

Mapping the nature and extent of private tutoring at transition points in education

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Abstract

Parents employ private tutors to supplement the teaching their children receive in school. Tutoring extends students' opportunity to learn outside the normal school day and may provide a helpful boost in the years leading up to transitions from primary to secondary school, GCSE to sixth form and sixth form to higher education. The aim of this paper is to provide a systematic description of the nature and extent of private tuition received by students at these three points of transition. A sample of 30 primary and 34 secondary schools and colleges participated in the research, in areas representing a range of demographic characteristics and school organisation. Over 3000 students in years 6, 11 and 13 completed a questionnaire survey of the nature and extent of private tuition in school curriculum subjects, their views about and evaluations of private tuition and demographic information. In the sample as a whole 27% of students had a private tutor and there was no significant difference between the year groups. Most tutoring was in mathematics, followed by English. The main reason for tutoring was to help students do well in entry tests for secondary school and in national examinations. Primary school students who did not receive tutoring felt that members of their family were able to give them enough help, whereas secondary students were more likely to ask a teacher if they needed help. The implications of these findings are discussed.

Introduction

Private supplementary tutoring has been defined as 'tutoring in academic subjects which is provided for financial gain and which is additional to the provisions by mainstream schooling' (Bray & Kwok, 2003, p.2). This definition makes a clear demarcation between tutoring that is provided by the state and private sectors. Although useful, it does not distinguish between different forms of tutoring, encompassing both tutoring on a one-to-one basis and additional teaching in large classes in private institutions such as 'juku' in Japan and 'frontisera' in Greece. In England, the term 'private tutoring' generally refers to tutoring on a one-to-one basis, which often takes place in the home of the tutor or the student.

Private tutoring is generally treated as distinct from other forms of support for learning available to students, such as tutoring in school or community organisations and help received from parents. These forms of support do have similarities with private tutoring for example, in school some students receive individual tutoring in literacy or may take part in study support activities out of normal school hours (MacBeath, Kirwan & Myers 2001). At home, many parents are able to tutor their children, especially during primary school when they help with reading, mathematics and spelling (Greenhough and Hughes, 1998). In the community, voluntary and other organisations include West Indian supplementary schools (Stone, 1981), language schools where children of minority language groups have lessons in their mother tongue and schools run by religious organisations. For the most part these latter schools do

not provide instruction in school curriculum subjects, although their work may support students' learning in school indirectly. Some of these organisations have been established to meet perceived needs for educational support to supplement or complement students' opportunity to learn in school. Access to these forms of educational support may limit the perceived need for private tutoring in different areas of the country.

In global terms, the prevalence of private tutoring varies considerably between countries. The Third International Maths and Science Survey (TIMSS), undertaken during the 1994-5 school year, included a student questionnaire item on the amount of time usually spent taking extra lessons in mathematics during the week before or after school. A recent analysis of the responses from students in 41 countries shows large variation in the percentage of eighth grade pupils participating on a weekly basis, from less than 5 to over 80 per cent (Baker, Akiba, LeTendre & Wiseman, 2001). More than three-quarters of students in Columbia, Latvia, Slovak Republic, Philippines and South Africa reported having extra lessons in mathematics. High levels of private tuition were also reported in other countries such as Japan, Hong Kong and Korea whereas levels were relatively low in most European countries. In England, only about 10 per cent of year 8 pupils had extra lessons for mathematics, the second lowest proportion in the countries surveyed, with only Danish students having less tutoring.

Large differences between countries were also found in the PISA survey undertaken in 2000 (OECD, 2001). Unlike TIMSS, students were asked whether they regularly attended remedial courses in the language of assessment and in other subjects, training to improve study skills or private tutoring. There was wide variation between countries with 24 per cent in the UK, compared to 71 per cent in Japan and 58 per cent in Korea. A second question asked students whether they attended remedial courses in the language of assessment, in other subjects or additional courses outside their school. In Japan and Korea respectively the figures were 17 and 64 per cent, while in the UK only 20 per cent of students reported attending such courses. These surveys confirm that internationally there are wide variations and that the uptake of tutoring and additional classes is relatively low in the UK, along with other European countries. The PISA estimates for the UK are higher than those obtained in the TIMSS survey, however the TIMSS question was confined to mathematics whereas the PISA questions encompassed a wider range of supplementary tutoring. As the question included remedial courses in the language of assessment, study skills and private tutoring together, it is not possible to establish patterns of participation in these different activities.

