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Students ditch the beach to get a head start on the HSC

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WHILE their friends are outside enjoying the sun, Jessica Bracken and Jake Samia are spending their holidays in a lecture theatre learning parts of the Legal Studies and English curricula before they return to school this month.

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The year 12 students hope to gain an edge over others in their final year by attending HSC "head start lectures", part of a booming industry of summer schools and holiday tuition for primary and high school students.

"I'm aiming for a very high mark in the HSC and I'm committed to getting it so I guess giving up my summer holidays for one year is a small sacrifice," said Jake, 17, from Holy Spirit College in Lakemba.

About 1000 students enrolled in summer school lectures with The School for Excellence, a private tuition institution which has doubled its intake in three years.

But the school's director, Irena Jaskula, said students are preparing for their HSC even earlier, in year 10.

"A lot of students feel that this is it, if they don't do well [in year 12] that their future prospects are very limited ... whereas if you start doing preparations slowly and gradually in year 10 you can reduce the overall pressure," she said. "People are realising that year 12 is not the year. You need to start earlier."

More than two-thirds of children enrolled in outside tutoring started at age 12 or younger, according to figures released by the Australian Tutoring Association yesterday, and as parents have more children they are enrolling them in tutoring from an earlier age.

By their third or fourth child, the majority of the 1000 parents surveyed were enrolling them in private tuition in pre-school.

"Parents were saying things like 'we realised that it was better not to leave things too late and that early intervention made the biggest difference'," said the chief executive of the association, Mohan Dhall.

"There's an element of 'keeping up with the Joneses' but parents are also taking a greater interest in education and identifying learning disabilities earlier.

"They're saying they're not going to rely on the school's remediation only."

He said private tuition should be included in the Education Tax Rebate to even the playing field.

Teachers also needed to see tutoring as an adjunct for students, not a competitor.

Jessica, 16, from Kellyville High School, said she would use everything possible to help her get into a Bachelor of Arts/Laws course. "I just like all the help I can get. You put so much pressure on yourself to do well."

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/students-ditch-the-beach-to-get-a-head-start-on-the-hsc-20120117-1q4t2.html>