Evidence for Excellence in Education

From Education to Employment

# NEET Prevention: Keeping students engaged at Key Stage 4

## Second case study report

National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)

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## Second case study report

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# 1 Introduction

*Strategies implemented before the age of 16 that are designed to prevent young people from becoming NEET are likely to be the most effective way of reducing local NEET levels.* (Institute of Health Equity, 2014, pp18).

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 support early on (Spielhofer *et al*., 2009; Audit Commission, 2010).

There is a lack of research evidence systematically exploring and identifying the preventative support strategies 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. This current research project starts to fill this gap.

This study runs from 2012 to 2015 and examines the perceived 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 to monitor progress[1].

This report is the second in a series of case-study reports that provides details on each of the 10 case studies. The first report (Kettlewell *et al.,* 2014) was published in February 2014 and provided an overview of nine case studies alongside the attitudes and views of students prior to starting the support programme. This report provides an update on those case studies; identifying how the nine programmes have been implemented in practice, teachers' perceptions of successes and challenges so far, and the views of students in the first year of involvement in the programme. We have also included the baseline data for the tenth case study which ran a short programme to develop young people's coping skills in summer 2014 and as such was not included in the baseline report.

Alongside this report we have published practical tips for implementing support strategies such as these in schools. This draws on the findings from across the case studies to identify key successes and enablers and how to overcome barriers to implementation to provide a practical resource for schools. This Top Tips guide can be found at www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/IMPE03.

[1] Please see section 4 for a summary of the methodology.

Ultimately, we aim to assess the impact each support strategy is having on reengaging young people at risk of disconnection from learning (but who do not face multiple and/or complex barriers). This assessment is based on mixed research methodology (outlined in section 4). On conclusion of the study we will draw out the support strategies that are viewed to be most effective and, if possible, we aim to test them through a more robust impact evaluation such as a randomised controlled trial.

It might be that the study concludes it is more appropriate to identify key factors common to successful interventions, and that we work with school partners to design and develop a support programme combining elements from across multiple case studies. Such a co-produced support programme could then be introduced into schools at KS4 and subsequently independently evaluated. This journey would produce robust evidence of what works in terms of reengaging young people back into learning.

# 2 Overall findings

While the case studies summarised in this report are all different in their approach to supporting young people at risk of temporary disconnection from learning, they do have a number of common factors that appear to contribute to their success. Many of the students already believe they are benefiting from the support in the form of improved attitudes to school, understanding the point of learning and more awareness regarding their future choices.

In summary the key factors for success emerging from the first year evaluation include:

- flexibility within programmes, ensuring that, as much as is practical, programmes can be tailored to the needs, and interests, of the individual young person;
- developing open and supportive relationships between staff and students. This is particularly relevant for one-to-one support and mentoring;
- opening up the young people's horizons on future possibilities, providing them with the knowledge to feel confident in making decisions for their future;
- ensuring that students do not feel stigmatised by the support and do not feel labelled as 'problem kids' because of receiving additional support;
- commitment from senior leaders, and the engagement and buy-in of all staff, through clear communication on all elements of the support programme (aims, structure and process, and student progress);
- securing parental engagement and buy-in and understanding regarding why their child is involved in such programmes
- recognising the extra value an external partner brings to schools including expertise, support and training.

# 3 The case studies

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:

**Employer or business-focused support**

- Case study one: Extended employer work experience
- Case study two: BT mentoring programme
- Case study three: Social enterprise qualification
- Case study four: Enterprise and business programme

**Pastoral or academic-focused support**

- Case study five: City Year
- Case study six: Academic intervention support in English and mathematics
- Case study seven: Do Something Different (baseline data only)

**Alternative curriculum**

- Case study eight: NVQ Level 2 Beauty Course

**Combined approaches**

- Case study nine: Raising the Participation Age project

**Whole school approach**

- Case study ten: Project-based learning

For more in-depth information on the context of the programmes and the characteristics of the students involved, please see the baseline case study report: www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/IMPE01 .

# Case study one: Extended employer work experience

## Great Barr School

### What is the programme of support?

The school has developed a programme of support which includes a weekly schedule of academic learning, offsite vocational qualifications and work experience.

**Programme aim:**

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 is delivered in Years 10 and 11 and 20 students started the Year 10 programme in September 2013. The diagram below shows the planned structure of provision for the 2013/14 academic year[2].

| | |
|---|---|
| Monday and Tuesday | •Students work in school on GCSE English and mathematics, BTEC science and work skills. |
| Wednesday | •Students work off-site on other vocational qualifications such as catering and media |
| Thursday and Friday | • Students undertake work experience placements, off-site. |

There is a dedicated team delivering the programme, consisting of a full-time Head of Foundation Learning, 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?

