Learning mentor support: an investigation into its perceived effect on the motivation of pupil premium students in year 11.

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Abstract

Motivation is seen as one of the most important aspects that educational practitioners can target to effect engagement and thereby improve student outcomes (Meece *et al.,* 2006). This case study research, which took place in an above-average sized secondary school, aimed to investigate the perceived effect of learning mentor support on the motivation of those students in Year 11 receiving pupil premium funding. Questionnaires for twelve students and seven teachers explored the impact of motivation on student outcomes; the role goal setting plays on student motivation; the benefit of mentoring relationships and how a learning mentor can support disadvantaged students and their motivation. A semi-structured interview with the Deputy Headteacher responsible for monitoring pupil premium within the school provided further insight into learning mentor effectiveness in improving motivation and the resultant effect on outcomes such as attendance, behaviour, and attainment. Documentary analysis of student progress data at two reporting points provided triangulation.

Key findings indicated that learning mentors were effective in promoting student motivation and thereby positively affecting outcomes of attainment, confidence, homework and focus in lessons. Findings also suggested that participants viewed mentoring positively; it produced beneficial relationships. However, the findings for outcomes of attendance and organisation contrasted with key literature; it did not appear that learning mentors had a positive effect on these particular outcomes in this case study.

Introduction

The overall aim of the research was to investigate the perceived effect of learning mentor support on the motivation of students in receipt of pupil premium funding. The House of Commons Education Committee (2014) write that underachievement in the education of young people has a likely consequence that post-16 they will enter neither training, further education nor employment. The United Kingdom has the widest achievement gap in the world between those from poorer backgrounds and other children. A key objective of the current government is to narrow this gap, and the provision to schools of pupil premium funding is a crucial element in attempting to achieve this.

Introduced in April 2011, pupil premium is additional funding provided to raise achievement and improve outcomes for students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds (Ofsted, 2013). It is known that pupil premium eligible students are far less likely than non-eligible peers to gain good GCSE results, with Ofsted (2014) reporting that in 2013 38% of students eligible for free school meals (FSM) achieved five GCSEs or more (A* to C) compared with 65% of non-FSM peers. Furthermore, Meece *et al.* (2006, p.489) suggest, disadvantaged students commonly 'lack the motivation to attend school and to engage in learning'. The Motivation Review Group's findings assert that demotivation leads to 'disaffection with, and even disengagement from, learning' (Smith *et al.*, 2005, p.1). Student engagement leads to academic achievement - motivation has a fundamental effect on this engagement (Ryan and Deci, 2009).

Citation

The provision of learning mentor support, DfES (2005) research reports, finds students one and a half times more likely to achieve five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C than those of similar previous attainment levels who have not received learning mentor support. The school in my study embarked on an initiative to support students receiving pupil premium funding in 2014 by appointing a learning mentor (the researcher); this has operated on a wider level since September 2015 with additional staff appointed. The school's learning mentors are members of non-teaching staff who aim to improve confidence, participation and access to learning by increasing motivation and, ultimately, improving GCSE outcomes. Although new to the school, learning mentors have been an established role in many schools since 1999 when they were introduced as part of the Excellence in Cities initiative (DfES, 2005).

Disadvantaged students may lack self-esteem, be demotivated or not be achieving their academic targets (DfES, 2001). Additionally, they can have personal organisational difficulties, difficulties at home, poor study skills and disaffection with learning (Cruddas, 2005). Working primarily outside the classroom with individual students (Ofsted, 2012), learning mentors 'bridge academic and pastoral support roles' with the aim that 'students [will] engage more effectively in learning and achieve appropriately' (DfES, 2005, p.13). Goodman and Gregg (2010) found that disadvantaged students who had a greater self-belief were more likely to do well in their GCSEs. Central to the learning mentor role is assisting students to overcome barriers to learning to improve their engagement, self-confidence and, therefore, attainment (DfES, 2005).

This study sought to establish an element of definition and location of the learning mentor role within the wider genus 'mentoring'. I was interested in exploring the relationship between student and learning mentor, with a focus on the effect the support and understanding created by this relationship had on promoting motivation and, finally, what effect this had on student outcomes.

