

NSW PATHWAYS GUIDE™

Opportunity Class (OC) /
Selective High School /
Private Scholarship

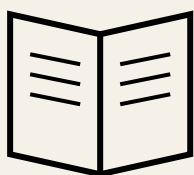


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1. Purpose of This Guide

Families in New South Wales who are considering advanced academic pathways often face three major options:

- **Opportunity Classes (OC)** in Years 5–6
- **Selective high schools** in Years 7–12
- **Private school scholarships** (independent/Catholic sector)

This guide:

- explains what each pathway is,
- summarises how entry works,
- sets out pros, trade-offs and common misconceptions, and
- provides a simple decision flowchart to help families think through which routes may be appropriate at different stages.

It draws on current NSW Department of Education information on opportunity classes and selective high schools, as well as public information on scholarship testing programs such as ACER and EduTest.

2. Brief Definitions

2.1 Opportunity Classes (OC)

What they are

Opportunity classes are full-time, academically selective classes for high potential and gifted students in Years 5 and 6, offered at a limited number of NSW public primary schools.

When you apply

Parents usually apply when the child is in Year 3 or early Year 4 for placement starting in Year 5. It is a two-year program only (Year 5 and 6; no separate Year 6 entry).

How entry works

Students sit an Opportunity Class Placement Test in Year 4. The test currently has Reading, Mathematical Reasoning and Thinking Skills components and selection is based on relative performance (percentiles) across all candidates, not fixed cut-off scores.

2.2 Selective High Schools (Year 7–12)

What they are

Selective high schools are NSW public high schools that provide academically selective programs for high potential and gifted students in Years 7–12. They offer more advanced and faster-paced academic work than a typical comprehensive high school.

When you apply

For Year 7 entry, families apply when the child is in Year 5/6, with the placement test usually held in Year 6 and outcomes released later that year.

How entry works

Students sit the Selective High School Placement Test, which (from 2025) is a computer-based exam with four equally weighted sections: Reading, Mathematical Reasoning, Thinking Skills and Writing.

Entry is highly competitive: recent data indicate roughly 18,000 applicants for just over 4,000 Year 7 places each year.

2.3 Private School Scholarships

What they are

Private (independent and some Catholic) schools may offer academic, all-rounder, music or sport scholarships which remit part or all of the school fees for a defined period (for example, Years 7–12).

When you apply

Scholarship tests are typically sat in Year 4–6 for secondary entry, with some schools also offering later entry scholarships (e.g. Year 9 or 11).

How entry works

Many schools use external testing bodies such as ACER, EduTest or Academic Assessment Services (AAS), which run standardised scholarship exams assessing reasoning, reading and writing rather than curriculum recall. Some schools design their own tests and may add auditions, portfolios or interviews for music or sport scholarships.

3. Flowchart: Which Pathway(s) Should We Consider?

You can turn this into a visual flowchart with boxes and arrows. Below is the logic in text form.

Step 1 – Where is your child now?

Currently in Year 2–3

- OC is a potential early acceleration pathway (Years 5–6).

Currently in Year 3–4

- Decision point for OC application (Year 4 test) and early thinking about selective / scholarships later.

Currently in Year 5

- Main decision is usually selective high school vs local/Catholic/independent for Year 7;
- Scholarship exams (for Year 7 entry) often sit in Year 5 or early Year 6.

Currently in Year 6

- Focus is on selective test outcomes, local placement, and late scholarship opportunities;
- Later entry (Years 8–11) to selective or private schools remains possible.

Step 2 – What is your primary constraint?

Ask: Which of these matters most to our family right now?

Cost sensitivity

- Public OC and selective programs have no tuition fees (standard public school contributions only).
- Private scholarships may reduce fees substantially, but many are partial, and families must be comfortable with remaining fees and incidental costs.

Geography and commute

- OC and selective schools are available across metropolitan, regional and rural NSW, but not in every suburb; some placements involve significant travel.
- Private schools may be closer (or further) depending on location; transport and time cost need to be considered in any pathway.

Type of environment sought

- OC and selective schools focus on academic extension within the NSW public system, aligning with the High Potential and Gifted Education (HPGE) policy.
- Private schools often emphasise a broader "whole-school" package (facilities, co-curricular programs, pastoral structures) with varying degrees of academic selectivity and pressure.

Step 3 – What best matches your child's current profile?

Use a simple screening based on your existing data (school reports, NAPLAN, trial tests) and temperament:

Profile A – Highly advanced academically and enjoys competition

- High or "Exceeding / Strong" in NAPLAN Reading and Numeracy;
- Strong school reports in English and Maths;
- Coping well with timed tests and new concepts.