The main criteria for inclusion are poor behaviour, poor attitudes to learning and attendance, underachievement and low aspirations. Students were interviewed to check whether this programme or another curriculum pathway would be most appropriate.

### What is the perceived impact so far?

Feedback towards the end of the first year suggests the extended employer work experience programme has had a positive impact on the students involved. A survey of students reported that:

[2] The Year 11 provision was similar except that two days were spent in school and three days on work placement.

- most students felt that the programme had helped them feel more positive about learning and over half felt that it had led them to participate more in lessons.
- most students felt that it had encouraged them to find out more about what they could do in the future and to feel more confident about what they can do after Year 11.

The majority of students showed an improvement in their attendance over the past year. Teachers also believed the work experience element in particular had increased students' levels of maturity, improved their understanding of the outside world, and improved their communication skills with adults.

> *Their ability to communicate with each other ... and also understand other people's opinions has got much better ... before, they wouldn't listen to other people, they just had to have their say.*
>
> Work Related Learning manager

## What challenges has the school faced?

The current **importance being placed on English and mathematics GCSEs has meant that the school element, which was skills-based, has become more academic focused.** For the same reason, a further change to the programme was implemented part way through the academic year. The two days initially spent by students in school was increased to four days, with one day spent out on placement.

Many of the students on the programme have **behavioural problems which affected their ability to form a cohesive group** that could effectively engage in learning. Furthermore, some of the Year 10 students were **not mature enough to engage in the work experience element** and as a result, the school brought in an outside agency to provide these students with additional one-to-one support. Staff have also needed to provide additional support to several students who failed to turn up to their work placement.

## What are the key drivers of success?

The programme is **flexible** and is adapted to meet the needs of individuals in order to engage them.

**Good quality work placements** where the employer is able to form a supportive working relationship with the student. Students are motivated to engage and succeed as they have been made aware this programme is a **'last chance'** for them to achieve something at school.

> *What works for one doesn't work for another but you've got to keep trying things I think.*
>
> Work Related Learning manager

Staff **support post-16 progression** by helping with college applications and accompanying them to college open days to sign up for post-16 courses.

Staff **involve parents** by inviting them to reviews, providing feedback and involving them in the post-16 progression activities to encourage their ongoing support.

# Case study two: BT mentoring programme

## Oasis Academy Shirley Park

### What is the programme of support?

The programme is a student mentoring scheme delivered by BT.

**Programme aim:**
To improve the students' self-esteem and ultimately improve attainment.

- Ten students in Year 10 students are assigned a mentor (a BT employee) whom they meet with twice a term over the course of a year.
- The mentors work with the students to help them to realise how their interests and skills can steer them towards a suitable and fulfilling career path and ultimately help them reach their full potential.
- The students are also invited to attend a summer celebratory event held at BT's offices in London.

In the school, the programme is coordinated by the Director of Work-Related Learning. The school does not pay a fee for this support. The mentors are recruited from within BT and BT also provides training for them. BT tries to match students with appropriate mentors, based on the students' chosen career path.

### Who are the students involved?

The main criteria for inclusion in the programme were low attainment and underachievement. 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.

### What is the perceived impact so far?

Feedback towards the end of the first year suggests the mentoring has had a positive impact on the students' attitudes and views of the future. All students completing the follow-up survey believed that the BT mentoring programme had:

- helped them to feel more confident about what they can do after Year 11
- encouraged them to find out more about their future options
- helped them to better understand the world of work.

Since being involved in the BT mentoring programme, students were more positive about planning for the future. For example, almost all students agreed or strongly agreed that their school was providing them with skills they can use in the future, was helping them to plan and that they know from where to get careers advice.

In addition, almost all of the students said the BT mentoring programme had helped them to see the relevance of maths and English to their future, understand their

strengths and weaknesses and helped them to develop skills. There was less evidence that the programme had impacted on their general attitude towards learning and their participation in lessons. This lack of impact was highlighted in their attendance and progress towards predicted grades which failed to show any improvement between the autumn term of 2013 and the spring term of 2014.

## What challenges has the school faced?

**Some students' attendance at the mentoring sessions had been poor.** The school had also learnt to vary the lessons students missed in order to attend their mentoring session, as this had been an issue in the previous year. One student commented that the programme sessions were 'short and spaced out' and would prefer longer and more frequent sessions, while two were concerned about missing out on core lessons and falling behind in their work as a result (one suggested that the sessions could be held after school).

The school experienced **some reluctance from students initially 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.

