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## Report

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# School Approaches to Supporting Students to Remain Engaged at Key Stage 4

**Baseline case study report**

National Foundation for Educational  
Research (NFER)



# School Approaches to Supporting Students to Remain Engaged at Key Stage 4

## Baseline case study report

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## Foreword

As a charity, the Foundation exists to improve the education and life chances of learners through the provision of independent evidence aimed at influencing policy, informing practice in the learning environment and directly impacting on learners. One area of focus for us is *From Education to Employment* where we have carried out for work for clients as well as used our own charitable funds to invest in conducting new research to provide evidence where we feel important gaps exist.

Recent NFER research that has informed our *From Education to Employment* strand of work includes:

- evaluation of the Work Experience Placement Trials for 16-19 year olds (Sims *et al.*, 2013)
- evaluation of the first year of PRIME work placements in the legal profession for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Kettlewell *et al.*, 2012)
- the development of practical tools to support practitioners to identify and understand the reasons why young people disengage from learning (based on research evidence) (NFER, 2013a and b)
- the development of a brief for senior school and college leaders to improve their delivery and monitoring of careers education, information, advice and guidance (informed by evidence).

The above examples highlight NFER's commitment to using research evidence to inform practice by, for example, in this case providing practical easy-to-use guides for practitioners and school and college leaders.

We intend that the current exploratory research into approaches to engaging young people at risk of disengagement at Key Stage 4 (but who do not face multiple and complex barriers to learning), discussed in this report, will provide preliminary evidence about what works to engage learners. Equipped with this knowledge, we can then evaluate and trial the suitable approaches.

**Tami McCrone**  
**Research Director**



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# 1 Introduction

Over recent years, public awareness of the number of young people described as being not in education, employment or training (NEET) has grown. However, the NEET group is a complicated and heterogeneous group with young people having a vast array of characteristics, needs, attributes and ambitions (Spielhofer *et al.*, 2009). Through research we know that the majority of young people who are NEET do not face multiple or complex barriers to engagement (such as teenage pregnancy or having social care involvement). These young people could be prevented from becoming NEET if targeted with the right intervention early on (Spielhofer *et al.*, 2009; Audit Commission, 2010).

There is a lack of research evidence identifying the preventative interventions that are most effective with this particular group of young people, i.e. those who are at risk of becoming NEET, but who do not face multiple or complex barriers to learning. To establish the effectiveness of interventions, studies should quantify the impact achieved; calculating the costs of programme delivery is also important if seeking to make a comparison between different programmes. NFER is starting to address this gap in research evidence. We have recently carried out research to establish a comprehensive checklist of indicators to help practitioners understand the reasons why young people may be at risk of disengaging. Schools can refer to NFER's checklist and use a related discussion aid<sup>1</sup> to 'profile' the characteristics of students they have concerns about, and use this to select the most appropriate support.

Our current study will examine the impact of school-based programmes that support students in Key Stage 4 (KS4) who are at risk of temporary disconnection from learning. We will track these students through to the end of Year 11 using indicators of disengagement from our checklist to monitor progress. We will aim to quantify the likely impact each programme may have, identify the features that will allow it to be replicated in other settings, and estimate the cost of implementation. Our findings will enable us to identify evidence of promising practice, and suggest which programme(s) would be suited to a more robust impact evaluation (a quasi-experimental design or, ideally, randomised controlled trial). Figure 1 outlines the methodology for this study and our plans for sharing preliminary evidence of programme effectiveness with schools.

