



One-to-one tuition allows tutors to adapt their teaching techniques for individual children

## Private tuition – right for your child?

Siobhan Mason looks into the different types of private tuition available to families when children need a little extra academic support

Parents are increasingly turning to private tuition to help their children – and not just when GCSEs or A-levels are around the corner. For children who lack confidence in a particular subject, have moved schools or countries, missed school through illness or have additional educational needs, many parents find investing in some personal academic attention really pays off.

In an ideal world, extra support would be available at school, and it's always a good idea to ask there for help first. But with increasingly stretched school budgets, paying for some private tuition can make a real difference to a child's progress.

And, reasons Ian, who sent his Year 6 daughter for private tuition when they moved to Bath from America, "if you identify a time

when your child may be struggling at school, it's better to catch it than when it's too late and they're planning for exams."

### Who seeks private tuition?

"Around a third of our students come to prepare for their GCSEs and private secondary school entrance exams," says Hannah Lippiatt from Kip McGrath's Bath Weston centre. "But the majority come because parents feel their child is lacking in confidence, a particular subject is starting to be a real worry for them or find that homework is increasingly stressful and difficult. Sometimes parents feel that their child isn't gelling well with a particular teaching style, in which case, having someone explain things in a slightly different way may help."

"We have children attending who are new to the UK or local area, and occasionally see children who are home-schooled: parents want to know that they've got the right grounding in core subjects," she adds.



### Writer profile

Siobhan Mason, who has two children at secondary school, could have done with having a private tutor when trying (and failing) to get to grips with some difficult concepts in her maths A-level many years ago.

"A lot of our work at Kip McGrath is computer-based, which works well for dyslexic or dyspraxic students. We've got some students working on hand-eye co-ordination, handwriting and scissor skills. If a child has additional educational needs, working towards exams and getting everything done in time can be extra stressful, so we use various learning techniques to help them achieve the best they can."

Tuition is available in most subjects, but it's the core subjects of maths and English that are often the areas parents have most concerns. Hannah sees more maths students at the upper levels of primary school where any gaps are more obvious to children and parents. Whereas from years 8 and 9 onwards, more students attend the centre for English tuition.

## "With some, the collaborative learning of working in small groups really helps"

"At secondary school, English changes from being about reading and writing, to a subject in its own right," explains Hannah. "That shift can be difficult for some students. We try to demystify the subject a little, make it a bit more explicit and help them get that into a format where they can show off their knowledge in an exam."

There are many styles of private tuition. Logistics and time constraints mean not everyone can make it to a centre and there are plenty of home-visiting tutors to be found through agencies like Bath Tutors. Online tutoring, which is typically a cheaper option, is also available through sites like Tutorhouse.

**The benefits of private tuition**  
Whether one-on-one or in small

groups, an obvious benefit of private tuition is that subjects can be explained at a child's own pace.

In a classroom environment, teachers have a timetable to keep to and a curriculum to deliver, making it hard to adapt lessons to suit individual pupils' needs and pace. But that's not to say that the solution is always one-on-one tutoring explains Mark Renison from Kip McGrath's Bath North study centre.

"One-on-one tutoring can be very intense, and success is highly dependent on the dynamics between tutor and child," Mark says. "At school, children are used to working in group environments, and many younger children feel more comfortable in the company of peers. One-on-one tuition works well when close attention is needed and the tutor is highly skilled, sensitive and supportive, but the approach we take tends to

## It worked for us...



*The Beaufort Bookshop also offers private tutoring*

**Louise Press shares the benefits they experienced when her son Luca had some English tuition at The Beaufort Bookshop in Bath.**

"Luca enjoyed and excelled at English in primary school; he was a creative writer and an avid reader," Louise explains. "But all this changed when he started secondary school. He stopped reading and started falling behind. By year 10, he was scraping by in tests, but we knew that he could do much better – and so did he."

"As his GCSEs loomed, we started extra tuition and in just eight weeks Luca's teachers reported a huge improvement. Luca comes out of his sessions with a real spring in his step. With some focused guidance from tutor James, someone who could assess him, understand where his weaknesses lay, and work closely with him to put the pieces back together, we've seen

Luca gain confidence hugely in a very short period of time."

Luca agrees: "I felt a bit lost in class. Classmates were seeing things in books that I couldn't really grasp: it left me in no-man's land. My sessions with James have increased my confidence and helped me read connotations into a text that I just couldn't see before. I do think there's more progress I can make, but with practice I'm hoping James' support will lead to better GCSE grades, followed by better A-level results. Both will help me get a good university place.

