Peer Mentoring: Advice for running the programme

This table represents the learning from running peer mentoring in 3 schools for one full year – in some cases, we experimented with different models and all these different models are replicated below in case you can use them to inform your own programme.

|  | Findings from all the schools | Some schools tried… |
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| How often should the mentor and mentee meet? | Initially, we all suggest a **weekly organised meeting**. Individual mentors and mentees may wish to supplement this, but we recommend that you do not force this. We found it difficult to maintain momentum as Year 10 became increasingly focused on their exams towards. Consequently, we would recommend ending the programme for most students at Easter. | A more informal programme in the Summer Term relying on the most enthusiastic mentors and Year 7 effectively mentoring themselves.  A more activity-based approach for some students using sports as a draw. |
| When should the mentor and the mentee meet? | We all opted for a **breakfast mentoring session**. We found this offered some significant benefits:   * Providing a free breakfast motivated students to attend * It made a nice start to the day * It supported the work of the attendance and punctuality team * We were not in conflict with other school systems (clubs, tuition, detentions etc) * Students did not feel as if they were giving up their own time | Setting up lunchtime meetings for students who struggled with early mornings. Although this worked in some individual cases, it proved difficult to staff and schedule. |
| What should they do in Session 1? | Gangs Unite suggested a useful introductory mechanism where all the **mentors and the mentees were asked to bring something** to the first session which was important to them e.g. photos; sketchbook; music. Students then circulated talking to a wide range of mentors and mentees. |  |
| How much guidance should you give the mentors as to what to discuss in each session? | We all began the programme with a fairly rigid timetable of topics to discuss. We even developed cards which the mentors could use to structure their conversations. It is fair to say that this had mixed success. Some mentors felt that it stilted the conversation and that it was repetitive. Others liked the guidance and support.  We suggest offering **some guidance for the first few sessions** but then moving to a more open system as relationships develop. | Opting for a more informal structure in which mentors decided what to discuss.  Giving more open guidance to mentors e.g. please discuss homework at some point today.  A mixed approach – some sessions were prescriptive e.g. looking at student reports and some were more open. |
| How do you manage the session with students arriving at different times? | We all agreed that trying to manage the mentoring as one member of staff was extremely difficult. We all moved to a situation where **students were doing much of the administration** e.g. taking registers; organising breakfast etc. | Advertising for administrators and managers to take over the day-to-day routine  Using Sixth-Form students in an administrative role |
| How do you manage student absence? | This was a challenge. For Year 2, we all evolved the training so that there was less emphasis on a very focused relationship between one Year 7 and one Year 10. We tried to create more of a **group feel to mentoring** (so that if a student was absent, it did not feel like a wasted morning), however, some students will develop a strong relationship with each other and will be disappointed if they do not attend. Typically, in this scenario, over the longer-term the students motivate each other to attend. | Having some highly-skilled mentors who operate in a floating role who can work with any Y7 students whose mentor is absent for any reason  Mentoring groups e.g. 2 mentors with 4 mentees meaning that mentoring can easily accommodate an occasional absence. |
| How do you motivate students to attend? | For many students, this was not a problem. In fact, some students opted into the programme because they could see that it represented something positive. However, motivation was required for others. **We overwhelmingly tried to rely on positive motivation**. All the schools used a free breakfast as a motivational factor. | 2 schools used MyStickers rewards  1 school ran a reward trip to a bowling alley  All schools used certificates to reward regular attenders  1 school put on a termly ‘special breakfast’ with sausage rolls, bacon rolls, chocolate croissants to reward regular attendance. |
| What if a mentor and mentee don’t get on? | This occurred surprisingly rarely. In some cases, the situation resolved itself naturally with the mentors and the mentees re-organising themselves into a model which better suited personality types. This worked especially well for EAL students where students were quickly able to identify which mentors could work better with individual mentees. In some cases, we had to intervene to repair relationships – in these cases, the relationship was often strengthened as a consequence. |  |
| How often did the lead member of staff meet with the mentors? | In the early stages of the programme, we all tried to meet the mentors regularly (perhaps weekly or fortnightly). However, we found that this became difficult to sustain and actually there was no need for such a regular and formal structure. We would recommend a **light-touch approach** e.g. lead teacher hanging back at the end of a session so that Y10 students could report any concerns. In fact, the mentors were incredibly responsible about finding us to report issues that they had encountered with the mentees. |  |