

## Mentoring

Low impact for moderate cost, based on moderate evidence.



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Mentoring in education aims to develop young people's strengths by pairing them with an older volunteer, sometimes from a similar background, who can act as a positive role model. It is often characterised as aiming to build confidence, or to develop resilience and character, rather than directly focusing on teaching or tutoring specific skills. Mentors typically build relationships with young people by meeting with them one-to-one for about an hour or so a week either at school, at the end of the school day, or at weekends.

Activities vary from programme to programme, sometimes including direct academic support with homework or other school tasks. Mentoring has increasingly been offered to young people who are hard to reach or deemed to be at risk of educational failure or exclusion.

### How effective is it?

The impact of mentoring is low in terms of direct effect on academic outcomes, accelerating learning on average by only about one month's additional progress for the majority of pupils. There is some evidence that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds can benefit by up to about two months' additional progress.

School-based mentoring programs have on average been less effective than community-based approaches, possibly because school-based mentoring can result in fewer opportunities for young people to develop more lasting and trusting relationships with adult role models. Other positive benefits have been reported in terms of attitudes to school, attendance and behaviour.

Programmes which have a clear structure and expectation, provide training and support for mentors, and use mentors from a professional background, are associated with more successful outcomes. There are risks associated with unsuccessful mentor pairings, which may have a detrimental effect on the mentee, and the negative overall impacts reported by some studies should prompt caution.

### How secure is the evidence?

The evidence is moderately secure. The quality of evaluations has improved in recent years with more rigorous designs compared with earlier studies, which often relied on correlational designs. Impact estimates have been fairly consistent over the last decade.

Most of the studies come from the USA and focus on secondary school pupils, with a few studies from the UK and other European countries such as Portugal. A recent rigorous study of mentoring for reading in Northern Ireland with eight to nine year olds found small improvements of about two months' progress in fluency, but not in reading comprehension. Further rigorous evaluation in the UK is needed of varying approaches to mentoring across different age groups.

### What are the costs?

Costs overall are estimated as moderate. Compared with other professionally delivered interventions and approaches, mentoring is relatively inexpensive. Costs mainly cover mentor training and support, and the organisation and administration of the programme. Community-based programmes tend to be more expensive than school-based programmes as schools tend to absorb some of the costs, such as space costs or general administration. Estimates in the USA are between \$1000-\$1500 per student per year or about £600-£850 per pupil per year.

## What should I consider?

*Before you implement this strategy in your learning environment, consider the following:*

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1. The impact of mentoring varies, but overall, it is likely to have only a small impact on attainment.
2. Positive effects tend not to be sustained once the mentoring stops, so care must be taken to ensure that benefits are not lost.
3. Community-based approaches tend to be more successful than school-based approaches.
4. Mentor drop-out can have detrimental effects on mentees. What steps have you taken to assess the reliability of mentors?
5. What training and support have you provided for mentors?