

TUTOR TO THE TOP

THE COMPETITION FOR LEADING SCHOOL PLACES BECOMES TOUGHER EVERY YEAR. PART OF THAT PATH TO SUCCESS IS FINDING A GOOD TUTOR, BUT SOURCING ONE CAN SEEM AS OVERWHELMING AS FINDING A GREAT BRITISH SCHOOL. EDUCATION WRITER AMANDA CONSTANCE HAS PUT TOGETHER A GUIDE FOR TENGOL ON HOW TO NEGOTIATE THE MINEFIELD





Does my child need a tutor? Extra support can be invaluable for a child who needs help academically, or a child who has missed school through illness or who has a specific learning difficulty. For international families who want their children in the British education system, a tutor can facilitate that transition, whether it be getting a pupil's English up to speed, exam preparation, or making up for differences in the curriculum. Lucy Cawkwell, of tutor agency Osborne Cawkwell, says: "Moving country is a very stressful experience, particularly if the child doesn't speak English. Working with a tutor, who can tell them what school is like, particularly boarding, will provide emotional support as well as preparing them academically."

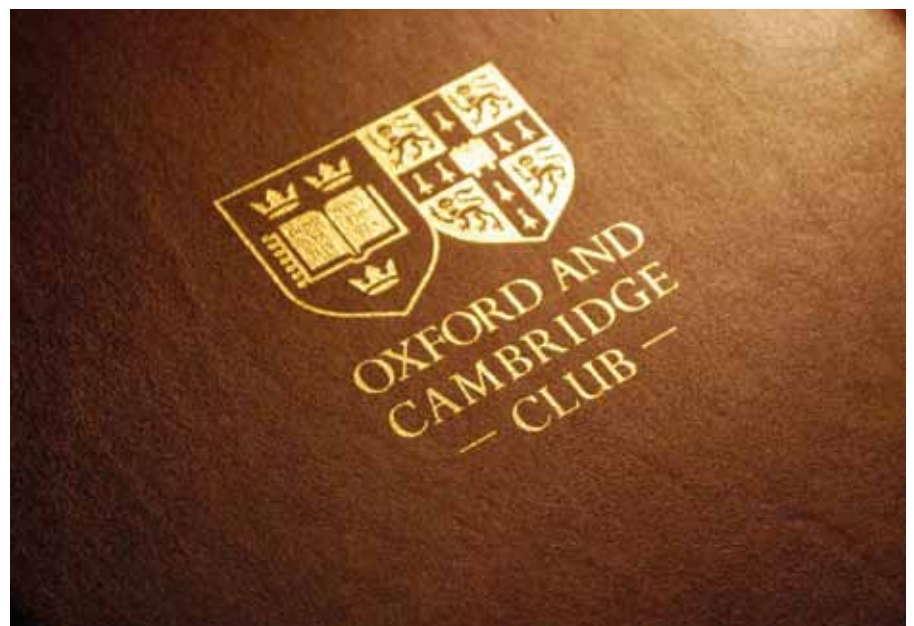
At what age should tutoring start?

Tutors often prepare children for specific exams: the 7+ for prep school assessments, the 11+ for selective independent and grammar schools and the 13+ or Common Entrance for the major public schools. Tutors may also be called on for GCSE, A-Levels (or IB) and Oxbridge examinations. The pinch points for fami-

lies wanting to enter the private education system are the 7+ and 11 or 13+. As Charles Bonas of tutor agency Bonas MacFarlane says: "Everybody needs tuition because the [private] schools system is so competitive and tutoring gives you a clear advantage. To get into the top senior and independent schools – particularly in London – gets more difficult every year."

How long before the exams should tutoring begin?

"The key is to get going as early as possible," says Lucy Cawkwell. "If English as a second language is a big issue, the children will often really need to work in it before starting school over here." Two years before the 11+ is the ideal. "This makes it a more relaxed process," says Stephen Spriggs, managing director





GETTING YOUR CHILD INTO A PARTICULAR SCHOOL IS ONE THING, THEM STAYING THERE AND BEING HAPPY IS ANOTHER.

STEPHEN SPRIGGS

of William Clarence Education. "It means we have time to build good relationships and cement good learning habits." As a minimum, tutoring should start no less than six months before the 11 + exams.

