

Testing time for selective entry school hopefuls

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Charlotte Robinson's dining room table embodies the stress felt by thousands of students who are about to sit one of their toughest tests.

As her laptop generates maths questions, the 13-year-old flicks through folders bulging with practice exams that are strewn across the surface.

Charlotte Robinson, 13, will be sitting her selective entry school exam this weekend.

On Saturday, the year 8 student will join 2887 students at the Royal Exhibition Building to sit an exam that will hopefully secure her a coveted place at one of Victoria's four selective entry schools.

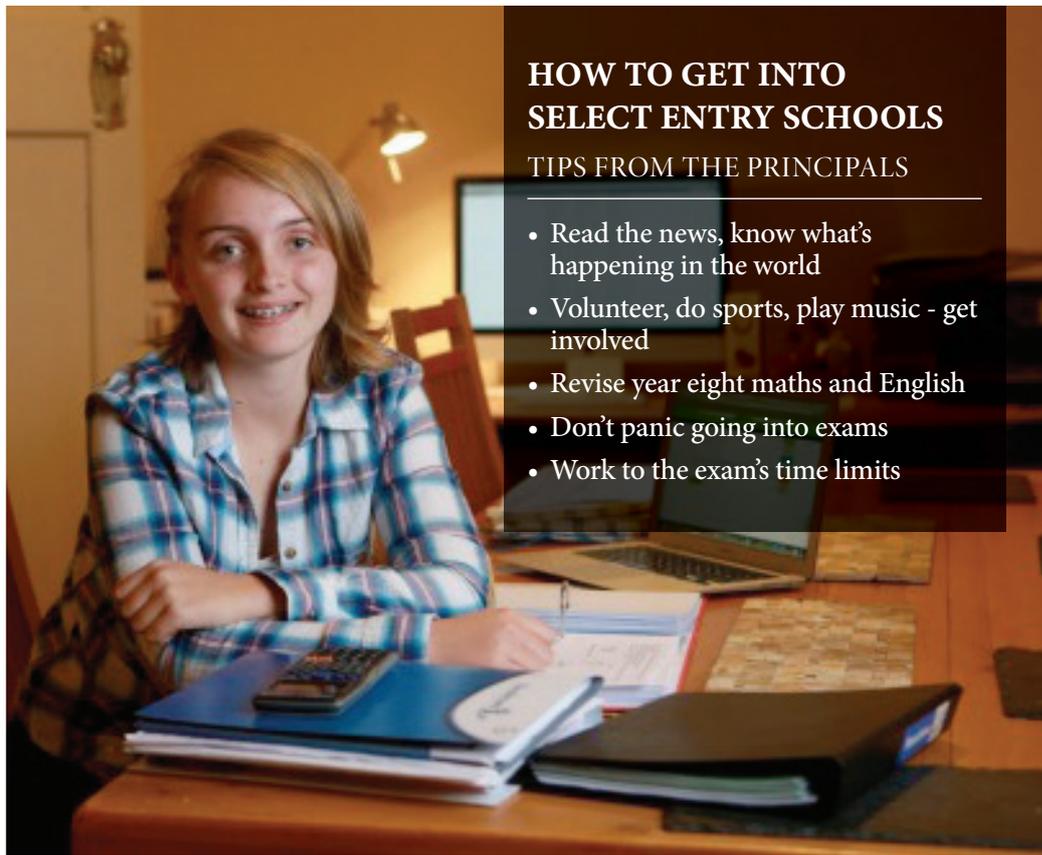
Competition is fierce. About one in three students who sit the three-hour exam will be accepted into year 9 at the academically selective Melbourne High School, Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, Nossal High School or Suzanne Cory High School.

The Camberwell High School student wants to be accepted into Nossal High School in Berwick because it is co-ed and will "push her more".

And like many students, Charlotte has spent her weekends and school holidays attending a coaching service, where she sits mock exams and learns tips.

"You want to get into the school, so you have to just clench your teeth," she said.

It is a busy time of the year for Melbourne's long-running coaching company, Hendersons Educational Services. It is helping more than 489 students prepare for the



HOW TO GET INTO SELECT ENTRY SCHOOLS

TIPS FROM THE PRINCIPALS

- Read the news, know what's happening in the world
- Volunteer, do sports, play music - get involved
- Revise year eight maths and English
- Don't panic going into exams
- Work to the exam's time limits

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Photo: Wayne Taylor

exam, with some clients travelling from Kuala Lumpur and Adelaide to attend its sessions.

Hendersons director Fran Paroissien said the exam required a year 9 level of maths as well as creative and analytical writing, reading comprehension and verbal and numerical reasoning.

While year 8 students in accelerated programs at schools would already be learning at a year 9 level, other students might need additional help, Ms Paroissien said.

There were a few common misconceptions about getting into a selective entry school.

Ms Paroissien said some parents believed that sending their child to a "low-performing" school in year 7 and 8 improved their chances.

"We think that is counterproductive because if you are with a group of

children who are not as motivated and academic, the pace of the learning at that school could be slower."

The "5 per cent rule"- which restricted how many students could leave one particular school to take up a spot at any selective school- also caused some confusion. It only kicked in when more than 5 per cent of the entire year 8 population of a school had achieved sufficient marks to obtain a place.

There's a glimmer of hope for students who did not get in based on their exam performance alone. Up to 10 per cent of enrolments were reserved for children who were Aboriginal or had parents with health care cards. And a further 5 per cent were awarded a place at the principal's discretion. This was for students who narrowly missed out on a place, but might be

involved in co-curricular activities, community service and had impressive leadership skills.

Suzanne Cory High School principal Colin Axup said the principal's discretion category took into account what "happens outside of the classroom".

"I look at what the student could contribute to the school so co-curricular activities, SRC, sporting clubs they may be involved in, musical instruments. You could call it an x-factor."

Mac.Robertson Girls' High School director of transitions Marina McAlpine said the school would offer 225 year 9 places and preferred it when students were not coached.

"We prefer for them to get into the school on their own abilities. Coaching services do not prepare them for our school."