

# *An Evaluation of the Work of EiC Learning Mentors in Lambeth*



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# Executive Summary: Evaluation of the work of EiC Learning Mentors

An evaluation on the varied roles that EiC Learning Mentors undertake and the successes that they have achieved to date was undertaken by the London Borough of Lambeth to explore what might be done to develop the learning mentor roles further. Learning mentors operate at both primary and secondary school levels and are responsible for supporting pupils whose achievement is lower than expected and to help break down barriers to learning for these pupils.

The evaluation was carried out through a questionnaire sent to those Lambeth schools where EiC funding supported the learning mentor work. Approximately 70% of these schools participated in the survey. Meetings were also held with senior leadership members and learning mentors along with evaluation visits to schools to explore the key lessons and issues arising from the mentoring programme.

The evaluation identified the role of the learning mentors to be wide ranging in scope and environment. For example, mentors have developed both pastoral and academic dimensions to their roles, have worked with parents and carers of pupils and based their mentoring both inside and outside of the classroom.

The level of support of the headteacher and senior staff to the learning mentors has been a crucial factor in the implementation, development and refining of the mentor role to enable the needs of pupils to be understood and met. It is also evident that the clear direction of the Lambeth Education Authority's Co-ordinator for Learning Mentors and Learning Support Units had contributed to the effective establishment of the mentor role.

Findings highlight the necessity for clear communication at all levels of support surrounding the mentor programme. For example, an initial adjustment period was required to allow for the development of an understanding of the mentor role for other school staff. Also regular meetings of mentors allowed for a strong network to enable the sharing of mentor experiences and raising of issues and concerns.

Key findings include the benefits of mentors in providing: confidential support to pupils; pastoral support for individuals and groups; academic support; multiple benefits to teachers; increasing self-awareness in pupils; benefits to the wider school community; and building the capacity of schools.

In common with other schools nationally, these schools are concerned about their ability to secure the continuation of this highly regarded work. This was evident from the questionnaires and the school visits. EiC funding has raised expectations and opened up opportunities. Changes to the funding system will pose challenges to schools which face competing priorities

There is a pressing need nationally to create a career pathway for learning mentors which would provide for higher levels of seniority, responsibility and remuneration. This would include recognised qualifications which are directly comparable to other national awards. Mentors doing similar work are paid different rates for the same job and that is inequitable. The issue of pay is central to the development of a nationally recognised career path.

# INTRODUCTION

In 1999, as part of its strategy to support improvement in schools facing challenging circumstances, the government introduced the major, nationally funded initiative 'Excellence in Cities' (EiC). The duration for the funding was not specified. This extended development had several distinctive strands. Each was designed to help schools to develop innovative ways of structuring learning support for a wide range of targeted pupils at risk of underachievement, already failing to thrive or likely to succumb to disaffection.

The learning mentor strand of EiC offered schools a new role in learning support and one which left them broadly free to define and develop the role to suit their individual needs. The role of learning mentor came out of a perceived need to create a different kind of support for pupils who were failing to thrive and whose achievement was below what might be expected, at both primary and secondary levels. Its focus was to be the alleviation of barriers to learning.

Lambeth EiC followed the national pattern beginning first in the secondary phase. Secondary schools had an option as to whether they had a learning mentor and Learning Support Unit (LSU). Schools choosing not to have a LSU received an extra amount of funding for their learning mentor. Six of Lambeth's secondary schools have an LSU, and a further four secondary schools opted to have learning mentors. In secondary schools, pupil numbers and eligibility for free school meals were used to construct the formula for the distribution of funding for learning mentors.

Primary learning mentors began in 2000 following the success of the secondary strand. In primary schools the method for deciding the formula was slightly different. Several additional factors relating to the perceived levels of challenge faced by the schools were taken into account. Priority was given to schools not in an Education Action Zone. Twenty-three of the 77 primary schools opted to have learning mentors. The formula adopted in each phase was considered broadly to match need. It was anticipated that there would be a link between the primary and secondary learning mentors in terms of an earlier intervention with pupils and a link towards a smoother transition for pupils from Year six to seven.

There was little, if any, guidance on pay scales of learning mentors and as a result there is a large difference in remuneration rates between learning mentors in participating secondary schools.

Lambeth LEA has provided a structure for the support and guidance of its learning mentors through the appointment of its Learning Mentor Co-ordinator. The co-ordinator has become the point of reference for schools and learning mentors. The role includes facilitating training opportunities and organising the very effective network for learning mentors.

# METHODOLOGY

## AN EVALUATION OF THE WORK OF EiC LEARNING MENTORS

This report was commissioned by Lambeth Education as part of its evaluation of the work undertaken through funding for Excellence in Cities.