Literature review
Motivation, goal setting and mentoring
Researchers have identified that motivation within the school environment is essential for learning and academic achievement (Pintrich, 2003; Ridley and Kendall, 2005). Hirsch (2007) suggests that students from disadvantaged backgrounds display lower motivation as they may be more likely to be disengaged. Disengaged students, propose Smith *et al.* (2005), are those exhibiting poor relationships with their learning, affecting the motivation for engagement, and ultimately student attainment. Moreover, unmotivated students may be disorganised, determined not to seek help, be inattentive, not review their learning (Schunk *et al.*, 2010) or do homework (Hirsch, 2007). Gorard *et al.* (2012) discerned an association between motivation and the student's attendance and attainment.

Focusing on a student's reason for engaging in a task, mastery goal orientation - 'a focus on developing one's abilities' (Meece, *et al.*, 2006, p.490) - can be linked to intrinsic motivation (learning for learning's sake), whereas performance goals link to extrinsic motivation (achievement and gaining good grades) (Pintrich, 2003). Students with a performance goal orientation are concerned with demonstrating competence or conversely avoiding the demonstration of a lack of ability (Grant and Dweck, 2003). Although goals provide the impetus for action, Harlen and Deakin Crick's (2002) review found they negatively affected low-attaining secondary students. Disadvantaged students, often lower attaining, are demotivated further as they do not have the 'skills or self-confidence to deal with criticism or setbacks' (DCSF, 2009, p.20). Galloway *et al.* (1998) suggest that for motivation to improve providing students with goals that are challenging but achievable is important.

Mentoring can be defined as 'a supportive relationship between a youth…and someone who offers support, guidance and concrete assistance' (Gay, 1994, p.4). Dunne *et al.* (2007) found that the use of mentoring to support students and to develop a positive atmosphere both in and outside the classroom was seen to be advantageous in motivating low-attaining students. Taking this further, Sebba *et al.* (2007) discuss the positive effect seen on the motivation of low-attaining students using learning mentors within a personalised learning approach, an approach also advocated by Macleod *et al.* (2015) for disadvantaged students.

The learning mentor and the mentoring relationship
Learning mentors, a term devised by Sir Michael Barber in 1999 in describing those who assist disadvantaged students in overcoming barriers to their learning (Megginson *et al.,* 2006), were initially part of the government-funded 'Excellence in Cities' (EiC) initiative. Learning mentors were established in response to the need to improve the academic performance and attendance of disadvantaged students in inner city schools (DfEE, 1999). Conversely, an initial report by Ofsted (2003), which assessed the effect of the initiative over a two-year period, found that, despite learning mentors being a generally successful element of the EiC initiative, their influence had not improved attendance.

Mentoring is widely used to support disaffected and disengaged students often with a focus on improving academic outcomes (Colley, 2003; Russell, 2007). Often seen as an element of established intervention for disadvantaged students in secondary schools (DfES, 2005), learning mentors seek to raise achievement, attainment and attendance by improving some facets of engagement, one of which is motivation: the 'will to succeed' (Roberts and Constable 2007, p.40). Those students that are mentored are more likely to improve their attendance and engagement with learning (Jekielek *et al.,* 2002)

For this support to be effective, Rose and Doveston (2008) assert, students must personally commit to it, however; they found that significantly most often students are selected for learning mentor support rather than choosing to participate in it. Also affecting the quality of the mentoring is the frequency and length of time given to the mentee; mentors need time to establish trusting, respectful, supportive and productive relationships (Golden *et al.,* 2003, Ofsted, 2003). Similarly, providing students with the time and space to identify and focus on goals is significant within this mentoring process (Cruddas, 2005). Furthermore, for mentoring to be successful and support a student's commitment to learning (Kettlewell *et al.,* 2012), it needs to be in response to student need rather than driven by the aims and goals of the school and teachers (Russell, 2007). Cruddas (2005, p.127) moreover acknowledges that learning mentors need to create a balance between 'institutional goals and the personal goals' of the students. Reid (2002) also argues that goals should be attainable. This could be said to be somewhat in conflict with the agenda set by the pupil premium funding that is provided to close the attainment gap (Macleod *et al.*, 2015), where goals are GCSE grades set by the school and are also fundamental to gauging a school's success.

