

## SPOTLIGHT ON:



### Woburn Sands Maths

Anyone who currently has a teenager in year 11 will be aware of the changes to GCSE maths introduced when Michael Gove was Education Secretary, which first hit the exam halls this summer.

The maths content and difficulty has increased so significantly that schools have struggled to support their pupils, and in some cases to assign pupils to the level – foundation or higher – that best matches their ability.

With no past papers to use as a guide, and very few example papers supplied by the exam boards, maths teachers and, more importantly, their students have had a tough time of it.

Presumably Mr Gove did not intend to inflict such difficulty on this year's students. He wanted to raise standards, and thought that making the exams harder would force the schools to devote more time and resources to teaching maths. Sadly he overlooked the fact that we already had a shortage of maths teachers. I imagine that many schools will have struggled to find adequate maths teachers, even if they had the resources to do so.

In my work with year 11 students this year, I've found that their greatest challenge is not in mastering the new topics, but in coping with a more demanding style of exam question which weaves a number of topics together into a puzzle which requires logic and creative thinking to unpick. It used to be fairly obvious what the question was about. The student learned the topics, and then demonstrated what they knew. You could take until Christmas or beyond to get on top of the individual topics, and then spend the last few months learning how to answer exam questions.

The difference now is that this final phase – of developing skill in applying the techniques – is so much more demanding that it exceeds the abilities of some pupils, and in others requires a full year of study to achieve.

This is great for the most mathematically able. It stretches and stimulates, and separates out the very best from the rest. The trouble is that the vast majority of students are 'the rest', and they matter too.

So the reason I am writing this is to alert parents to the new situation. If you want to provide extra support for your child, then leaving it until year 11 is likely to be too late, even for children in the higher sets. For a child who gets on well with maths, year 10 is a good time to start. If your child has any difficulty, then year 9 is likely to be better.

Unfortunately many parents don't realise their child needs help until the GCSE mock exam results, just a few months before their real GCSEs. By this time it is generally too late, even if you can find a tutor who has space to take them.



One big advantage of getting help sooner rather than later is that your child will gain more benefit from their school maths. If you plug the gaps in a child's understanding, they are then better able to keep up in class. It is amazing how much difference you can make to a child's happiness by enabling them to follow and enjoy their school maths.

For the child whose maths has been disrupted by a spell with a poor teacher, or has missed some weeks due to illness or holiday, or has been distracted by personal or family difficulties, just a term or even a few weeks support at the right time can

have more benefit than a year of tutorials later on.

I don't say this to drum up business: I only have space for 15 students for one-to-one sessions, and places are generally full. However I do hope to provide the best possible support for my students, and this includes starting early enough to ensure they achieve their full potential.

*(Advertising Feature)*

### Woburn Sands Maths Tutor

I am currently taking new students for the summer and beyond.

We work at the kitchen table, looking out over my beautiful wildlife garden, with Merry the Spanish Water Dog dozing beside us.

I offer one-to-one tutoring, tailored to your child's needs. My priority is that this should be affirming, effective and enjoyable.

**01908 585977**

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*Experienced female tutor, Oxbridge educated, over 20 years teaching experience with the Open University*

**Specialising in GCSE Maths**