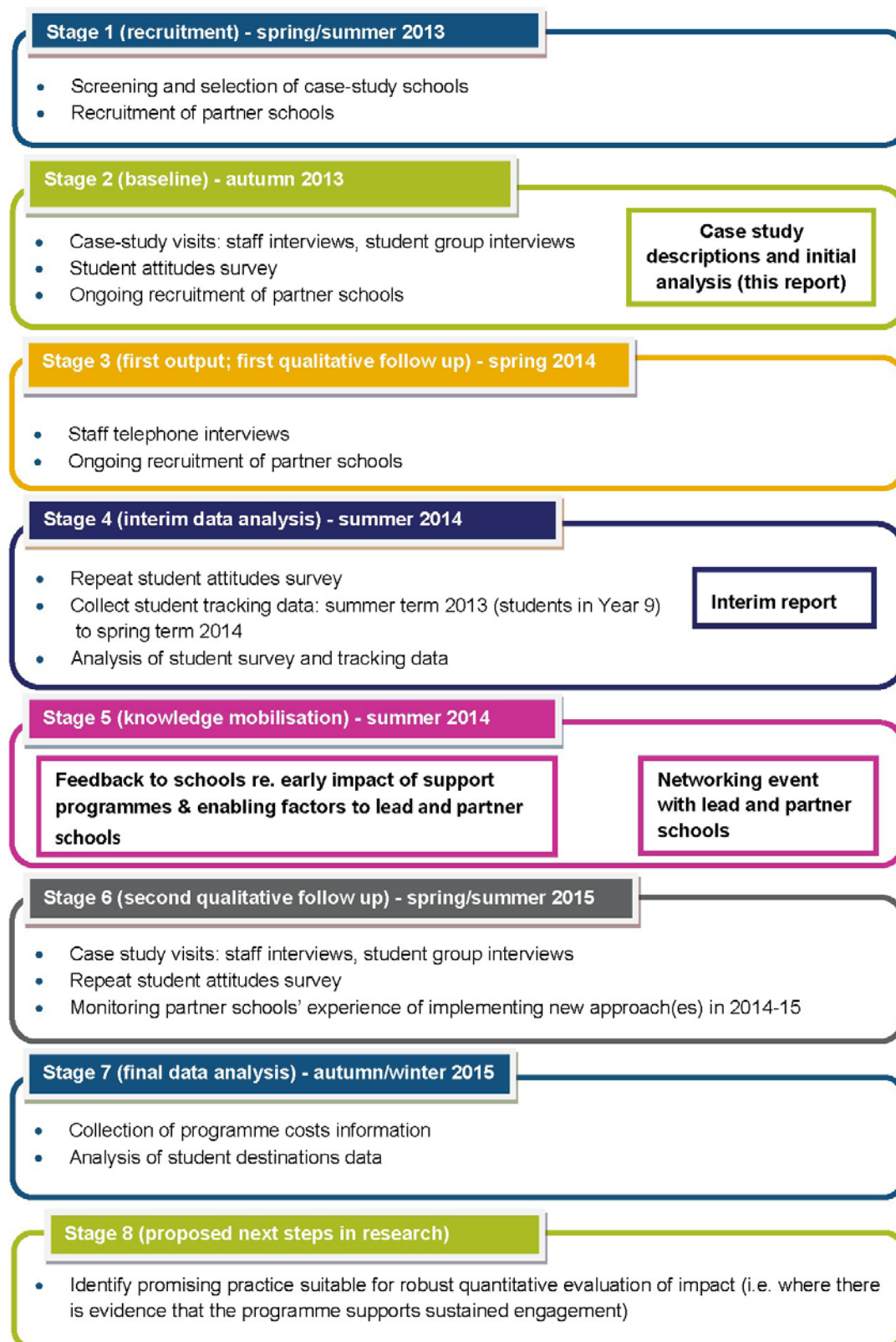
In this report we describe nine support programmes, including details of how they are being run; the characteristics of participating students and how they are selected; and the perceived benefits and challenges of the support approaches. The baseline visit to the tenth and final case-study school (which intends to run a short programme that develops young people's coping skills) is scheduled for spring 2014. The aim of the report is to provide an initial description and analysis of the interventions being studied, that we will use as a foundation for future stages of the research.

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<sup>1</sup> The interactive checklist and discussion aid tools can be downloaded free of charge at <http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/INDS02>

**Figure 1: Research methodology.**

**(Boxed text in bold denotes key project outputs)**





## 1.1 The support programmes

Each case study is presented individually to give a descriptive overview of the key features and how each school is delivering their support programme. The type of support programmes being run in each case-study school can be summarised as:

### 1. Employer or business-focused support

- Case study one: extended employer work experience (page 4)
- Case study two: BT mentoring programme (page 7)
- Case study three: Social enterprise qualification (page 9)
- Case study four: Enterprise and business programme (page 11)

### 2. Pastoral or academic-focused support

- Case study five: City Year (page 13)
- Case study six: Academic intervention support in English and mathematics (page 15)

### 3. Alternative curriculum or pedagogy

- Case study seven: NVQ Level 2 Beauty Course (page 17)
- Case study eight: Project-based learning (page 19)

### 4. Combined approaches

- Case study nine: Raising the Participation Age project (page 21)

## 2 Employer or business-focused support programmes

### 2.1 Case study one: Extended employer work experience

#### School context

Great Barr School is an 11-18 foundation school on the outskirts of Birmingham. The school is large (2100 students) and 21 per cent of students are eligible for free school meals (FSM). The school is situated in a predominantly White British working class area, and is increasingly attracting Asian and Afro-Caribbean students from the inner city. The school reported that many people in the area have low skills and that most parents have not attended higher education.

The aim of the programme is to keep the students engaged in education so that their opportunities are maximised and they are able to continue in education post-16, enter college, employment with training or undertake an apprenticeship.

The programme has been running for over five years. Before taking the programme in-house the school had used a local college to provide the vocational element of the course and subsequently an external agency to provide the work placements. In each case the school felt that they were not kept informed about the students' progress, or any problems that had arisen. Being a large school they decided that they had the resources to run the intervention themselves.

#### What is the programme of support?

The programme is delivered to Year 10 and Year 11 students and this year 20 students have started the Year 10 programme.

The Year 10 provision is shown in the diagram below. The Year 11 provision is similar except that two days are spent in school and three days on work placement.

## Year 10 provision

Monday and Tuesday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students work in school on GCSE English and mathematics, BTEC science and work skills.</li></ul>
Wednesday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students work off-site at a local community centre on other vocational qualifications such as catering and media</li></ul>
Thursday and Friday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students undertake work experience placements, off-site. Most students experience several different placements over the course of a year.</li></ul>

A dedicated team deliver the programme and this is supplemented by subject specialists who have experience of working with underachieving and disengaged students. The team includes a full time Head of Foundation Learning who oversees the whole programme; a full time teacher and teaching assistant; subject specialists who work in school; and a work-based learning team of four staff who organise the off-site vocational qualifications and the work placements.