The learning mentor and promoting motivation
Mentoring can positively affect social and emotional outcomes such as self-esteem, attitudes, contentment (Younger and Warrington, 2009; Whitney *et al.*, 2011) and student self-confidence (Colley, 2003). In seeking to achieve this, learning mentors are often required to use a range of skills, utilising a holistic approach in their support (Miller, 2002; Jones *et al.*, 2009). This holistic approach draws upon the mentor's abilities to befriend, support, tutor and offer counsel. Miller (2002) suggests that mentors need to recognise the relationships between many facets of a student's life, including that of their ambitions, confidence and self-esteem, motivation, learning and attainment to ensure effectiveness. The ability to 'befriend' students is corroborated by Rose and Doveston (2008) who found that students regarded learning mentors as more of a 'critical friend'

rather than an authoritative figure. Students value 'a critical friend who would listen, ask questions and challenge their perceptions in a safe environmen'' (Rose and Doveston, 2008, p.149, p.150). The students perceive their relationships with a learning mentor to be different to that of other adults, including teachers (Rose and Doveston, 2008; Bishop, 2011).

Developing a trusting relationship with a student allows the learning mentor to be an advocate or act as an intercessor between teacher and student in overcoming barriers to learning (Rose and Doveston, 2008). However, some argue that learning mentors could see their role become that of a disciplinarian with the objective of containing undesirable behaviour, often displayed by disaffected, disengaged students, rather than focusing on learning (Cruddas, 2005). Indeed, Ofsted (2005) report that some learning mentors have proven ineffective if their role concentrates on student behaviour. Conversely, Golden *et al.* (2003) support the view learning mentors positively influence behaviour as well as effecting motivation, attendance and student confidence. Mentoring can improve the motivation of disadvantaged students (Galloway *et al*. 1998, Russell 2007, Sebba *et al.* 2007, Martin and Dowson 2009, and Macleod *et al.* 2015). Furthermore, increased motivation will influence student attainment (Roberts and Constable, 2007) which supports the desire to close the attainment gap for pupil premium students.

Methodology
Methodological approach
A case study approach was considered suitable as it examines a 'phenomenon …within its real-world context '(Yin, 2014, p.16). As an 'in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system', it provides a depth of examination (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p.37). Although acknowledging limitations in this approach, Denscombe (2010, p.36) suggests that this model of research allows focus 'on just one instance of the thing that is to be investigated', as such an intensity of inquiry could be achieved. Gerring (2007) proposes that a case study will have distinguishable boundaries of time, location, and individuals involved, seen as apt for the learning mentor support. There are some limitations to the case study approach, one of which Walliman (2006) suggests is that generalising using this approach is not possible. Yin (2014) also states that due to a case study having a sample that is small and idiosyncratic it cannot be seen to be representative of some larger population; what was found in the research school may not apply to other schools.

Sampling
Purposive sampling allowed for selection of participants who have pertinent knowledge related to the purpose of the research study (Bowling, 2014). Questionnaires were distributed to all twelve Year 11 students in receipt of learning mentor support, and all ten English and all ten mathematics teachers responsible for teaching these students. The staff sample for the research was limited to teachers of English and mathematics due to these subjects being the primary academic focus of the learning mentors. The Deputy Headteacher, being responsible for monitoring pupil premium within the school, was interviewed using a semi-structured approach.

Reliability and validity
A multi-method approach was taken in this research using questionnaires for teachers and students, a semi-structured interview with the Deputy Headteacher and documentation analysis of student progress data. A case study lends itself to a multi-method approach, providing triangulation, defined by Cohen *et al*. (2007, p.141) as utilising 'two or more methods of data collection' increasing the quality of the research and confidence to the findings, thereby supporting reliability and validity (Sharp, 2012). Denscombe (2010, p.334) defines reliability as a research method producing 'the same data time after time on each occasion that it is used', the research is repeatable. Validity, applying to both the research design and methods, concerns whether the research is rigorous, and that data are representative of what it intends to measure (Denscombe, 2010).

