

# Explore Learning

*Shipshape speaks to Bill Mills, founder of a company that gives children extra tuition while their parents go shopping.*

Explore Learning set up its first centre in conjunction with Sainsbury's in Chelmsford in 2001. The company, which has since grown to 22 centres around the UK, gives extra maths and English tuition to children aged between 5 and 14.

## Bright idea

"I thought, how could one do something that would be widely affordable and accessible that could work alongside mainstream primary education?" says Bill, who also owns Highfield Preparatory School in West Sussex, which his grandfather set up a century ago.

With Explore each child has his or her own individual programme of learning, based on the National Curriculum, personalised to their needs. Mostly computer-hosted, there's a minimum of one member of staff to six children.

"Children really like it once they get a sense of their progress," says Bill. Membership costs between £80 and £100 a month for an hour's session twice a week. "It doesn't matter if the child is struggling, very bright, or just cruising along in the middle. Every child has his or her own needs and can benefit from individual attention."

The link-up with Sainsbury's determines the majority of its locations, but Explore Learning has also set up in shopping centres and will soon open in stand-alone units. "It's got to be convenient. The idea is that parents can go shopping while

their children learn. There's no need to book in advance."

Shipleys' Steve Foster has been working with Explore since the beginning. "He provides us with a mixture of formal and informal advice. Shipleys is a pleasure to work with and doesn't make an unnecessary meal of things. They are pragmatic and sensible and have given good advice over the years."

## The future

Explore's biggest challenge is finding good staff, and training them at the same rate at which they are opening new centres. Explore currently has some 6,000 members and Bill plans to open one or two new centres a month over the next couple of years.

"We look for people who are great communicators and passionate about education. Our centre managers must be good graduates as they will do the tutoring, recruit new members and assistant tutors and run the centre."

With regards to the credit crunch Bill finds that "Parents would rather give up their Sky subscriptions than Explore. We are also being presented with some good deals to open in shopping centres where we couldn't have previously afforded the rent. They would rather have someone occupying the space than not. These are exciting times for us."

[www.explorelearning.co.uk](http://www.explorelearning.co.uk)