### Who are the students involved?

A team including the Head of KS4, the Head of Year 9 and heads of house identified students for inclusion in the programme in the previous academic year (i.e. when students were in Year 9). The main criteria for inclusion were poor behaviour, poor attitudes to learning and attendance, underachievement and low aspirations.

### What is the perceived and intended impact?

It is too early in the programme for any perceived impacts to have emerged with this year's cohort. On the whole, the students were unable to comment at this early stage of the programme, although one student did feel that the programme was preferable to school. However, a number of former students who took part in the programme previously are now in jobs or apprenticeships as the result of a work placement undertaken. Additionally it was reported that some students from previous cohorts on this programme had been more successful than students with similar abilities who had remained in mainstream schooling

In previous years the programme has been perceived as increasing the students' confidence and self esteem, helping them realise the importance of skills, qualifications and improved attendance. The work experience, in particular, is believed to have increased students' levels of maturity, given them a better perception of the outside world, and improved their communication skills with adults.

## What challenges has the school faced?

This programme has developed over a number of years but the constantly changing educational landscape has meant that new challenges continue to arise. The current importance being placed on English and mathematics GCSEs has meant that the school element, which was skills-based, has become more academic. Staff on the programme are concerned that this is less appropriate for many of these young people.

Many of the students on the programme have behaviour problems and a further challenge is the time and effort it takes to form a cohesive group which can effectively engage in learning.

Staff also need time to develop good quality work placements where the employer can understand and engage with the students.

## 2.2 Case study two: BT mentoring programme

### School context

The Oasis Academy Shirley Park in Croydon is a sponsor-led 3-19 academy with 1,520 ethnically diverse students, the majority of whom are native English speakers. It is situated in a deprived area of Croydon and 32 per cent of students are eligible for FSM. It was reported that there is a high incidence of 'gang membership' in the local area, although not within the school. The major problems faced by the school are the lack of parental support and poor student attendance.

The school has a wide variety of support programmes in place which cater for a range of students. The school was approached by British Telecom (BT) and invited to participate in a scheme to re-engage students at risk of disengaging in 2012.

The aim of the programme is to improve the students' self esteem. The school wants to improve attainment and they believe that improving self esteem will help to achieve this.

### What is the programme of support?

The programme is a student mentoring scheme delivered by BT. Each of the participating Year 10 students is assigned a mentor whom they meet with twice a term over the course of a year. The mentors work with the students to help them reach their full potential by helping them to realise how their interests and skills can steer them towards a suitable and fulfilling career path. The students are also invited to attend a summer celebratory event held at BT's offices in London. The mentors are recruited from within the BT workforce and BT provides training for them. The students indicate a chosen career path and BT tries to match students with appropriate mentors. There is no cost to the school. In the school the programme is coordinated by the Director of Work-Related Learning.

### Who are the students involved?

The mentoring scheme is limited to ten students per school. The students were identified by their Head of Year in conjunction with other teaching staff. The main criterion for inclusion in the programme was the students' low attainment, and in particular if the school's student tracking indicated that they were underachieving. The students' attitudes and aspirations were also taken into consideration and other indicators included: low student confidence and self esteem; if the students were unhappy at school; if the students had low or unrealistic expectations; and if the students were not participating in lessons.

Most of the students in the programme had some idea about their future plans and felt that their plans were realistic. However, the majority were not satisfied with the subject choices available at Year 10. They thought that their options post-16 were being limited by the fact that in some subjects they were studying BTEC and foundation tier GCSE courses rather than taking the higher tier GCSE courses.

The students' views about school were mixed, with some enjoying it, particularly the social aspect, whilst others did not. A few students believed that some teachers did not respect them and their views. Most students said that they had enjoyed their primary schools because they had fewer responsibilities placed on them.

What is the perceived and intended impact?

The students had not yet had their first session and therefore could not comment on the programme. The school hoped that involvement in the programme would lead to increased student attendance, an improvement in the students' attitude to learning and an improvement in the students' attainment.

What challenges has the school faced?

Two main challenges were highlighted by the school. The first was the issue of student attendance. The way that the mentoring sessions had been arranged the previous year meant that students always missed the same lessons and it was thought that this was why some students' attendance at the mentoring sessions was poor. To counteract this the session times will be varied this year.

The second challenge was students' reluctance to engage in the programme. The school sent letters to 20 students inviting them to be part of the programme but only received 11 responses.

## 2.3 Case study three: Social enterprise qualification

### School context

The Forest E-ACT Academy is a sponsor-led 11-16 academy situated in a small semi-rural town in the Forest of Dean. The school is located in the tenth most deprived council ward nationally and there are limited job opportunities for young people in the surrounding area. The school is small (315 students) and 18 per cent of the students are eligible for FSM.

The school was initially approached about participating in the Social Enterprise Qualification (SEQ) by the delivery partner, Real Ideas Organisation (RIO). The headteacher was keen for the school to be involved as she felt that it addressed a number of needs which the school had already identified. These included:

- engaging students in an exciting way
- helping students to participate in and be involved in their community
- helping the students to be more aware and thoughtful about local and global issues and to experience new things outside the local area
- enabling the school to build links with local employers.

