

FT guide to schools

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The jet-set tutors

→ Influx of international pupils drives a boom in tuition

The influx of rich foreign families to London - from the likes of Russia, the Middle East, east Asia and southern Europe - has triggered a boom in demand for places at top schools. That in turn is causing rapid growth in the school placement and tutoring services that help parents get their children admitted.

"Until five or six years ago, the constituency of London schools was London. Now their constituency is the globe," says Susan Hamlyn, director of the Good Schools Guide Advice Service (GSGAS).

Wealthy foreign parents may not make a final decision to move to the UK until their children have found places at good schools, she adds.

Tutoring agencies and educational consultancies are growing, with more opening in the UK and abroad.

Demand is reinforcing a trend towards tutoring at a younger age. Where tutors once focused on GCSE and A-level, the emphasis in London is now on getting pupils into secondary schools.

"Preparing boys and girls for entry to top secondary schools at 11 or 13 is our biggest market," says Malachy Guinness, director of Bright Young Things Tuition. "Nearly 60 per cent of our work is now with foreign families"

The company has set up BYT International for families based abroad. If there is time, they will send a tutor out for a year or more - to, say, Moscow, Kazakhstan or Abu Dhabi - to live with the family and

tutor the children after school and at weekends, as well as joining them on holiday. The tutor teaches them English and the subjects they'll need

for Common Entrance, such as science and history, as well as giving "cultural guidance". The cost for a year? About £50,000.

It can be hard for wealthy parents to accept that a place at their dream school cannot be bought, says

Guinness. "Many of the foreign families we deal with are used to paying a bit more and getting things in a hurry."

Harry Williams of educational consultants Bruton Lloyd (catering to wealthy parents mainly in Russian-speakers) also stresses the need for families to plan several years ahead if they can. And they should consider both boarding and single sex schools.

"We explain to them that most of the top independent schools in and around London are single sex and that getting your child into a top London day school is extremely difficult," says Williams. Bruton Lloyd, like BYT, sends its graduate tutors abroad to stay with families, as well as providing tuition in London.

The GSGAS package, starting at £2,500, covers everything from assessments to arranging interviews with schools and introductions to the best tutorial agencies.

"That means agencies with well-qualified, experienced tutors - not jolly undergraduates who play polo," says Hamlyn.

Biddy Passmore

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