## What has facilitated success?

The school has 'sold' the programme as a positive addition to the students' core curriculum. The **students enjoy 'being listened to' and being offered support and guidance.** Students reflected that they have been taken '[out of their] comfort zone in a good way' and as a result of the programme have **become aware of their role in determining their own future.**

# Case study three: Social enterprise qualification

## Forest E-ACT Academy

### What is the programme of support?

**Programme aim:**

To encourgage students to participate and get involved in their community. To be more thoughtful about issues and the world generally.

Students in Year 10 work towards achieving a Social Enterprise Qualification (SEQ)3. The SEQ is being delivered over the course of one or two years.

Eighteen Year 10 students work in groups to identify an issue and then set up a social enterprise to generate money to help solve or improve the identified issue.

Students work towards either SEQ 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.

The SEQ is run by a mentor, who is the school's Resource Centre Manager. Other members of staff are sometimes involved and will support a particular skill, for example if the students want to make a particular product.

**Example of a social enterprise**

Students 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. In the next academic year (2014-15), there will be dedicated time in the school timetable for this activity.

The school's partner organisation, Real Ideas Organisation (RIO) provides initial training and ongoing support to the mentor, including a help desk and online resources. RIO also organise events for those participating in the SEQ. There is an initial one-off fee 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. Staff used indicators to identify students including 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.

[3] 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.

## What is the perceived impact so far?

Feedback suggests the SEQ is having a positive impact on the students involved. The students were enthusiastic about the programme; particularly the fact that they felt they were helping the school and local community. Most of the students involved felt that the qualification was helping them to understand the world of work better.

Self-reports on the skills students are developing as a result of participating in the SEQ included listening skills, leadership skills, business skills, Power Point presentation skills and team work skills.

> *It [the SEQ] helped me learn how subject[s] learnt in school can be applied.*
>
> Student

The students reported that the programme was positively influencing their attitudes to school. Most of the students reported that the programme helped them to feel more positive about learning. All of the students agreed that the SEQ helped them to see the relevance of English to their future and all but one agreed that it helped them to see the relevance of mathematics.

Staff reported that they have observed changes in the students' self-confidence and self-esteem.

> *Students realise they are able to achieve more than they thought. They are able to set themselves higher goals in life for their future.*
>
> Mentor

## What challenges has the school faced?

The main challenge for this programme has been to ensure that there is sufficient time to complete tasks as **no curriculum time was allocated.** Next year, the qualification will be timetabled.

Students are involved in a range of different projects according to their interests; this is an important aspect of the programme but does make it **more time-consuming for staff to manage.** The school is exploring the possibility of using the Pupil Premium to fund this project in the future.

**The group dynamics can also present difficulties.** Some of the students have learning difficulties, while others have behaviour problems, and require effective management to keep them on task.

## What are the key drivers of success?

**Tailoring the projects** to meet the individual needs and interests of each student is key to the success of the programme.

It is important to **build in time and activities at the start of the programme** to help students develop their ideas for what will make an interesting project.

The delivery partner RIO has been very supportive. They **regularly communicate** with school staff to discuss issues when they arise.

# Case study four: Enterprise and business programme

## Shaftesbury 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).

**Programme aim:**

To equip students with the skills to be able to access employment and training when they leave school.

Young people in Years 10 and 11 participate in the programme throughout KS4.

Small groups of students establish and run a small business, which aims to make a profit. Each group 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.

**Examples of enterprise projects:**

- Designing and establishing the school garden and nature area.
- Selling printed t-shirts, bags and home-made jewellery.

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 supported by a specialist business teacher and a local business manager.

### Who are the students involved?

The main indicator used to highlight possible students for inclusion was lower than predicted attainment at KS3. 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 a factor.

### What is the perceived impact?

Seven of the 13 students who responded to the follow-up survey were positive about the benefits of the programme and agreed that it has helped them to:

- feel more positive about learning
- to participate more in lessons
- to understand their strengths and weaknesses

- to feel more confident about what they can achieve at school after Year 11
- to understand the world of work better.

However, six of the students also reported that the programme has not really helped them, while two were unsure (the remainder did not respond). Some students said that they would prefer an activity which requires 'harder' work and that could make a more direct contribution to their academic progress (giving the example of revision or homework rather than 'chatting with friends outside'). Staff do plan to include more revision based work and academic mentoring around the exam period.

Staff reported that some students now make better decisions about their conduct in school, and have had less negative feedback about them from other staff. During practical sessions, informal conversations between students and staff about life after school help students to consolidate their progression plans, and this appears to motivate them to perform better in school.