This evaluation focuses on the varied roles learning mentors undertake and the successes achieved. It explores what might be done to develop the role further. Two education consultants, Eileen McAndrew and Chris Power, both retired HMI, carried out the evaluation.

Headteachers and learning mentors in those schools where EiC funding supported this work, were asked to complete and return questionnaires about the nature and context of the mentor's role in their school. Seventy-two percent of primary schools and 82% of secondary schools did so and this information informed the evaluation as appropriate.

Separate meetings were held with senior leadership members and with learning mentors from the schools which were visited. One day evaluation visits were made to five primary and three secondary schools to explore the key lessons learned and issues arising from their involvement in mentoring support.

# THE ROLE OF THE LEARNING MENTOR

The broad job description was to support pupils whose attitudes, behaviour or social circumstances were leading to under-performance and a lack of progress and engagement in learning. Mentors were *not* intended to be additional teachers, classroom assistants or learning assistants. Their function was to offer pupils a different kind of personal support which would focus on diminishing barriers to their ability to learn effectively. The word mentor means 'a trusted friend or adviser' (Oxford English Dictionary) and the definition is useful in clarifying the specific function of the role and how it is different from but complementary to, other forms of support schools offer to pupils.

The open ended nature of the job description has allowed individual schools to shape the role to their own circumstances and needs and to recruit people they judged best able to undertake the role and develop it as their particular knowledge, talents and experience

suggested. This explains why the work of the mentors has developed differently in different schools. Nevertheless, there is one overarching aim which is common to the role in all schools, that of breaking down barriers to pupils' learning.

The phrase 'barriers to learning' is general and covers a wide but important range of issues faced by pupils. These might include those who:

- are poorly motivated;
- have poor or intermittent attendance;
- find it difficult to communicate;
- lack self-esteem or self-confidence;
- are in public care;
- have suffered bereavement



- have difficulties at home;
- have moved schools often;
- have fallen behind in their work, or
- for whatever reason, find the routines and organisation of school very difficult to accommodate.

Whatever the issues which constitute barriers to learning, the major thrust of the mentor's work is to alleviate them where possible, or to help the pupil recognise them and find ways of coping where the difficulties are deep-seated or intransigent. The latter is particularly relevant when the difficulties faced by pupils are not within their control. Part of the mentor's role would be to help pupils to:

- develop respect for themselves and others
- improve their social skills; form relationships with adults and their peers;
- improve their attitude to learning and their behaviour in and out of school;
- realise their own responsibility in relation to learning and school.

Evidence from the questionnaires identified some work with parents and carers as a dimension of the mentor's work, though the extent to which this was a major feature of the role varied between schools. Mentors in all schools have some routine contact with parents of targeted pupils but some schools additionally undertake specific work with parents such as family learning workshops and drop in sessions, as well as acting as a bridge to put parents in touch with support agencies. The role has developed both pastoral and

academic dimensions and individual schools have determined their own balance with the majority focusing on the personal and pastoral aspects of support. The range of support is wide and flexible as schools seek to respond swiftly to the changing needs of pupils. In all schools, the mentors work for some of their time with individuals or small groups, both in and out of the classroom, focusing on learning, emotional, or communication issues, helping pupils to improve their attitudes and responses in class and more generally in school. In some schools, mentors plan and deliver courses in social skills, conflict resolution and behaviour. Some are closely involved in specific aspects of their school's personal, social and health education programmes (PSHE). A singular and valuable contribution is the training courses that mentors run for pupils in peer mediation so that they can in turn use their newly acquired skills to help other pupils. Similarly, some mentors are responsible for training pupils to support the learning of younger pupils for example in reading, while at the same time securing and improving their own levels of literacy.

In some secondary schools visited learning mentors are directly involved in academic support for identified pupils, for example in the development of study and revision skills or to ensure that where course work is weak or incomplete, pupils have targeted support to ensure adequate completion. In another secondary school visited, mentors work specifically with pupils targeted under school action plus on a part-time programme to enhance engagement in learning. In all these schools the work being undertaken by the mentors was carefully targeted, well planned and highly effective.

In primary schools targeted pupils are often supported through mentors working in specific curriculum areas or year groups. This gives the

opportunity for the mentor to work more directly on aspects of learning which can then be a focus for follow-up with the individual and in some cases, parents.

In the best practice such deployments take place after decisions have been made about how different pupils' needs are best met, and by which staff. In discussions with mentored pupils they felt this support really helped them both to make progress and gain confidence.

An integral part of each mentor's role is close liaison with teachers, other staff and sometimes with outside agencies who work with the pupil or their family. The extent to which the learning mentors are involved in external liaison varies between schools. Some mentors take part in multi-agency meetings which might include social services, the police, or family support. Some mentors also attend case conferences, for example, on child protection matters or issues relating to mentored pupils' welfare. In other cases, mentors may contribute information but have no direct involvement with external agencies. Mentors in the schools visited demonstrated a clear understanding of their responsibilities in relation to aspects of liaison, internal and external.

