Revealed: The state's most improved schools in the 2025 HSC

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When Violetta Duvnjak was checking out schools after arriving from New Zealand, she immediately noticed there was something different about Blakehurst High.

"It just felt like it was actually like a supportive place," the 16-year-old said about the comprehensive school in Sydney's south. "Going around to all of these other schools … you just don't feel like the teachers want to be there."

Almost 70 per cent of Blakehurst High students achieved band 4, 5 and 6 results in last year's HSC, climbing six percentage points since 2019 AUDREY RICHARDSON

Her instinct about Blakehurst High was right: it is among the most improved schools in the state. Almost 70 per cent of its students achieved band 4, 5 and 6 results in last year's HSC, climbing six percentage points since 2019. Last year, the school achieved 68 band sixes, about double that of 2024.

Blakehurst High School is one of 45 public high schools identified in a major NSW Education Department analysis as showing the most improved HSC results over six years. The department examined HSC results from 2019 to 2025 to identify schools with the biggest improvement in the proportion of students achieving band 4, 5 and 6 results.

The *Herald*'s annual school league tables are based on the results of students achieving band 6, or marks over 90. The department's analysis captures student improvement across the top 3 bands.

Blakehurst principal Kylie Rytmeister, who has been in the job since term two last year, describes the school's HSC improvement as a gradual climb through a series of small changes.

Rytmeister has standardised classroom routines and she has sharpened how teachers use data, but she said there was another factor beyond drilling in on results. She said schools need to be places where students can laugh with staff.
"If they feel connected to the school, they want to come to school, they connect with staff, they connect with each other, they do better at school," Rytmeister said.

"Our teachers do a really thorough unpack of their previous year's HSC results, and it goes beyond just looking at 'how many band sixes did we get?'. The band ones matter as much as the band sixes.

Blakehurst High School principal Kylie Rytmeister said schools need to be a happy place for students.
AUDREY RICHARDSON

“We’re using data, but we use it better and more collaboratively to actually make changes that are impactful for students.”

Among the changes are the introduction of a quick independent task at the start of every lesson, and HSC-quality academic writing that is taught from early stage 4.
Year 12 student Ethan Middleton said he used to spend the first 10 minutes of class “confused and a bit lost about what we’re learning”. This changed with the fast “do-now” tasks.

“It’s either active recall or trying something new, which gives it purpose,” Middleton said.

Valentine messages to students from leadership at Blakehurst High School. AUDREY RICHARDSON

At Kingswood High School, the past five years had been the best in its 57-year history, said principal Adam Forbes. About 54 per cent of students achieved band 4, 5 and 6 results last year, a rise of 21 percentage points since 2019.

“When you are changing the culture, it normally takes a cohort of students from year seven to 12 to really see the benefit and impact of that culture, and we’re able to see that now,” Forbes said.
When Forbes joined the school in 2016, he focused on lifting student expectations, insisting on high-quality work and increasing senior curriculum time.

“The continuous feedback is allowing the students to be able to provide responses that are in that top performance bands,” Forbes said.

Maitland High School recorded a 50 per cent improvement in band 5 and 6 achievements compared to 2023 and 2024.

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Every year 12 student has a personalised learning plan, a teacher mentor and access to a support hub. But adaptability is key, said relieving principal Melissa Schatz.
“Schools change. You can have the blueprint, that blueprint is always going to be adjusted depending on your cohort because otherwise it’s not necessarily going to be something that is going to work for every student,” she said.

At Glenwood High School, in Sydney’s booming north-west corridor, principal Sonja Anderson said HSC began in year 7. The school ensures each student has foundational literacy and numeracy in junior years, and it tracks and predicts student growth through data.

A specialised English teacher works with each faculty to assess the literacy demand of each subject.

“Ultimately, the exam is a written exam, so they need to be able to perform in that space,” Anderson said.

About 73 per cent of Glenwood students achieved in the top 3 bands last year, a rise of 11 percentage points since 2019.

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