Although both these international surveys provide strong evidence based on representative samples of students, their validity is open to question. If teachers administer questionnaires, students may not report private tutoring as this might be considered a criticism of their teaching, which might then affect their relationship. Students may not want their peers to know, as the need for additional help is often construed as a sign of a learning difficulty or low ability (Graham & Barker, 1990). Alternatively they may fear being considered a 'swot'. Estimates from surveys may be affected by the social desirability of tutoring in different countries. Tutoring may be desirable in some countries and frowned on in others. A second methodological issue is that international surveys provide a somewhat limited picture of the nature and extent of tutoring in a few curriculum subjects. Further information is needed to establish the subjects that are tutored and the duration of tutoring in different subjects.

One of the main concerns about private tutoring is that it enhances inequalities. Indeed two small-scale studies in England suggest that private tutoring is predominantly a middle class

activity. Middle class parents of children in the final year of one primary school in London employed tutors to enhance their chances of obtaining a place in secondary schools of their choice (Reay, 1998). A small survey of the families of pupils in both state and private schools in England found that just over a third of the parents employed a tutor at some time (West, Noden & Edge, 1998). This study included 107 children aged 10-11 years, however the majority of parents were employed in non-manual occupations. This again suggests that private tutoring is a middle class activity.

There is also some concern about the effectiveness of tutoring (Ireson, 2004). Experimental studies of literacy tutoring show that programmes are very variable and while some are very effective, others do not raise children's attainment significantly (e.g. Elbaum et al. 2000; Wasik and Slavin, 1993). The quality of tutoring influences its effectiveness and there is little information available to help parents who are looking for a tutor.

In England, tutoring of primary school children is likely to be prevalent where parents are concerned about uneven quality of local secondary schools. Although many LEAs have fully comprehensive secondary schools and there is little or no competition for places, there are many areas of the country where primary school children face a competitive system. In some areas certain secondary schools have a good reputation and are oversubscribed, while a few remaining LEAs still have grammar schools and children sit an 11+ examination. Research in Northern Ireland, where many children take the 11+ indicates that children have coaching for the examination in school, however some parents also coach children themselves and some employ tutors (Bunting and Mooney, 2001; Caul, Williams and Eason, 2000).

Evidence from international research suggests that cultural values influence the extent to which families invest in private supplementary tutoring. More specifically it has been pointed out that high levels of tutoring are evident in countries where effort is highly valued. This might explain why tutoring is especially prevalent in Asian cultures influenced by the Confucian tradition as compared with Western cultures where more emphasis is placed on ability (Stevenson & Lee, 1990; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). Although there may be some truth in this view, it tends to gloss over any cultural differences in the meaning of effort and ability. If ability is seen as an entity then effort will have only limited value, whereas if ability is seen as malleable effort has great value, as it will increase one's ability. Values of hard work and sacrifice may also be implicated in cultural attitudes towards tutoring.

Families with different cultural backgrounds or with experience of education systems in other countries may have different expectations of the UK education system. If they are used to a system in which most families pay for private tutoring, they are more likely to consider this option. As the prevalence of tutoring tends to be higher in non-European countries, we might expect to find that families from outside Europe are more likely to pay for supplementary private tutoring. Cultural norms and expectations are likely to influence levels of tutoring.

To date, there has been very little research on the subjects for which students receive private tutoring in the UK. While it seems likely that students seek tutoring in the core subjects English and mathematics, it is possible that tutoring occurs in other subjects. There is also little information about the duration of tutoring, which may be seen as a short-term solution or long term support. This paper therefore aims to provide evidence on the nature and extent of private tutoring in England at three transition points in education. The research focuses on students in year 6 as they prepare to move from primary to secondary school, year 11 as they

prepare to take GCSE and progress into sixth form or leave to start work and year 13 as they prepare to move into higher education.

Method

Samples

School samples. When selecting schools to participate in the research, the main aim was to obtain a sample of pupils from a range of socio-economic backgrounds and demographic areas. In view of the variety of types of secondary school provision in LEAs across the country, it was also desirable for the sample to represent this diversity. The initial plan was to select schools from 6 local education authorities in England, two in inner city areas, two in suburban areas and two counties. To ensure that the sample represented a range in terms of socio-economic status, the initial selection of LEAs was based on figures provided by DfES giving percentages of pupils in each LEA taking free school meals. An analysis of these figures revealed that one third of LEAs had less than 11%, one third 11-19% and one third over 19%. Based on this categorisation, two LEAs with over 19% taking free school meals were selected, two with 11-19% and two with less than 11%. To ensure that the sample also represented a variety of forms of secondary provision, one LEA in each category was comprehensive and one had some selective secondary schools, such as grammar schools or specialist schools.