Mentors, because they are not teachers, can relate to parents in different ways and act as a conduit between home and school. In the schools visited there was evidence from discussions with staff of effective work in the strategies being developed to increase active parental engagement.

In both phases, mentors work on a wide range of ad hoc or expedient activities. These are often highly diverse and also add value for pupils across the wider school community. Work with pupils during lunch and playtimes is particularly significant. These are times when shy children feel vulnerable and exposed and where pupils with aggressive behaviour are

most likely to get into trouble. Helping to structure and support this time allows pupils to explore boundaries and practise their developing social skills, safe in the knowledge that a trusted, familiar adult is supporting them. In the same vein, breakfast, lunchtime and after school clubs have also benefited from mentor input. These range from homework support to activities in the expressive arts and sport which give pupils alternative opportunities to develop their skills and competences. These enriching activities have intrinsic value and also help pupils to form better relationships with their peers while strengthening their relationship with the mentor.

In some schools, the mentors' work on conflict resolution and anger management with pupils was seen as particularly relevant. Teaching staff asked mentors to run training courses for them so that they could incorporate the strategies into their work and the training was reported as very beneficial.



# MAKING THE ROLE WORK

## *Leadership*

The role of the headteacher and senior staff has been a crucial factor in the introduction, development and refining of the learning mentor's role. Headteachers considered carefully how the mentor's field of work related to the work of other staff and how it should offer a different dimension of support. The schools visited were adept at looking at the possibilities that the learning mentor role opened up. They shaped and refined the job to meet the school's needs and to exemplify their distinctive ethos. They sought to recruit people with specific talents and capabilities, either from their existing staff or externally. It is noteworthy that schools succeeded in recruiting people with very different levels of qualification up to degree standard and with very different previous experience. Some had been teaching assistants; a small number had been mentors in a different context and some had no educational experience, but brought a perspective of work outside school. In defining the job, headteachers and senior staff responded well to the initiative and carefully considered the needs of the pupils, and the specific skills and talents which led them to appoint individuals to the role.

## *Management structure*

The structures within which mentors work are different from school to school and the lines of accountability vary. Evidence from the questionnaire indicates that in half of the primary schools the Head or Deputy line managed the mentors. In other cases, the line management is undertaken by a variety of senior staff, including: the SENCO, learning mentor co-ordinator or inclusion manager. In the secondary schools, line management was the direct responsibility of deputy or assistant heads. The seniority of the line managers in the schools visited has helped to establish the role and to give it authority as a new, different, but integral part of the school's support provision. Another factor contributing to the effective

establishment of the role has been the clear direction given to support and guide the mentors in their work, by the LEA's Co-ordinator for Learning Mentors and Learning Support Units.

## *Communication*

Communicating the nature and scope of the new role within the organisation presented a challenge to some schools. In a discussion meeting with learning mentors, some felt it took some time to really establish a good level of staff understanding of what mentors do. At the beginning some mentors themselves felt a measure of insecurity, especially if they had no previous experience of working in schools. They felt they were sometimes on the periphery, 'hovering on the edge', not quite sure of where they fitted in and with some teachers and staff not clear about their work and responsibilities. Visits to schools made plain that this uncertainty has been dissipated as the role has developed and become embedded.

In the secondary schools visited, the lines of communication were formalised and clear. Size and complexity led some to place the mentor's work within an established network, as for example in one school, within the fortnightly multi-agency meeting, chaired by the deputy head. Other systems for the effective sharing of information so that everyone who needed to know was reliably informed about mentored pupils were firmly in place and well understood. Similarly, in the best practice in the primary schools visited, communication systems worked very well. In some primary schools, communications were sometimes described as 'informal' because staff see each other often and can pass information to each other. These do have systems intended to ensure smooth communication, but are at a point where they recognise the need to review their procedures. What is clear is that all mentors should be part of a two-way communication network, so that information

from them reliably reaches teachers, managers and where necessary, outside agencies, and vice-versa. This essential aspect has a consequence for the allocation of mentors' time which should not be overlooked.

### **Referrals**

Referral of pupils to mentors usually takes place in the context of regular reviews to assess pupils' progress. Often the beginning of term is taken as an opportunity for such review and referral. In the best practice, class teachers are able to discuss their concerns with senior staff and mentors before decisions regarding mentor support are made. These discussions take place in the context of understanding who else may or may not be giving a particular pupil support. In secondary schools referrals are most likely undertaken by Heads of Year and Heads of Department but again in the best practice Senior Staff are also involved in the discussions about which pupils work with a mentor. Even where systems are less well defined, staff are aware of the dangers of pupils being referred on the basis of emergency 'corridor referrals' which might arise from particular incidents or events which suddenly erupt.

