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# SCHOOL REPORT DECODER

UNDERSTANDING WHAT  
EACH LINE MEANS FOR  
SELECTIVE CHANCES



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Understanding What Each Line Means  
for Selective Chances

# 1. What This Guide Is – and Is Not

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This guide is designed to help parents decode a typical NSW primary school report so they can:

- understand what A–E grades, comments, bands and percentiles actually mean, and
- see how these pieces of information relate (approximately) to selective high school readiness.

## It is not:

- a prediction tool or guarantee of offers
- a replacement for teacher judgement, the NSW Department of Education's own information, or professional advice.

Selective high schools are for high potential and gifted students, and entry is competitive. For Year 7 entry, parents apply when their child is in Year 5/6, and places are allocated based on relative performance, not fixed cut-offs.

Your child's school report cannot tell you definitively, 'you will get into X', but it can give useful signals.

## 2. Key Parts of a NSW Primary School Report

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A typical NSW primary report will include some or all of the following:

- A–E grades in each subject (using the Common Grade Scale)
- Outcome statements for English and Mathematics (Stage 2/3 outcomes)
- NAPLAN block / proficiency levels (for Years 3, 5, 7, 9)
- Percentiles, rankings, or 'top X%' notes (not in every school, but common in some)
- Teacher comments and effort/attitude indicators

Here is what each of these means in formal terms.

### 2.1. A–E Grades: The Common Grade Scale

#### NSW uses a Common Grade Scale (A–E) in Years 1–10:

A (Outstanding / Extensive)

- The student has extensive knowledge and understanding of the content, and can apply skills in new and challenging situations.

B (High / Thorough)

- Thorough knowledge and understanding; can apply skills in most situations.

C (Sound)

- Sound knowledge and understanding; working at the expected standard for the stage.

D (Basic)

- Basic knowledge and understanding; has difficulty when tasks become more complex.

E (Limited / Elementary)

- Only elementary knowledge and understanding; needs significant support.

#### Important points:

- A C is not a '50%' – it means the student is performing at the expected standard.
- Teachers use professional, on-balance judgement based on multiple pieces of evidence.

## 2.2. Outcomes

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Reports often list syllabus outcomes (codes such as EN3-3A, MA3-7NA). These describe the knowledge and skills expected by the end of a stage (e.g. Stage 3 = Years 5–6).

'Achieved' or 'Working beyond' an outcome indicates secure or advanced understanding.

Outcomes are written for teachers, so they can be difficult for families to interpret without explanation.

## 2.3. NAPLAN Proficiency Levels

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From 2023 onward, NAPLAN is reported as four proficiency levels rather than old 'bands':

**Exceeding: result exceeds expectations for the year level.**

**Strong: result meets challenging but reasonable expectations.**

**Developing: working towards expectations.**

**Needs additional support: not yet meeting expected outcomes, likely to require extra support.**

NAPLAN gives a national reference point for reading, writing and numeracy.

## 2.4. Percentiles and Rankings

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Some reports and portals show:

- Percentiles (e.g. 'Writing: 85th percentile in grade')
- Rankings (e.g. 'Top 5 / 120 students in Mathematics')
- Standardised scores (e.g. stanines, scaled scores)

These indicate relative position among a group, not raw marks.

## 2.5. Comments and Effort

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Teacher comments and effort ratings often reveal:

- independence and organisation
- resilience, response to feedback
- behaviour and engagement

Selective environments rely heavily on independent work habits and resilience, so comments here matter.



### 3. How School Reports Connect to Selective Chances

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#### For Year 7 entry:

The selective placement score is built from a combination of school assessment and placement test performance. Historically, a maximum of 300 points has been used, with up to 200 points from the test and up to 100 points from the scaled school assessment, adjusted across schools.

The NSW Department of Education now emphasises that there are no fixed minimum entry scores; offers depend on relative ranking, number of applicants and places.

#### Implications:

- School reports matter because they inform the school assessment component and reflect teacher judgement of achievement.
- However, they must be read together with NAPLAN, trial test data and other indicators – not in isolation.

## 4. Decoder Key – What Each Line Signals

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Below is a decoder key you can apply to your child's report.  
It should be treated as a guide, not a guarantee.

### 4.1. A–E Grades in English and Mathematics

#### Pattern A – Mostly A's (and strong B's)

##### Likely signal:

- Student is performing well above expected standard in core areas.
- In a typical mixed-ability cohort, this often implies top 10–15% of the year group.

##### Selective implication:

- Positive sign for competitiveness at many selective schools, especially when supported by NAPLAN 'Strong/Exceeding' and solid trial test performance.