> *Once they know where they are going, that's when we see them improving their performance.*
>
> Programme leader

## What challenges has the school faced?

The staff at Shaftesbury explained that they prefer that programme students remain unaware of the purpose of the support strategy as they feel that this is the best way to avoid any **possible stigma** associated with additional support. This means that **some students remain unsure of the purpose of the programme activity** and stated that they would prefer to carry out what they perceive to be more challenging work.

Some of the students reported that simply being removed from the main curriculum for an activity they have not chosen creates stigma and **creates worry about how they would be perceived by their peers.** It is possible that this has negatively affected their attitude to the programme and the extent of its impact on the programme objectives.

## What are the key drivers of success?

A **positive relationship** between staff and the programme students and adequate time to run the programme (two hours a week) along with the **absence of academic pressure and a relaxed and flexible timescale.**

The school have now further developed the programme to include one hour a week of extra maths and English tuition alongside the practical work. They have also secured some Year 13 maths students to support students in this lesson. The school report that this is being **well received by the students** and they are **measuring the impact of this on their forecast outcomes** in English and maths.

## Case study five: City Year Mentoring

# Golden Hillock School

### What is the programme of support?

City Year, a youth and education charity which offers graduate volunteer mentors to state schools in disadvantaged areas.

**Programme aim:**

To raise the attainment of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly in English and mathematics.

- City Year volunteers work full-time in the school and are assigned for one year.
- Each volunteer mentors up to five students and supports each mentee several times a week within lessons. They also meet their students outside of class time to discuss the learners' personal targets and support needs.
- Their role includes helping to explain classroom English for the learners and supporting the learners to meet school expectations on conduct and uniform.
- The volunteers keep records of the mentoring sessions and actions, and discuss these with staff.

City Year has arranged coffee mornings at the school for mentees' parents, giving parents the opportunity to discuss their children's progress, learn more about the support on offer, and get advice on helping their children to learn. They have also introduced other initiatives which benefit the wider school community including a breakfast club, and an after school club for girls in Years 9-11.

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 a year depends on the number of volunteers assigned to the school, which is negotiable.

### Who are the students involved?

City Year supports selected students in each year group. Indicators included poor attitude to learning, poor attendance and underachievement.

### What is the perceived impact?

Findings from the first year are largely positive.

One Year 10 student who attended all his mentoring sessions made sufficient progress (in terms of punctuality, attendance and behaviour) to be able to leave the scheme after the first term.

The behaviour of two of the three other Year 10 students being monitored improved over the year, and they had fewer lesson exclusions each term.

In terms of academic progress, the three students who continued to be mentored maintained or improved their performance in English so that by the summer term, they were on track for their predicted grades. These students are not yet on track in mathematics.

More widely, staff also noted the increased engagement from some parents in their children's progress, following on from coffee mornings run by City Year and the school community benefiting from the additional adults available for 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. This was to ensure that it was clear to students and other staff that mentors were in a position of authority and responsibility, and so that mentoring meetings focused on academic matters. The school also **needed to remind City Year that extra-curricular activities should have an educational focus.**

## What are the key drivers of success?

- Targeting the mentoring to a small number of students in each year group
- The provision of one-to-one mentoring outside of class (not just assistance in class time).
- Staff and students' understanding of the purpose and remit of the volunteers so that students embrace the support.

**Parental engagement** was also perceived to be important. The coffee mornings for parents raised awareness of City Year's work in the school and the benefits for students.

> *Students didn't want to be seen as the problem kid who wasn't coping; the one that needed support. To get over that, everyone having these discussions and getting used to each other really helps.*
>
> Deputy Headteacher

The Deputy Head at this school believed that they have agreed a **partnership** which offers good value for money, and has supported renewal of the partnership for another academic year.

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

## Goole High School Academy for Excellence

### What is the programme of support?

**Programme aim:**
To improve the outcomes for pupils in English and mathematics at Key Stage 4.

The school devised the academic intervention support in English and mathematics to help improve the outcomes for predominantly Pupil Premium students. This programme is delivered in the form of one-to-one or small group tuition. Students are withdrawn from various lessons to attend their tuition sessions.

Sessions are delivered by Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs) and graduate coaches with degrees in English and mathematics (mathematics tutors without a mathematics degree received training before starting the sessions).

Tutors are managed by the Progress and Intervention Development Teacher. Tutors have familiarised themselves with the English and mathematics schemes of work so that they know what areas of work students will miss and these are then covered in the intervention support. Tuition was provided to around 100 students over the course of the academic year.