### **Provision Mapping**

Schools had to envisage where and how the new role would fit into and extend their pupil support. This required them to map provision to ensure that duplication and omission were avoided. All have managed this well, seeing the mentor as the confidential listener and trusted guide, with the time and space for identified pupils. This is a unique aspect of the work of learning mentors. In the schools visited, the responses of managers and mentored pupils highlighted the importance of this distinctive aspect of the support. The relationship between mentor and pupils is different and areas of concern to them in their personal and family life can be discussed in confidence, outside the classroom.

### **Shaping the role**

In the best practice seen, mentors themselves contributed to the shaping of the role so that their own strengths and interests could be exploited both in individual and group work, and in designing and organising additional school-wide courses and activities. Here again, communication networks are vital in encouraging other staff to collaborate with mentors so that the work undertaken is strengthened and secured. Other staff need to know how mentors' are working with pupils and to reflect on additional ways in which the mentors expertise might enrich or extend school priorities. In one very successful example, the mentor and a senior staff member take pupils to nationally organised residential weekends for trained peer mediators. Here they meet their counterparts from other schools to share experiences and join in workshops. In discussion, these peer mediators judged the weekends to be the highlights of their year. They believe these occasions give them the opportunity to learn from others; to increase their knowledge, understanding and expertise; to gain confidence and a sense of achievement and to enjoy the social experience.

### **Feedback on progress**

One challenge raised in a number of the school responses in the questionnaire and also in the meeting with mentors, is the issue of making time to share feedback on pupils' progress. This can be a difficulty, particularly where there is insufficient time available to consider the observations and perspectives on pupils' progress prepared by mentors. In the best practice seen, opportunities for such feedback take place in the context of planned, regular reviews between senior staff, mentors and classroom teachers.

## Clarity

The mentors' roles, especially where, as in most cases, they undertake a variety of work, need regular clarification for all staff. This is not only because the staff changes, but also because the mentors' roles change, responding to different needs and exploring new possibilities. Some mentors also accrue additional tasks, for example in relation to aspects of attendance, gate-duties, or supervision of pupils waiting to be collected after school. The criterion against which the mentor's intervention is decided should relate back to the core function of breaking down barriers to learning.

## Training

The training mentors have received has added significantly to their skills and confidence in forming good working relationships with staff and pupils. Training has given mentors insights into a wide range of issues which can affect individuals and groups of pupils and militate against their well-being and ability to learn. The training focuses covered include child protection, family breakdown, anger management and substance abuse. Courses on strategies to help engage pupils, such as, peer mentoring and mediation, play leaders and the development of social skills have also featured. Questionnaires and information from discussions with mentors paid tribute to the quality and value of locally based courses.

The national five- day training was considered to be satisfactory by the majority of mentors in the schools visited. There is a range of additional courses offered by other providers which individual mentors have found valuable. Chief amongst these is the Liverpool Excellence partnership which provides the national training. There are degree and foundation courses available which include aspects relevant to the work of learning mentors. Mentors were concerned, however,

that there appears to be no calibration of their current training against nationally recognised awards. In their view, this adversely affects the development of a direct career pathway. The absence of an agreed pay scale results in mentors in different schools being paid different rates. For some mentors these factors are a severe disadvantage: they want to stay in this work but there is no structure to increase their seniority, responsibility or remuneration. In some cases in the schools visited, highly successful mentors are considering other career options where their skills and experience will transfer and where clearer professional pathways are established. This will be a loss to schools both in expertise and continuity.

## The pupils being mentored

Pupils interviewed in the schools visited, spoke with great strength of feeling about the benefits of having a mentor. Older and younger pupils were eloquent in expressing how in many cases, being mentored was for them the defining element which enabled them to engage with school. They were adamant that support came not only from the direct learning support or courses, but from the security and confidence that the mentor was a constant in a sometimes shifting and uncertain world. The quality of the relationships and the implicit and explicit levels of trust were crucial and impressive. The additional skills and confidence built up through engagement in specific curriculum activities, courses and other endeavours were important but the sense of personal support was the vital element.

## *Pupil having problems with friends being teased over personal hygiene*

*'Meeting the learning mentor was kind of helpful. I was getting really lonely. My mentor gave me good advice which I followed. I think I met her for 7 sessions but she used to come and work with me on my literacy and work*

*with my friends as well. I made cards to give out to friends and asked them to play games with me. The mentor helped me join the groups again. I feel happy that I now have lots of friends' .*

### ***Pupil falling behind***

A Year 5 boy was referred by the deputy head after a review indicated he was falling behind in his work. There were complications in his out of school circumstances which were also adversely affecting his work.