#### Pattern B – Mostly B's (with some A's or strong C's)

##### Likely signal:

- Student has thorough or solid achievement overall.
- May be in the top third of a typical cohort, with some areas stronger than others.

##### Selective implication:

- Potentially competitive for a range of selective schools, particularly mid-tier or partially selective, assuming strong test performance and good work habits.

#### Pattern C – Mostly C's, occasional D's

##### Likely signal:

- Student is at or close to the expected standard for the year level; some gaps may be present in harder topics.

##### Selective implication:

- This profile alone is not usually enough evidence to treat the highest-pressure selective environments as the main focus right now.
- Extension at a local or Catholic/independent school, with targeted skill building, may be the priority unless other data show a very different picture.

## 4.2. Outcomes: Achieved / Working Beyond / Working Towards

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### 'Working beyond Stage 3 outcomes' in English/Maths

**Signal:**

- Student is operating above the expected Stage level for their year.

**Selective implication:**

- Supports the idea that they are ready for accelerated or enriched content, favourable for selective readiness.

### 'Achieved most Stage 3 outcomes'

**Signal:**

- Working at the expected stage standard; there may still be room for stretch.

**Selective implication:**

- Combined with strong NAPLAN and trial performance, this can still be compatible with selective entry, particularly in mid-tier schools.

### 'Working towards Stage 3 outcomes'

**Signal:**

- Not yet consistently meeting year-level expectations; may need consolidation.

**Selective implication:**

- Suggests that immediate focus should be on securing core skills before aiming exclusively at highly competitive selective tiers.

## 4.3. NAPLAN Block in the Report

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### Example lines in a report:

- 'NAPLAN 2024 – Reading: Exceeding'
- 'NAPLAN 2024 – Numeracy: Strong'

### Decoder:

Exceeding = above expectations, often aligned with higher-performing students nationally.

Strong = meets challenging but reasonable expectations for the year level.

A pattern of Exceeding/Strong in Reading and Numeracy across multiple years is consistent with a high academic baseline.

### Approximate selective implication:

- Multiple years of Exceeding/Strong in key domains, combined with strong school grades and trial data, generally supports serious consideration of selective pathways.
- Developing or Needs additional support in key domains suggests that selective may be a longer-term goal, with an initial focus on consolidation.

## 4.4. Percentiles / Rankings in School Reports

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### Where available:

- 'Top 10% of cohort in Mathematics' → very strong indicator of relative performance.
- 'Between 25th and 50th percentile in Reading' → around middle of the group.

### Selective implication (approximate):

- Top 10–15% in a large, academically solid cohort in both English and Mathematics is consistent with being competitive for many selective schools, provided test performance aligns.
- Top third but not top decile may still align with mid-tier selective or partially selective settings.
- Lower percentiles may still support local extension, Catholic or independent options as strong pathways.

## 4.5. Teacher Comments and Effort

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### Comments such as:

- 'Works independently and completes tasks with minimal prompting.'
- 'Persists with challenging tasks and uses feedback to improve.'
- 'Reads widely beyond class requirements.'

are strong signals of selective-relevant habits.

### Comments such as:

- 'Requires frequent reminders to stay on task.'
- 'Rushes work and makes careless errors.'
- 'Finds timed tasks stressful and may give up quickly.'

indicate areas where coaching and habit-building are required, even if grades are high.

## 5. Annotated Sample Report – Line by Line

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Below is a constructed example of a Year 5 Semester 1 report extract, followed by a 'decoder' column you can mirror for your own child.

### 5.1. English Section (Sample)

**Subject: English**

**Grade: A**

#### **Outcomes:**

- EN3-1A: Composes and responds to texts using appropriate language forms and features – Achieved, working beyond stage expectations
- EN3-7C: Thinks imaginatively, creatively, interpretively and critically about familiar and unfamiliar texts – Achieved

#### **Comment:**

*"[Student] reads widely and with strong comprehension. They infer meaning from complex texts, use sophisticated vocabulary in writing, and edit work independently. They participate actively in class discussions and justify their opinions with evidence from the text."*

#### **Decoder:**

- A in English + 'working beyond stage expectations'  
→ strong evidence of performance above expected level.
- Comment emphasises independent reading, inference and writing  
– skills directly relevant to selective English components.

#### **Selective implication:**

- Favourable indicator for both selective and scholarship pathways, especially when mirrored in Mathematics and NAPLAN Reading.

