



THE SEVEN AGES OF TUTORING

In London, private tutors are available for every age group. How can your child get the most from the experience, asks **Lisa Freedman**

Illustration by David Sparshott

THE PRE-SCHOOL YEARS

The race to the starting line is always fraught, particularly for parents new to the education game. But, though it can be tempting to call in additional support at this point, try to resist. Schools that test at three and four are not looking for the ability to do long division or spell your name in Greek. What they hope to find is concentration, cooperation and articulation. The best way to foster these is to spend time with your child, talking, reading, and playing with them.

AGE SEVEN AND UP

If you've sent your child to a stand-alone pre-prep, which finishes in Year 2, seven-plus entrance can be a big moment. Remember that pre-preps are experts in the field – they wouldn't survive otherwise – and will be working harder than any tutor to bring about a positive result. However, coaching at this age can certainly be worthwhile for those elsewhere. If you're

attempting to move from state primary to independent prep or from a stand-alone prep school to the junior school of a major public school, you're unlikely to receive much help in making the leap. An experienced tutor will know exactly what's required in terms of exam content and interview format and can help bring your child into fighting form.

AGE 11 AND UP

For many London parents, 11-plus is the die-is-cast moment, a time they feel their child's entire future hangs in the balance. At this point, tutoring will, to a large extent, depend on where you're coming from and where you want to get to.

If your child attends a prep school with a strong record of sending children to the leading day and boarding schools, it makes sense to leave it up to them. They know what your child is capable of and what additional support will be required. If, however, you're moving from state to

private or from a laid-back prep to one of the most academically selective secondary schools, then tutoring undoubtedly makes sense.

For children in the state sector, I always recommend starting at the beginning of Year 5, allowing plenty of time to take on board unfamiliar exams and more taxing expressions of the Maths and English they've already studied. Find a tutor through recommendation (ask where their pupils have gone on to in recent years) and start looking well beforehand. Successful tutors for this age group are frequently booked years ahead.

AGE 13 AND UP

Time was, children were allowed to mature at a gentle pace making a smooth transition from childhood to adolescence at 13. Now there's 'pre-testing' – the exams set in Years 6, 7 or 8 by many of the major boarding schools and London day schools to sort

out numbers well in advance of entry. Most schools at this point have some form of IQ (or "reasoning") test, used as an indicator of potential. If you're lucky enough to find a tutor (as I did) who can explain nonverbal reasoning (which I couldn't) and is able to give plenty of extra practice in weaker aspects, then they are worth their weight in gold.

THE GCSE YEARS

Most children sit GCSEs in nine or ten subjects and, clearly, not every child is going to shine in every one at every point in this long stretch. Most schools are happy to offer extra in-house support but, if your child has a classroom teacher they find less than sympathetic, private tutoring can both fill in gaps and boost confidence.

At this stage, it's important to ensure the tutor understands the content of the syllabus your child is studying, since this can vary significantly from

board to board and year to year, and you will certainly be doing your child no favours if your tutor is teaching inappropriate or outdated material. Nor will it benefit them if the child is not comfortable with the treasure you've found. This is a morale-boosting exercise and it's essential the relationship is a happy one.

'A' LEVELS

In the public-exam years, those with more ingrained personal, emotional or academic difficulties may find that tutoring can become a full-time escape from conventional schooling, and central London is particularly well-endowed with 'tutorial colleges'.

These well-run and professional establishments, generally with highly qualified and experienced staff, can help turn disaster into triumph. Often more flexible than mainstream schools in terms of subject combination, start dates and retakes (one year 'A' Level,

USEFUL CONTACTS

Kings Tutors

This agency provides tuition for all ages and levels in London and throughout the rest of the UK. kingstutors.co.uk

Fleet Tutors

Recommended by *The Good Schools Guide* and with more than three decades of experience, Fleet also offer live online tutoring. fleet-tutors.co.uk

Keystone Tutors

Established in 2007 by Will Orr-Ewing (Harrow and Oxford), offering coaching at all levels. keystonetutors.com

Oxbridge Applications

Oxbridge specialists, of course. oxbridgeapplications.com

Duff Miller

Sixth form tutorial college with strong 'A' Level results and preparation for further education. duffmiller.com

Collingham

Much-loved refuge for escapees from more traditional environments at GCSE and 'A' Level. collingham.co.uk

Westminster Tutors

Going strong for over 70 years now, and delivering tailor-made tutoring for GCSE, 'A' Level and Oxbridge. westminstertutors.co.uk

for example, is a common offering), they may not have the same plentiful supply of playing fields, but can frequently bring a smile to the most despairing parent and forlorn pupil.

OXBRIDGE, MEDICINE AND LAW

You can't get into Oxbridge without top exam grades, but if you've already met the exam benchmark, tutoring can undoubtedly be a boon in the process. The interview at both Oxford and Cambridge is a key part of establishing whether a candidate is right for the form of teaching on offer. A number of tutorial colleges, on the other hand, offer bespoke Oxbridge preparation, including interviews with appropriately qualified academics.

Those looking to become the next generation of doctors or lawyers can also often benefit from specialist preparation in the relevant aptitude tests, for a confidence-boost and accurate knowledge of what's expected.