

# THE THREE SHORT CHECKS READINESS GUIDE

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*Using NAPLAN, ICAS and School Data to Understand OC,  
Selective and Scholarship Fit*



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# 1. What Problem Does This Guide Address?

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## Many families tell us:

*"Our child's marks are all over the place. Sometimes they score very high, sometimes much lower. We honestly don't know their true level, so we don't know which schools or scholarships are realistic."*

## Single tests are noisy:

- A "bad day" can pull a strong student down
- A "lucky paper" can temporarily inflate a result
- Different schools and tutoring centres use different marking standards

This guide offers three short, evidence-informed checks that use existing data (NAPLAN, ICAS and school/trial results) to build a clearer average profile.

**The goal is not to "predict" outcomes with certainty, but to**

# **help families:**

- See the pattern, rather than chasing one-off highs or lows
- Map that pattern to bands of Opportunity Class (OC) schools, selective schools and private scholarships in a realistic way

## 2. How the Three Checks Work

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Each check focuses on a different data source:

- **NAPLAN Profile Check** – national baseline in reading and numeracy
- **ICAS Profile Check** – competition-based percentile information
- **School & Trial Test Check** – how your child performs in their real cohort and in selective-style assessments

**For each check, you classify your child into one of three levels:**

Level	Description
<b>Level A – High</b>	Consistently top band
<b>Level B – Solid</b>	Above average but not consistently at the very top

**Level C –**  
**Emerging/Unknown**

Inconsistent or limited data

You then combine these three ratings to place your child into a **Readiness Band (1–3)**, which is mapped to tiers of OC, selective, and scholarship options.

# 3. Check 1: NAPLAN Profile

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## 3.1. Why NAPLAN is useful

NAPLAN is a national assessment of literacy and numeracy in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. It reports achievement against common scales and proficiency levels across Australia.

From 2023, NAPLAN reporting uses proficiency standards such as **Exceeding, Strong, Developing, and Needs additional support**, rather than the earlier band labels.

While NAPLAN is not a selective or scholarship exam, it provides:

- A national reference point for where your child sits
- An indication of whether foundational skills are secure enough for more competitive settings

## 3.2. What to look at

For the most recent NAPLAN in your child's year level, check:

- Reading proficiency level

- Numeracy proficiency level
- (Optionally) Writing proficiency level

### 3.3. Classifying NAPLAN into A / B / C

Level	Criteria
<b>Level A (High)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reading and Numeracy both at <b>Exceeding</b>, or</li> <li>▪ One at <b>Exceeding</b> and the other at <b>Strong</b>, and</li> <li>▪ This pattern has been consistent across at least two NAPLAN years (e.g. Years 3 and 5)</li> </ul>
<b>Level B (Solid)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reading and Numeracy at <b>Strong</b>, or</li> <li>▪ One at <b>Strong</b> and the other at <b>Developing</b></li> <li>▪ With generally upward or stable progress across years</li> </ul>
<b>Level C (Emerging/Unknown)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ One or more domains at <b>Developing</b> or <b>Needs additional support</b>, or</li> <li>▪ Large fluctuations between years (e.g. Strong then Developing), or</li> <li>▪ Limited NAPLAN data (new to the system, test missed, etc.)</li> </ul>

**Note:** Being in Level C does not mean a child cannot attempt OC, selective or scholarships. It simply indicates that foundational

literacy/numeracy may need consolidation, or that more data is required, before aiming at the most competitive tiers.

# 4. Check 2: ICAS Profile

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## 4.1. Why ICAS is useful

The International Competitions and Assessments for Schools (ICAS) provide international benchmarking in English, Mathematics, Science and other domains. Awards are based on percentiles across all participants:

Award	Percentile
<b>High Distinction</b>	Top 1% in each year level
<b>Distinction</b>	Next 10%
<b>Credit</b>	Next 25%
<b>Merit</b>	Next 10%
<b>Participation</b>	Remaining students

This means that repeated High Distinctions and Distinctions correspond to consistent top-decile performance relative to a broad reference group.

## 4.2. What to look at

Consider the last 2–3 years of ICAS (if available) in:

- English / Reading
- Mathematics
- Science or other relevant subjects

## 4.3. Classifying ICAS into A / B / C

Level	Criteria
<b>Level A (High)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ At least one <b>High Distinction</b> or multiple <b>Distinctions</b> in core subjects (English, Maths, Science) across the last 2–3 years, and</li><li>▪ Limited or no results below <b>Credit</b></li></ul>
<b>Level B (Solid)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Mostly <b>Credit</b> and occasional <b>Distinction</b> in core subjects, or</li><li>▪ Mixture of Distinction/Credit/Merit, with overall profile clearly above Participation</li></ul>
<b>Level C (Emerging/Unknown)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Mostly <b>Participation</b> results, or</li><li>▪ Few or no ICAS attempts to date, or</li><li>▪ Results highly variable from year to year</li></ul>

**Note:** Some students do not sit ICAS at all, or sit in only one subject. In that case, treat this check as "data-light" and give more weight to

NAPLAN and school/trial data.