## 5.2. Mathematics Section (Sample)

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**Subject: Mathematics**

**Grade: B**

**Outcomes:**

- MA3-4NA: Orders, reads and represents integers and solves problems involving addition and subtraction – Achieved
- MA3-7NA: Compares, orders and calculates with fractions, decimals and percentages – Achieved
- MA3-18SP: Uses appropriate methods to collect data and constructs suitable data displays – Working towards

**Comment:**

*"[Student] has a thorough understanding of core number concepts and applies strategies accurately in routine questions. In unfamiliar multi-step problems, they sometimes need support to plan their approach. They would benefit from further practice with fractions, decimals, and time management in multi-step tasks."*

**Decoder:**

- B grade → 'thorough' understanding; a strong but not outstanding result.
- Outcomes show most key number outcomes achieved, one area still developing (data).
- Comment suggests that the main limitation is problem-solving under novelty/time pressure rather than basic understanding.

**Selective implication:**

- Solid foundation for selective mathematics. Targeted practice in multi-step reasoning and timed conditions may be needed to convert this into competitive selective test performance.



## 5.3. NAPLAN Block (Sample)

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NAPLAN 2024 – Year 5

Reading: Exceeding

Writing: Strong

Numeracy: Strong

### Decoder:

- Pattern of Exceeding/Strong in Year 5, particularly following similarly strong Year 3 results, is consistent with a student who sits in the higher national range.
- Combined with the English A and Mathematics B above, this supports an interpretation of high baseline academic ability.

### Selective implication:

- When combined with strong classroom performance and well-developed work habits, this NAPLAN pattern aligns with being competitive for a range of selective schools, and potentially more competitive tiers if trial results are equally strong.

## 5.4. Percentiles / Rankings (Sample)

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### Examples:

- 'Mathematics internal assessment: approx. top 15% of cohort.'
- 'Reading comprehension assessments: approx. top 10%.'

### Decoder:

- Being top 10–15% across core areas in a typical mixed-ability school suggests the student is at or near the upper end of the cohort.
- This is consistent with an A/B pattern in English/Maths and strong NAPLAN.

### Selective implication:

- Combined with supportive comments and trial test performance, this is within the range commonly seen among students who gain entry to many selective schools, with the very top schools remaining a stretch depending on test performance and competition in a given year.

## 5.5. Effort and Comment Summary (Sample)

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### Effort:

English – Always

Mathematics – Usually

### General comment:

*"[Student] is a highly motivated learner who sets personal goals and acts on feedback. They manage class time well, complete homework reliably, and maintain positive relationships with peers. At times, they become anxious about assessments; continued support with stress management will be beneficial as expectations increase in Year 6."*

### Decoder:

- High effort ratings and positive comments about independence and organisation are strong predictors of being able to cope with the volume and pace of selective settings.
- Note the anxiety comment – this is not a barrier, but an indication that wellbeing should be actively managed if the student enters a more competitive environment.

## 6. Putting It Together – Traffic Light Framework

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You can think in terms of traffic lights based on the combined pattern:

### Green Zone – Strong Indicators for Selective

- English and Mathematics mostly A/B with comments emphasising depth, independence and problem-solving.
- NAPLAN Reading and Numeracy consistently Strong/Exceeding across years.
- Where available, internal assessments show top 10–20% placement in the cohort.
- Effort comments show high motivation and self-management.

#### → Implication:

It is reasonable to treat one or more selective schools as serious primary options, while still building robust Plan B and C pathways in other sectors.

### Amber Zone – Mixed Signals

- A mixture of B/C grades; strengths in some areas, gaps in others.
- NAPLAN at Strong in at least one domain, Developing in others.
- Comments suggest potential but highlight issues such as inconsistent effort, significant time-management difficulties, or anxiety.

#### → Implication:

Selective may still be appropriate for some students, particularly mid-tier or partially selective schools, but decisions should be made cautiously and alongside strong non-selective, Catholic or independent options.

### Red Zone – Foundation First

- English and Mathematics mainly C/D, with outcomes marked 'working towards' in several key areas.
- NAPLAN mostly Developing or Needs additional support.
- Comments indicate persistent difficulties with basic skills, engagement, or attendance.

#### → Implication:

Immediate priority is consolidating core skills and wellbeing. High-quality extension within a local, Catholic or independent school can still offer strong long-term pathways, and selective options can be reconsidered when the academic and emotional base is more secure.

## 7. How to Use This Decoder

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1. Lay out your child's report and, for each section, use the 'decoder key' to identify green/amber/red signals.
2. Summarise the pattern (not just the highest or lowest mark).
3. Discuss the report with your child's teacher, bringing specific questions:
  - 'In which areas do you see my child at the top of the cohort?'
  - 'Where are the most important gaps to address before we consider selective?'
4. Combine this with other data (NAPLAN, trial selective tests, ICAS, etc.) before setting targets.

Used properly, the school report becomes one part of a calm, informed decision about selective high schools – not a source of confusion or panic.