### Who are the students involved?

Initially, the school focused on Year 10 pupil premium students who were identified in Year 9 as not achieving expected levels of progress. Relatively early on in the programme the focus changed to centre on Year 11 students who required additional support to prepare for their GCSEs. The school intends to work with the current Year 10 students in the next academic year when they transfer into Year 11.

### What is the perceived impact?

Reflecting on their experiences of the programme, most students felt it has had a positive impact on them:

The vast majority agreed that the support has helped them to understand their strengths and weaknesses and has helped them to feel more confident about what they can achieve at school.

Most of the students reported that the support has helped them to feel more positive about learning.

> *It has improved my writing skills and I can explain things much easier now.*
>
> Student

The school has seen improved academic outcomes for students participating in the programme. Among a cohort of students receiving English tuition for two months, for example, 83 per cent improved from a grade D to a grade C in their English

assessment. Class teachers positively commented on the progress students have made and the confidence they have developed.

## What challenges has the school faced?

**Initially, both students and teachers were uneasy** about students being taken out of lessons during KS4. However, with clear communication, staff and young people have overcome this challenge.

Getting students to participate in the support programme was an initial challenge as a number of students expressed a strong dislike for mathematics and/or English, and **some students were reluctant to attend the tutoring sessions** due to behavioural issues. On occasion, students have to miss their favourite subject to attend tuition and this can lead to conflict. Where students are brought together for small-group tuition there are occasional issues with behaviour. However, student engagement has improved over time.

The **organisation of the 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.

There is **not a dedicated room** in the school where students go to receive their tuition and when the location is changed it can confuse the students.

## What are the key drivers of success?

- Ensuring students understand the progress they are making. Tutors log assessment scores along with additional information on students' attitude and attendance and share the progress data with the students.
- Using monitoring data to identify areas for development so these can be targeted in subsequent sessions.

> *They [students] can suddenly see their progress moving and they start gaining confidence and their attendance starts increasing a lot more.*
>
> Teacher

- Using a variety of resources to keep students engaged. Tutors have developed a range of resources (including the use of interactive computer games) to use with students in the sessions.
- Having one member of the tutoring team to act as the first point of call when a problem arises. This person speaks to the pupils and liaises with their parents.
- Using incentives to encourage engagement. This includes merit stickers from which they can get points and prizes.

## Case study seven: 'Do Something Different'

# Kings Lynn Academy

### What is the programme of support?

**Programme aim:**

To boost confidence and self esteem, and to ultimately encourage more positive behaviour and attitudes.

Kings Lynn Academy is one of eleven infant, primary and secondary schools in West Norfolk that are part of the Learning Catalyst initiative. This has been running since 2006 to engage parents and families in achieving goals related to (among others) health, literacy and numeracy, training and employment. The approach involves a range of whole-school and group based activities which aim to increase confidence and self-esteem and raise aspirations.

Kings Lynn Academy has implemented the 'Do Something Different' (DSD) online programme, which was initially developed by psychologists at the University of Hertfordshire. There are a number of variants of the programme; the students do the 'Teen' version which is aligned with the Academy's aim of improving health and wellbeing (including self esteem, mood and anxiety), and increasing attainment.

The programme includes:

- An initial assessment of the young person's behavioural habits. This informs the selection of a range of 'Do' tasks suited to the young person.
- Three 'Do' tasks are sent by email or text to the participant about three times a week for six weeks.
- Students develop strategies to help them succeed in the future.

Eight Year 10 students will take the course over six weeks during the summer term 2014. It is anticipated that the same group of students will repeat the programme during the following autumn term.

The course will be coordinated by a member of the school support staff who has been trained as a DSD coach and works on other Learning Catalyst initiatives; a teaching assistant will also be involved in delivery. These staff will support students while they are on the course and will run catch-up sessions every three to four weeks after the six-week programme, to provide opportunities for reflection on progress and remind students of the principles they learned during the course.

**What are 'Do' tasks?**

'Do' tasks are suggested simple actions sent to the students to try for one day (e.g. sitting in a different chair in class or trying not to complain for a day). 'Do' tasks help students explore their behaviour, encourage them to try things outside their 'comfort zone' and offer them tools to deal with situations in a more positive way.

## Who are the students involved?

Students were selected to be involved in the programme partly based on their responses to an attitudinal survey, which explored their views about school/college, themselves and future plans. The survey was administered to 50 students identified by senior staff as potentially benefiting from the programme. Another factor in selecting the students was that those chosen are not currently receiving any other intervention support, because the school has found that students can be overwhelmed with interventions and become reluctant to engage.

