Using coaching and mentoring to support students
Coaching and mentoring have been used as effective strategies for supporting struggling students. The following case studies illustrate how:

- mentoring was used to improve attendance and attainment of students in a secondary school and;
- coaching was used to raise the engagement and attainment of underachieving male students.

Ann Horsley from Farnborough used assertive mentoring with her post-16 students. In doing this she learned a great deal about how to adapt the process for older students. Her case study can be accessed on the case studies of Farnborough practice stop on this line.

Case Study 1- using mentoring to improve attendance and attainment
Fitzharrys is a secondary community school located in a relatively affluent area of Oxfordshire. Fewer students than average nationally are eligible for free school meals or have special educational needs. Little unemployment in the local area has been linked with some students’ low aspirations and lack of motivation to make efforts to learn and succeed: ‘it is too easy to find a job’. Assertive mentoring was used with identified underachieving students.

Key outcomes
Evidence collected by the school and the research team suggest that following the mentoring:

- target students’ attendance and attainment improved, with higher numbers of students\(^1\) achieving 5 A*-C GCSEs;
- mentored students’ have been taking greater responsibility for their learning and their attitudes have improved; and
- 0% NEET (not in employment or training) students were recorded at the end of year 1 of the project\(^2\); more students continued learning past the age of 16.

The students when interviewed were explicit about recognising the impact of mentoring on their academic successes and attitudinal changes:

Without it [mentoring] we wouldn’t have got the grades and we wouldn’t have much of a future, a job or anything.

Before I had a mentor I didn’t even care about my GCSE’s... It [mentoring] made me see my grades were important.

\(^1\) Compared to past cohorts and students’ own predicted achievement levels.

\(^2\) End of year 2 data was not available at the moment of writing.
New progress tracking and target setting systems, embedded in the school as part of the project, provided better opportunities for personalisation of teaching and learning, which was recognised by Ofsted\(^3\).

**How was mentoring used with the students?**

Originally concerned with supporting more students to get good GCSE grades, the project developed and in its second year aimed at addressing general underachievement. A mix of ‘hard and soft’ data was used in identifying the target group of students. Progress tracking and FFT data were used to identify students who had a greater than 50% chance of attaining 5A*-C. Staff knowledge of students were also important in balancing judgements during the selection and sometimes led to offering mentoring to students who were on track in terms of their achievement but would benefit from it in other ways, e.g. a girl who had issues at home during her GCSE year was offered mentoring as a form of on-going support to help her cope and discuss with somebody she trusted how the situation at home affected her learning. Generally, assertive mentoring was thought to support students in three ways:

- helping them with organisation and study skills, getting on top of their coursework, prioritising their work;
- raising aspirations and challenging students who ‘are happy where they are but we [the school] are not’; and
- raising confidence and self-esteem of students who were at risk of being ‘un-noticed’ in the classroom.

Mentors, all trained by Deputy Head, were allocated one of the target students. In few cases when mentoring was not going well, this was usually because of the mentor and student not getting on well, so the project leaders performed some ‘moving around’ to make sure mentoring pairs were well matched from both mentors’ and students’ perspectives. Trust, care and positive relationships between students and their mentors were important for mentoring to be successful, as these student quotes indicate:

> It’s important that someone *individually cares* about you.

> If you do something bad or don’t do the work, you feel like you let your mentor down.

Using the assessment and progress data which all subject teachers regularly put on the system for each mentored student, mentors held regular meetings with their students, reviewing their progress in different subjects, discussing concerns, ways of organising course work, how to study and

\(^3\) Fitzharrys school 2010 Ofsted report is available at: [http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/oxedu_reports/display/(id)/116212](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/oxedu_reports/display/(id)/116212)

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prioritise. Mentors helped students to break their work into simple steps yet see the bigger picture, i.e. how their current work could affect their future:

                          Our mentors helped us realise that we need to work now to get the future we want.

The ‘assertive’ aspect of mentoring was seen as key: mentors had to challenge students and not just to have ‘cosy’ conversations with them. Being assertive yet have positive relationships with students was challenging for some staff so a significant part of the training and on-going support to mentors from the project leaders was about helping them achieve this.

Case study 2-Using coaching to improve the attainment of underachieving males

The four secondary schools involved in the project, all shared concerns about the achievement of a group of underachieving white working class males. Group and individual coaching was used to improve their engagement and achievement.

Key outcomes

Evidence collected by the schools suggested that:

- the majority of the students appeared to be engaged and enthused by the coaching;
- attendance and attainment had improved;
- students had developed better relationships with teachers and other students;
- the four schools involved in the project appeared to be working well together and communications were proving effective; and
- the group leaders have gained a greater understanding of ways of collecting evidence that are appropriate to the outcomes of the project.

“lt makes them feel a bit special” said one leader, with reference to the students involved in the project. In one school most of the students improved their attainment by one GCSE predicted grade over the year. The students recognised the positive effects the coaching was having on them:

                              The coach lets you express yourself. She sort of makes you come out with things.

                              The project helps me across subjects - I now ask questions in English and science.

How was coaching used with the students?

The students were identified by heads of year and form tutors in the schools based on the criteria:

- current achievement in the GCSE C-E range, although subject teachers believed they could gain higher grades;
- a good behaviour record; and
- an interest in exploring ways of raising their achievement.
The programme consisted of group coaching on three half-day sessions in each term. These sessions were based on group activity and challenge. The leaders have found challenge helps to motivate the students and to create group cohesion. The sessions were broadly based on group tasks interspersed with group coaching to explore students’ experiences. The group sessions were complemented by individual termly meetings in the students’ own schools.

Leaders and individual teachers monitored students’ progress and gave oral and written feedback to the group leader. In addition each student kept an evaluation journal which the senior leader used to supplement other sources of evidence. Feedback from coaches provided the group leader with other helpful information, too. For example, after student feedback in year one of the project the group changed the length of the coaching sessions in year two from 45 to 30 minutes because the students suggested a shorter time would be more productive. The coaches also gained insight into what’s causing low student expectations which then provided material for leaders’ discussions.

Students talked with their coach about targets, organisation, coursework deadlines, using time more effectively, and how they might get the information they need, for example, when they were researching a topic for coursework. Observations and feedback suggested that the students became more confident in talking as the coaching progressed. One leader commented:

Students are very quiet at the start – they want to be invisible, then over time they grow in confidence and are more willing to engage in dialogue.

**Implications**

- Coaching and mentoring had a positive impact on the achievement of the identified students. The students highlighted the value of having someone who cared about them as individuals. To what extent do your students feel that they have access to someone in the college who has an overall view of them as an individual?
- Each school adapted the coaching and mentoring to fit their context. Would it be helpful to read the Ann Horsley case study on this line to find out what she learnt about adapting assertive mentoring for post-16 students?

This is an extract from