# 5. Check 3: School Reports and Trial Tests

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This check looks at how your child performs in their actual school context, and in selective-style trial tests where available.

## 5.1. School report information

Use the last 1–2 years of:

- General comments and overall grades
- Any class rankings or statements like "top 10% of cohort" where provided
- Subject teacher comments in English and Mathematics

Classroom-based assessment is not standardised like NAPLAN, but it can reliably show relative standing within a school.

## 5.2. Trial tests (OC, Selective, Scholarship)

Consider:

- Results from external OC>Selective-style practice exams
- Practice tests run by tuition providers
- Any reports that show percentile rank or estimated selective score

NSW selective placement information indicates that students are ranked relative to all test-takers, with performance reported in percentile-based bands. External guides and calculators typically report total scores on a scale where the maximum is 300, with historical minimum entry scores around 246 for the very top selective schools and lower thresholds (around 170–200) for others.

## 5.3. Classifying this check into A / B / C

### School reports

Level	Criteria
<b>Level A</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Regularly in the top group in English and Mathematics (e.g. top 10–15% or "A" grades in a strong cohort), and</li> <li>▪ Teacher comments emphasise high independence, accuracy and depth of thinking</li> </ul>
<b>Level B</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Generally above-average (e.g. B grades, top third of cohort), with some stronger areas, and</li> <li>▪ Teachers note good potential but also areas needing consolidation (e.g. careless errors, time management)</li> </ul>

**Level  
C**

- Mostly mid-range or below in key subjects, or
- Profile is highly variable between terms or subjects, or
- Limited information (e.g. recent school move)

## Trial tests

Where the report includes percentile ranks or estimated selective scores:

Level	Indicators
<b>Level A indicators (trial tests)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Regularly in the top 10–15% of a sizeable cohort in selective-style trials, or</li><li>▪ Estimated selective score typically &gt;220/300 on reputable scales (with the understanding this is approximate)</li></ul>
<b>Level B indicators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Frequently in the top 25–30% of trial cohorts, or</li><li>▪ Estimated scores often in the 190–220/300 range</li></ul>
<b>Level C indicators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Mostly below the top 30% in trials, or</li><li>▪ Very few trial results available</li></ul>

**For this third check, take a balanced view of both school reports and trial test information.**

# 6. Combining the Three Checks into Readiness Bands

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**For each check, record A / B / C:**

**NAPLAN:** \_\_\_\_\_

**ICAS:** \_\_\_\_\_

**School & Trials:** \_\_\_\_\_

Then locate your child in one of the following Readiness Bands:

## **Readiness Band 1 - Strong Multi-Source Evidence**

**Typical pattern:**

- NAPLAN: A
- ICAS: A or B

- School & Trials: A

**Interpretation:**

There is consistent evidence across national data (NAPLAN), competition data (ICAS) and school/trial results that your child is frequently in the top decile or close to it. Fluctuations still occur, but the underlying pattern is strong.

## **Readiness Band 2 - Solid but Mixed Profile**

**Typical pattern:**

- At least one A
- One or two B
- No more than one C

**Interpretation:**

Your child is generally performing above average, with some high points and some less consistent areas. They may be competitive for a range of OC, selective or scholarship pathways, especially where school fit and wellbeing are carefully matched.

## **Readiness Band 3 - Emerging/Unclear Profile**

**Typical pattern:**

- Multiple C ratings, or
- Limited or inconsistent data, or
- Recent changes in schooling or language background

**Interpretation:**

At this point, the data does not strongly support aiming only for the most competitive tiers. Strengths may still be emerging, or foundational skills may need consolidation. High-quality extension in a local, Catholic or independent setting may be an appropriate focus, with selective or scholarship options revisited later.

# 7. Mapping Readiness Bands to School Tiers (OC, Selective, Scholarships)

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**Important:** The tiers below are illustrative bands, based on publicly available HSC rankings, historical minimum entry scores and OC ranking summaries. They are not official cut-offs and do not guarantee outcomes. Families should always consult current NSW Department of Education information and independent data sources.

## 7.1. OC (Opportunity Class) Tiers (Examples)

Using historical OC ranking information and minimum score data, some schools have consistently appeared as higher-cutoff OC providers.

## OC Tier A - Historically most competitive OCs

**Examples:** Beecroft Public School, Matthew Pearce Public School, Ermington Public School, North Rocks Public School, Dural Public School, Artarmon Public School.

## OC Tier B - Strong but less extreme cutoffs

A wide range of metropolitan and regional OC schools with solid placement histories.