Extra tuition isn't something you feel you should need, but actually, if you are struggling and determined to do well, then it's definitely the right thing to do."

involve small groups of similarly-aged children all working on tailored programmes. Tutors are there to guide, intervene and, when necessary, teach, but ultimately the child has responsibility over their own learning."

"With some children, the collaborative learning of working in small groups really helps," adds James Thomas, who offers English tuition at The Beaufort Bookshop in Bath. Most students come to James to consolidate what they're doing in the classroom, while others are sent by their parents in the hope that their love for reading will be re-ignited.

"I have a few younger children who seem to have completely switched off from English. Many parents want their children to love reading once more and to enjoy creative writing," he says. "But most of my work is GCSE revision. A parent might have been told at parents' evening that their child is off target or needs a general boost to get over the line. I had one student who was getting level 4s in his mocks. We intensively studied



*Kumon Instructor Jacqui Knowles supports one of her students*

Macbeth line-by-line, so he had a really broad understanding of the play. He ended up with a level 8 in the final exam."

Kumon Study Centres, where students progress their maths and English skills in small, manageable steps through daily study, are very popular. Children usually attend sessions twice a week and do worksheets every day.

Amelia sent both her boys, aged 12 and nine to Jacqui Knowles's Kumon Study Centre in Midsomer Norton, mainly because her eldest had been struggling with maths all the way through primary school.

"My younger boy joined in too because he had an aptitude for figures and really loved doing the worksheets," says Amelia. "The worksheets – which have lots of examples and guidance – take around half an hour a night. By doing small amounts of work regularly, my eldest soon felt more secure with his times-tables and multiplication, and more confident with maths overall."

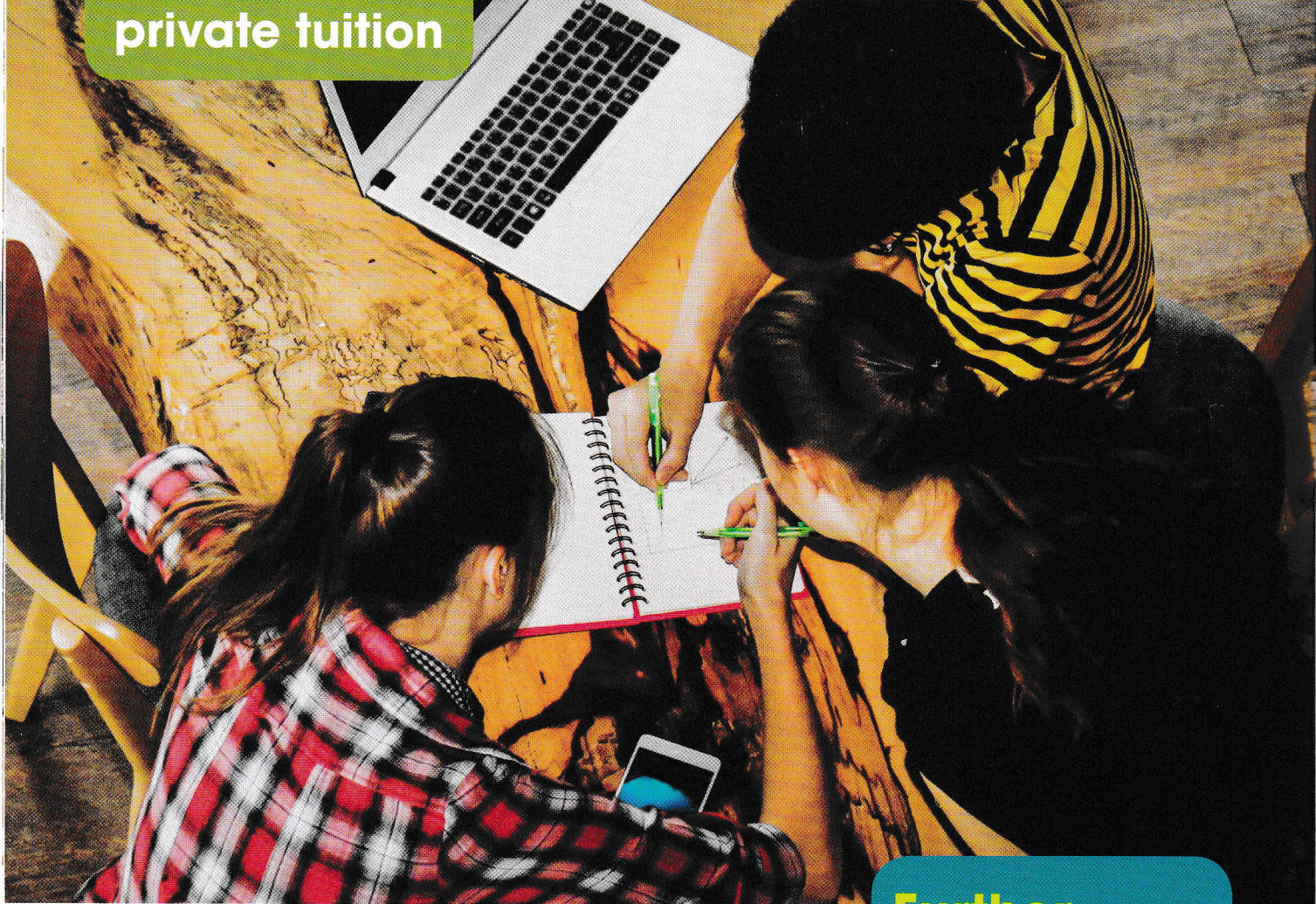
**"Some children are sent by parents in the hope that their love for reading will be re-ignited"**