Advisors in LEAs were contacted for more detailed information about demographic characteristics of their area. They were asked to provide names of primary and secondary schools in affluent, less affluent and more deprived areas. Most advisers were able to provide this information, while one asked the research team to write to all schools inviting them to participate, as this was their normal way of proceeding. Efforts were made to obtain similar primary and secondary samples using post-code matching. A few secondary schools were asked to supply the names of their main feeder schools. Schools were then invited to participate and if they were unable to do so, another school in a similar area was approached.

As the sampling progressed it became clear that insufficient secondary schools would be obtained in the selected LEAs due to a large number of schools being unable to take part in the research. The main reasons given were that the school was already involved in other projects or the school was under too much pressure. The number of rejections was greatest among LEAs in the city and suburban areas and additional LEAs with similar characteristics were therefore incorporated into the sample.

The final sample comprised 30 primary schools in 9 LEAs and 34 secondary schools and colleges in 10 LEAs. In all, 29 schools contributed to the Year 11 sample and 28 to the Year 13 sample. As some secondary schools did not have sixth forms, additional colleges in similar areas were included. Mean percentages of pupils eligible for free school meals were slightly above the national average, meaning that the sample was a little more disadvantaged than average in terms of the free school meal indicator.

Pupil samples

Samples of 50-60 pupils (two classes) were drawn from each target year group, year 6, year 11 and year 13. In the larger schools, classes were selected on a random basis to be representative of the year group in terms of socio-economic background and attainment. In

primary schools with two classes or fewer, all pupils were included. The final sample comprised 1254 students in year 6, 1214 in year 11 and 1147 in year 13. There were 1819 males and 1710 females, while 86 did not state their sex. Of those who identified their sex 51.6% were male and 48.4% female.

Questionnaires

Pupil questionnaires. The main aim of the questionnaires was to obtain information on private tuition, however for several reasons the scope of the questions was broadened to cover other sources of educational support. A main concern was an ethical issue that pupils who did not receive private tutoring would find themselves giving few positive responses and might feel discouraged. Also, it was thought to be useful to include other sources of support such as study support and other extracurricular activities, and help received from members of the family. For purposes of statistical classification, pupils were also asked to supply information on their age, ethnic origin and family background. The year 11 questionnaire was developed first and piloted. The year 6 version was also piloted in two schools that were not included in the final sample. Questionnaires for year 6 pupils covered the same topics as those for older students but were shorter and obtained less detailed information. Changes were made as a result of pupils' comments and questions.

Parent questionnaire. The questionnaire for parents was designed to obtain information on the nature and extent of private tuition received by their child, reasons for employing or not employing tutors and evaluations of tutoring received. It became clear at an early stage that if the questionnaire was concerned solely with private tuition, parents who did not employ tutors might feel that they were letting their children down and that this might discourage them from completing and returning questionnaires. For this reason additional questions were asked about help provided by the family and about other family activities. Parents were also asked to supply information on their education and occupation and to indicate if they would be willing to be interviewed.

Procedure

The original plan was to survey all year 11 pupils towards the end of the school year in 2003 before they left to take their examinations. For operational reasons it was only possible to administer questionnaires to year 11 pupils in 7 schools at that stage and the remainder were therefore surveyed at a similar point in the following year, during the late spring term. Year 13 questionnaires were administered during the first part of the autumn term 2004, in September and October and Year 6 during November and December.

For reasons of confidentiality discussed above, researchers visited the schools to administer the questionnaires so that pupils were reassured that their teachers would not see their answers. Most students completed the survey in their normal classrooms however in some schools they were gathered in the school hall or dinner room. Teachers were handed information about the research and this included a request for them to remain at the periphery of the room and not to help students complete the questionnaires. A researcher explained the research to the whole class and checked that students understood the meaning of 'private tutor' and any other terms they were unclear about. It was also emphasised that teachers would not read the questionnaires and that there were no right or wrong answers. To ensure confidentiality, students were spread out around the room as far as possible and asked to complete their own questionnaire and not discuss their answers with neighbours or look over

other students' answers. The researcher circulated around the room and answered queries. When students had finished they were asked to go back and check through their answers.

