



# Three Biggest Mistakes When Selecting Selective Schools

Common pitfalls parents encounter when choosing the right selective schools for their children



Outdated School Lists



School Selection Strategy



Performance Deviation

*Guidance for parents with children in Years 3-6*

# Mistake #1: Using Outdated School Lists

## The Problem

- ✗ Relying on school rankings and cut-off scores from 3+ years ago
- ✗ Using predictive marks from coaching centres based on outdated data
- ✗ Assuming school popularity remains constant over time

## What's Changed?

- The selective test has become increasingly difficult
- Competition has intensified with 10-15% more students each year
- Over 20,000 students now sit the selective schools test

## School Popularity Shifts



### Example: North Sydney Boys vs James Ruse

Three years ago, parents of high-performing boys typically prioritised James Ruse over North Sydney Boys. Recently, many parents who would have chosen James Ruse are now selecting North Sydney Boys instead.

*"We don't have public data on any of this information just yet."*

## Recommended Approach

- ✓ Follow the latest trends rather than outdated data
- ✓ Be more conservative in your school selections
- ✓ Without a top OC class background, chances for top five selective schools are significantly reduced

# Mistake #2: Poor School Selection Strategy

## ⚠ The Problem

- ✗ Selecting schools that are too closely ranked
- ✗ Overestimating chances based on mock test results
- ✗ Not having a secure backup option

### Closely Linked Schools

Examples of closely linked school pairs to avoid:

- ➔ North Sydney Boys and James Ruse
- ➔ Other top-tier schools with similar entry requirements

*"I wouldn't be choosing for example North City Boys and James Ruse... I would not pick two schools that are very closely linked to each other."*

## ✂ Better Selection Strategy

- 1 Choose schools with at least a three-school gap between preferences
- 2 Be conservative with your selection unless you're certain of your child's placement
- 3 Include at least one "safety" school you're confident your child will qualify for

## ✓ Recommended Combinations

Better option: North Sydney Boys + Sydney Boys

Better option: North Sydney Boys + Baulkham Hills

Remember: If you're certain about placement, the gap between preferences matters less

# Mistake #3: Ignoring Performance Deviation

## The 20% Deviation Factor

There can be up to a 20-30% difference between a child's typical performance and their actual result on the selective test day.

*"You have to have a really good understanding of how your child self-reflects and whether their self-reflection is accurate or not."*

## The Self-Assessment Problem

- ✗ Many children incorrectly assess their own performance
- ✗ Students often claim "I did so well" when actual results show otherwise
- ✗ Tricky questions in English and Thinking Skills can mislead students about their performance

## Mock Test Limitations

- Different marking standards between coaching centres and actual selective tests
- Writing assessments particularly vary in scoring approaches
- Selective test may introduce new rubrics to identify coached responses

*"You got to ask yourself, is the writing mock that you get at your mock trial going to be accurate? I'd say on the balance of probability, it's not going to be the most accurate."*

## Recommended Approach

- 1 Establish a "code of honesty" with your child about test performance
- 2 Practise with difficult, inference-based questions to develop accurate self-assessment
- 3 Be more conservative with school selections to account for performance deviation

# Preparation Strategies to Reduce Performance Deviation

## Volume of Practice Needed



For top 5 schools:

200+ questions per day



For top 10 schools:

150-200 questions per day



For schools ranked 11-20:

100-150 questions per day

## Writing Preparation

Consistent practice is essential to improve writing performance and reduce variability:

- ✓ Complete at least one writing topic per day
- ✓ Practise a variety of text types and topics

*"The writing component this year will be very tricky as it may include new rubrics to identify coached responses."*

## Reducing Performance Variance

Many students experience significant performance fluctuations (e.g., scoring 70% one day, 50% the next, then 80%).



*"The only way that you can really get rid of that kind of variance is by doing more questions and stabilising it."*



Consistency builds accuracy and reduces performance variability

## Practising Effectively

- 1 Focus on difficult, inference-based reading comprehension questions
- 2 Practise complex problem-solving questions in thinking skills
- 3 Complete questions under timed conditions (aim for under 1 minute per question)
- 4 Review and analyse patterns in incorrect answers

*"I fear not the man who has practised 10,000 different kicks once, but I fear the man who has practised one kick 10,000 times."*

# Understanding Tricky Questions in Selective Tests

## Why Questions Appear "Easy" But Aren't

- › Seemingly "innocuous" questions often contain subtle traps
- › Options may be deliberately closely linked to test careful reading
- › Questions designed to identify students who rush or make assumptions

## English Comprehension Challenges

Difficult inference types:

- ✓ Subtle character motivations that aren't explicitly stated
- ✓ Distinguishing between similar yet distinct themes
- ✓ Questions where all options seem partially correct

## Thinking Skills Complexities

Thinking skills questions are designed to test nuanced understanding and reasoning abilities:

- ✓ Problems with hidden steps or non-obvious approaches
- ✓ Pattern recognition questions with deliberate distractors
- ✓ Abstract reasoning that requires multiple logical jumps

*"A lot of the exam questions especially in English and Thinking Skills are very closely linked... it's very natural for a child to think that they did very well when they chose the wrong option out of the two every single time."*

## Developing Accurate Self-Assessment

- 1 Practise with questions at or above selective test difficulty level
- 2 Learn to identify question types that you commonly struggle with
- 3 Develop awareness of the "confidence trap" in seemingly easy questions
- 4 Consider all options carefully even when one seems obviously correct

