

The Fair Education Project

Improving Equity in Selective School Entry in Western Australia

Policy options for increasing the fairness of the selective school system

Important Note: This is an independent, student-led project. It is not conducted, commissioned, endorsed or published by Perth Modern School or the WA Department of Education. Perth Modern School is identified only because the majority of respondents attended WA's only selective school. The views expressed in this document should not be interpreted as representing the views of Perth Modern School, its staff, students, leadership or the WA Department of Education.

Contents

Executive Summary

Part 1 - the problem

- 1.1 - Why does preparation matter?
- 1.2 - Limitations of evidence
- 1.3 - Unequal access to preparation

Part 2 - Policy

- 2.1 - Equalising access to preparation
 - 2.2 - Regulating private preparation
 - 2.3 - Targeting educational disadvantage
- Conclusion

Executive summary

Selective education is intended to provide academically challenging opportunities for students who demonstrate the potential to benefit them. However, students seeking selective-school entry may have unequal access to preparation and knowledge regarding the test, including commercial tutoring and paid resources.

In August 2026, The Fair Education Project conducted a voluntary survey of 330 students examining tutoring and selective-school access. The survey provides student perspectives on the prevalence, cost and perceived effectiveness of preparation. The sample was predominantly drawn from students attending a WA Selective school and is not representative of all Western Australian students generally.

This report considers policy approaches that could reduce the influence of unequal access to private preparation while maintaining the purpose and academic standards of selective education.

The Fair Education Project's current position is focused on improving access to high-quality, free GATE preparation. Other approaches discussed in this paper are presented as policy options for consideration and do not necessarily represent organisational positions.

Policy Options Examined

1. Equalising access to preparation: Proposals 1-4
2. Regulating private preparation: Proposal 5
3. Targeting educational disadvantage: Proposal 6

PART 1

The problem

1.1 Why does preparation matter?

Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) programs provide opportunities for students identified as having high academic potential to participate in academically enriched and challenging education. In Western Australia, students can apply to selective GATE programs through a selection process that includes an entrance assessment. Perth Modern School is currently Western Australia's only fully academically selective secondary school, while other schools offer specialist GATE programs.

For students seeking entry, performance in the selection assessment is therefore an important part of the process. Students and families may choose to undertake preparation before sitting the assessment. This may include using practice questions, sample tests, commercial tutoring and other paid or free resources.

Preparation is relevant to the policy discussion because students may not have equal access to these forms of support. Some families may be able to purchase commercial tutoring or resources, while others may rely on free tutoring or undertake little or no preparation.

This introduces a potential question of equity: to what extent should access to preparation outside the school system influence a student's opportunity to compete for a selective-school place?

The purpose of this paper is not to assume that tutoring directly determines GATE outcomes. A student's performance may be influenced by many other factors including academic ability, prior learning and motivation. Rather, the policy question is if all eligible students should have access to a reasonable baseline of high-quality preparation, regardless of their family's ability to purchase additional support.

1.2 Unequal access to preparation

In August 2026, we at the Fair Education Project conducted an independent, student-led survey. We received 330 responses, the majority of which attended WA's only fully academically selective school.

The results of the survey can be found here: [Link](#).

Among respondents who attended a selective school, 75% reported using external preparation for the GATE test. The most common method, by far, was at a tutoring center, reported by 82% (197) of respondents who prepared for the GATE test.

The survey also asked respondents to estimate how much they had spent on preparation for the GATE test. The largest reported expenditure category was between \$1000 and \$5000, selected by 35% (83 respondents). A further 17% (39 respondents) reported spending \$5,000-\$10,000, while 4% (10 respondents) reported spending more than \$10,000. These figures indicate that some students and families are spending substantial amounts on preparation for selective-school entry.

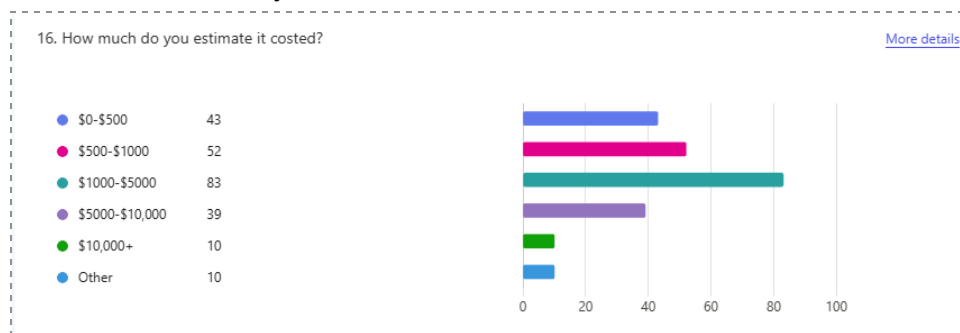


Figure 5: Reported expenditure.

These findings do not establish that tutoring causes students to perform better in the GATE selection process, nor do they demonstrate that expenditure directly determines admission. Students may differ in academic preparation, prior learning, motivation, familiarity with assessment and the amount and type of preparation undertaken. However, the findings do demonstrate that paid preparation is common among the surveyed population and that some students report substantial expenditure on it.