Results

Extent of tutoring in Y6, Y11, Y13

Students were asked if they had ever had a private tutor. Of the pupils who answered this question (N=3515), 27% had received tutoring. A somewhat higher proportion of students in year 13 reported having a tutor (29.5%) compared with 26% in both year 6 and year 11. The difference was not statistically significant (Chi Square = 4.3, df=2, n.s.).

Subjects tutored Year 6

Year 6 pupils were asked when they had tutoring in reading and writing, maths and science and any other subject. Table 1 displays the number of students having a tutor in each of these three curriculum areas and in other subjects. More students had tutoring in mathematics (17% of the year group) and reading and writing (15%) than in science (8%). Of the other subjects reported, the majority of students received tutoring to help them prepare for entrance to secondary schools, including the 11+, or verbal or non-verbal reasoning, which forms part of many entry examinations. Together these amount to 5% of the year 6 sample. A few students (24) had tutoring in English and in other subjects including history, geography, art & design, Spanish, Arabic, PE and RE (see Table 1).

Looked at as a proportion of the 313 students in receipt of tutoring, the main reason for employing tutors is to have help in literacy (60%) and numeracy (67%), however 19% had tutoring to help them pass entry examinations.

Subject	No. of students	% year 6	% students with tutors
Reading & writing	191	15	60
Maths	212	17	67
Science	97	8	31
Other subjects:			
English	24	1	8
Verbal or non verbal reasoning	31	2	10
11+	13	1	4
Entry exam	16	1	5
All other subjects	15	1	4

Table 1. Number and percentage of year 6 students in receipt of tutoring by subject.

Duration of tutoring (year 6)

Students were asked to indicate whether they had tutoring during the autumn term in year 6 when the questionnaire was administered, in each term in year 5 or before year 5. In both literacy and maths, about 42% of the students who had tutors had just started tutoring in year 6 or had one term in year 5. Fewer students had tutoring for two terms or more, 29% in literacy and 27% in mathematics. A similar proportion had tutoring before year 5 only, 27%

in literacy and in mathematics. The pattern was similar in science, as 47% of students had just started tutoring in year 6 or had one term in year 5, 31% had tutors for two terms or more and 22 % had tutoring only before year 5. There was also a similar pattern for other subjects. The overall picture is that over half the students started to have tutoring well before year 6 (see Table 2).

Terms of tutoring	Reading & writing	Maths	Science	other subjects
Y6 only (autumn term)	40	37	18	21
1 term in year 5 only	42	54	25	26
2 terms	23	23	8	10
3 terms	6	10	3	9
4 terms	17	13	5	9
5 terms	11	13	7	4
Before year 5 only	51	58	29	22
1 term in Y5 + before Y5	1	4	1	0
Total	191	212	97	101

Table 2. Duration of tutoring received by subject (year 6)

Subjects tutored Year 11

Year 11 pupils were asked when they had tutoring in English, mathematics, science, French, history, geography and any other subject. Table 3 displays the number of students having a tutor in each subject. More students had tutoring in mathematics (18% of the year group) and English (10%) than in science (6%), French (1%), History (1%) or Geography (1%). Of the other subjects listed by students, most tutoring was in modern languages (1%). Very few students had tutoring in any other subject.

Looked at as a proportion of the 303 students in receipt of tutoring, the main reason for employing tutors was to have help in mathematics, with 70% of tutors employed for this purpose, compared to 38% in English and 24% in science (Table 3).

Subject	No. of students	% of year 11	% of students with tutors
(N=1147)			
English	114	10	38
Maths	212	18	70
Science	74	6	24
French	23	2	8
History	13	1	4
Geography	12	1	4
Other subjects:			
Modern languages (Spanish, German, Italian)	13	1	4
ICT	4	0.3	1
Art & Design, Printmaking	3	0.3	1
Others (Business Studies, Electronics, Food technology, Performing Arts, RE, Child Development)	7	0.6	2
Entry exam/verbal & nonverbal reasoning	2	0.2	0.7

Non-GCSE subject/unclassifiable	2	0.2	0.7
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Table 3. Number and percentage of year 11 students receiving tutoring by subject.

Duration of tutoring (year 11)

Of the 212 students who had tutoring in mathematics, 61 received tutoring in one term during year 10 or 11, 32 in 2 terms and 22 during three terms, while 32 had tutoring for more than 3 terms. The remaining 65 students received tutoring before year 10 and did not continue in years 10 and 11. This means that 41% had tutoring in mathematics for more than two terms. Looked at another way, 113 students had tutoring in year 11, which is 10% of the year group of 1147 students.