## OC Tier C - Regional / developing OCs

OCs serving smaller cohorts or regional centres; still academically focused but with lower historical cutoffs.

### Indicative mapping:

Readiness  
Band

OC Recommendations

<b>Readiness</b>	Tier A as realistic stretch; Tiers B and C as strong/likely options.
<b>Readiness</b>	Tier B as realistic; Tier A as selective stretch depending on wellbeing, and Tier C as secure.
<b>Readiness</b>	Tier C or local enrichment as primary focus; Tier B considered only if trial data improves.

## 7.2. Selective High School Tiers (Examples)

Based on historical entry scores and 2024 HSC rankings:

### Selective Tier 1 - Most competitive fully selective schools

- James Ruse Agricultural High School
- North Sydney Boys High School
- North Sydney Girls High School
- Baulkham Hills High School
- Hornsby Girls High School
- Normanhurst Boys High School
- Sydney Boys High School
- Sydney Girls High School
- Girraween High School

- Fort Street High School

These schools have historically combined very high minimum entry scores with top HSC rankings.

## Selective Tier 2 - Other fully selective / high-performing selective schools

**Examples:** Penrith High School, Caringbah High School, Hurlstone Agricultural High School, St George Girls High School, Smith's Hill High School, Merewether High School, Manly Selective Campus and others in the fully selective list.

## Selective Tier 3 - Partially selective and regional selective options

Partially selective high schools (e.g. Chatswood High, Sefton High, Parramatta High) and regional selective schools where entry is still competitive but cutoffs have historically been lower.

## Indicative mapping:

Readiness  
Band

Selective Recommendations

<b>Readiness</b>	Tier 1 as realistic stretch (depending on trial performance and wellbeing), Tier 2 as strong likely options, Tier 3 as secure.
<b>Readiness</b>	Tier 2 as realistic, Tier 1 as stretch for some students (especially with strong ICAS and trial results), Tier 3 as secure.
<b>Readiness</b>	Tier 3 or high-quality local extension as primary focus, Tier 2 considered only if data trends upwards over time.

## 7.3. Private School Scholarship Tiers (Examples)

HSC rankings show that many independent schools sit alongside selective schools at the top of the state. Scholarship competition is typically strongest in schools with consistently high HSC success rates.

### Scholarship Tier A - Highly competitive independent schools

**Examples:** Sydney Grammar School, Knox Grammar School, Reddam House, Abbotsleigh, Pymble Ladies' College, Ravenswood, Wenona, SCEGGS Darlinghurst, Ascham, Kambala, Meriden, Moriah College, Barker College, Central Coast Grammar, Frensham.

### Scholarship Tier B - Other independent and Catholic schools with strong

## academic outcomes

**Examples include:** Schools identified in diocesan or media reports as high-performing Catholic or independent schools (e.g. St Clare's College Waverley, Brigidine College Randwick, St Ursula's College Kingsgrove, Loreto Normanhurst, Kincoppal–Rose Bay, Monte Sant' Angelo, St Mary's Cathedral College, and selected diocesan high achievers).

## Indicative mapping:

Readiness Band	Scholarship Recommendations
Readiness Band 1	Scholarship Tier A as realistic stretch (particularly for academically-focused scholarships), Scholarship Tier B as realistic to strong.
Readiness Band 2	Scholarship Tier B as realistic; Tier A as selective stretch where ICAS and trial performance are strong.
Readiness Band 3	Fee-paying enrolment or partial/remission scholarships in Tier B may be more realistic, with academic scholarships attempted selectively rather than assumed.

# 8. How to Use This Guide in Practice

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## Follow these steps:

1. **Complete the three checks** with existing data; record A/B/C for each.
2. **Assign a Readiness Band** (1, 2 or 3) using the patterns above.
3. **Use the OC / Selective / Scholarship tier mapping to:**
  - Build a shortlist of "stretch", "realistic" and "secure" options, and
  - Adjust expectations if the current data does not support certain tiers yet.
4. **Revisit the checks annually** as new NAPLAN, ICAS and school data become available.

This way, you are basing key decisions on a stable average across multiple sources, rather than chasing individual highs or being discouraged by one-off lows.

## Key Benefits of This Approach:

- **Evidence-based decisions:** Uses multiple data points rather than single test results
- **Realistic expectations:** Helps align school choices with actual performance patterns
- **Reduced stress:** Focuses on trends rather than individual test anxiety
- **Strategic planning:** Enables better preparation and school application strategies
- **Ongoing assessment:** Allows for adjustments as new data becomes available

## Remember:

This guide is designed to provide clarity and direction in your educational planning journey. While it offers structured guidance based on established assessment data, every child is unique, and factors beyond academic performance—such as school culture, individual interests, and wellbeing—should also play important roles in your decision-making process.

Use this framework as a starting point for informed discussions with your child, teachers, and educational advisors to create the best possible educational pathway for your family's specific circumstances.