In addition, the school felt the programme had the potential to have a long lasting effect on students. The students could develop skills which could be transferred to families allowing them a means of generating income which could be ploughed back into the community.

### What is the programme of support?

Students in Year 10 work towards achieving a SEQ<sup>2</sup>. This requires the students to identify an issue and then set up a social enterprise which will generate money so that they can help to solve or improve the identified issue. Students have been divided into groups and each group has identified an issue they want to focus on including recycling/littering; developing a community greenhouse; and young people becoming isolated through the use of computer games.

Students in one group, for example, are making items to sell using recycled materials, and are researching the issue of littering and learning about social enterprise more generally. They produce a portfolio detailing their work. Students meet up at least once a week in lunchtimes and break times.

Students are working towards either Bronze or Silver awards. The Bronze award (QCF Level 1 award) requires 30 hours of guided learning and the Silver (QCF Level 2), 60 hours of guided learning and 20 hours of independent learning. A Gold award (QCF Level 2 certificate) is also available. If students complete an award then they can continue to the next level using the same project. The SEQ is being delivered over the course of one or two years.

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<sup>2</sup> Usually, there are no restrictions on which year groups are involved in the programme. For the purposes of this study, the school selected a Year 10 group.

The SEQ is run by a mentor, who in this case is the school librarian. Other members of staff are sometimes involved and will support a particular skill, for example if the students want to make a particular product.

RIO provides initial training and ongoing support to the mentor. This support includes a help desk, online resources and an opportunity for mentors to check that they are applying the assessment criteria correctly. RIO also organise events for schools and groups participating in the SEQ. There is an initial one-off fee for membership for each mentor which is £150 plus VAT and for each student participating the costs are £20 for the bronze award and £25 for silver.

### Who are the students involved?

The school directed Year 10 students showing signs that they might be at risk of disengaging towards the programme, although any Year 10 student could choose to be involved. These students do not constitute an easily identifiable group. None of the students have any obvious external reason why they might disengage from learning and staff used indicators related to students' attitude and behaviour to identify those for inclusion in the programme. This included identifying those with a lack of interest in lessons and dissatisfaction with school, low attendance, difficult social relationships and a failure to understand their own strengths and weaknesses.

### What is the perceived and intended impact

Early signs suggest that young people appear to be positive about the programme. One participating student commented: 'You get to pick what you want to do and it's helping us get a good job too.'

At this stage it is too early to assess impact, however the school ran a pilot programme last year and, although the evidence of impact is anecdotal, the mentor described, for example, how one student 'really came out of her shell' and has become more confident. Subject teachers also observed an improvement in the behaviour of two boys in particular. The school hopes that through the programme students will develop better engagement in school, will demonstrate an increase in confidence, and have better attendance.

Generally the students were enthusiastic about the programme, particularly the fact that they were helping the school and local community.

### What challenges has the school faced?

The main challenge for this programme is ensuring that there is sufficient time to complete the tasks as no curriculum time is allocated and activities are carried out in lunch and break times. Another challenge is ensuring that the programme will benefit the community beyond the school. Funding the intervention is also a challenge and the school is exploring the possibility of using the pupil premium to fund this project in the future.



## 2.4 Case study four: Enterprise and business programme

### School context

Shaftesbury School is an 11-18 Church of England Voluntary Controlled school in a small semi rural town with a large agricultural community. There are few large firms and employers in the area. The school has about 1000 students and 9 per cent of students are eligible for FSM.

This programme developed from a business project which was already running in the school and an extra-curricular gardening and fashion project which was specifically aimed at those students who were at risk of disengaging. The main aim of the programme is to equip students with the skills to be able to access employment and training when they leave school.

### What is the programme of support?

The programme is a Young Enterprise/business activity which can lead to the students gaining a Level 1 vocational qualification (although the qualification is not the aim of the course). Young people in Years 10 and 11 participate in the programme throughout KS4. At Shaftesbury School it is being included as part of a vocational route curriculum, but it could be run as a stand-alone programme or integrated into any other KS4 curriculum.

The programme involves small groups of students establishing and running a small business, which aims to make a profit. Each group of young people has to raise the £80 needed to cover business start-up costs. The students develop a business plan which includes, for example, undertaking research about their product; setting up bank accounts; devising a marketing strategy; and holding business meetings. One group of students is currently designing and establishing the school garden and nature area, and another is making jewellery, bags and printed T-shirts to sell locally. A local business manager comes in to the school to help and support them.

The programme is timetabled for two hours per week: one hour is for practical activities and one hour is for project management. Three staff members work on the programme: the programme leader oversees the project and together with another teacher runs the practical side and the business ventures are also supported by a specialist business teacher.

### Who are the students involved?

Two groups of students are currently participating in the programme: those taking the Princes Trust course at the school (a vocational course specifically designed for young people at risk of disengagement from learning); and the students who had chosen a vocational college route at KS4 rather than a straight GCSE route.

