



Selective-entry Academic Schools Discussion Paper

June 2007

Published by the Office of Education Policy and Innovation
Department of Education
Melbourne
June 2007

Also published on www.education.vic.gov.au

© Copyright State of Victoria 2007

This publication is copyright.
No part may be reproduced by any process except in
accordance with the provisions of the *Copyright Act 1968*.

Authorised by
Department of Education,
2 Treasury Place,
East Melbourne, Victoria, 3002

Contents

Preface	2
Introduction	3
Consideration 1: Meeting the Needs of Students and Schools	5
Selection process	5
Enrolment caps	6
A 'discretionary selection category'	7
Consideration 2: The Depth and Breadth of Applications	9
Consideration 3: Partnership Potential	11
Consideration 4: Governance Arrangements	13
Appendix: Summary of Considerations and Key Questions	14

Preface

Public consultation process for selective-entry schools

The Victorian Government is inviting public comment by written submission on operational issues concerning the establishment of two new selective entry academic schools. These submissions will be taken into consideration in finalising policy concerning the development and operation of selective entry academic schools in Victoria.

This discussion paper has been prepared to assist consideration of the issues and with the preparation of submissions.

Submissions are to be sent electronically to sec@edumail.vic.gov.au and should be identified in the email subject line as 'Selective-entry schools'. A submission form has been provided. All submissions will be treated as public documents.

Submissions close at 5pm on Friday, 14 September 2007.

For further information, telephone Neil Barker, Manager, Priority Projects Branch of the Department of Education's Office of Education Policy and Innovation on (03) 9637 2306.

Scope of the consultation

This consultation is focused on the operational issues involved in the establishment of two new selective entry academic schools in Victoria. It does not involve discussion about the need for, and place of, selective-entry schools.

Introduction

Providing opportunities and pathways for the diversity of student need and interest across the state is central to ensuring ‘an assured future for all Victorians and a prosperous society through learning¹.’ A broad array of programs and potential pathways are currently available for Victorian students and it is important that future initiatives continue to focus on this key area.

In the 2006 state election the Government’s election commitments included the development of two new co-educational selective entry Year 9–12 academic schools – one in North Melbourne and one in the outer-eastern growth corridor of Melbourne.

The establishment of the two new selective-entry schools will provide increased state-wide opportunities for academically talented students to pursue a focused academic pathway through their senior years of government secondary schooling.

In meeting this commitment to a comprehensive and systematic approach to catering for the diversity of need among highly-able academic students a number of key considerations need to be explored. Discussion needs to focus on how these schools might operate, particularly in the context of the broader education system; how these schools can bring value to the broader education system; how the education system and broader community might support these schools; and on how the balance between the needs and interests of individual students and the needs and interests of schools can be achieved?

Current selective entry school arrangements

There are currently two selective entry academic schools in Victoria – Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School and Melbourne High School. The schools began as one school in 1905 and were the first government high schools in Victoria. Melbourne High School is a boy’s school that caters for students in Years 9–12. Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School is for girls in Years 9–12. Prospective students undertake an exam in Year 8.

These two schools have the highest VCE median score in the state (government and non-government schools); have the highest exit destination of Year 12 students to University of all government schools; and have extremely high Year 11–12 retention rates.

Approximately 50 per cent of the current Year 9 enrolments come from non-government schools.

1. Vision Statement, sited in Department of Education & Training 2005, *Corporate Plan 2003–06*, p .8. Available from <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/stratman/planning/corpplan/detc.orporate-pln.pdf>

Mac.Robertson Girls' High School and Melbourne High School currently provide for approximately 2,300 Year 9–12 Victorian students each year. There is, however, significant unmet demand for entry to these two schools. Each year, there are approximately 2,500 applications for the 560 Year 9 places at Melbourne High and Mac.Robertson Girls' High schools.

The development of two new schools has implications for the management of the current selective entry school arrangements. It also provides opportunities to consider the role and operation of selective entry school programs and pathways for highly-able academic students in Victoria.

This paper provides a basis for discussion concerning the arrangements for selective entry schooling in Victoria. Current arrangements are outlined and a number of key questions are posed.