→ **Pathways to consider as primary:** OC for Years 5–6 (if age-appropriate), a range of selective high schools (including more competitive options), academic scholarships at schools with strong HSC outcomes.

4. Comparison Table: OC vs Selective vs Private Scholarship

Feature	Opportunity Class (OC)	Selective High School
Primary years covered	Years 5–6	Years 7–12
Sector	NSW public primary	NSW public high (fully or partially selective)
Purpose	Provide full-time, academically selective classes for high potential students in Years 5–6.	Provide academically challenging programs for high potential students in Years 7–12.
When you apply	End of Year 3 / start of Year 4, for Year 5 start.	Year 5/6 for Year 7 entry; later applications possible for Years 8–11 (school-managed).
Entry test	OC Placement Test (Reading, Mathematical Reasoning, Thinking Skills).	Selective High School Placement Test (Reading, Mathematical Reasoning, Thinking Skills, Writing; equal weighting).
Number of places	~1,840 Year 5 places across NSW; demand significantly exceeds supply.	Just over 4,000 Year 7 places across all selective high schools, with many more applicants.
Fees	No additional tuition fees beyond public schooling.	No additional tuition fees beyond public schooling.
Duration	2 years (Years 5–6).	Usually 6 years (Years 7–12).

Feature	Private School Scholarship
Primary years covered	Usually Years 7–12 (sometimes Year 5/6 entry or later entry)
Sector	Independent or Catholic
Purpose	Provide fee relief and attract high-performing or talented students to specific schools.
When you apply	Typically Year 4–6 for Year 7; some offer Year 9 or 11 scholarships.
Entry test	School-chosen scholarship exam (often ACER, EduTest, AAS; some school-written tests).
Number of places	Varies by school; often a small number of full or partial scholarships per year.
Fees	Fees partially or fully remitted according to scholarship conditions; families still cover non-tuition costs.
Duration	Depends on school (often 4–6 years for secondary).

5. Pros and Trade-Offs (Pros/Cons) – in Formal Language

These lists are general patterns, not absolute statements. Individual schools can differ.

5.1 Opportunity Classes (OC)

Potential advantages

- Provide full-time grouping with similarly advanced peers in Years 5–6, which can support higher-level discussion and faster pacing in core subjects.
- Offer access to advanced curriculum within the public system, without additional tuition fees.
- May help some students adjust early to selective-style expectations, ahead of high school.

Potential trade-offs

- Students often need to change primary schools for only two years, which may disrupt existing friendships or local ties.
- Travel can be significant if the OC school is not nearby.
- The placement process is highly competitive; some families may experience increased pressure around a single Year 4 exam.

5.2 Selective High Schools

Potential advantages

- Provide an environment where teaching and curriculum are geared to high potential students, often including extension and acceleration options and exposure to advanced coursework.
- Peer groups typically include many students who are academically focused, which can be motivating for some children.
- As public schools, they do not charge tuition fees, making them a relatively low-cost option for high-level academic schooling.

Potential trade-offs

- Entry is highly competitive and based on relative performance; not receiving an offer does not mean a student lacks ability.
- Some students may experience reduced academic self-concept when moving from being "top of the primary class" to sitting among many equally high-achieving peers (the "big-fish–little-pond" effect noted in research).
- Commutes to selective schools can be long, affecting time for sleep, homework and co-curricular activities.

5.3 Private School Scholarships

Potential advantages

- Access to additional facilities and co-curricular programs (music, sport, overseas exchanges, specialist facilities) that may not be available in all local or selective schools.
- Some schools offer structured programs for gifted and talented students, integrated with pastoral care and broader school culture.
- Scholarships can significantly reduce tuition fees while retaining the benefits of an independent school environment.

Potential trade-offs

- Many scholarships are partial, meaning families still carry a substantial financial commitment and must consider fee increases over time.
- Scholarship programs often involve additional expectations (maintaining grades, representing the school, co-curricular commitments).
- The academic pressure and culture vary widely between schools; some environments can be high-pressure and may not suit every student.

6. How This Guide Fits with Scholarly Support

You can close the lead magnet by explaining how Scholarly helps parents navigate these choices:

- interpreting data (NAPLAN, trial tests, school reports),
- using tools such as the Selective Fit Self-Test and Plan B & C Blueprint,
- planning preparation timelines using the 12-Month Exam Countdown Planner, and
- discussing local extension, OC, selective and scholarship options as integrated pathways rather than competing "all-or-nothing" choices.

This guide provides the foundation for understanding your options, but every family's situation is unique. Scholarly's personalised approach helps you make decisions that align with your child's abilities, your family's values, and your practical circumstances.

For more detailed guidance and support in navigating these pathways, contact Scholarly to discuss your specific situation and develop a tailored plan that works for your family.