The students on the Princes Trust route (those considered to be at risk of disengagement) were selected at the end of Year 9. The main indicator used to

highlight possible students for inclusion in this group was their lower than predicted attainment at Key Stage 3. Other indicators included poor attendance, poor social skills and attitudes to learning, and low aspirations. Low self esteem, particularly in the case of girls, was also an indicator.

Most of the students had some idea about what they wanted to do after leaving school; often this was a low skilled job rather than going to university. In general the boys did not like school, although a few were enjoying this year more because they had more options and were taking subjects with a substantial practical component. The girls enjoyed the social aspect of school and were also enjoying this year more than previous years, again because they perceived that they had more freedom and choice.

### What is the perceived and intended impact?

No significant impacts had been identified either by the staff or students as the programme had only been running a few weeks. However, the programme lead said that some of the group were already beginning to understand which skills the course would help them develop and how it would benefit them. He hoped that the programme would help the students to become more confident and that their self esteem would increase. He also thought that it would help them to consider a broader range of post-16 options, in particular apprenticeships.

### What challenges has the school faced?

There have been very few challenges with the programme reported so far, although motivating the students in the classroom-based project management lessons was proving to be difficult.

## 3 Pastoral or academic-focused support programmes

### 3.1 Case study five: City Year

#### School context

Golden Hillock School is an 11-16 mixed-gender secondary school with 900 students currently on roll. It is based in the Sparkhill area of Birmingham. The school converted to an academy in October 2013. Almost all of the school's population comes from minority ethnic backgrounds and there are considerable English language issues. Around two thirds of students are eligible for the pupil premium - much higher than the national average - and the proportion of disabled students and those with SEN is higher than average.

For the year 2013-14, the school has partnered with City Year, a youth and education charity which offers graduate volunteers who are trained to mentor students in state schools in disadvantaged areas. The primary driver for the school partnering with City Year is the need to raise attainment, especially in English and mathematics. The volunteers work full-time in the school they are assigned to for one year. Currently, City Year operates in London and Birmingham.

#### What is the programme of support?

City Year aims to 'raise the attainment of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.' The volunteers provide academic support in lessons to selected students, and are also a resource outside classroom time: they set up and run extra-curricular activities, open to all students, such as homework and breakfast clubs and sports activities.

Each volunteer mentors up to five students and supports each mentee several times a week within lessons. Their role includes helping to explain classroom English for the learners and supporting the learners to meet school expectations on conduct and uniform. They meet their mentees individually outside the classroom to discuss the learners' personal targets (academic and other) and their support needs.

City Year volunteers have a two-week externally delivered training programme over the summer before the start of the volunteers' first term in the school. Volunteers are managed by a team leader (a member of City Year staff) who is based in the school. Volunteers spend four weekdays in school and one day at City Year where they receive training.

The cost to the school of partnering with City Year for the year depends on the number of volunteers assigned to the school, which is negotiable.

## Who are the students involved?

The students in Year 10 and 11 who have been assigned a mentor have been identified for a range of issues including poor attitude to learning, poor attendance and underachievement. In some cases, emotional, family or medical problems contribute to difficulties attending school and focusing on lessons. Some struggle with exam technique: English is a particular area of weakness. Several of the learners lack aspirations or are apathetic about working toward the goals they have set for themselves (for instance, career aspirations): 'some [of the young people] don't really have that expectation at home that you need to go out and do something really big and amazing' (City Year volunteer). The pastoral team (including heads of year) selected the students based on their attainment and attendance records and staff observations and knowledge of the young people.

## What is the perceived and intended impact?

The volunteers had only been in the school for a few weeks at the time of the initial visit, so it was too early for indications of impact (and for students to have formed views on the scheme). The volunteers discuss their mentees' progress with the form tutors; they also keep records of their discussions with, and actions relating to, the young people's personal targets.

The school has detailed tracking systems which will enable the City Year team to use accurate data to monitor the students they support, in due course. The school's Deputy Head anticipates that the scheme will help to raise attainment in English and mathematics (proportion attaining A\*-C) particularly amongst this disengaged group of young people, and alongside this believes the school community will benefit from the additional adult resources in terms of extra-curricular activities and trips.

## What challenges has the school faced?

The City Year group initially recruited a smaller team of volunteers than contracted, however this suited the school better given that it is a new programme for the school. The expectations of conduct and the role of the team needed to be clarified in the initial stages. The team's four day week caused some issues for the school. The renewal of the project will depend on budgetary constraints. However, the Deputy Head at this school believes that they have agreed a partnership which offers good value for money.

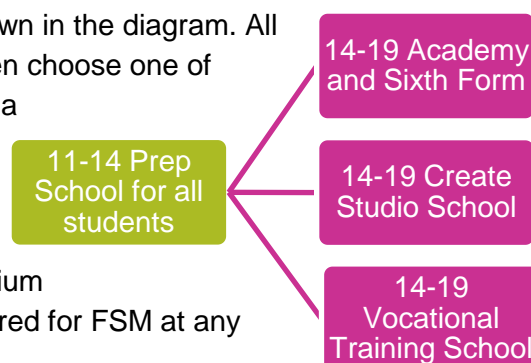
## 3.2 Case study six: Academic intervention support in English and mathematics

### School context

Goole High School Academy for Excellence is an 11-18 mixed-gender school based in the East Riding of Yorkshire with 1000 students currently on roll. The school converted to an Academy in 2011. Almost nine per cent of students have English as a second language while 16 per cent of students are in receipt of FSM. Around a tenth of students have a SEN statement or are on School Action Plus.

