some "AE managing schools". We have identified these. Our achievement data excludes AE students, along with overseas students and some non-AE special needs students.