Consideration 1: Meeting the Needs of Students and Schools

Increasing opportunities and pathways for highly-able academic students requires careful consideration of the needs, interests and abilities of the students, the interests and preferences of parents and the needs and interests of schools across the state.

Key question 1 – How can a balance be achieved between the needs and interests of individual students and the needs and interests of schools?

In balancing the needs and interests of students, parents and schools, consideration needs to be given to a range of factors involved in managing the operation of these schools. Factors such as the processes used for student selection, the use of discretionary selection processes and the use of enrolment ‘caps’ to manage the transfer of students between schools. These factors are discussed below.

Selection process

The processes used to select students will impact on the mix of students who attend each of the schools. Consideration needs to be given to how the processes are applied, and to the form/s of selection used.

Key question 2 – How should the selection process into the selective-entry schools be conducted?

Currently, students who are interested in attending Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School and Melbourne High School sit an entrance ‘exam’ in Year 8. The exam, which has been developed by the two schools, takes approximately three hours and covers Verbal Reasoning, Numerical Reasoning, Reading Comprehension, Mathematics, Creative Expression and Analytical Expression.

Focus questions:

- What form should the selection take?
 - Should an ‘examination’ be retained or should there be interviews, written applications or a combination of these and/or other methods?
- What should the exam test?

The current exam process is administered jointly by Mac.Robertson Girls’ High School and Melbourne High School through a common exam, usually held in the middle of each year.

The establishment of two new schools will allow students to apply for more than one selective entry school. One option for organising the selection process for the four schools is to have a common process, with selection arrangements and student preferences for placement being undertaken in a coordinated manner. An alternative option would be for each school to undertake their own separate selection process.

Focus questions:

- Should each school operate their own selection and enrolment process, or should a common process exist?
- If a common process is developed who should manage the process?
- Should students be able to nominate a preferred school? If yes, how should preferences be applied?
 - For example, should preference be allocated on ‘applicant score’, school preference, locality or some other criteria?
 - Would zoning be useful in determining student enrolment allocation?
- Which arrangements would be most the most effective and efficient for students, parents, selective-entry schools and source schools?

Enrolment caps

Enrolment ‘caps’ are currently used to manage the transfer of students from ‘source’ schools to selective-entry schools. This cap is applied to both government and non-government schools and ensures that no more than 3 per cent of a Year 8 cohort from any one source school can be selected for enrolment at the selective-entry schools through the exam process. For example, a school may have a Year 8 enrolment of 200 students, the 3 per cent cap would mean that no more than six students can be offered a place in one of the selective-entry schools.

Key question 3 – Should there be caps on enrolments from source schools? If so, should a single cap applied to all schools or a differential cap?

Enrolment caps are currently the key mechanism for balancing the needs and aspirations of students with the needs of schools. They regulate the transfer of students from individual schools. Schools make a number of important resourcing, curriculum, learning and teaching decisions based upon enrolment numbers and projections and upon the characteristics of their student population. The transfer of highly-able students to selective-entry schools can impact on a school’s ability to provide a comprehensive and quality education for its students.

Enrolment caps can be used to give preference to particular applicants or groups of applicants; for example, students from particular locations. They can also be used to limit the number of students selected for enrolment from particular source schools or groups of source schools; for example, government or non-government schools.

Focus questions:

- Are enrolment caps necessary or desirable?
- If enrolment caps are necessary, then to which schools should the cap/s be applied: government schools, non-government schools, large schools, small schools, high-performing schools, equity-funded schools, and/or schools in particular locations?
 - Why?
- Should caps be applied to individual schools and/or would an overarching cap on a particular category of schools be more effective?

The application of caps can limit the enrolment opportunities of some highly-able academic students. For example, a student may score in the top 10 per cent of all students who apply, but may be excluded from enrolment as the school they attend has already reached the 3 per cent cap, whereas a student who scores less well on the exam may be offered enrolment as that school has not yet reached the 3 per cent school cap. Increasing the cap would provide a greater number of more highly-able students with opportunities for selection.