Fewer students had tutoring for English (114) and of these about half had tutoring during years 10 and 11. Only 13 received tutoring for more than three terms.

Number of terms of tutoring	English	Maths	Science	French	Humanities
1	22	61	22	7	6
2	11	32	9	1	2
3	11	22	11	2	3
4	3	9	5	0	0
5	4	8	4	3	0
6	3	10	2	2	0
7	3	5	1	2	0
before year 10 only	57	65	20	6	14
Total	114	212	74	23	25

Table 4. Duration of tutoring received by subject (year 11)

Subjects tutored Year 13

Year 13 students were asked to list the subjects in which they had received tutoring. Of the 1127 students, 326 indicated that they had ever had a tutor. The largest number had tutoring in mathematics (213) representing 19% of the year group. This was followed by English (8%), science (6%), modern languages including French (3.4%), history (0.4%). Students were tutored in a variety of other subjects, however numbers in each subject were very small.

Looked at as a proportion of the 326 students in receipt of tutoring, the main reason for employing tutors was to have help in mathematics, with 65% of tutors employed for this purpose, compared to 27% in English, 23% in science and 13% in modern languages (Table 5).

Subject (N=1127)	No. students	% year 13	% students with tutors
Maths	213	19	65
English language/literature	87	8	27
Science	31	2.8	10

Biology	13	1	4
Chemistry	15	1	5
Physics	12	1	4
French	27	2.4	8
Other MFL	15	1	5
History	5	0.4	2
Other subjects	19	2	6

Table 5. Number and percentage of year 13 students receiving tutoring by subject.

Duration of tutoring (year 13)

For each subject listed, students were asked to indicate the terms in which they had received tutoring. These included the autumn term of year 13 when the questionnaire was administered, the three terms in year 12 and before year 12. Analysis of these responses revealed that most tutoring took place before year 12, in other words before students started sixth form (see Table 6). There were 440 responses as some students reported tutoring in more than one subject. Of these, 288 indicated that tutoring was received before year 12 and 152 had tutors in year 12 or 13. Table 6 displays the number of students with tutors only before year 12 and in years 12 and 13. This shows that 149 students had tutors for mathematics before year 12, compared to 64 students in years 12 or 13. More students received tutoring in English before year 12 (64) than in sixth form (13). For science, there was a similarly large reduction in tutoring in years 12 and 13 (4 students) compared to before year 12 (27). A different pattern is evident for single science subjects with more students having tutors in sixth form (26) than before year 12 (9).

Subject	No. of students	Tutoring in Y12 or Y13	Tutoring before Y12
(N=1127)			
Maths	213	64	149
English	87	13	64
Science	31	4	27
Biology	13	10	3
Chemistry	15	12	3
Physics	12	9	3
French	27	12	15

Table 6. Number of year 13 students receiving tutoring before and during sixth form, by subject.

Differences between schools

The proportion of students who had ever had a private tutor varied considerably from one school to another. Among the primary schools the highest was 59% and the lowest 0%. Seven schools had over 40% and 3 under 10%. The range for the year 11 sample was 6% to 59% and for the year 13 sample 7% to 65%.

Reasons for having a tutor

Students with tutors were asked to tick reasons for having a tutor and to add any other reasons. The questionnaire used in the first wave of year 11 data collection in 7 schools had an open question and so responses from students in these schools were excluded from this part of the analysis. Table 7 displays the number and percentage of students indicating each reason, by each year group. Most students (71%) indicated that they had tutors to help them do well in exams and tests. This option was worded slightly differently in the primary and secondary students' questionnaires. Primary students were asked to indicate if they had tutoring to help them pass an exam or entry test for secondary school, while year 11 and year 13 students were asked to indicate if tutoring was to enable them to obtain high grades in examinations. Slightly more year 11 (77%) and year 13 (71%) students than year 6 students (68%) had tutors for this reason however the difference was not statistically significant (Chi square = 4.8, df = 2, n.s.). The percentage of primary school students having tutoring to help them pass an entry examination into secondary school is high. All the more so when we consider that the students reported tutoring they had ever had, so the slightly higher rate of tutoring reported in year 11 and 13 included some tutoring in primary school. A total of 198 students indicated that passing entry tests or obtaining high grades was their only reason for having a tutor, 80 of these were in year 6. A further 90 also indicated that the tutor would help them learn subjects more quickly and 41 indicated that they needed extra help with their work.

