

# The Good Schools Guide Review of Fleet Tutors, London, W4 4PU

## Our View

Fleet Tutors say, 'Our values and philosophy apply to our clients, tutors and staff. It's not about hot-housing but building confidence and relieving anxiety about exams. I found it amazing that there was no national company with a national brand which delivered a consistent service that was value for money. We have the systems, the processes and the procedures while maintaining the personalisation of a local company. Our new IT and phone systems now allow us to provide all of our clients with a named consultant at our offices to support them throughout their home tuition programme. We are the largest but it's not about building numbers – every single client counts.' Quality. quality and, er, quality.

We say, Tutors clearly like the set-up. 'They give me loads of work... I've never had a problem.' 'They're fair, honest, efficient – sort any problems immediately... they're fantastic to work for.' And clients are similarly satisfied, 'They found me a good tutor who exactly met my needs. She helped me amazingly... I would never have got to college without her' – and so on! Wellington College says they 'have used Fleet Tutors for a number of boys over the past four years... have been impressed by the quality of the tutors and the way in which they take an individual interest in the pupils they are working with'. Reliable, slick, excellent. This is Amazon – you get the quality and the delivery, and all done in the mass-market but direct to your door and at a discount. Of the big operators, it's the one to beat.

## Fleet Tutors Staff

Mylène Curtis is the owner and managing director. Stylish, half-American, terrifically elegant, focused and pulsatingly dynamic, she bought Fleet in 2003 and has so successfully injected it with energy, drive and ambition that it is now the only national agency in the UK. Mylène has an 'entrepreneurial background, running professional services that operate in a wide geographic area with a goal of providing a consistent, high-quality service'. She regularly appears in newspapers as 'the' spokesperson for this huge industry. 'Quality' is a word she uses a lot and one has to be impressed by Fleet's scale and slickness.

Moved to new, slick office in Chiswick, west London, in 2007, testament to growth in business. Despite Big Money credit being crunched possibly more in west London than elsewhere, expansion continues and the initial office in Fleet is now a thing of the past. New offices in 3,200 square feet of Georgian grandeur on edge of Farnborough suggests Mylene Curtis understands something of relating to her clientele in ways some banks could learn from!

She now employs 35 members of staff, between the offices in Hampshire and London, with one manager based in Lincolnshire and another in Bristol. This is an empire. Also an Educational Service Management Team responsible for the tuition quality and training of tutors, a development manager who works with LAs and schools, as well as accounting and administrative staff.

## Academic Matters

Fleet Tutors offer around 80 subjects – yes, 80. However, as everywhere, most demand is for maths, English and the sciences and mostly at GCSE level. Fastest growing areas? – school entrance exams and A levels. They can find tutors for every level including every school stage to post-grad for some subjects. They have tutors with experience and qualifications in various SpLDs and, basically, if they don't teach it you can't possibly want to learn it! All pupils have individual education plans – copies kept by clients, teachers and pupils, serving as a target and achievement record – useful to all.

They are a national company and, of the agencies who offer more than just a database, they are the only one that has a good spread of tutors in most subjects over the country. In that respect, they are unique and no other company comes near. They are also now developing online learning, either instead of face-to-face or as a complement to it – well worth exploring if you are on a moor or in a glen or one of the few other places a Fleet tutor cannot climb, swim or abseil to.

They have 1,500 tutors in London and over 5,000 nationally. They are especially busy in areas with grammar schools – no prizes for guessing why! Tutors visit pupils' homes unless they are brought in by schools and work there. Fleet supplies teachers for individual help to a number of schools, eg

Wellington, Frensham Heights and Queen Anne's, Caversham. They also offer residential tutors who live with the family and/or accompany them on holidays (skiing maths GCSE tutors are a popular request for Easter!), top-up courses over the summer holidays and home-based holiday camps. This means that tutors in sports, arts, drama and music come to you!

## **Background and Atmosphere**

Fleet has been established for 34 years but has been propelled into the 21st century by Mylène Curtis. With tutors tutoring over 10,000 students throughout the country in the past year, it's no surprise to find the office is a beehive of activity with staff answering the constant flow of calls.

You realise that this is one-of-a-kind as far as tutor agencies go. Some 570 tutor applicants are interviewed each month – fewer than half meet Fleet's criteria and are invited to sign up. Around 800 tutors have had long relationships with Fleet and are kept well-supplied with assignments. In fact Fleet's founder, over 34 years ago, still tutors with Fleet and remains a most popular tutor. The average age of Fleet's tutors is 40, but many are retired teachers. Some are younger but have fallen out of love with the system, some are postgrads and others are, as we have met elsewhere, highly-educated younger people who mix some tutoring with, eg, acting. A few are retired professionals from careers in eg science, engineering, etc who enjoy the work.

Applicants need a minimum of a teaching certificate or degree in the main subject they offer and the majority of tutors are now experienced, qualified teachers. Unlike other agencies, Fleet insists that all tutors have a degree in the subject they are offering – other agencies consider an A level to be sufficient and we don't agree – except at primary or perhaps the earliest years of secondary levels. All tutors go through enhanced CRB clearance, must present copies of their qualifications and references – all of which are pursued. All applicants are interviewed – usually by phone – and the interview process is rigorous.

"We do not hire tutors who want 'stop-gap-employment' – we're a hands-on service provider, not just an agency. If tutors are not qualified teachers, we prefer experienced professionals or PhD students who can demonstrate enthusiasm for their subject and an ability to inspire and engage young people."

Tutors are offered regular training opportunities and are kept in touch via monthly newsletters which keep them up-to-date with curriculum developments, policy changes, etc – this is a seriously useful thing for those who can't keep up with every latest notion in the DfE's noddle. Likewise Fleet is assiduous in seeking feedback – more so than most other agencies we know. They call after the first session to see how it went. They send formal feedback forms which ask really sensible questions about the tutor, the tutoring and the whole works. They follow up tuition four to six times a year, run an exam results survey and take all comments seriously. 'We spend a lot of time on the phone – not just in the set-up period but during the tuition.' We read through a vast ring-binder of comments and it was hard to spot anything less enthusiastic than 'good' in answer to any question. Tutors are appraised regularly, and 'if tutors do not receive consistently high ratings... they are removed from our books'.

## **Money Matters**

All tutors work on a self-employed basis. The clients are invoiced monthly and the tutors are paid likewise by the agency. Clients pay a registration fee of £50 - £82 depending on location and tuition required. This is payable as soon as Fleet has ascertained that they can provide what is needed, and clients can have a second or third shot at settling down with a tutor if number one doesn't suit. It does, however, in 75 per cent of cases, we are told. However, there can be problems with this fee if, in between registering and them ringing you back with suggested tutors, you find one elsewhere. Better check this out before agreeing if you are looking elsewhere. Tutors sign a contract with the agency.

Average fee for lessons is £38. However, it varies between £30 and £50 depending on what you want and where. Discounts for multiple lessons booked at once. And the first lesson is free – to see how it works. We like this. (Though you can't keep on getting free ones if you don't like the first tutor!)