Focus questions:

- If there is a cap, at what level should it be set?
 - What effect might different cap percentages have on individual students' opportunities?
- Should a cap or range of caps be used to provide preference or priority for particular student or group of students?
 - If so, which students?

A 'discretionary selection category'

Currently, 95 per cent of the Year 9 enrolments at the selective-entry schools are selected through the 'examination' process described above. The remaining 5 per cent are selected through a 'discretionary selection category'. This equates to approximately 28 students per year across both Mac.Robertson Girls' High School and Melbourne High School.

This selection category is designed to account for 'extenuating' or 'exceptional' circumstances. Students selected under this category must, however, be within five marks of the examination cut off. Criteria for selection in this category currently includes illness at the time of the examination, interrupted schooling as a result of illness, non-English speaking background, siblings attending the school, other evidence of academic performance, special abilities (for example, in music, sport), anomalies arising from application of the aforementioned 3 per cent cap, and the recommendation of the contributing school.

Key question 4 – What should the purpose of any 'discretionary' selection category be? How should this category be applied?

A discretionary selection category could suit a range of purposes designed to give particular students opportunity for selection. For example, it might be used to give preference to students from the local area or to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, or it might be

used to continue to provide opportunity for students who have experienced ‘extenuating’ circumstances. It might also be used to provide for a combination of these or other circumstances. Another option might be to remove this category completely and to select all students using the same process.

Focus questions:

- Should there be a discretionary selection category?
 - If so, for whom should this category be designed to provide opportunity?
 - What criteria should be used?
- What percentage of students should be selected under this category?
 - Should there be different percentages for different groups?
- What might be the implications of removing this category, or increasing the percentage of students selected under this category?

The discretionary category is currently applied above the ‘3 per cent cap’, potentially increasing the number of students selected from a particular source school.

Focus question:

- Should this category of selection be within an enrolment cap, or in addition to any cap?

It might also be desirable to have different categories for each of the four schools so that they might address local needs and interests.

Focus questions:

- Should there be different criteria for different schools, or should the criteria be common for the four schools?
- If different criteria are necessary, what criteria should there be for each school?

Consideration 2: The Depth and Breadth of Applications

The development of two new co-educational selective-entry schools sited in North Melbourne and the outer-eastern growth corridor of Melbourne provides an opportunity to increase the number and range of applicants. Selection arrangements will need to ensure that appropriate numbers of highly-able students apply, and that the students who are selected are those most likely to benefit from their enrolment at the selective-entry schools.

Key question 5 – How might the number and breadth of applicants across the state be increased?

The processes used to select students should ensure that all highly-able academic students have an opportunity to access the selective-entry schools. Parents and students should have knowledge of, and access to, the selection processes used by selective-entry schools.

Focus questions:

- How might various ‘forms’ of selection be used to influence the breadth of applications?
- How might the broader education system support students who are interested in a selective entry school pathway, or those who might benefit from it?

The ‘performance’ and ability range of students who apply for entry to the selective-entry schools is likely to vary. It will be important to ensure that students who are selected are those most likely to benefit from being at a selective entry school.

Focus questions:

- Should a minimum set of ‘standards’ for selection apply?
 - If so, how should the standards be determined?
- Where vacancies at the selective-entry schools exist, should students be enrolled if they do not meet the standards set or where there is a possibility that the school might not meet that student’s needs?

Key question 6 – What strategies should be used to ensure equity of opportunity for all highly-able academic students?

It is possible that economic, social and locational factors may restrict student opportunity. The distance to, or time taken to travel to, one of the selective-entry schools might discourage applicants. Some students may not be aware of selective entry schooling as a potential pathway or be discouraged by particular selection processes.

Focus questions:

- How might applications from underrepresented student populations and students from a variety of backgrounds and circumstances be encouraged?
- How might source schools encourage and support applications from students from disadvantaged backgrounds and underrepresented populations?
- What arrangements might exist for supporting students who may require assistance once enrolled?
 - For example, scholarships, mentoring programs or travel assistance?