To negate possible reliability issues each student and each teacher received the same structured questionnaire; teachers were given a week to complete the questionnaire to ensure they did not feel hurried into responding too quickly. Furthermore, as there was likelihood that the students' responses to the questionnaire could be influenced by researcher presence (Lowe, 2007), I deemed it pertinent not to be present while the questionnaires were completed; it may have affected the reliability of the data provided. Due to the limited time available, an opportunity to use a method of 'test-retest' to improve reliability was not possible (Cohen *et al*., 2007, p.146). As the research looked at the perceptions of staff and students, these data may not necessarily be replicable and as such, reliability cannot be guaranteed.

Yin (2014) advocates that a difficulty encountered when using a case study approach may be that of bias, as the researcher, being familiar with the issues under examination, may use this as a means of corroborating a predetermined point. Therefore, to avoid bias, and thereby aiding validity, the key findings from the literature helped to structure research questions, as Bell (2010) asserts, questions should relate to the research objectives. To further increase validity, participation was encouraged by carefully constructing the questionnaires: clear instructions were provided; familiar types of responses were elicited, such as, circling a response; the length of the questionnaire was not prohibitive (Cohen *et al*., 2007).

Ethics
Ensuring reliability and validity of the data involves ethically executing the research. Tinson (2009) suggests that, when conducting research with young people, all potential ethical implications are considered. However, the first step in working towards the ethical considerations is that of gaining informed consent, which Cohen *et al*. (2007, p.52) describe as the 'bedrock of ethical procedure'. This consent was achieved in the form of the Ethical Approval Form (EAF), approved by the Headteacher and the University Ethics Panel. This considered all ethical concerns in line with BERA (2011) guidelines; as Lindsay (2015) suggests, these guidelines assist in recognising ethical considerations for research. BERA (2011, p.5) indicate that to ensure informed consent has occurred 'all participants in the research [must] understand the process in which they are to be engaged'. Each participant was provided with a missive explaining the purpose of the research and participant right to withdraw. As the students were 15 or 16 years old, it was felt they could provide their informed consent, supported by the BERA (2011) guidelines, which state that children should be given the opportunity to consent when appropriate for their age and maturity.

The students may not have been aware that the reason they receive learning mentor support is that they receive pupil premium funding. Therefore, to reduce any risk of distress, in accordance with Article 20 of the BERA (2011) guidelines, no reference was made to this. As my role as learning mentor means that all participants are personally known to me, both confidentiality and anonymity were offered to the questionnaire participants, advocated by Lowe (2007). Teachers and students were asked not to include their name when completing the questionnaire, further contributing to anonymity and confidentiality. As only one Deputy Headteacher within the school has responsibility for pupil premium funding, I was unable to offer anonymity to the interview participant; I could offer confidentiality.

Data collection tools
Questionnaires
The teacher and student questionnaires were designed to gather data relating to the identified themes of the effect of mentoring on student motivation and student outcomes. The questionnaires also aimed to explore participant perceptions of the mentoring relationship. Considered an appropriate method for gathering data from this number of participants (Burton *et al*., 2008), questionnaires are also simpler to organise than, for example, an interview (Denscombe, 2010).

However, there are some limitations in using questionnaires - the resultant data may not be detailed or insightful, and the response rate may be low as participation is voluntary (Burton *et al.*, 2008).

The questionnaires utilised both open questions and Likert (1932) scales; these scales providing 'a degree of sensitivity and differentiation of response' (Cohen *et al.,* 2007, p.325). As the teachers' and students' perceptions were sought, this scale was appropriate, recording opinions rather than factual information (Burton *et al.*, 2008).

Semi-structured interview
Lowe (2007) suggests that interviews offer an opportunity of triangulating with the other data collection methods. Interviewing senior members of staff later in the research process may be prudent as there will be a clearer view on the research at this point (Nisbet and Watt, 1984). Therefore, the Deputy Headteacher was interviewed last in the data collection process.

