Against the odds
From war to VCE, top student’s a bright light

MASAD Alfayadh knew just two English expressions — “hi” and “how are you” — when she arrived in Melbourne from war-torn Iraq as a child.

Those four words went nowhere to describing the horrific scenes she fled with her mother and two sisters.

Eight years later, it is not just Masad’s vocabulary that has spectacularly evolved. Having survived a war and a family tragedy — so too have this teenager’s prospects.

Tomorrow, when VCE results are released, the year 12 student from Isik College in Broadmeadows is expected to be recognised as a top performer.

And then Masad, 18, hopes to use her academic success for the good of others, as a doctor, and in honour of her late father.

“My dad was a surgeon in Iraq, but when his life was endangered he emigrated to Australia,” she said.

“My mum and my two sisters and I came here five years later, after the US-led invasion (in 2003).”

Within five months of the family’s reunion in Melbourne Masad’s father, who had been working at Frankston Hospital, was killed in a car accident.

“It was very, very sad for us,” Masad said.

“You don’t feel whole when you lose someone from your family.”

Mehmet Koca, principal of Isik College’s secondary girls’ campus, said Masad was a fine example of someone overcoming personal tragedy and challenges.

“One side of it is her academic achievements, but the other is the role she has taken at the school,” Mr Koca said.

“We do a lot of fundraising activities, and Masad is always at the front of all of them.

“She is very hard-working, and very motivating for other students. She deserves success.”

Evonne Barry
education reporter

Success story: Masad Alfayadh is a high achiever. Picture: ALEX COPPEL