



PORTLAND Secondary College Year 8 student Zak Heppenstall proudly displays the Australian Mathematics Competition medal he won, one of 25 presented to Australian students in Melbourne last Friday.

Picture: JOSH NASH 121114JN03

Medal for young maths master

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PORTLAND Secondary College student Zak Heppenstall is one of the top mathematics students in Australia and the very best in country Victoria.

Last Friday the Year 8 student was at Government House in Melbourne to receive one of 25 medals awarded to the top Australian students who competed in the Australian Mathematics Competition earlier this year.

“My teachers decided I might do well in (the competition) so they entered me,” Zak said.

Zak’s mother Theresa Heppenstall said her son has Asperger Syndrome, an autism spectrum disorder, which is a condition that can enable people to excel in certain areas.

Mrs Heppenstall said the college had supported Zak extensively and “their flexibility of programs has been paramount to the success Zak has had.”

“When he was at the special school they would give him maths worksheets for good behaviour. He’s always enjoyed it,” Mrs Heppenstall said.

From: PAGE 1

Zak, 14, started school at Bundarra Primary, attended Portland Bay School and then completed grades 5 and 6 at St John’s Lutheran Primary before starting Year 7 at PSC last year.

Zak was low-key about his outstanding results.

“I’m just mathematically good, naturally, I didn’t really need any sort of big preparation,” Zak said.

PSC maths teacher Dale England agreed, saying Zak’s results were as a result of his own skill — he is in Year 8, but is taking Year 10 maths this year, having completed Year 9 maths last year.

“We haven’t done anything out of the ordinary, it’s really just come from him,” Mr England said.

Mr England said he enjoyed having Zak in class and looked forward to working with him in the future.

Beyond his natural adeptness with maths, Zak also excels in science, receiving top marks in the International Competition and Assessment for Schools science test for the past two years, and is keen to pursue maths and science.

“I hope to make a difference in the world,” Zak said and, according to PSC integration manager Erica Mather, he

probably will.

“People like Zak are the ones chipping away at the coalface of science and mathematics,” Mrs Mather said.

When he came to PSC Mrs Mather said she knew the key to his success was to adjust Zak’s curriculum to keep him engaged.

“Part of the transition process is to be flexible to the needs of the individual,” Mrs Mather said.

Mrs Heppenstall said the PSC integration group played a big part in the success.

“I would highly recommend the college to any parent of a child with special needs,” Mrs Heppenstall said.

“He is able to concentrate on advanced maths and science while doing a customised English program to suit his abilities.”

The Australian Maths Competition is run in more than 40 countries throughout Australasia and South East Asia for children from Grade 3 to Year 12. Just 70 medals were presented throughout Australasia this year.

Zak’s outstanding result has also landed him an invitation to Melbourne University’s academic enrichment program.