
Synthesis

Mentoringⁱ

Very low or no impact for moderate cost, based on extensive evidence



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Mentoring in education involves pairing young people with an older peer or volunteer, who acts as a positive role model. In general, mentoring aims to build confidence, develop resilience and character, or raise aspirations, rather than to develop specific academic skills or knowledge.

Mentors typically build relationships with young people by meeting with them one to one for about an hour a week over a sustained period, either during school, at the end of the school day, or at weekends.

Activities vary between different mentoring programmes. While some mentoring programmes include some direct academic support with homework or other school tasks, approaches focused primarily on direct academic support are not covered in this strand. See One to one tuition and Peer tutoring.

Mentoring has increasingly been offered to young people who are deemed to be hard to reach or at risk of educational failure or exclusion.

How effective is it?

On average, mentoring appears to have little or no positive impact on academic outcomes. The impacts of individual programmes vary. Some studies have found positive impacts for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, and for non-academic outcomes such as attitudes to school, attendance and behaviour. However, there are risks associated with unsuccessful mentor pairings, which may have a detrimental effect on the mentee, and some studies report negative overall impacts.

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School-based mentoring programmes appear to be 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.

Programmes which have a clear structure and expectations, provide training and support for mentors, and use mentors from a professional background, are associated with more successful outcomes.

How secure is the evidence?

The evidence is extensive. Five meta-analyses have been published in the last ten years, and estimates of average impact have been fairly consistent over the last decade. The quality of individual studies has improved in recent years with more experimental — rather than correlational — studies available for inclusion in reviews.

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.

What are the costs?

Overall, costs are estimated as moderate. They 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.

What should I consider?

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

1. The impact of mentoring varies but, on average, it is likely to have very little 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.

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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?