## What is the perceived and anticipated impact so far?

In 2012/13, around 120 students were involved in the programme. Previously, the school has used the programme with the 'hardest to reach' and least engaged students, and those who had 'self-selected' to participate. Some students reported that the programme had positive impacts on their behaviour, self-esteem and confidence[4].

Staff thought that the effects in terms of positive behavioural and attitudinal change are long-lasting, and report that students who have attended the programme regularly progress onto further education.

> *When you start changing people at their core and looking at their personality habits, it does tend to have long [term] sustainability.*
>
> Member of staff

Staff are keen to trial the programme with students who have less serious issues with engagement (compared with earlier participating cohorts) and to see what influence behavioural change has on actual (rather than perceived) attendance and attainment, as well as factors such as wellbeing that are measured through the DSD online programme itself. 'If we can stop [students at risk of disengaging from learning] falling off the edge, then it's a much shorter journey back to engagement for these students.'

Staff were also encouraged to do a version of the DSD course, and the headteacher reported that this had also helped staff to have positive, mutually respectful working relationships with students with whom there had been some conflict in the past.

## What challenges has the school faced?

The **staff did not identify significant challenges** in delivering the programme, other than those students who were very disengaged not turning up on time to DSD sessions and needing to be sought out in the school. Staff anticipate that this will not be such a problem with the group taking part for this evaluation.

[4] Comments from *The Learning Catalyst Approach: Review of activities 2012-13*, produced by the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, available at: http://www.eastgate.norfolk.sch.uk/norfolk/primary/eastgate/arenas/website/web/thelearningcatalystapproach-reviewofactivities2012-13.pdf

# Case study eight: NVQ Beauty Course

## The Winston Churchill School

### What is the programme of support?

**Programme aim:**

To raise the attainment of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, to service future pathways and assist students with potentially low levels of qualiifications to access further training.

The NVQ beauty course involves:

- studying practical skills, anatomy and physiology, health and safety, client communication and how to present themselves in the workplace
- numeracy and literacy sessions during each day of the course
- 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. Two cohorts of students (currently in Year 10 and Year 11) are enrolled on the course which started in the 2012/13 summer term.

### Who are the students 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, free school meals eligibility, exclusion, English as an additional language (EAL) and special educational need are also taken into account.

### What is the perceived impact?

The students appear to be benefiting from the course. Nearly all of them agreed or strongly agreed that the course is helping them to feel more positive about learning, to see the relevance of maths and English to their future and to understand their strength and weaknesses, helping them to feel more confident about what they could achieve and to develop skills and understanding about the world of work.

> *It's made me realise that education is important and you need it to get far in life. Also [it has] calmed me down more.*
>
> Student

Students were more likely to report improvements in behaviour in school since starting the course.

Since starting on their course, most students showed improvement in their effort grades, and half of the students had improved their attendance at school.

Students were more likely to know what sort of job they want and were more positive about being able to get that job compared to before starting the course.

Results from the first year are very positive, with all students who have completed the course going on to Beauty Apprenticeships or college-based courses involving beauty.

The tutor believed that the students' behaviour was much improved during intervention days, but questioned the extent to which this reflects their behaviour in the wider school context or its impact on their academic achievement. So far, little change is apparent in the students' performance in English, maths and science.

## What challenges has the school faced?

Initially, there were **concerns from parents** about their children being taken out of timetabled lessons. This was overcome by a parents' evening, providing information about the course and reasons for selection, along with regular feedback on progress. Staff have also experienced some **resistance from students** to the literacy and numeracy sessions because they are seen as challenging.

Another challenge was **locating a room and providing the required facilitates** and equipment. However, the delivery tutor reflected that creating this environment was important to distinguish the course from their normal school.

The small size of the group has led to some issues associated with the **group dynamic**. Some students mentioned that peers had negatively affected their enjoyment of the course. One student has been removed from the group as a result.

Originally, students were told that they would complete the Level 2 qualification but were too young to deliver hot wax and eye lash treatments. This issue was a result of a **miscommunication between the school and the college staff**. Staff have informed the students about opportunities to complete Level 2 at college.

Overall the tutor explained that they have learnt from the original cohort and have made necessary changes. For example, the school now interviews students before allowing them onto the course, while still holding a focus on disadvantaged students and those with low self esteem.

## What have been the key drivers of success?

It is **vital that students have an interest in the subject area.** This has clearly been supported by introductory activities which ensured that only those students with an interest accessed the course. The **positive relationship with the tutor** is also thought to be very important for success. Students are said to relate better to a tutor who is nearer to their age and who can draw on their own experience of working in the industry.