This semi-structured interview sought to provide further insight into themes of learning mentor effectiveness in improving motivation and the resultant effect on outcomes such as attendance, behaviour, and attainment. As Sharp (2012, p.74) states, semi-structured approaches 'probably offer most scope', allowing particular questions to be asked but also providing the interviewee with an opportunity to talk more freely about the subject, for clarification to be gained (Bell, 2010). The interview was recorded to ensure that attentiveness during the interview was achieved, without a distraction of note taking, and afforded the opportunity to analyse more readily the results (Sharp, 2012).

Student progress report data analysis
The final element of triangulation was an analysis of the participating students' progress report data at two reporting points. This ascertained whether any correlation could be seen between motivation and student outcomes of attitude, classwork, homework, and organisation, as well as academic outcomes and attendance. Yin (2014, p.107) asserts that documents are important as they 'corroborate and augment evidence'. As Denscombe (2010, p.137) affirms, this 'enhances confidence in the validity of the findings' as it provides a more complete picture.

Discussion of Findings
Evidence gathered from the data collection was interpreted and analysed under some key themes.

The impact of motivation on student outcomes
The questionnaires revealed that all twelve students and five out of seven teachers perceived that since receiving learning mentor support there had been a positive effect on student motivation. Furthermore, improvements in student outcomes of attainment, homework and focus in lessons were also perceived. This appeared to be consistent with the assertion made in literature that there is a strong link between motivation and academic achievement (Pintrich, 2003; Ridley and Kendall, 2005; Smith *et al.*, 2005; Roberts and Constable, 2007; Schunk *et al.*, 2010).

Confidence
Nine out of twelve students perceived increased confidence in English and eleven out of twelve in mathematics; one commented that 'working with a mentor helped me realise I am good at maths'. In examining what makes them feel they had succeeded in school, three out of twelve students indicated a growth in confidence. Three out of seven teachers felt that student confidence had improved as students are provided with 'time to go through key concepts again'. One teacher remarked on the student's 'increased self-belief'. These findings appeared to support the views of the Colley (2003), Golden *et al.* (2003) and Kettlewell *et al.* (2012) that an essential element of the mentoring role is to encourage and raise student self-confidence. This increasing self-belief is

important for disadvantaged students' chances of improving academic outcomes (Goodman and Gregg, 2010).

Academic outcomes
Findings appeared to highlight improvements in students' English and mathematics attainment, with ten out of twelve students and six out of seven teachers perceiving an improvement. Also indicated was that eight out of twelve students felt they had made progress in English and eight out of twelve in mathematics. One student commented, 'I was a C and now am a B'. Progress data showed students made an average grade progression in English of 0.67 sub-levels and two sub-levels in mathematics. The Deputy Headteacher also indicated that attainment had improved, with progress now at the school target level. These findings appeared to concur with the views of Roberts and Constable (2007) and Gorard *et al.* (2012) who propose that by increasing motivation it may have a positive impact on student attainment.

Engagement, attendance and behaviour
Roberts and Constable (2007) view that, alongside raising attainment, enhancing student outcomes of engagement and attendance as a result of improving motivation is central to the work of a learning mentor. When asked if student outcomes of motivation, timekeeping, attendance, behaviour, homework, organisation, attainment and focus in lessons had improved with learning mentor support it was seen that 68 out of 96 possible student questionnaire responses and 31 out of 49 responses by teachers either agreed or strongly agreed that there had been an improvement. This corroborated the DfEE (1999), Jekielek *et al.* (2002) and Ofsted's (2005) view that mentoring disadvantaged students enabled them to improve academic performance, attendance, and engagement outcomes.

In analysing student progress report data outcomes of behaviour, homework, organisation and classwork, improvement was suggested in classwork (focus in lessons) and homework; no change was perceived in behaviour and organisation. Three out of seven teachers regarded in-class support as beneficial, a 'team to support learning'. One student commented their 'motivation gets better when my mentor helps with my lessons'. The learning mentors are in a position to support and encourage students' learning by working both in and outside the classroom; they can foster motivation (Cruddas, 2005; Dunne *et al.*, 2007). Schunk *et al.* (2010) state that unmotivated students may be disorganised, which would suggest motivation improves organisation. However, findings did not appear to substantiate this assertion. Although motivation may have appeared to improve, only two out of seven teachers and one student felt an improvement had been seen in organisation. One teacher negatively remarked on a student's organisation. When considering the impact on behaviour, some contradicting evidence was seen. Six out of seven teachers and nine out of twelve students perceived an improvement in behaviour; however, progress report data did not identify an improvement. These findings somewhat resonate with the views of Cruddas (2005) and Ofsted (2005) who viewed that learning mentors should not focus on behaviour.

