

Parents 'buying' place at schools

Training for selective test

EXCLUSIVE

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RECORD numbers of children are jostling for entry to selective schools and scholarships as the cost of a private school education soars.

Parents are forking out thousands for private tuition to help their child pass the selective high school entrance exam or ACER scholarship test used by independent schools.

The prize is a place at a selective school such as James Ruse Agricultural High or Baulkham Hills High and elite, non-government schools such as SCEGGS Darlinghurst, which are consistently among the top performers in the HSC.

It follows revelations in *The Daily Telegraph* that Sydney's most expensive schools have almost doubled their fees in a decade. Charges have been bumped up by more than \$1000 a year since 2003.

This comes as 13,512 students applied for 4158 places at selective schools in next year's Year 7 intake, with the most popular choices Baulkham Hills High and Fort Street High. This year 13,365 applied for 4127 places.

Australian Tutoring Association chief executive Mohan Dhall said more than one in four NSW children received

academic coaching. "The investment in tuition for these tests can save families tens of thousands of dollars in private school fees," he said.

"If you really want a child to have a chance to undergo these tests without stress they need a bit more tuition than just three or four months. Parents would be wise to make the decision at the end of Year 4."

Tutors such as Master Coaching Hurstville recommend training begin at one hour a week in Year 5. Cost is \$50 to \$70 a lesson.

At Pre-Uni New College, children preparing for the selective exam practise questions weekly, with their progress frequently assessed and reported to their parents.

Master Coaching Penrith principal Chris Avent said her students were assessed for weaknesses and teachers worked on those.

Kids First Children's Services director Sonja Walker said its program began in term three of Year 5 and aimed to "encourage rather than pressure" children.

"We would rather ensure development of ... problem solving, lateral thinking and imaginative activities," she said.

Ourania Tlagissos said her 11-year-old son Teo was being tutored to increase his chances of entry to a selective school. "He was struggling with maths and I felt he needed the help of a professional," she said.