Consideration 3: Partnership Potential

A variety of strategies and pathways exist to provide opportunities for the various needs and interests of Victorian students. The development of two new selective-entry schools provides an opportunity to consider how partnerships associated with selective-entry schools might assist in improving outcomes for the selective entry schools and for schools and students across the state.

Key question 7 – What opportunities might exist concerning cooperative relationships with educational, corporate, philanthropic and community organisations?

The development of a selective entry school in North Melbourne provides opportunities to examine innovative curriculum design and delivery associated with a city campus, including with major corporate organisations, universities, and major sports and cultural organisations. The establishment of a school in the outer-eastern growth corridor of Melbourne provides opportunities to consider partnerships and cooperative arrangements with new and emerging and established businesses and education providers. The current selective-entry schools already have well-established partnerships with a variety of organisations.

Focus questions:

- What particular opportunities exist for each of the selective-entry schools to develop cooperative partnerships and arrangements?
- What opportunities might exist for the four selective-entry schools to work cooperatively to develop common partnerships and arrangements with a range of organisations?

Key question 8 – How can selective-entry schools provide a benefit to the broader education system?

Selective-entry schools have the potential to provide the broader education system with a range of opportunities that will assist in improving outcomes for all schools and students across the state. These schools are well placed, for example, to be key players in research, development and support for the development of innovation in the education of gifted and talented students, as well as in the development of innovation in student learning strategies.

Focus questions:

- What cooperative arrangements might be developed between schools and groups of schools and non-school organisations that might impact positively on gifted and talented education or on innovation in student learning across the state?
 - For example, opportunities for mentoring, networking, research, etc.?

- What opportunities exist for using the selective-entry schools to enhance professional learning in schools in the local area, the region, the state?
- What research opportunities might exist for selective-entry schools?
- How might the various strategies and partnerships developed concerning selective-entry schools be used to provide a broader system benefit?
 - What new strategies and partnerships should to be considered to ensure that selective-entry schools provide a broader system benefit?

Consideration 4: Governance Arrangements

Establishing two new selective-entry schools provides opportunities to consider a variety of potential governance arrangements. Arrangements which might, for example, include various corporate, community and education partners and which might be used to develop innovative approaches to learning, teaching, leadership and management.

Key question 9 – What are the major governance considerations and opportunities associated with the new selective-entry schools?

The North Melbourne and outer-eastern growth corridor schools might be set up as completely new schools with their own school councils formed as per Department of Education guidelines, or they might be established in concert with, or as campuses of, existing schools.

It will be important to ensure that the governance arrangements that are developed meet the needs of the individual schools and their students and parents; that they are able to accommodate potential partnerships and cooperative arrangements; and they are able to support potential school arrangements for broader education system development.

Focus questions:

- What potential governance opportunities exist?
 - How might these arrangements be implemented?
- What opportunities might exist concerning governance relationships with other educational, corporate, philanthropic and community organisations, on a local, regional, state, national or international basis?
- How might governance arrangements need to be structured to ensure that any potential opportunities for broader education system benefit are able to be accommodated?

Appendix: Summary of Considerations and Key Questions

Consideration 1: Meeting the needs of students and schools

Key question 1

How can a balance be achieved between the needs and interests of individual students and the needs and interests of schools?

Key question 2

How should the selection process into the selective-entry schools be conducted?

Key question 3

Should there be caps on enrolments from source schools? If so, should a single cap applied to all schools or a differential cap?

Key question 4

What should the purpose of any 'discretionary' selection category be? How should this category be applied?

Consideration 2: The depth and breadth of applications

Key question 5

How might the number and breadth of applicants across the state be increased?

Key question 6

What strategies should be used to ensure equity of opportunity for all highly-able academic students?

Consideration 3: Partnership potential

Key question 7

What opportunities might exist concerning cooperative relationships with educational, corporate, philanthropic and community organisations?

Key question 8

How can selective-entry schools provide a benefit to the broader education system?

Consideration 4: Governance arrangements

Key question 9

What are the major governance considerations and opportunities associated with the new selective-entry schools?