For the full methodology, questionnaire, response data and detailed results, see the Fair Education Project's Tutoring and Selective School Access in Western Australia — Survey Data Release (August 2026).

1.3 Limitations of evidence

The survey was voluntary and its respondents were not representative of all Western Australian students. The majority of respondents attended a selective school. The results should therefore be interpreted as student-reported evidence that informs policy discussion, rather than as an estimate of tutoring prevalence across Western Australia.

1.4 Policy objective

To ensure that students' access to selective-school opportunities is not unnecessarily constrained by their ability to purchase private preparation.

PART 2

Policy

2.1 Equalising access to preparation

Proposal 1 - Release past tests and other resources

The Department of Education could release GATE past tests, study guides and preparation guidance for parents in addition to the sample test already available. These could be available alongside the already available practice test. This circumvents the current need to pay a tutoring company to obtain high-quality preparation resources.

Potential benefits:

- This would remove the cost barrier for preparation.
- This would reduce reliance on sometimes expensive commercial preparation.
- This would be accessible regardless of family income.

Potential limitations:

- Universal resources may not eliminate disparities if families differ in the amount of time and encouragement provided.
- Students may still purchase private tutoring.
- Free preparation materials may encourage more applicants to prepare.
- Could create a preparation arms race, raising the bar of preparation needed to remain competitive. However, this may already occur with commercially available tutoring.
- As the GATE test aims to measure skills and natural abilities, releasing past papers may have a limited impact on actual performance.

Proposal 2 - Email every eligible parent and tell them about it

The Department of Education could send standard information to every eligible applicant. This could explain eligibility, the application process and outlining free preparation resources. This addresses the knowledge gap between parents who are knowledgeable about selective entry and those who are not.

Potential benefits:

- Could help to reduce differences in awareness between families who are familiar with selective-school pathways and those who are not.
- Could make free preparation resources easier to find and reduce reliance on information obtained through tutoring networks.
- Relatively inexpensive to implement compared with additional teaching or tutoring.

Potential Limitations:

- Receiving information does not guarantee that a student will apply or prepare.
- Families differ in the time, resources, and support they can provide even when they receive the same information.

Proposal 3 - Require schools to provide GATE information to eligible students and families

Similarly, schools could be required to provide information about GATE to eligible students and families. This should ensure that they understand application deadlines, testing information, and the free preparation resources available to them. This is another way to ensure more families understand the test.

Potential benefits:

- Could reduce differences in awareness of selective-school opportunities.
- Could increase applications from students who may otherwise not consider applying.
- Relatively inexpensive compared to other proposals.

Potential limitations:

- This does not guarantee that students will apply.
- Schools may have differ in their capacity to provide GATE information, resulting in inconsistent implementation.

Proposal 4 - School-Based GATE Preparation

The Department of Education could provide free GATE preparation through schools. This could include practice questions, workshops, or mock assessments. This is another way to reduce the need to pay for preparation.

Potential benefits:

- Provides students with access to preparation regardless of their family situation.
- Could give all students a baseline of familiarity with the assessment

Potential limitations:

- Would require funding, staff time, and appropriate training across the ~500 primary schools across the state.
- The quality and availability of preparation could vary between schools if implementation is inconsistent

2.2 Regulating private preparation

Proposal 5 - Regulate GATE-specific commercial tutoring

Regulate GATE tutoring. Ban outside of school GATE tutoring completely for kids in a certain year level and under, and only allow a specific number of hours or less of tuition per child per week after that. Require all GATE tutoring companies and tutors to enter a registry, and create a portal for parents, where they can anonymously complain about bad service, or breaking of the rules. This will help mitigate the 'vicious cycle' of more tutoring, starting earlier, that occurs due to competitiveness.

Potential benefits

- Could reduce the incentive for families to begin expensive selective-school preparation many years before the assessment.
- Could reduce pressure on younger students to undertake highly specialized entrance-test preparation.

Potential limitations:

- Enforcement would be difficult if tutoring is provided privately.
- Determining what counts as "GATE-specific" tutoring could be difficult.

2.3 Targeting educational disadvantage

Proposal 6 - Equity placement for disadvantaged students

An alternative approach could be to reserve a proportion of selective-school places for students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds who demonstrate strong academic potential. A similar model operates in New South Wales. Under the NSW Equity Placement Model, up to 20% of places at selective high schools are held for students from specified equity groups. Additionally, NSW is introducing a gender parity model from the 2027 intake. This approach is a more direct way to help ensure a diverse range of students can get placements.

Potential benefits

- Could improve representation of disadvantaged students in the selective school system.
- Could increase diversity within selective schools.

Potential limitations

- It may be difficult to determine eligibility.
- There may be potential concerns about academic selection.

Conclusion

Our current position is that we need to equalise preparation before restricting it. This project is not arguing that preparation itself is illegitimate. However, it is arguing that before imposing restrictions on private preparation, policymakers could consider whether every eligible student can access a reasonable public baseline of high-quality preparation.