



The super tutor fad that's killing children's summer holidays

With school fees now unaffordable for many, ambitious parents are turning to an army of private teachers. *Melissa Twigg reports*

One would imagine that a three-year-old girl doing weekly French and Mandarin lessons was already receiving quite enough education. And yet Sabine Hook – a former teacher offering assessments for early childhood – was hired by the girl's parents to look into why she was failing to be stimulated intellectually by her nursery. During the hour they spent together, Hook noticed that the child's responses were unusually anxious – and suggested that the parents simply allowed her more time to play.

As Britain's £7.5 billion private tuition sector rapidly expands, more children are finding their free time is being consumed by extra lessons. According to social mobility charity the Sutton Trust, 30 per cent of young people now report having had private tutoring,

up from 27 per cent pre-pandemic, and just 18 per cent in 2005.

The best of these tutors are trained teachers, like Hook, who have left the classroom to do something new and will take a child's overall wellbeing into account before accepting a new pupil. But many are graduates with famous universities and schools to their names, but not much in the way of formal teaching experience.

Not that this matters to many parents. "Etonians really do make exceptional tutors," insists Charles Bonas, the co-founder of private tuition firm Bonas MacFarlane Education. "They make better tutors than prime ministers. They have charm, charisma, social understanding and confidence, and bring great clarity to what they explain." Old Etonians might be unusually talented at wrangling

an 11-year-old into doing algebra but, these days, the pupil in question is also far less likely to be heading to a similarly illustrious school.

School fees have been rising in private education for more than a decade and stagnating wages mean middle-class parents can no longer afford prestigious schools, while pupils at second-tier private schools are finding it increasingly difficult to get places in top universities as vice-chancellors increase the

proportion of students they take from state schools.

Now, a new trend has emerged where parents (many of whom were privately educated themselves) are sending their children to comprehensives, and using the money they save on fees to pay for tutors. And not just a little bit of help with maths – these are tutors

for a range of subjects and they are working children long hours.

"A combination of the cost of living crisis and the possibility of a Labour government bringing in VAT for private schools means a lot of parents who would have gone down the independent route for secondary now want their children to go to grammar schools," says Alistair Delafield, the managing director of Ivy Education, which provides private tuition and assessment services.

According to Delafield, parents worried about the VAT hike are having to act in advance of a general election and get their children into grammar schools now – because, unlike private schools, children can only enter the grammar school system at 11. Ivy Education already has a series of courses for grammar-school



'Many children simply need more time to play': tutor Sabine Hook