Although literature regarded attendance to be positively affected by increased motivation through mentoring support (Golden *et al.*, 2003), the data appeared to present a mixed response; only one student felt their attendance had improved. Although the Deputy Headteacher indicated improved attendance, the analysed attendance figures evidenced an average decrease over the period of learning mentor support. This lack of definitive improvement seemed to contradict the assertion of Jekielek *et al.* (2002) and Roberts and Constable (2007) that by improving motivation through mentoring it will improve attendance.

Goal setting and student motivation
Cruddas (2005) suggests that the learning mentor supports students in setting and achieving goals. Five out of twelve students felt that gaining good GCSE grades indicated success and five out of twelve students felt that improvement in their learning demonstrated success. All students agreed that their motivation to learn had grown, and ten out of twelve students strongly agreed that their motivation to get good grades had grown. This appeared to indicate that goal setting has had an impact on students' motivation; 'the learning mentor has made me understand I should keep striving for success and achieve my target grades'. According to Harlen and Deakin Crick (2002) and the DCSF (2009), disadvantaged, low-attaining students are demotivated by goal setting. However, in the research findings, this did not appear to be the case as five out of twelve students were motivated to achieve their target GCSE grades. The Deputy Headteacher viewed a student's achievement to be the motivating factor, 'they want a C grade'. The students appeared to be demonstrating a motivation by performance goals (GCSE grades), defined by Pintrich (2003) to be extrinsic motivation. The findings seemed to conflict with the view held by Harlen and Deakin Crick (2002) and Hayenga and Corpus (2010) that extrinsic motivation does not produce positive learning outcomes, as students seemed to have made progress in English and mathematics.

The benefit of mentoring relationships
The data reflected a positive relationship between student and learning mentor. The Deputy Headteacher highlighted the 'atmosphere that has been created' which supports the relationship; it is 'a safe space to come', an importance highlighted by Rose and Doveston (2008). These findings appeared to concur with Dunne *et al.* (2007) who advocate that developing a positive atmosphere both in and outside the classroom promotes the student's motivation. Eleven out of twelve students agreed that they enjoyed working with their learning mentor. All students agreed that their learning mentor is supportive and easy to talk to. Four out of seven teachers appeared to support these findings reporting evidence of a positive, close, nurturing relationship between students and learning mentor. The students appeared to value a one-to-one relationship with someone 'who cares', producing 'very positive relationships', an approach advocated by Rose and Doveston (2008) to generate an effective mentoring relationship. These findings appeared to concur with Schunk *et al*. (2010) who suggest that students can be motivated by positive mentoring relationships.

Rose and Doveston (2008) advocate that the manner in which secondary students are selected for learning mentor support is essential for ensuring success; the students must personally invest in it. Some students reported an issue with when they saw their learning mentor, with three out of twelve students stating that missing PE lessons was problematic. Students should also be provided with the appropriate amount of time to support the building of a quality mentor/mentee relationship for it to be effective, as proposed by Golden *et al*. (2003). Four out of twelve students felt they do not have enough time with their learning mentor. The Deputy Headteacher also remarked that allocating the minimum learning mentor time for a student is not the best way to improve outcomes.

Learning mentor influence on disadvantaged students and their motivation
Miller (2002), Cruddas (2005) and Jones *et al*. (2009) suggest that holistic support, utilising a range of skills to improve motivation, is provided by learning mentors. The research findings seemed to substantiate these claims as the learning mentors tutor, counsel, befriend and provide a safe environment in which students feel able to talk and ask questions. The Deputy Headteacher discussed the 'holistic' support for the pupil premium students, and that the 'skills and strengths' of a learning mentor are key to positive relationships – the learning mentor is a 'keyworker for that student'. The findings appeared to suggest that participants regarded that the role of a learning mentor has a positive effect on the students' motivation and outcomes. When asked what the most helpful aspect of learning mentor support had been, five out of twelve students commented that the

support is motivational. All teachers felt positive about the learning mentor support for the students; it had had a positive impact on students. These results seemed to be in line with comments made by Harlen and Deakin Crick (2002), Hirsch (2007) and Martin and Dowson (2009) who suggest that a mentoring relationship can improve the motivation of disadvantaged students.