# The Writing Component Challenge

## Why Writing Is Particularly Tricky

- › The 2023 selective test may introduce new rubrics to identify coached responses
- › Different marking standards between coaching centres and actual selective tests
- › Designed to identify formulaic, memorised writing patterns

## Mock Test Limitations

Key concerns about mock writing assessments:

- ✗ Markers at coaching centres may use different criteria than selective test markers
- ✗ Writing scores in mock tests are often the least accurate predictor
- ✗ False confidence from high mock writing scores can lead to poor school selection

## Effective Writing Preparation

- 1 Practise writing at least one full piece daily
- 2 Focus on developing original ideas rather than memorising formulas
- 3 Vary your topics and prompts to build adaptability
- 4 Write under timed conditions (25-30 minutes per piece)

## Reducing Writing Score Uncertainty

### Diversify Feedback Sources

Seek writing assessment from multiple qualified sources, not just a single coaching centre

### Conduct Self-Assessment

Learn to critically analyse your own writing using selective test criteria

*"Be more conservative with school preferences if writing is a significant factor in your overall estimated score."*

# Action Plan: Final Preparation Timeline

## 3-4 Months Before the Test

- ✓ Establish baseline performance through diagnostic tests
- ✓ Research current school rankings and entry requirements
- ✓ Begin daily practice routine (50-100 questions per day)
- ✓ Start preliminary school preference discussions

## 2 Months Before the Test

- ✓ Increase to 100-150 questions daily
- ✓ Focus on areas of weakness identified in practice tests
- ✓ Begin timed practice sessions under test conditions
- ✓ Create draft school preference list with primary and backup options

## 1 Month Before the Test

- ✓ Increase practice to recommended levels based on target schools:
  - Top 5 schools: 200+ questions daily
  - Top 10 schools: 150-200 questions daily
  - Schools ranked 11-20: 100-150 questions daily
- ✓ Complete at least one writing piece every day
- ✓ Take full-length practice tests weekly

## Final Week & Test Day Strategy

- ✓ Maintain practice routine, but avoid introducing new concepts
- ✓ Establish a "code of honesty" for post-test self-assessment
- ✓ Prepare questions to accurately gauge performance after the test
- ✓ Plan to reassess school preferences based on actual test experience

### Remember:

Consistently high practice volume is the most effective way to reduce performance variation. Consistent practice leads to consistent results.



# Post-Test School Selection Strategy

## Post-Test Performance Evaluation

- ✓ Conduct a thorough post-test discussion immediately after the exam
- ✓ Ask specific questions about question types and difficulty
- ✓ Identify sections where your child struggled or excelled
- ✓ Determine if performance likely matched, exceeded, or fell below practice levels

## Warning Signs to Watch For

### Overconfidence

"Everything was so easy!" could indicate falling for trick questions

### Time Management Issues

Rushing or not completing sections suggests performance below practice levels

### Vague Responses

Inability to recall specific questions may indicate genuine struggles

## Adjusting School Preferences

- 1 Consider more conservative choices if the test was harder than expected
- 2 Apply the 20-30% performance deviation factor to your assessment
- 3 Ensure you have at least one "safety" school in your preferences
- 4 Remember that writing assessments are particularly unpredictable

*"If you don't have a good idea of how your child performed on the day, then you won't really know what schools to put down."*

## Final Decision Checklist

- ☐ Have we accounted for the increased competition this year?
- ☐ Are our school choices sufficiently spread out in rankings?
- ☐ Have we considered both academic fit and child's wellbeing?
- ☐ Are we being realistic about our child's performance relative to the cohort?
- ☐ Have we included at least one school we're confident our child will qualify for?

## Important Reminder:

You can adjust your school preferences after the test. Take time to carefully evaluate your child's actual performance before making final decisions.

# Key Takeaways: Successful Selective School Selection

## 💡 Avoiding the Three Critical Mistakes

- 1 Use current data, not outdated school lists – the competitive landscape changes yearly
- 2 Select schools with appropriate ranking gaps – avoid choosing closely ranked schools
- 3 Consider the 20-30% performance deviation factor in your school selection strategy

## 🎯 The Conservative Approach Benefits

- ✓ Reduces anxiety and disappointment if results aren't as expected
- ✓ Increases likelihood of placement in schools where your child can thrive
- ✓ Provides better academic positioning (being in the top half rather than bottom percentiles)

*"This year's selective schools test is going to be very tough... Be more on the careful side and ensure that you have some leeway to play with."*



*"It's better to have a conservative approach that ensures success than to aim too high and risk disappointment."*

## 🌟 Essential Preparation Strategies

- High volume practice: 100-200+ questions daily based on target school ranking
- Writing consistency: Complete at least one full writing piece every day
- Focused repetition: Target areas of weakness with concentrated practice
- Self-assessment: Develop accurate performance evaluation skills
- Mock limitations: Be cautious about predictions based on mock tests

## ★ Final Advice for Parents

- ✓ Establish open, honest communication with your child about performance
- ✓ Create a balanced preparation plan that's consistent and sustainable
- ✓ Reassess school preferences after the test based on actual performance
- ✓ Remember that school fit is ultimately more important than ranking

For additional resources and guidance [🔗](#)