The second most common reason for having a tutor was to help students learn subjects more quickly, in total 40% gave this reason. Fewer year 13 students indicated this (27%) than year 11 (44%) or year 6 (50%) and the difference was statistically significant (Chi square = 37.5, df = 2, $p < .001$). Only 36 gave this as their only reason for having a tutor and 20 also indicated that they needed extra help with their work. This suggests that more primary school and year 11 students felt that they could work at a faster pace than in the classroom.

A third of these students (33%) had tutors because they needed extra help with their work. There were no differences between year groups (Chi square = 1.8, df = 2, n.s.). This reason was often given in combination with other reasons for having a tutor, however a total of 76 students gave only this reason and over half of these (42) were in year 11.

Overall 17% of students had tutors to help them catch up on work missed. More primary school students had tutors for this reason (25%) than year 11 (17%) or year 13 (11%). The difference was statistically significant (Chi square = 20, df = 2, $p < .001$). Most students giving this reason indicated that there were also other reasons for having a tutor with the most common, given by 108, being to pass examinations.

A similar proportion (17%) had tutors because they did not learn well from their teachers in school. More year 13 students had tutors for this reason (27%) than year 11 (17%) or year 6 (7%), a highly significant difference (Chi square = 46, df = 2, $p < .001$). Very few students (11) gave this as the only reason for having a tutor.

Fewer students had tutors because their school did not provide enough help (13%). More students in year 11 gave this reason (19%) than year 13 (15%) or year 6 (7%), a statistically significant difference (Chi square = 15.6, df = 2, $p < .001$). It was rarely the only reason for having a tutor (8).

In total, 9% of students had tutors because they had additional learning needs. There was little difference between the year groups, with a slightly higher proportion of students in years 6 and 11 giving this reason (11% and 10% respectively) than year 13 (7%). The difference was not statistically significant (Chi square = 4.2, df = 2, n.s.). This reason appeared in combination with many others, only 23 students giving it as the only one.

One in ten students had tutors on the basis of a recommendation by their school. This reason was given by more year 6 students (15%) than year 11 (8%) or year 13 (8%), a statistically significant difference (Chi square = 9.9, df = 2, p < .01).

	Year 6		Year 11		Year 13		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
To do well in an entry exam into secondary school/high grades in exams **	202	68	157	77	231	71	590	71
To help me learn subjects quicker**	148	50	90	44	88	27	327	40
Because I need extra help with my work	107	36	64	31	103	32	274	33
To help me catch up on work missed**	74	25	34	17	36	11	143	17
Because I do not learn well from my teachers at school**	20	7	34	17	89	27	143	17
Because my school does not provide enough help**	22	7	39	19	48	15	109	13
The school recommended I got extra help**	46	16	17	8	26	8	88	11
Because I have additional learning needs	33	11	20	10	22	7	76	9
Total with tutor in year	297		204		326		827	

* p<.01 **p<.001

Table 7. Number and percentage of students giving reasons for having a tutor, by year group.

Students gave many additional reasons for having a tutor. Some had a tutor to teach them a subject not offered in school - this was mainly for languages such as Spanish, Urdu and Punjabi. Tutors were also employed to provide help in examinations and re-sits, including practice and revision. Some students had tutors to provide more explanation and help them understand a subject better, others to improve their confidence or simply to learn more or do their best. A small number indicated that there were problems in school such as a timetable clash that prevented them from taking a subject or there was no teacher for that subject. One student stated 'to prove my teacher wrong'. Parents' wishes or inability to help were also mentioned.

The pattern that emerges is that the majority of tutors are employed to help students do well in tests and examinations. A second main reason for employing a tutor is to learn more quickly, especially in primary school. Tutors are also employed to help students catch up with work missed or to assist with additional learning needs.

Reasons for not having a tutor

Students who did not have a tutor were asked to tick reasons from a list supplied. The questionnaire used in the first wave of year 11 data collection had an open question and so responses were excluded from this analysis. The number and percentage of students giving each reason are displayed in Table 8. The main reasons were that students felt they could get help from their teacher, members of their family or friends. Overall, 64% of students would go and see a teacher if they needed extra help, however fewer year 6 students gave this reason (59%) than year 11 (68%) or year 13 (66%), a statistically significant difference (Chi Square = 15, df = 2, $p < .01$). Over half of the students (56%) who did not have a tutor felt they received enough help from their family and friends, with significantly more primary school students giving this reason (77%) than year 11 (52%) and year 13 (38%) (Chi Square = 254, df=2, $p < .001$). This is not surprising in view of the more specialised GCSE and A level curricula.

