

Subject-Specific Mentoring Sessions

"I had help in Year 9 before the SAT's with how to answer experiment questions and that was really fun." Jack, Year 9

Headlines

- Centrally funded activity with the objective of raising attainment in science.
- The majority of the students felt that the sessions were beneficial.
- Students appreciated the small group size and the level of help that it afforded.
- Students found the sessions on revision, subject knowledge and exam techniques particularly helpful.

Introduction

The subject-specific mentoring sessions is a new initiative offered by North Somerset Aimhigher. A trained science teacher was recruited in January 2008 who has used his expertise in the four Weston-super-Mare secondary schools.

Wyvern is acting as a host for the mentor and this is where most of the mentoring takes place with up to 3.5 days being spent there. An after school science club has also been set up at Wyvern as another Aimhigher initiative run by the mentor.

Sessions

The mentoring sessions covered topics such as revision skills (with a focus on science), GCSE and KS3 SAT exam technique and subject knowledge. Group size was normally four and this seemed to work well allowing for group discussion while maintaining high levels of help. The sessions took place in whatever quiet place the school could provide. Sometimes the venues were quite noisy which was distracting.

Feedback

Students were asked to fill a questionnaire at the end of the sessions and the feedback from these was positive. The best sessions and feedback was from Wyvern where the sessions focused on subject knowledge and there was sufficient time to build a rapport with the students and get to know them as learners.

Students appreciated the level of help they received. They commented that the exam technique and revision sessions were helpful; although a second session on exam technique was too much.

Students at schools other than Wyvern suggested as an improvement to the sessions, focusing on areas of challenging subject knowledge. A number of students wanted to see a more appropriate work environment. Other suggested improvements included using practical work and competition.

Results of Wyvern questionnaires

Pupils were given a sheet with the following statements. They were asked to rate each one with a number between 1 and 5 - 1: strongly agree and 5: strongly disagree

- During mentoring sessions I learn new things about science.
- Because of the mentoring session I feel more confident about exams.
- The mentoring sessions have been beneficial.
- I feel that during the mentoring sessions my needs are considered and addressed.
- I enjoy working with a small group during the mentoring sessions.
- I would like to continue with the mentoring.

Statement	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Average
1	2.0	2.0	1.6	1.9
2	2.5	2.5	2.8	2.6
3	1.9	1.8	1.7	1.8
4	1.6	1.6	2.0	1.7
5	1.8	1.8	1.7	1.8
6	1.5	1.8	1.1	1.5

Good practice

Attendance was an issue at all of the schools apart from Wyvern. There are lots of reasons for this. It is important that the sessions are held at a time of year that does not clash with other calendar commitments such as exams or work experience. There needs to be mechanisms in place to remind students when their sessions are taking place – it is very difficult for a lot of students to remember a session date two dates after they were told.

It is hard to come in cold and anticipate the needs of learners in a school. The more information that can be provided to the mentor the more focused and beneficial the sessions will be.

The Future

Science mentoring is set to continue into the 2008-2009 school year and will run in the four Weston-super-Mare secondary schools and may also be extended to include other target schools in North Somerset.