**Daily assessments** of their work have helped students to understand what they can improve on. The **design of the course** is also important. It is perceived to be successful because it consists of around 80 per cent practical work.

# Case study nine: Raising the Participation Age project

## Rushden Academy

### What is the programme of support?

The school is part of a consortium with five other schools in East Northamptonshire, all of which are participating in this project.

**Programme aim:**

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 involves:

- assertive (academic) mentoring
- targeted careers guidance and support with CV writing from an external provider
- a variety of trips, including a skills show/workshop day, further education (FE) taster days, and away-day team activities (for some activities, students join students from the other schools participating in the project)
- tailored work experience opportunities

Mentors have been selected from the core staff team and the first cohort has received training in assertive mentoring. Each mentor meets their one student mentee formally once a term, but have ongoing informal contact with them. Mentor's liaise with subject staff to help students meet agreed personal targets in lessons and then monitor their students' progress.

The programme, is overseen by the assistant headteacher 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.

### Who are the students involved?

The school selected students based on analysis of data such as attainment and attendance, and discussions with staff. Some need to improve their behaviour and/or have been underachieving in key subjects including English and mathematics.

### What is the perceived and intended impact?

After a year on the project, feedback from students was positive:

- Students' views of their progress at school had improved.
- Students' attitude to school had improved. This improvement in attitude was reflected in an improvement in data regarding attendance and punctuality at school.

- Students were less likely, compared to a year ago, to agree that there were not any suitable education or training opportunities for them after Year 11.
- All students reported that the programme had helped them understand their strengths and weaknesses, while most felt that they were more positive about learning, and more confident about what they could achieve at school.
- Students stated that they had particularly enjoyed the trips and social aspect, for example, communicating more with peers, the support from their mentor; and the taster days (for finding out about job possibilities).

> *It [the programme] has made me think that I need to work my best.*
>
> Student

The school programme lead also reported that the students had responded very positively to the programme.

## What challenges has the school faced?

The programme lead commented that it can be **difficult to get to the root of the students' issues within the time available** for the formal mentoring session. As such, mentors tended to meet their mentees quite often on an informal basis at other times. This can be **challenging for the mentor to accommodate**, but is also crucial to the project's success. In the first cohort (2012/13) each mentor had at least three students to work with however this has now been reduced so that each mentor could focus on one young person.

**Taking students to events needs to be cost effective.** The programme staff have had to cancel a planned off-site taster day due to not having enough students involved. Where there have been particular events where only one student has been interested, they have tried to arrange for a Teaching Assistant to transport the young person to the taster session in order to reduce costs.

In the future, the continuation of the programme will depend on the evaluation of its success and the availability of budget.

## What are the key drivers of success?

The **full support** and promotion of the project by the school senior leadership team is important, so that all staff are aware of what and who it involves.

The **relationships** between the mentor and the students are vital to the success of the project. While the mentors only have one timetabled mentoring session a term, they tend to spend a lot of time assisting the students informally. This relationship has helped them to identify more personal issues that are affecting the students, in addition to their academic needs, and to give advice or intervene as appropriate.

## Case study ten: Project-based learning

# Matthew Moss High School

**Please note: this case study focuses on a whole-school approach to teaching and learning, rather than a targeted approach to help prevent disengagement.**

### What is the school doing?

The school has adopted a learner-centred, project-based learning approach to teaching, particularly in Years 7 and 8 where significant curriculum time through the two years has been allocated to 'My World'.

My World is an extended project which results in the students producing 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 this research study, the pastoral team identified fifteen learners in Year 10 who are disengaging from learning. These learners are being tracked to see how they respond to the overall learning agenda of the school.

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 impact so far?

Staff believed that the school's approach to teaching and learning helps 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.'*

Learners who were interviewed thought they had slightly more say in the content of their lessons than young people at other schools (i.e. co-construction), although they felt this was less the case now that they were doing GCSEs than in previous years. They had appreciated the freedom to choose the topic of their extended project work in Year 9.

According the school's records, two-thirds of the 15 students being tracked sustained or improved their level of attendance in autumn and spring compared to the previous summer term. Nearly all students regularly arrived late to school, although this improved in the spring compared to the autumn. The school records students' 'work ethic' as red/amber/green in English, maths and science. Eight students (three of whom were also being academically mentored) improved their work ethic scores in one or more subjects over the year, meaning that around two-thirds of students received a score of amber or green in English and maths in spring 2014.

## 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.

# 4 About the research

The overall aim of this study is to identify, raise awareness of, and facilitate replication of 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. Further, the project aims to identify any support strategies (or key elements of strategies) that could be further developed and/or further evaluated by more robust means. 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.

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.

