

Testing times are big business

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STUDENTS are spending up to nine hours a week in private tutoring, at a cost to parents of thousands of dollars, as they prepare for this year's selective schools exam.

Just under 13,000 students will sit for the test on March 14, competing for 4194 places in NSW's 47 selective or partially selective high schools.

A huge industry has developed around the test in recent years, with structured courses, unofficial "trial exams", private tuition and books promising to prepare students.

"It's become very formalised, become very structured and it's become very well organised," the Australian Tutoring Association chief executive officer, Mohan Dhall, said.

"It would be much better to acknowledge private tutoring is a reality of mainstream education; let's embrace it."

The Department of Education and Communities does not endorse coaching for the selective test, while the NSW Teachers Federation

described it as "absurd" and an "epidemic" that defeats the purpose of the test itself.

One of the largest coaching colleges, James An, claims to have coached a third - about 1200 - of the roughly 4000 students who gained a place in a selective school last year. It would not provide figures on how many children took its course.

The coaching college's assistant manager, Royce An, said students did between three and nine hours' coaching a week, with the selective trial test course costing \$1090 for four subjects over a 10-week term.

Mr An said he had also noticed a shift in the past five years or so in the backgrounds of their clients. "James An was originally dominated by kids from an Asian background but now it's diversified," he said.

The director of Capra Coaching at Double Bay, Helen Velis, said she had seen an influx of inquiries in the past few weeks before next month's exams.

Sydney father Mohan Mysore was

angry with the conditions at a trial selective school exam run by the popular Pre-Uni New College, where a "no food policy" was enforced for the four-hour exam period.

"He was hungry and tired," he said of his 11-year-old son.

Mr Mysore said he had spent about \$3000 to help prepare his son, who went to coaching for four hours a week, for the selective exam.

Pre-Uni New College did not respond to a request for comment.

Many parents seek coaching for the private school scholarship tests at the same time as the selective schools tests.

Maurie Mulheron, the president of the NSW Teachers Federation, said children who needed coaching to get into selective schools should probably not be there in the first place and that too much pressure was being placed on the very young.

But Karambir Singh, the director of S4S Coaching, said practising exams at a coaching school could help children build on their natural ability.

SAMPLE SELECTIVE TEST

1. If the words below were rearranged to form the best sentence, which word would come last?

chances want take any they to not did
A. chances
B. did
C. take
D. they

2. In three minutes Gabrielle can walk 300 metres. In five minutes Mara can walk 600 metres. They started walking at the same time along the same track.

How far apart were they after 4 minutes?

A. 80 metres
B. 100 metres
C. 120 metres
D. 300 metres

3. In a certain code, TIVZG means GREAT.

In the same code, what is OPAL represented by?

A. OZKL
B. LZKO
C. LKZP
D. LKZO

4. The numbers in each pair of brackets follow the same rule. Find the missing number.

[25, 13] [7, 4]
[11, ?] [15, 8]

A. 5
B. 6
C. 12
D. 23

SOURCE: SAMPLE GENERAL ABILITY AND MATHEMATICS TEST PAPERS, NSW DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND COMMUNITIES.

ANSWERS: 1-A, 2-A, 3-D, 4-B.

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