Conclusions and recommendations
This research revealed some key themes, which formed the basis for the data collection process.

The impact of motivation on student outcomes
The findings suggest that the student's motivation had improved since working with a learning mentor. All participants agreed that students were more motivated and that confidence and attainment appeared to have also improved. This correlation was highlighted by Ridley and Kendall (2005), Roberts and Constable (2007) and Gorard *et a*l. (2012) that improved motivation will influence student outcomes, including attainment and engagement in learning. The findings appeared to demonstrate that the majority of the students had made progress in English and mathematics within the A* to C GCSE outcomes. This is positive in working towards the desired outcome for pupil premium students of achieving five GCSEs A* to C (Ofsted, 2014).

The findings seemed to support the assertion made by Russell (2007) and Macleod *et al.* (2015) that mentoring can improve the motivation of disadvantaged students which leads to improved outcomes (Hirsch, 2007; Gorard *et al.*, 2012). Other outcomes, such as homework and focus in lessons, were also perceived to have improved. This resonated with the views of the DfEE (1999), Jekielek *et al.* (2002) and Ofsted (2005) who all assert that mentoring disadvantaged students improves these types of outcomes. However, teachers did not perceive improvements in the students' attendance and organisation; evidence from the progress data concurred. Despite assertions made by Roberts and Constable (2007) that mentoring would improve attendance, and by Schunk *et al.* (2010) that improved motivation impacts on organisation, the research did not appear to support either of these views.

Goal setting and motivation
Although extrinsically motivated by goals (Pintrich, 2003), this does not appear to have had a negative effect on the students' motivation. The students regarded gaining good GCSE grades as a motivational element, and that the learning mentors were effective in motivating them to get good grades, the students were motivated extrinsically. Although Harlen and Deakin Crick (2002) claim that disadvantaged, lower-attaining students are negatively affected by the extrinsic motivation of goals, this did not appear to be the case for the students within this research study. Despite being motivated, extrinsically, by the reward of a good GCSE grade, the students progressed academically and regarded the mentoring support to be helpful in providing the motivation to achieve these goals, as advocated by Cruddas (2005).

Mentoring and the mentoring relationship
All participants appeared to view the mentoring relationship positively. The students appeared to value the one to one nature of the support, both pastorally and academically. Most students directly correlated the learning mentor support to their improvement in learning and academic outcomes. Moreover, the teachers seemed to regard the building of nurturing relationships as being positive both in and outside the classroom.

The students found that the limited time available to meet with a learning mentor was an issue as some student comments were made in this regard, and it was identified by the Deputy Headteacher that variable learning mentor time for some students could affect effectiveness. Moreover, the view of Rose and Doveston (2008), that involving secondary students in the selection will ensure the

students buy into the support, was somewhat borne out by comments made by students about missing PE lessons, with a teacher also querying the student selection process.

This study suggested that all participants perceived that motivation and outcomes of attainment, homework and focus in lessons improved since students had received learning mentor support, as such, it is recommended that learning mentors continue to have this focus for pupil premium funded students. Pupil premium funding is provided to improve student outcomes and close the attainment gap (Ofsted, 2013) with motivation seen as one of the most important aspects that educational practitioners can pursue to effect engagement and thereby improve student outcomes (Ridley and Kendall, 2005; Meece *et al.,* 2006) and as such this intervention is working in support of these assertions. However, students reported that sufficient time is not always provided with the learning mentor each week, with teachers and Deputy Headteacher also regarding the provision of the appropriate time as key in ensuring effectiveness. Therefore, consideration should be made of providing suitable amounts of time and space for students to meet with their learning mentor.

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