*'My mentor worked with me on literacy and numeracy and then would give me time to talk about issues out of school. She came home to talk to my Mom and helped my Mom with courses and housing'.*

### ***Pupil with deteriorating behaviour in class***

A Year 6 boy started to work with a learning mentor after relations had broken down with the class teacher and the teaching assistant. A meeting with his parents was arranged involving the learning mentor deputy head and class teacher. Targets were agreed and the mentor worked with him individually and in class. Feedback was given daily to his mother. Gradually behaviour improved and engagement in learning became more consistent.

*'I really felt happier about things. Having my mentor to talk to really helped. I didn't feel that when I got into trouble she would ignore what I had to say.'*

### ***Pupils living in difficult family circumstances***

One mentor was assigned to be the key worker for a pupil whose mother was a crack cocaine addict. The mentor has kept in regular contact with the pupil for nearly three years and maintained liaison with social services over that time. The relationship between mentor and pupil has flourished and the pupil felt able to

disclose some of the difficulties that were being faced. Detailed records were kept and relevant information was appropriately passed on. The pupil's school-work began to improve and behaviour around the school and in class became more balanced and settled. This support is still ongoing but links are now more intermittent as the parent is seeking help with the condition.

*'My mentor was an adult I could talk to. She had the time to listen which I didn't think my teacher had time to do because she was always teaching. I could get things off my chest ...personal things. I really am happy I met her.'*

### ***Pupils wanting quiet time***

Year 3 children can be nominated by their class teachers to attend a lunchtime activities club run twice a week by a mentor. Between 10 and 15 children attend and can engage in model making, reading, drawing and imaginative play. One girl commented

*'I really enjoy the opportunity of coming. It gives me quiet time to think.'*

### ***Pupil needing to catch up with work in year 2***

*'Time with my mentor meant I could get help if I didn't understand things or get things wrong. She gave me a lot of encouragement. She saw what I was good at particularly art and drawing. She kept in touch with my Mom and told my Mom how I was getting on.'*

### ***Pupil lacking in confidence***

A girl in Year 2 described as bright and capable was referred to a mentor because teachers thought she needed more reinforcement to build her self-confidence and self esteem. She worked with the mentor for 40 minutes a week for seven weeks alongside a child with similar issues. The mentor helped her to undertake a personal project on a topic that interested her.

This involved her working with books, art and a computer and was designed to reinforce the notion that she was capable of achieving. The mentor also went out with her at playtimes to help her integrate with other pupils. The mentor commented:

*'She has been participating more in class by asking questions voluntarily, something she rarely did before. She asked if she could show her project in assembly, whereas before she would never had been prepared to talk in a large public gathering. She seems to have a wider circle of friends. I will continue to monitor her but so far real progress seems to have been made.'*

### ***Pupil having problems forming relationships***

A class teacher referred a Year 2 boy because of inappropriate reactions to situations on the playground. The mentor worked with him to resolve minor friendship issues and on how to react in certain situations. Weekly targets were set :one being to go through playtime without any issues. The time spent in reviewing responses and encouraging better, more mature behaviour appears to have paid off as inappropriate reactions have decreased.

### ***Pupils working as peer supporters***

A mentor is involved in co-ordinating the work of Year 6 pupils who act as peer mentors with Key Stage 1 pupils. Pupils are given training on a weekly basis about interactions and games that can be played on the playground. This gives pupils an opportunity to show responsibility. One pupil commented :

*'It has helped me to listen and feel more helpful. It is nice helping people not to be shy. If they haven't got friends I try to help to find friends'. Another commented' I feel more independent through looking after other pupils. School isn't just about lessons it is also about having fun with other people. I have*

*learnt different ways of playing new games as a peer supporter as well making new friends myself.*

### ***'Pupils extending horizons***

Some pupils benefit from learning mentors support in a range of activities that extend pupils opportunities. In one school a learning mentor trained a group of Year 6 pupils in first aid. The pupils then entered a regional first aid competition in which they demonstrated their skills in a range of simulated scenarios. One pupil commented:

*'I really benefited from working with the learning mentor. I learnt about things that might one day help me to save someone's life. Going to the competition really opened my eyes to the sort of accidents that people can have but I felt confident that I knew what to do in each case. I know that if I have to face an emergency situation I won't panic but will try to help.'*

### ***Pupils needing intensive support***

Learning mentors within one secondary school work part-time with pupils within the structure of a Student Learning Centre. Pupils' barriers to learning may be connected to issues within or outside school. Care is taken to involve parents in the process and much effort is made to help pupils discuss their concerns, aspirations, behaviour and likes and dislikes in lessons.

