

# Gifted children vie for special learning program

May 30, 2014

Benjamin Preiss



Brighton Secondary College student James Hunt is in the program. *Photo: Michael Clayton-Jones*

Demand is booming for select-entry classes for gifted children, far outstripping the number of places on offer at many state schools.

Schools that offer the accredited Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) program have held entrance exams in recent weeks.

Last year 36 schools ran the program but at least four others have since chosen to introduce it, although now they need not be accredited.

The program allows gifted students to do more challenging work than their mainstream classmates.

Some schools offer separate advanced programs.

University High School principal Rob Newton said about 440 children applied for the 2015 year 7 program, compared with about 350 in previous years. The school will offer 50 places.

He said the program was for gifted children who loved learning but were bored at school. "Our testing shows they're operating at year 8 level in grade 6," he said.

At Brighton Secondary College demand has increased about 10 per cent a year. The



Garance Timbal is also in the accelerated learning program. *Photo: Michael Clayton-Jones*

school aims to fill two SEAL classes and had about 150 applicants for the 2015 intake.

The college's SEAL program manager Brendan Pateman said he believed some parents tried to gain entry to the school through the program. He said 65 per cent of applicants lived outside the neighbourhood zone.

The program focused on problem solving and encouraged students to tackle philosophical questions, Mr Pateman said.

SEAL students often start VCE subjects earlier than their mainstream classmates. Brighton Secondary College also insists SEAL students learn an instrument and two languages in the junior years.

Monash University gifted education expert Leonie Kronborg said the select-entry program was different to the practice of streaming in which students are ranked in groups from best to worst-performing.

"It's about being aware of the academic, social and emotional needs of these students," she said.

Dr Kronborg said gifted children were often overlooked.

The state government has released a new strategy to raise the profile of gifted education.

At Box Hill High School more than 250 children applied to join the program in 2015. Principal Kate Mitchell said the program allowed students to do work that met their high abilities. "It's all about the educational needs of the child. It's not a badge of honour," she said.

Next year Mordialloc College will have two SEAL classes for the first time. College principal Michelle Roberts said 56 children applied for a total of about 40 places. "They were all very high calibre," she said.

At Brunswick Secondary College 75 students applied to join the program for 2015. The school intends to have a class of 25 students.

Demand for the program also increased at Mount Clear College in Ballarat, Rosebud Secondary College, Balwyn High School and Mill Park Secondary College.