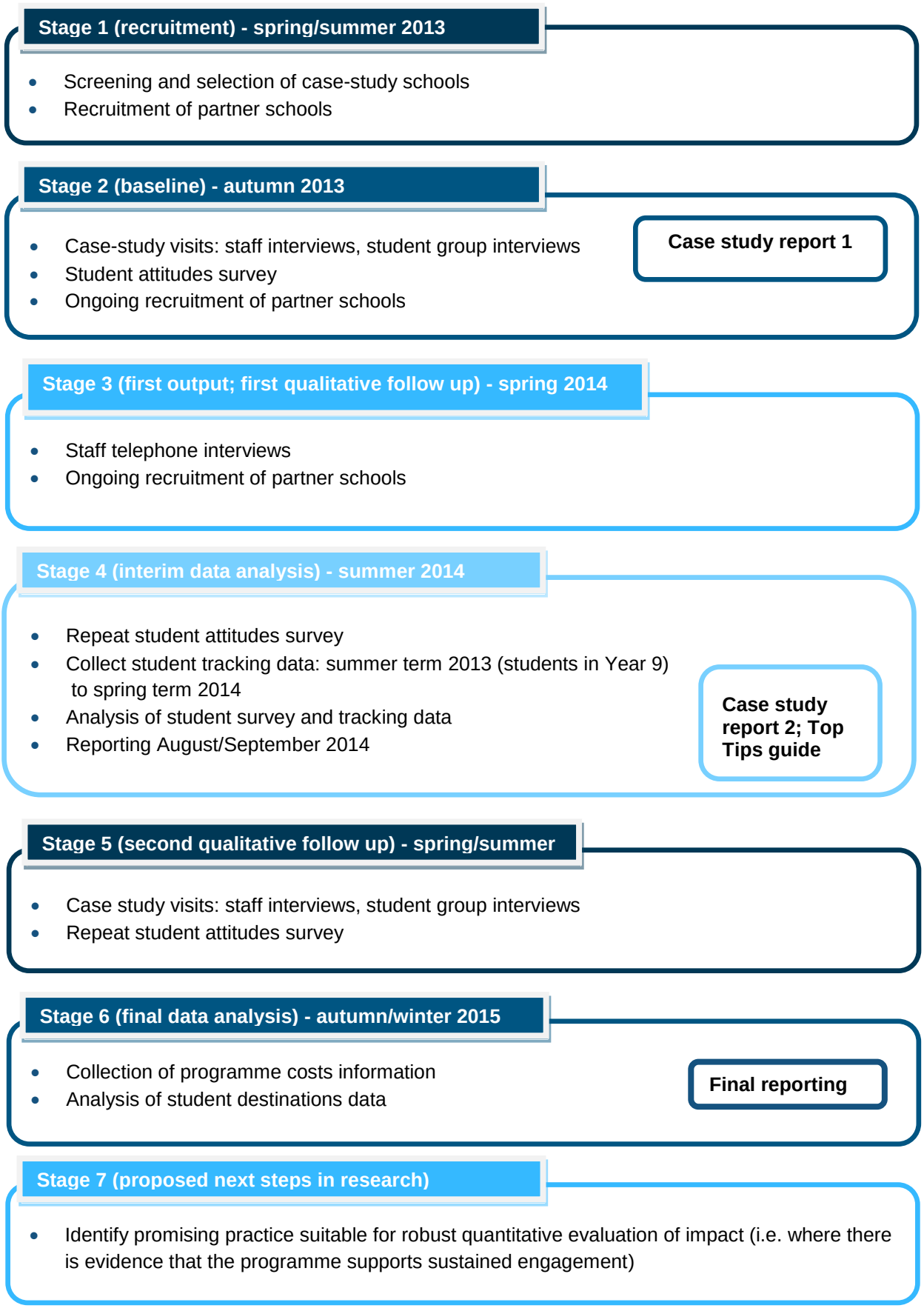
Figure 1 shows the different stages of this project. The research team carried out baseline visits to nine of the schools in September and October 2013[5]. The visits included interviews with teaching staff involved in the project, senior leaders, careers staff and delivery partners. At each school we 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. This data formed the basis of the first case study report (Kettlewell *et al.,* 2014).

This report builds on the baseline data but also draws on the following data collection activities:

- Telephone interviews with programme leads (March/April 2014)
- Second attitudes survey of students (May-July 2014)
- Collection of tracking data on the students for each term in the 2013/14 academic year. This included data on attendance, effort and achievement. (May-July 2014).

[5] The tenth case study visit was completed in March 2014.

**Figure 1: Research methodology.**



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