Mentors work on a discrete part-time programme of support which aims to motivate learning through inspiration, by enabling and empowering students to work through issues. Specific opportunities are given for pupils to develop researching, processing and presentation skills through individual work and group work. The learning mentors work as key workers: they undertake in class support, keep in contact with other staff, parents and agencies to discuss progress and meet the pupils on a one- to- one basis to discuss issues



relating to lessons, concerns and areas of weakness. When the pupil has made enough progress to exit the SLC there is a specific occasion called graduation when two friends of the mentee come together with the pupil's Head of Year, Tutor and Learning Mentors to celebrate the progress. One pupil who had moved on from the SLC commented

*'The graduation ceremony made me feel respect for myself. Having two friends and my parents there made me feel proud. Praise is important. It boosts your confidence. I felt special having completed my goal. When I look back all the work I did with my mentor it means something. The mentors helped me to talk things through with teachers where things had gone wrong. They helped clear the air. Working with my mentor wasn't a soft option. It was challenging but worthwhile.'*

### ***Pupil with health, attendance and Child Protection needs***

A secondary aged pupil, whose home circumstances, health and attendance caused concern, was given an hour of individual mentoring each week to provide her with urgently needed support. This pupil made significant progress over time. She is now attending school regularly, is able to manage her health and related needs more effectively

and feels much happier and settled. She enjoys being in the company of her peers at school, has caught up with all her school work, and has returned to a full timetable. She also has a better understanding about what it means to be on the Child Protection Register and has come to terms with this. The pupil agrees that she now needs to become independent of mentor support but welcomes the continuing safety-net that the mentor's role offers.

### ***Pupil as Mediator***

One mentored secondary school pupil joined a group of others to undertake a 12 week course in peer mediation run by the school's learning mentor. The work involves responding to other pupils who ask for help in resolving disputes and also being proactive in noticing when help might be constructive but has not been sought. The mentored pupil believed that having a mentor herself and being encouraged and trusted to take on this mediation role had been a turning point for her. It had made a real impact on her understanding and increased her maturity helping her to improve her own behaviour and her engagement with school work.

*'The training really opened my eyes about what my behaviour was like for my teachers to deal with and I thought I owed her (the mentor) something for all she was doing for me'.*

The mediators in this school are part of the Youth Mediation Network and some are members of its steering committee which plans the national residential weekends for mediators from schools across the country. These have been signally successful in developing the self-esteem and confidence of mediators in this school, as well as raising their aspirations.

*'If anyone said I'd be going away and planning stuff like this I'd have said NO WAY, but I am and it is really great'*

## WHAT THE PUPILS SAY

*'It helped me realise the kind of person I want to be. Before I didn't think of the consequences or reactions I had with other people. I now want to focus on becoming a young lady. Teachers can't always focus on one pupil whereas the mentor has the time to do that. I really appreciated their patience and determination to see me through my difficulties.'*

*'I sometimes get into fights and don't want to listen to anyone when I am angry. My mentor talks to you in a way that makes you understand and sort it out yourself. He lets me put my side. He is someone you can talk to and express your feelings to.'*

*'My mentor grows my confidence.' When I fall over in football he says 'Don't worry you won't be hurt. He fights with tigers and he is strong.'*

*'When I came to school I had many difficulties and I couldn't tell my teacher my problems and my mentor was my voice to my teacher and I found it so, so useful. I couldn't do it myself.'*

*'In the beginning I had quite a few problems in my life and it was hard to express myself and organise myself but I have changed because*

*of my mentor. In year ten, I am completely different. Less timid, more organised and able to do my academic work.'*

*'A mentor is like an unusual person. You can't talk to teachers or your Mom in the same way. With the mentor you feel more comfortable and more able... I'm not a bad pupil but last year wasn't good... my mentor was a wake up call and made me more focused.'*

*'The mentor acts like someone to depend on. They don't judge you. In year seven I was missing a lot of school and getting into fights. My mentor helped me to talk and to calm down.'*

*'My mentor trained us to be a mediator and now I help out other people and give back something. I have more experience now to help them get out of their problems and find solutions.'*

*'My mentor did so much for me so you feel you have got to give it your best shot.'*

*'I reckon mentors give you reasons and I think of all I have benefited from this. I have many worries. If she wasn't there I know on many occasions I would have failed.'*

## ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF THE WORK

Measuring the impact of the learning mentor's work is difficult. What will count as evidence has to be decided and it is rarely easy to identify precisely which factor was causal. Often it is a combination of factors which come together and influence progress. Nevertheless, there are ways in which schools are effectively assessing and tracking improvement and recording progress.

Much of the one-to-one and small group withdrawal work centres on personal development and seeking to improve pupils' attitudes and behaviour; similarly, with courses in anger management and conflict resolution. In cases where pupils have long-standing or intractable family related difficulties, mentors work to build up pupils' resilience and strategies for coping. The outcomes and benefits from all of these crucial aspects are hard to measure and, of necessity, require some subjectivity. That does not make the judgement less valid: it makes it measured differently, but quite appropriately.