Students start worksheets at an 'easy' starting point, according to Jacqui, not just so they can build confidence and get into the routine of doing them before they become challenging, but also to give tutors a chance to assess a child's approach to studying. Instructors

## Find the perfect tutor

**The relationship between your child and their tutor is really important, so here's the key things to consider when selecting a private tutor to suit them:**

- If your child is struggling, check with your school first as they may provide extra help. Some schools will bring in tutors for one-to-one support.
- Think about what will best fit into family life: someone coming to your home, or going to a centre?
- Ask for tutors' experience and qualifications (proof of qualified teacher status for example) to ensure they know the curriculum and understand a range of teaching techniques.
- Think about what suits your family budget.
- Ask to see personal testimonials from families the tutor has worked with.
- Check that tutors' are Ofsted registered; as well as ensuring good teaching standards, this means they'll also accept childcare vouchers.
- Always meet the tutor before starting. The relationship between tutor and child is vital, and the tutor needs a clear idea of ability levels, strengths and weaknesses to formulate a plan.
- Ask if your tutor is happy to liaise with schools (they will only do this with your permission).



Group-based tuition gives students a chance to learn from tutors and peers

can then tailor a study plan to the child's individual abilities and learning style.

### Liaising with schools

Tuition is often more effective if you keep school teachers in the loop. "It's important to ensure that we're not pulling in opposite directions," says Kip McGrath's Hannah. "If you overload a child with too many targets at the same time, it can be difficult for them to focus. When we do liaise with schools, we align ourselves with what they're working on and give the school the results of our independent assessments. This means the child gets additional work towards the same targets and will get there quicker. Through understanding the school's techniques, particularly if something isn't working, we can introduce children to alternative ways of explaining things."

Some parents see private tuition as a short-term boost, others as a continuous investment in their

child's future. "We have families with children who start with us in year 3 and stay until year 11; their view is that every child can always improve," says Hannah.

"Getting a private tutor for our daughter was the best way for her to get to know the English education system, which is much more exam-based than the US," explains Ian, whose daughter went to the Kip McGrath centre twice a week when she first moved from the States. Now she's in Year 10, she's dropped to one session a week. "She needs it less at this point and she's balancing it with other activities," her father explains.

What does he say to those who think tuition is for pushy parents? "How do you know I'm not a pushy parent," he laughs. "But seriously, she makes the choice. You might have to push them to try it in the first place, but the child has to want to go. They won't continue if they don't see and feel the benefits for themselves." ■

## Further information

**Kip McGrath** offers English and maths tuition to all ages, tuition for local entrance exams, dyslexia support and SATS prep  
[www.kipmcgrath.co.uk](http://www.kipmcgrath.co.uk)

**The Beaufort Bookshop** offers English tuition KS2 to A-level  
[www.beaufortbookshop.co.uk](http://www.beaufortbookshop.co.uk)

**Kumon** has local centres in **Bath South** and **Midsomer Norton**  
[www.kumon.co.uk](http://www.kumon.co.uk)

**Mitchell Tutors** offer science and maths tutors in Bath  
[www.mitchelltutorsbath.com](http://www.mitchelltutorsbath.com)

**Bath Tutors** are a personal tutoring agency serving Bath and the South West  
[www.bathtutors.com](http://www.bathtutors.com)

**Online tutoring** is also available  
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