

# The power of one-to-one

If your child is planning for entrance exams, or struggling in a particular subject, a private tutor can offer the confidence boost they need, writes **Katie Hughes**

**A**ccording to educational charity The Sutton Trust, one in four families have used one. Some take one on holiday with them. Others even have one staying long term. There are now more than a million private tutors in the UK\* and they outnumber full-time teachers, nurses and solicitors put together. Why is business booming for them?

“The personal and adaptive attention that a private tutor can offer is just not possible in a classroom environment with 20-30 pupils,” says Kate Shand, managing director of Enjoy Education – a Knightsbridge tutoring agency that, like many of its counterparts, offers everything from one-to-one and residential tutoring, to home-schooling, exam preparation and schools or university consultancy.

“A child’s self-esteem can be boosted an enormous amount with a little bit of extra support; this in turn allows the child to succeed academically,” adds Emily Jack, managing director of Kings Tutors; an agency that has two bases: one in London and another in Edinburgh.

“Places at top schools are fiercely competitive,” concludes Nathaniel McCullagh, director of Simply Learning Tuition in Battersea, “and parents see a value in using our insight and connections to give their child the best possible preparation for entrance exams.”

However, private tutors don’t see themselves simply as a means to an exam-related end.

“Whilst pupils often come to us for a certain goal and target grade in mind, tutoring is also to a large extent about increasing a child’s confidence in academia, and expanding their interest and knowledge in a subject,” says Alexander Nikitich, founder of Carfax Education, which has centres both in the UK and abroad.

“A good tutor gives your child the tools they need to release their innate potential. They teach them how to think for themselves,” adds Nathaniel McCullagh.



**Above and left, private tutoring complements the work put in by both teachers and pupils during school time**

And Lucy Cawkwell, managing director of London tutoring agency Osborne Cawkwell agrees.

“Tutors have the luxury of being one-on-one with a student, providing the time to work out the approach that is needed to help them.”

Not everybody lives close to a good tutor, however distance is not an impediment at all. McCullagh, like others, offers virtual lessons.

“Online tuition has grown, so that we are now regularly tutoring across the UK. It makes sense. Getting the best tutor in London to the client in the wilds of Scotland for a couple of hours a week can’t really be done any other way.” ▶

\*FIGURE FROM IPSOS MORI RESEARCH. IMAGES: TOM ODULATE/CULTURA/CHRIS CRISMAN/HERO IMAGES/FABRICE LEROUGE/ONOKY/CORBIS



“ Interview practice is not about preparing answers, it’s about helping a child to allow their character and personality to shine ”

But private tuition isn’t always the answer. “We would of course turn parents down for our services if we believed that it would not be beneficial to the child – perhaps, for example, because they are too young and this would just overload them,” says Emily Jack.

And how do tutors respond to schools such as Christ’s Hospital in West Sussex, whose admissions office advises against tutoring for assessments, with the warnings: “Your child is not likely to flourish at school if they always have to struggle to keep up,” and “over-coaching is quickly apparent to our experienced staff.”

“We agree that children should not be tutored for a school that they ultimately will not be able to cope with”, says Jack. “However, we do realise that students are often not lacking in ability but are instead in need of a key to unlock this.”

“Interview practice is not about preparing answers for a pupil to read off, or drilling them in specific topics,” adds Nikitich. “It’s about helping a pupil to allow their character and personality to shine.”

And many tutoring agencies work closely with schools. “Tutoring is very successful if a child’s school teacher is able to brief the tutor with specific areas to work on and the



Above, with a bit of extra tuition a pupil can gain confidence

latter can then offer feedback to the teacher,” suggests Lucy Cawkwell.

“For years, tutoring has played an important role in complementing the work of schools, to support pupils academically and sometimes pastorally,” adds Nikitich.

But it is true that the wrong tutor can do more harm than good, as McCullagh discovered: “I was told by the head of a prep school that they were sick of recognising the same opening sentences on applications – because a gaggle of parents had, discovered the local ‘wonder tutor’ for that school. Just because a tutor is perfect for the child next door doesn’t mean they will be ideal for your own,” warns Shand. “It’s crucial to check whether a tutor has the right qualifications and experience and especially whether there is a good rapport between tutor and child.”

With tuition from £50 per hour in London and about half that outside the capital, is private tutoring really worth the expense?

Cawkwell cites a parent in response: “the standard of teaching was matched by the care and understanding shown by every single tutor, and our daughter’s results speak for themselves... more A and A\* grades than we had imagined possible.” 