The school is divided into different pathways as shown in the diagram. All students enter the 11-14 preparatory school and then choose one of the three different pathways; each of these leads to a core suite of qualifications.

The school devised the academic intervention support in English and mathematics to help improve the outcomes for predominantly pupil premium students (i.e. those students who have been registered for FSM at any point in the last six years).



### What is the programme of support?

This support programme in KS4 is in the form of one-to-one or two-to-one mathematics and English tuition. Students in Year 10 are currently receiving this support for the whole of the academic year and the school plans to extend this support for these students into Year 11. They chose this particular approach to provide these students with time outside of mainstream lessons to not only receive more individualised support, but also to give them the time to discuss any other issues they may be experiencing with the intervention support staff.

Tuition takes place in school time and Year 10 students are taken out of mainstream lessons to attend their tuition sessions. The sessions are delivered by Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs) and graduate coaches with degrees in English and mathematics. This team of tutors is managed by the Progress and Intervention Development Teacher. Tutors are provided with the schemes of work from the class teachers in English and mathematics so that they know what areas of work students will miss and these are then covered in the intervention support.

The graduate coaches are mainly English graduates and therefore they have undergone training in mathematics to ensure they can support the students with this subject. The tutors work through the schemes of work themselves before they deliver any tuition to ensure they cover the tasks and topics to a good standard.

### Who are the students involved?

Students are identified for this intervention at the end of Year 9. The school has focused on Year 10 pupil premium students who are not achieving expected levels of

progress. While this is the primary selection criterion, most of them also have other issues that the school is trying to address through this and other intervention support (such as behavioural issues and poor attendance).

### What is the perceived and intended impact?

Currently, it is too early to measure impact on the students but the school plans to monitor and track student data including, among other things: assessment outcomes; attitudes to learning; working at expected level/grade; attendance and exclusions.

At the time of interviewing, the students had received only a small number of intervention support sessions and after initial reservations they appeared to be positive about the support. One student observed: '[Initially] you feel quite disappointed in yourself, 'am I stupid?' But then you think, if it is something that will get me that A that I want'.

### What challenges has the school faced?

The school has encountered two main challenges in adopting this intervention. Initially, both students and teachers were uneasy about students being taken out of lessons during KS4: 'Both sides panic, the kids panic that they're not in their lesson and what they are missing and the staff have that panic too.' However, with clear communication, staff and young people have overcome this challenge. The Progress and Intervention Development Teacher has worked closely with English and mathematics staff to provide further information about the aims and nature of the intervention to allay any concerns.

The organisation of the intervention support can also be challenging as individual class teachers need to be made aware of which students will be missing their lessons on particular days. This relies on good communication between the intervention support team staff, heads of department and their teams.

## 4 Alternative curriculum or pedagogy approaches

### 4.1 Case study seven: NVQ Level 2 Beauty Course

#### School context

The Winston Churchill School, a specialist sports college, is a mixed comprehensive school for students aged 11-16 based in the south east of England. Most of the students are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of students eligible for FSM, with special educational needs (SEN) or disabilities is below the national average.

#### What is the programme of support?

The NVQ Level 2 beauty course involves a mix of practical activity and assessments. Students learn practical skills (such as how to carry out manicures, pedicures, facials, nail art and eyebrow treatments) and study anatomy and physiology, health and safety, client communication and how to present themselves in the workplace. The course delivery tutor reflected that: [the course] is providing them with real skills so that when they go into a salon, they know what it's all about.' The students undertake a number of practical and written assessments and online exams.

The course is delivered by adult training college staff one day a week over 44 weeks, in the school's beauty facility.

*The difference between here and college for us and for the students is ... they're in school and we know they're here and we know the quality of the work we're doing. [The students are] more willing to engage in it because it's in school, they're near their friends.*

(Teacher)

The main aim of the course is to reengage the students in learning and improve their behaviour, self esteem, confidence and ultimately, overall exam success.

#### Who are the students involved?

Two cohorts of students (currently in Year 10 and Year 11) are enrolled on the course which started in the summer term of the previous academic year. Students undertook taster sessions and went through an interview process to identify their level of interest and reasons for wanting to be involved.

The students involved in the course have a range of characteristics such as poor attendance, behaviour or attainment, low self esteem and underachievement. Indicators such as gender, ethnicity, FSM eligibility, exclusion, English as an additional language (EAL) and SEN are also taken into account.

## What is the perceived and anticipated impact?

Students have responded positively to the course so far. The provision was reported to be having a positive impact on students' behaviour, communication skills and attendance. The delivery tutor said: 'we've seen a massive ... change in these girls - their attitude, the way they speak to one another ... they are growing up into nice young women'. The tutor is of an age that the students can relate to and is able to draw on her experience of working in the industry which facilitates their engagement. Students spoke positively about the course, commenting for example that: 'it's fun and we get to learn new things'. Students are also developing the skills required for employment within the beauty industry.