Overall, over half the students (56%) felt they learn enough at school so did not have a tutor, however more students in year 6 (67%) than year 11 and year 13 (49% and 48% respectively) indicated this, and the difference was statistically significant (Chi Square = 78, df=2, $p < .001$).

About a half of students indicated that they did not want a tutor (55%) and there was no difference between the three year groups (Chi Square = 1.1, df=2, n.s.). Overall 48% of the students without tutors indicated that they did not need a tutor, with more primary school students giving this response (53%) than year 11 (42%) or year 13 (48%), (Chi Square = 18.5, df=2, $p < .0001$). This suggests that more year 11 students feel the need for a tutor and might like to have one. In view of this response it is surprising that only a small number of students indicated that they would like a tutor (7%) and there was no difference between year groups (Chi square = 3.6, df = 2, n.s.).

Similar numbers of students in all three year groups felt that having a tutor would take up their spare time (42%), with a slightly higher proportion of the year 11 students (46%) giving this reason than year 6 (42%) and year 13 (37%), (Chi Square = 11.9, df=2, $p < .01$). More of the year 6 students did not want extra lessons (50%) compared with the year 11 and 13 students (43% and 36% respectively) (Chi Square = 30.8, df = 2, $p < .001$). Similarly Year 6 students were more likely to think tutoring is a waste of time (25%) compared to year 11 and 13 (15% and 10% respectively), overall 16% gave this as a reason (Chi Square = 67.7, df=2, $p < .001$).

About a third of students (37%) indicated that they did not have a tutor because it was too expensive, with more year 13 students (46%) giving this reason than year 6 or year 11 (29% and 36% respectively) (Chi Square = 54.9, df=2, $p < .001$). Only 8% thought they would get teased at school if they had a tutor, however more year 6 students gave this as a reason (14%), compared to year 11 and year 13 students (5%) (Chi Square = 52.4, df = 2, $p < .001$).

	Year 6		Year 11		Year 13		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
If I need extra help I will go and see a teacher**	503	59	455	68	515	66	1473	64

I get enough help from my family/ friends**	655	77	350	52	297	38	1302	56
I learn enough at school**	576	67	328	49	376	48	1280	56
I don't want a tutor**	464	54	372	55	443	57	1279	55
I don't need a tutor**	454	53	283	42	372	48	1109	48
Tutoring would take up my spare time	359	42	311	46	291	37	961	42
I don't want any extra lessons**	424	50	285	42	281	36	990	43
Tutoring is too expensive**	245	29	241	36	361	46	847	37
Tutoring is a waste of time**	214	25	99	15	79	10	392	17
Tutoring is a waste of money	-	-	123	18	110	14	233	16
I would get teased at school if I had a tutor**	115	14	36	5	36	5	187	8
I would like a private tutor	52	6	58	9	57	7	167	7

Table 8. Number and percentage of students without tutors giving reasons for not having a tutor, by year group.

The pattern of responses indicates that most of the primary school students who did not have a tutor felt they could get help from their teacher, family and friends. They thought they learned enough in school, spent enough time learning, and did not need a tutor. Year 11 and year 13 students received less help from their family and friends and looked to their teachers for extra help with their work. Families are less able to help with the more specialised GCSE and A level courses. Only about half these students felt they learned enough at school, which suggests that some might perhaps welcome having additional help with their schoolwork, however only a few of them would like a private tutor. This suggests that there is a substantial proportion of secondary age pupils who are not receiving as much help as they would like for their work in school, however they do not seem particularly enthusiastic about having a tutor.

Discussion

In the sample as a whole, just over a quarter of students had ever had a tutor and there was little difference between years 6, 11 and 13. Primary school students mainly had tutoring in literacy and numeracy, while some were tutored specifically for the 11+ or other standardised tests. It is likely that some of the students receiving help in literacy and numeracy were also preparing for such tests. Secondary students had most tutoring in mathematics, followed by English, science and modern languages.

The main reason for having a tutor, given by two thirds of the students with tutors, was to do well in tests and examinations. Primary school students had tutoring to help them do well in secondary school entry tests, which suggests that some of the students in our sample were in areas of competition for secondary school places. A small proportion explicitly mentioned the 11+ and tests of verbal and non-verbal reasoning. Others may have needed to obtain good levels in the Key Stage tests. Secondary school students had tutoring to help them improve their GCSE grades, especially in mathematics. Students sometimes had a tutor to help them keep up with work or to catch up on work they had missed, perhaps through illness. Some students, especially in secondary school, felt they did not learn well from their teacher. A small yet significant number had tutoring to help with additional learning needs. This suggests

that some schools were not providing sufficient support for special educational needs and that parents felt they needed to provide extra assistance.

