

NAPLAN used as entry criteria

» JOSEPHINE TOVEY EDUCATION EDITOR

Private schools are asking for students' NAPLAN test results as part of their enrolment applications and selection process, a move some education experts warn could fuel pressure on children to perform.

The latest round of the National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy tests will be taken this week for students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9. Test results are collected by the federal government and made available to parents, but increasingly, they are also being scrutinised as part of a child's application for many independent and Catholic schools.

The Australian Tutors Association, which represents private coaches, said one reason parents were paying for NAPLAN coaching was the hope it would help get their children into a preferred high school.

Abbotsleigh, an independent girls' school that is selective from year 5 onwards, uses NAPLAN results as part of its selection criteria when a vacancy opens at the school.

Principal Judith Poole said she requested a range of material, including NAPLAN results, school reports and information about extra-curricular activities, before an interview. "I'm trying to get a holistic view of the student," she said. "[NAPLAN] is just one small piece of a much broader process that we go through."

Some non-selective independent schools use the results to gain a sense of a student's abilities. "It's really just to gain a picture of, in our case, the boy, and so we've got a good understanding of each boy prior to them starting," David Mulford, headmaster of Newington College, said.

Rosebank College principal Tom Galea said the school used NAPLAN results as a diagnostic tool to alert them to students' needs.

"It's a limited tool, diagnostically,

but it's the universal tool," he said. NAPLAN results have no impact on whether a child will be accepted at either Newington or Rosebank, according to their headmasters.

Graham Parr, of Monash University's faculty of education, said the growing emphasis on NAPLAN by schools, politicians, the media and others was a problem, and contributing to stress placed on children.

"It's incredibly narrow and restricted in terms of the value or information about a student's learning that it can provide," he said.

The University of Melbourne's Nicky Dulfer led a study last year that found some children were experiencing stress-related vomiting and sleeplessness before the tests.

She said there was a perception among some parents that poor results could prevent children from getting a place in a high school.

Australian Tutoring Association chief executive Mohan Dhall said parents hoped NAPLAN coaching would open doors for their children. "It doesn't matter what the private sector is saying, they believe that it matters," he said.

Lila Mularczyk, president of the NSW Secondary Principals' Council, said some parents volunteered above-average NAPLAN results when applying for an out-of-area public high school.

A spokesman for the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, which administers the tests, said they were a "good source of information about an individual students' strengths and weaknesses and can be well used alongside a range of other valuable information about a student".

The Senate is about to launch an inquiry into the tests.

With Daniel Hurst