The adult training college will support students to find part-time employment and it is hoped that the course will lead onto apprenticeship opportunities.

## What challenges has the school faced?

Selecting the right students for the course has been a challenge. This process is being refined through offering taster sessions to provide an insight into what the course entails.

Initially, there were concerns from parents about their children being taken out of timetabled lessons. A parents' evening was held to provide information about the course and reasons for selection and regular feedback is provided to update on students' progress. In some cases, teaching staff expressed frustration about students being selected for the course given their behaviour in lessons. Observing improvements in students' behaviour in other lessons helped overcome any initial reservations.

Locating a room and providing the required facilities and equipment was also a challenge initially. However, the delivery tutor reflected that creating this environment was important to 'bring an adult element into the classroom. They're almost stepping into a room that takes them away from the school.'



## 4.2 Case study eight: Project-based learning

### School context

Matthew Moss High School is an 11–16 mixed-gender community school, with around 845 students on roll, based in Rochdale, Greater Manchester. Deprivation levels in the area, including child poverty and unemployment rates are significantly higher than average.

A high proportion of the school's population comes from minority ethnic backgrounds and the proportion of students who are eligible for the pupil premium is above average. The proportion of students with SEN is slightly higher than average. The Headteacher notes that underachievement is particularly an issue among students from White British backgrounds.

### What is the programme of support?

The school has developed various innovative teaching and learning approaches over several years and has worked with a number of partners and consultants including academics, educational theorists, and management consultancies, as well as learning from other schools in the UK and abroad. The school ethos emphasises the development of lifelong learning skills, and personal skills such as mindfulness and mutually respectful communication. Approaches include project-based learning; the 'co-construction'<sup>3</sup> of learning and assessment; and a programme to develop learners' academic language ('Breakthrough to Learning').

The learner-centred, project-based learning approach is most distinct in Years 7 and 8 where a quarter of curriculum time through the two years has been allocated to 'My World'. My World is an extended project with an exhibited output where possible, for example a presentation or product. Students are supported by teachers to choose suitable topics and challenging aims for their project, and to work in groups. Throughout the project, learners reflect on their learning and the skills they have developed such as team work and resilience. My World was developed as part of the school's Learning Futures engagement work with the Innovation Unit/Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

In Years 9-11, project-based learning also features to some extent in most subjects. Departments have the flexibility to choose the teaching and learning strategies that evidence suggests will best support learning.

### Who are the students involved?

All learners in the school experience innovative pedagogies, although project-based learning is less prominent in the KS4 curriculum due to the need to prepare for national assessments. For the research project, the pastoral team identified fifteen learners in Year 10 who are disengaging from learning. The learners are not

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<sup>3</sup> Co-construction describes a process where learners contribute to decisions about how they will learn, and when and how they will be assessed by teachers.

receiving a specific programme of additional support, but will be tracked to see how they respond to the overall learning agenda through KS4. Individual characteristics or indicators of these students include poor attendance; a lack of confidence or social skills; a lack of aspirations; unrealistic attitudes toward reaching their career goals; and being disinclined to venture outside the local area for further education.

### What is the perceived and intended impact?

Staff believe that the various innovative teaching and learning strategies help to engage learners by giving them a degree of choice over how they learn and how they are assessed. The Headteacher commented that 'someone else's idea of your education is far less engaging than something you've constructed yourself'.

School-leavers' rates of transition to further education and training are positive and suggest that the development of transferable skills and qualities, such as independence and self-motivation developed through project-based learning, contribute to preventing young people becoming NEET post-16. Project-based learning has been particularly effective in science, and is perceived to have contributed to the increasing number of learners who opt to take triple science at GCSE and go on to study the 'hard' sciences at A Level. The Headteacher stated that: '[There is] a direct link between innovative pedagogy done well in project-based learning in science, and ... learners seeking challenge.'

The school has recently improved its data management and analysis capability, which will enable staff to track these (and all) students' progress more meaningfully.

### What challenges has the school faced?

The main challenge identified by staff is the time needed to research and develop teaching strategies, including consultation with learners, and to plan lessons to make links between subjects. Where learners help to create the learning agenda, this can present challenges in planning ahead and ensuring that all prescribed material is covered. Learners were reported to respond positively to the innovative teaching styles, although there was some resistance from Year 7 students who had been used to more of a 'teach to the test' approach.

Ongoing priorities for the school include raising attainment by improving students' progress in key subjects and challenging those learners with higher prior attainment. Senior leaders aim to improve outcomes while maintaining the learning culture and approaches (such as project-based and learner-centred learning) that staff believe offer ongoing benefits for learners.

## 5 Combined approaches

### 5.1 Case study nine: Raising the Participation Age project

#### School context

Rushden Community College in Northamptonshire is an 11-18 mixed-gender school with around 900 Year 7-11 students on roll. It has a shared sixth form as part of the East Northamptonshire College, involving two other local schools. In December 2012 the school became a sponsored academy. The school is situated in an area where there are 'pockets' of deprivation and has identified underachievement among girls as a particular issue of concern.