How do I find a top-notch tutor? Talk to friends and colleagues who have been through the process. Interview owners of several leading agencies. Question the agencies' safeguarding protocols. Do these people seem honest? Can you trust them with your child's education? Does the agency have more experienced tutors or only use wet-behind-the-ears graduates? Ask for parent references and follow them up. State your personal preferences. Talk money. And meet the tutor without your child.

Do the agencies offer different things? Yes. Some, such as Osborne Cawkwell, offer tuition only. Some offer a schools' placement service. Agencies such as Tutors International specialise in residential tuition, placing tutors in private homes, in Britain and abroad. Other agencies do everything.

How do I know the tutor will be up to scratch? An agency is as only as good as its tutors. Some agencies will have a relatively small number of professional tutors, some have a vast data base of contacts, varying from the jobbing Oxford graduate to career tutors. Lucy Cawkwell says: "Our USP is the care we take with each





SCHOOL DEADLINES

There is a plethora of dates that parents need to know as their children proceed through the UK education system – be it state or private. TenGoal tries to make life easier by publishing the key ones here for 2016 just to give you that extra edge in helping your child achieve their best.

SCHOOL

State Primary School

– all applications must be received by 15 January 2016

Primary State School Allocation

– 16 April 2016

State Senior School

– all applications must be received by 31 October

11+ test dates - September 2016

Senior State School Allocation

– 1 March 2017

For more information go to

www.gov.uk/schools-admissions/applying

Common Entrance at 11+ - exams are sat in November and January

Common Entrance at 13+ - exams are sat in November, January and May/June

For more information go to www.iseb.co.uk/Parents/Examination-dates-timetables

UNIVERSITY

UCAS (University and Colleges Admission Services)

Deadline for the majority of 2016 entry courses - 15 January 2016

Some art and design courses
– 24 March 2016

Oxford or Cambridge Entry

– 15 October 2016 (for 2017 entry)

Medical, veterinary and dentistry

– 15 October 2016 (for 2017 entry)

For more information on course

deadlines go to www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/getting-started/when-apply

CONTACTS BOOK

Bonas MacFarlane -

www.bonasmacfarlane.co.uk

Osborne Cawkwell -

www.oc-ec.com

SGA Education -

www.sga-education.com

Tutors International -

www.tutors-international.com

William Clarence Education -

www.williamclarence.com

client; when we pick tutors, we pick them individually to match the client.” William Clarence use only professional tutors. “We have a much smaller tutor base than many other agencies. It’s a more personal service and therefore much more reliable.”

How will they assess my child?

Each agency has its own system for assessing academic performance. Some use computer programs, some use specialised tutors, but all good agencies will want to meet you and your child. They will want to get to know you, your aspirations and understand how the whole family is placed. “It is important to get an idea of the personality of the child,” says Stephen Spriggs, “all too often, even parents will ignore it.” Agencies will then devise a tutoring plan and create a short list of possible schools. “We put a bespoke package together for the family,” says Spriggs. “It’s about having a partner in the process. It is not about someone ringing us up and we give them a place at Eton.”

How to avoid putting too much pressure on the child? “The key is finding the balance between hothousing a child and giving them support,” says Charles Bonas. “We might start at five or six to prepare a child for the 7+, but often that’s too young; it all depends on the child.” Bonas Macfarlane can provide tuition for a three or four year-old to learn English as a second language, but this is always done through play; it is “too young for formal education”.



What about online tuition? Tony Little, the recently departed head of Eton, has predicted that 50% of learning will be online within the next decade. Online tuition is a booming business and companies vary hugely in the quality of provision. There is a big difference between reputable agencies relying more on Skype for overseas students, and tuition agencies that only exist online. Many are good, some not so great; it is a largely unregulated market. The obvious bonus is that it’s much cheaper.

Lucy Cawkwell says: “In the last few years the Russians have become a lot more cost-conscious. You can’t beat one-to-one teaching, but the specialist tutors who teach via Skype are able to engage with the pupil and create that relationship virtually.”

Is there a perfect school? Don’t push your child towards a school where they won’t make the academic standard. Take advice from your agency and listen to their recommendations. Don’t be attracted by only the starriest schools. “There is a brand obsession overseas,” says Charles Bonas. “For too many people in Asia, for example, it matters incredibly. That’s crazy. There are so many fantastic British schools that are less well known – Shrewsbury and Uppingham spring to mind.” Stephen Spriggs cautions that it must be about the child’s well-being. “Getting your child into a particular school is one thing, them staying there and being happy is another.”