Many of the primary school students without tutors felt that they did not need a tutor, as they were able to obtain help from members of their family or friends. By year 11, fewer students felt their families were able to help and they were more likely to ask their teachers if they had difficulties with their work. Understandably, more parents were able to help with the primary curriculum but fewer were sufficiently familiar with the more specialised GCSE courses. It is perhaps a reflection of the relatively high level of education in the population as a whole, which means that many parents are able to give considerable educational support to their children. It is also encouraging that the majority of students felt they could turn to their teachers to help them, however there remain a minority who would not. Other reasons for not having a tutor suggest that many students, especially in primary school, are satisfied with their learning and do not want or need a tutor. Older students were less satisfied with the amount they learned and would perhaps value more opportunity to do additional work at school. These students were more aware of the financial cost of tutoring.

Our findings indicate that levels of tutoring remain relatively low in comparison with other countries. In mathematics, 17% of year 6 students, 18% of year 11 students and 19% of year 13 students in the sample have ever had a tutor. These estimates are in line with European countries where between 16 and 20 percent of students have tutoring or extra lessons in mathematics (Mischo and Haag, 2002). Our research adds to previous studies by providing information on the duration of tutoring received. This shows that although the majority of year 6 students started tutoring in year 5 or 6, about a quarter started earlier. Similarly, while 10% of the year 13 students had a maths tutor during sixth form, the remainder had received tutoring in previous years.

To compare our estimates with those obtained from TIMMS, we used the information provided by students on the duration of tutoring in mathematics to calculate how many students had tutoring in the year of the survey. Based on this information, 9% had tutoring in mathematics in the first term of year 6 (when the survey was administered) and 10% in year 11. These estimates are similar to the TIMMS survey in the 1994-5 school year, which indicated that 10% of students had extra lessons in mathematics in year 8. It seems unlikely that there has been a substantial increase in the amount of tutoring in mathematics over the last decade.

Our estimates are a little higher than those obtained in the PISA survey (OECD, 2001), which indicated that 20% of students attended courses in the language of assessment, in other subjects or additional courses outside their school. This is most likely due to differences in question wording, as the PISA survey asked about courses attended, whereas we asked if students had ever had a tutor. We will be undertaking further analysis of the questionnaire data to clarify this.

There were large variations between schools in the proportion of children having tutors. In the primary schools, this ranged from 0% to 59% and in the secondary schools from 6% to 65%. A visual inspection of the data indicated that rates of tutoring were higher in schools in more advantaged areas, however further analysis of the data is needed to uncover other reasons for this variation. Whatever the reason, it is likely that these variations will have an impact on children's attainment and on overall levels of attainment in school. In a recent experimental study, Bunting and Mooney (2001) demonstrated that coaching raises attainment on the 11+

test, which is meant to measure stable intellectual ability, not achievement in curriculum subjects.

Tutoring in curriculum subjects is arguably even more effective, raising attainment by as much as two standard deviations (Bloom, 1984). The quality of tutoring is likely to influence its impact on attainment however as evidence indicates that tutoring programmes vary considerably in their effectiveness (Ireson, 2004). Parents do not always find it easy to obtain tutors for their children and often rely on personal recommendation (Rushforth and Ireson, 2004). It is difficult for them to be sure that their money is well spent and further research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of tutoring.

To conclude, this research indicates that a substantial proportion of students have tutoring at some point during the time at school. Primary school students mainly have tutors to help them make a successful transition into secondary school. This suggests that families feel that their children are not receiving sufficient support in primary school and see tutoring as a way of boosting their children's chances of gaining a place in grammar schools or popular comprehensive schools. At secondary level, the relatively high rate of tutoring in mathematics suggests that it is being used to help students achieve the all-important C grade at GCSE. Some families appear to be using private tutoring quite strategically to help their children make successful transitions in the education system. The very wide variation in the prevalence of tutoring in both primary and secondary schools suggest that the local environment and other factors influence family strategies and these will be explored in later stages of the research. For many families private tutoring is an affordable and flexible way to help their children, however this inevitably places others at a disadvantage in the education system.

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