The school is part of a consortium with five other schools in East Northamptonshire, all of which are participating in this project. The project aims to support students' continued engagement in learning, to raise attainment and help students reach their full potential, and to prevent students becoming NEET post-16. The programme, now in its second year, is overseen by the assistant headteachers and the Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural education (SMSC) Director. The overall project manager is the coordinator for the East Northants consortium, and the school has a programme lead with a background in youth work management.

#### What is the programme of support?

The programme for selected students involves assertive (academic) mentoring, targeted careers guidance from an external provider and a variety of trips, including a skills show/workshop day, tailored work experience opportunities, further education taster days, and participation in an away-day team activity (which is also an opportunity to improve basic numeracy, literacy and IT skills). For some activities, such as the FE college taster days, Rushden students join students from the other schools participating in the RPA project.

Mentors have been selected from the core staff team (for example, three mentors are assistant headteachers) and the first cohort has received training in assertive mentoring. Each mentor meets their one student mentee formally once a term. Part of the mentor's role is to liaise with subject staff to help students meet agreed personal targets (such as improved behaviour) in lessons. Some mentors teach their mentee so also provide additional support in class time. Students who are unsure of a career path by the end of Year 10 will be given extra support to ensure they have a plan for post-16.

## Who are the students involved?

The school selected students based on analysis of data such as attainment and attendance, and discussions with staff. Some of the students involved are eligible for the pupil premium, though this was not a lead factor in their selection. Some need to improve their behaviour and/or have been underachieving in key subjects including English and mathematics. Personal issues such as difficult family circumstances, moving schools and medical problems affect a minority of the group and their attendance/focus at school. Several students lack confidence and interest in progression beyond GCSEs, or have unrealistic aspirations.

## What is the perceived and intended impact?

Although the overall aim of the programme is to reengage the selected young people in learning, the programme has individual targets for each of the young people involved. The intended benefits include improvements in attendance/attainment and attitudes to learning (e.g. effort grades), and developing students' post-16 plans; these are among the areas in which the young people are being tracked to assess the impact of the programme. Alongside the data tracking, mentors note improvements in students' confidence and motivation, for example: staff felt that students in the first cohort (now in Year 11) had made good progress in their personal aims. They believe that the careers/further education tasters have had a positive impact on students' motivation to achieve the grades they need for their future work/training aspirations, and their preparedness for further vocational study.

*Students have responded well to the mentoring process and have clear targets to work towards in order to achieve the grades needed for their post-16 choices. All of the students know what they want to do upon leaving school and, alongside their mentors, are working towards achieving this.*

**(School programme lead)**

## What challenges has the school faced?

In the first cohort each mentor had at least three students to work with. The students usually need a lot of support, so this arrangement was challenging for the mentors. The programme lead decided to reduce the student numbers for this year so that each mentor could focus on one young person.

The programme lead commented that it can be difficult, within the time available for mentoring, to get to the root of the students' issues. Students and mentors tend to meet quite often on an informal basis outside the mentoring session time.

It is important that the programme is fully supported and promoted by the school senior leadership team, so that all staff are aware of what and who it involves.

The current cohort of young people will continue to be supported into Year 11. The continuation of the programme will depend on evaluation of its success and the availability of budget.

## 6 About the research

The overall aim of this study is to identify, raise awareness of, and replicate support programmes where there is evidence of promising practice in reengaging young people who do not face multiple and complex barriers to learning but who are not reaching their full potential. The research is taking place between September 2013 and autumn/winter 2015.

The initial stages of the research comprised identifying and recruiting schools delivering targeted support programmes in KS4 where there was some evidence of perceived impact in terms of reengaging young people in learning, and undertaking baseline visits to gain an overview of their approaches.

The research team identified schools through local authority recommendations, professional networks and partner organisations. We carried out a screening process with the recommended schools to ensure that our target group of students were involved in the support programmes.

We identified ten schools to include in the research. The research team carried out baseline visits to nine of the schools in September and October 2013<sup>4</sup>. The visits included interviews with teaching staff involved in the project, senior leaders, careers staff and delivery partners. At each school we conducted up to two group interviews with participating students. The students also completed a short survey, which explored their views about school/college, themselves and their future plans.

### 6.1 The next steps for the evaluation

Figure 1 shows the different stages of this project: we are currently at stage three. In subsequent stages we will monitor students' progress and schools' experiences of delivering their support programmes, and use our emerging findings to begin to devise 'what works' messages for schools.

We aim to quantify the impact of each support programme in terms of students' engagement and progress at school. Schools will provide the research team with student tracking data over the course of the study, including (for example) data on attendance, attainment, effort and progress towards predicted GCSE grades. Additionally, students will be asked to complete the attitudes survey at two further points during the evaluation to monitor changes over time.

We are currently recruiting partner schools that are interested in learning about or planning to introduce similar support programmes in their schools. We will be trialling a model to cascade knowledge from case-study schools to partner schools (and possibly beyond). As part of this, we will host an event in summer 2014 where partner schools will have the opportunity to learn from the case-study schools and to make links which facilitate the implementation of their own support programmes. We will monitor the enablers and barriers partner schools experience in implementing support programmes in their own settings.

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<sup>4</sup> The tenth case study visit is scheduled for spring 2014.

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