THE AGE

A school separated boys and girls until year 10. It has delivered record VCE scores

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When Brad Fry arrived as the new principal at Tintern Grammar in 2015, the school was just emerging from a profound period of change.

The school that began as a co-educational school had become girls-only before opening a separate campus for boys and then becoming co-educational again.



Principal Brad Fry with students at the school's farm. SIMON SCHLUTER

But this time, there was a difference, with students at the Ringwood East school taught in single-gender classes between prep and year 9, and coming together for lunch and extracurricular activities such as orchestra, drama productions and time spent on the school's farm.

Fry says the two-stream system is one contributor to Tintern Grammar's academic success. It has been named The Age's 2026 Schools that Excel award winner for the eastern Melbourne

region.
The annual series celebrates schools that have achieved outstanding advancement in their VCE results over the past decade.

“I think the model we have is one of the key things that gets them ready for VCE,” Fry says.

“We can instil a lot of really positive attitudes and dispositions by virtue of the fact that they’ve been parallel.”

In 2016, Tintern Grammar recorded a median study score of 32, but during the depths of the COVID-19 pandemic, that dipped to 30. In the past few years, its results have shot up, with the school attaining a median study score of 33 in 2023, and then achieving its best-ever median study scores of 34 in 2024 and 2025.
The percentage of students achieving study scores of 40 and above is also on the rise, climbing from 11.1 per cent in 2016 to a 10-year-high of 18.6 per cent last year.

A total of 11 students achieved a study score of 40 or above in maths methods last year, there were 10 scores of 40-plus in general maths, seven in physical education and four in business management. This was the best result Tintern has achieved in each of these subjects in the past decade.

One student recorded a perfect score of 50 in English, but keep in mind these figures are from students who permitted their VCE results to be published, so the school’s true total is likely even higher.

For Fry, a former science and maths teacher, the parallel learning model works because girls and boys learn differently.
“I think we can say that, in a general sense, young men don’t do things like sit still as well as girls do,” he observes.

“They like to learn by doing things.”

Year 12 student Olivia Cardamone joined Tintern in year 9 from an all-girls school.

The 17-year-old says the parallel learning model gave her a chance to settle in and build confidence in an environment in which she was comfortable before transitioning to co-

educational classes.

“It was an easy move because we already knew each other from being around the school,” she says.
“And it was really great in classes like English because until year 9, we’d always had the female perspective in discussions. But afterwards, we got the male perspective, too, so it broadened how we interpreted things.”

Sebastian Humphrys, joint school captain with Cardamone, says the model had served him well.

“It let me develop leadership skills and confidence, and then the gradual merge to co-ed classes was more comfortable,” says the 18-year-old aspiring teacher.



Students Sebastian Humphrys and Olivia Cardamone with some of the school’s merino sheep. SIMON SCHLUTER

Vice school captain Isabella Di Felice, 18, found the model allowed her to develop whom she was in a supportive environment, and to try new things.
“And now that it’s co-ed, we mix really well and have friendship groups made up of boys and girls.”

Another secret to the school’s success is its well-established careers program, which Cheuk Yui Lam, 18, says gave him invaluable work experience in the hospitality industry.

This, he says, allowed him to hone the communication and people skills he hopes to call on as a secondary teacher.

Fry considers the program a collaboration between staff and senior students at the school which marks its 150th anniversary next year. He says it is a chance to ensure students don't just focus on subjects that "get marked up" when the ATAR is calculated.

"If students aren't studying subjects that they are passionate about, then they are not going to do well," he says.

Fry is proud of students' achievements and the dedication of his 119 staff but says ATAR results are not what makes the school tick.

"We don't even talk about results, apart from in the staff room when they come out," he says.

"The analogy I use is you don't run onto the football field thinking about what the score will be at the end because if you do that, you're not concentrating on the things that create the score."