Assessment and recording of pupils' progress in the schools visited is a significant strength of the mentors' work. Knitting together information together from a variety of sources is very effectively carried out. The use of well-designed questionnaires from pupils, staff and parents provide useful and informative data on progress when compared with the original referral forms. The questionnaires give insights and evaluations from a range of perspectives, which together build into a tracking record of progress in aspects of a pupil's personal development. In the same way, the regular feedback which comes through the communication system, builds into a cumulative account of progress in attitude and behaviour over time. Keeping track of this progress is important, not least because progress in these aspects is not linear and is often slow and hard-won, so it is easy to

become discouraged and to forget small but significant steps along the way.

Several schools effectively use the Qualifications and Curriculum Authorities' (QCA) learning behaviour schedule on referral and at regular times during the mentoring period. This, and other similar instruments, such as pastoral monitoring sheets, are useful tools to evaluate progress in these affective areas of learning and can give clear evidence of barriers to learning being alleviated or removed. Where mentor's work includes family support, the views of parents provide additional feedback on progress. Improvements in attendance and punctuality can often indicate an improving attitude to school and an increasing engagement with learning. One older pupil in a secondary school commented that her mentor had given her simple strategies to help her to get up and get to school on time. This meant she was in lessons on time, not disrupting the teaching and having a calm start to the day. She added 'I'm not perfect but it is better and I'm getting there'.

In some of the best practice seen, staff compile files on each pupil containing formal and anecdotal evidence of achievement and progress, as well as any other relevant assessments. Pupils themselves are encouraged to analyse their progress through self and peer assessment. Where mentors are directly engaged in academic support, the setting and monitoring of targets are collaboratively decided, regular and effective. Occasionally, progress is very dramatic. In one secondary school visited, reluctant readers in Year 8 were trained to be Reading mentors for pupils having reading difficulty in a primary school. The reading ages of the Year 8 mentors had improved three months on average in the preceding year. At the end of their mentoring work with the younger children, their own level



of progress averaged one year and three months. Slower but discernible progress is more usual. It is worth remembering that some pupils' difficulties in learning or engagement may have been developing over a long period of time and so supporting and reinforcing the desired responses and habits will take time too.

Measuring the success of playground initiatives comes through the notable reduction of incidences of aggressive behaviour and the much calmer, relaxed state in which pupils begin subsequent lessons. Conflict and disagreement are lessened and problems are not trailed into the classroom so pupils are better able to settle to learning.

Record keeping is an overall strength of this work. Mentors are very assiduous in recording meetings and sessions as well as pupils' progress, so much so, that in some cases it would be timely to review the amount of recorded data so that only essential information is recorded and this aspect of the mentor's work is less onerous.

## Characteristics of good practice include:

- clear understanding of what the role entails, its possibilities and how it is different from, but complementary to, other roles;
- recruitment of empathetic, trained or experienced adults who can understand the difficulties some pupils face;
- senior staff who trust mentors to interpret, explore and develop innovative forms of support;
- clear structures for all forms of communication and well-defined lines of accountability and responsibility;
- effective needs-analysis for individual pupils
- provision mapping for all additional support so that any omissions and duplication are avoided;
- monitoring and record keeping that is appropriate in terms of scale and detail;
- the belief that well-planned, sustained and targeted interventions can make a real difference to pupils' progress and long-term life chances.

## CONCLUSIONS

The appointment of the Learning Mentor Co-ordinator has had a positive impact on the development and embedding of the learning mentors' role in schools. Her work has helped schools to define the role and to extend its scope in ways which are particular to their institutions and ethos.

A central strength has been the setting up of a network for the mentors with regular meetings where they share experiences, learn from each other and can raise issues of general or specific concern. The co-ordinator also acts as a point of reference for individual mentors as well as a conduit for information. The co-ordinator has been assiduous in ensuring that training across a wide range of relevant issues has been organised for mentors across the schools. In discussions, learning mentors were universally positive about the comprehensive internal training they had been offered.

### *...a confidential listener*

The different role has resulted in pupils having an adult whom they see as a confidential

support: someone who is not a teacher and who will listen to them without judging them. It is these elements which have facilitated the personal discussions which open up possibilities for reflection and developing different strategies and improvements to learning. This a most impressive feature of the work and one highly valued by pupils and teachers.

### *... pastoral support for individuals*

The one-to-one mentoring has been directly focused on individual pupils whose circumstances, attitudes or behaviour impede their ability to learn. Mentors have been able to work very effectively with some of the most vulnerable pupils and establish a productive relationship with them. Their efforts to help pupils come to a greater understanding of the consequences of their own and others' actions is making a perceptible difference to pupils and improving their ability to engage with work in class. Similarly, pupils who are shy or withdrawn are being encouraged to develop the basic social skills and a sense of self-worth.



