

NAPLAN has key role in scholarship selection

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Schools are using students' NAPLAN results to help decide who secures scholarships and places in select-entry classes for gifted children.

While the authority that oversees the NAPLAN exams has consistently said it is not a high stakes test, a good result could help determine whether a student is accepted into the school or program of their choice.

St Michael's Grammar School Year 3 students sit the NAPLAN test.

This week more than 1 million students across the country sat the test, which critics say causes unnecessary anxiety for students, parents and teachers.

The 39 Victorian schools that offer the Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) program use an entrance exam, reports and teacher recommendations as part of their selection process, and many also use NAPLAN results.

Balwyn High School interviewed dozens of students for its popular SEAL program this week, many of whom brought along their NAPLAN results as part of a portfolio of their achievements.

Principal Deborah Harman said students' grade 5 NAPLAN results were compared with their entrance tests for the



St Michael's Grammar School Year 3 students sit the NAPLAN test. Photo: Pat Scala

accelerated program to measure their progress.

"It is not the sole determinant," she said, "but because applicants are coming from so many different schools we like to have this benchmark data."

Fran Paroissien, the director of coaching provider Hendersons Educational Service, said there were a "fair few" private schools that examined students' NAPLAN results before deciding whether to enrol them.

"We know of people who have gotten into a private school, who inquired later than someone else, but whose scores on NAPLAN and on school reports are very high."

She said students were also asked to take their NAPLAN results to interviews for SEAL programs.

"They are not looking

at it in detail, but they are looking at it to see if the child normally performs well above their cohort."

St Michael's Grammar principal Simon Gipson said the school looked at NAPLAN results and school reports when deciding who qualified for scholarships.

"[It's] a useful tool as part of our scholarship process to map a student's educational journey," he said.

But Mr Gipson also has concerns about the test, believing it could be a "narrow way to judge schools".

Sale College's SEAL co-ordinator, Debbi Daff, said the test indicated which children were above the norm, but was "only a small part of the whole picture".

There were cases of smart students receiving low grades on the NAPLAN test, Ms

Daff said, with highly conceptual essays receiving low marks because of a restrictive marking guide.

Ms Daff said she photocopied the NAPLAN essay so she could read the work herself.

ACARA's general manager of assessment and reporting, Dr Stanley Rabinowitz, said in the context of selection processes, NAPLAN should "always be used in concert with other supporting materials, such as the results of in-school assessments, school report cards or interviews with students".

Parents Victoria executive officer Gail McHardy said the use of NAPLAN tests for special programs risked putting undue pressure on students, but she was pleased schools were also considering other forms of testing.