### **... pastoral support for groups**

Groups of pupils with similar needs have been successfully supported through courses in such aspects as anger management and conflict resolution. Helping pupils to recognise circumstances where they are likely to lose control and then teaching them strategies for managing their response, is reducing disruption in and out of class.

### **... academic support**

Mentors contribute directly to pupils' progress through their academic support. While many factors contribute to progress, the intervention of mentors is clearly one such factor. Their contribution is more difficult to quantify where they are working to alleviate those aspects which inhibit learning. When pupils' feelings about themselves and responses to school become more positive, their ability to learn is improved. There is evidence from the visits to schools that this is the case.

### **... benefits to teachers**

Teachers and senior staff have been swift to identify the benefits to them from the mentor's work. There are pupils who need continuous time and space to talk to an adult and the opportunities for teachers to do this adequately with the demands of the classroom are severely limited. These pupils needs are now being effectively met. In the same way, brief but regular meetings with some parents are essential to maintain dialogue and progress and mentors have helped to cover some of that contact where appropriate.

### **... increasing self-awareness in pupils**

A striking feature of discussions with mentored pupils was their growing self-awareness and their capacity to evaluate their own progress and the benefits gained from having the contact and support of a learning mentor. This was the case whether the mentors were working with individuals or more generally on

whole school activities.

### **... benefits to the wider school community**

The training of other pupils to become peer mentors for younger children and training as mediators has added a new and valuable dimension to the mentors' work. The pupils involved paid tribute to the experience as one which helped them to take more responsibility, to be more mature and to give back something to their community. They believed their work was making a difference to the children they reached, as well as offering as example to those who came after them.

Senior staff and teachers have been effective in drawing mentors into the wider work of the school through contributing to work in the creative and expressive arts and sport. Lunchtime clubs including art, athletics, football, creative and expressive arts and visits to extend curricular work have been enhanced by the mentors' contributions.

### **... building capacity**

A signal success has been the way in which schools have managed to incorporate the mentors' work into their structure of support. While there was a variation in the extent to which mentors have been able to extend the scope of their role, in the large majority of schools visited, the mentors were encouraged to explore possibilities and opportunities to maximise their contributions.



## ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE

### *... funding and sustainability*

In common with other schools nationally, these schools are concerned about their ability to secure the continuation of this highly regarded work. This was evident from the questionnaires and the school visits. EiC funding has raised expectations and opened up opportunities. Changes to the funding system will pose challenges to schools which face competing priorities.

### *... training and career pathways*

There is a pressing need nationally to create a career pathway for learning mentors which would provide for higher levels of seniority, responsibility and remuneration. This would include recognised qualifications which are directly comparable to other national awards. Mentors doing similar work are paid different rates for job and that is inequitable. The issue of pay is central to the development of a nationally recognised career path.

The creation of the role of learning mentor has had evident benefits for mentored pupils and for teachers and in many cases for the wider school community. A strong feature has been the quality of people recruited to the mentor posts. They have brought a range of qualifications and experience and schools have been effective in shaping the role to take advantage of their individual strengths. The work has been characterised by imagination, ingenuity, tenacity and a determination to make a difference. The role has developed differently in different schools in response to the perceived needs of particular pupil populations but there are common successes which indicate how the role has been embedded and can be developed further.



## APPENDIX

### List of schools returning questionnaires :

Archbishop Sumner CE Primary  
Bonnevill Primary  
Clapham Manor Primary  
Crown Lane Primary \*  
Glenbrook Primary  
Heathbrook Primary \*  
Henry Cavendish Primary \*  
Hitherfield Primary  
Immanuel and St Andrew CE Primary  
Macaulay CE Primary School  
St Andrew's RC Primary \*  
Stockwell Primary \*  
Streatham Wells Primary  
Sudbourne Primary  
Woodmansterne Primary  
Wyvil Primary  
Primary Pupil Referral Unit

Archbishop Tennison CE Secondary  
Bishop Thomas Grant RC Secondary  
Charles Edward Brooke CE Secondary \*  
Dunraven Secondary \*  
La Retraite RC Secondary  
London Nautical School  
Norwood Secondary \*  
St Martin-in-the Fields CE Secondary  
Norwood Secondary Centre (SPRU),  
(now called The Park Centre)

*\* These school were also visited and sent representatives to the meetings held with Senior Team leaders and EiC Learning Mentors.*

For further details about the work of Learning Mentors in Lambeth please contact the Co-ordinator for Learning Mentors and Learning Mentor Support Units:

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