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Title: Cheshire Children's Fund learning mentor service: An evaluation

Date: November 2004

Originally published in:

Example citation: Davies, S., Thurston, M., & Killey, M. (2004). *Cheshire Children's Fund learning mentor service: An evaluation*. Chester: University College Chester

Version of item: Published version

Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10034/26055>



**Cheshire Children's Fund
Learning Mentor Service**

An Evaluation

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Mona Killey**

November 2004

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University College Chester
ISBN: 1-902275-40-3**



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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the head teachers, teachers and children who participated in the evaluation at what was a very busy time in the school year.

Special thanks go to Barbara Healing, Learning Mentor Team Leader, and to the Learning Mentor Team, for their cooperation and support with the evaluation.

This service evaluation was commissioned and funded by Cheshire Children's Fund as part of the local evaluation.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Children's Fund is a national initiative established as a key part of the Government's strategy to support 5-13 year olds who are at risk of being disadvantaged by child poverty and social exclusion. The Fund is focused on promoting the development of local preventative strategies. Cheshire Children's Fund is the local response to the national initiative. One such service, commissioned under the theme of Success in Schools, is a learning mentor service based in a cluster of primary schools in Chester. This service consists of a senior learning mentor, who is also the co-ordinator of the service, and three learning mentors, who work across the nine schools in the cluster. Two head teachers act as project leads, on behalf of all the head teachers involved, and have ultimate responsibility for the project.

It was the purpose of this service evaluation to explore the extent to which the learning mentor service is contributing to positive outcomes for those children identified as likely to benefit from the intervention. The objectives of this evaluation were to:

- describe the service;
- analyse available service monitoring data about service usage;
- consider referral pathways into the service and how service providers may act as referrers to other local services;
- identify benefits of the service to users (to include all family members);
- analyse how the service is meeting Children's Fund objectives;
- draw conclusions about the performance of the service and make practical recommendations for future development;
- feedback evaluation findings to relevant staff to promote reflection on service development.

Methods

Both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were utilised for this evaluation. A sample of four schools was selected that represented a school from each of the learning mentor's allocation and was illustrative of the different types of schools and demographic areas included in the cluster. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in these schools. In total, 28 interviews were conducted, which included 8 interviews with head teachers and other relevant teachers, 16 interviews with children and 4 interviews with learning mentors. In addition, existing data relating to service usage, referrals and outcomes were collected.

Findings

Implementation of the learning mentor service was explored and a description of the service provided, including a profile of service usage.

Referrals

- During the first academic year since the service was introduced (September 2003 to July 2004), 174 children accessed the service and 20 of these children exited from the service.
- Overall, 107 boys accessed the service, compared with 65 girls. Referrals included children from every year group from Nursery to Year Six.

Reason for referral

- Reasons for referral to the service included: attendance; punctuality; social skills; standard of work/underachievement; low self-esteem/withdrawn; poor concentration; poor behaviour; bullying behaviour; and other.

A number of key themes emerged from the analysis of the interview transcripts.

Starting out

- Respondents discussed their experiences with regard to the establishment of the service and its introduction to schools. Issues relating to an initial lack of clarity about the role of the learning mentor were raised.
- Before going into schools the learning mentors arranged to undertake training relevant to work in schools such as training in child protection, behaviour management, child development, circle time and learning mentor training.
- The learning mentors spent the first school term establishing the service, undergoing training and familiarising themselves with the schools they would be working in. The issue of time needed to establish the service was raised by respondents. Attitudes were mixed as some respondents said this time was crucial and others considered that it encroached on time that the learning mentors could have been in school.

Service Delivery

The views of respondents regarding the way in which the learning mentor service has been delivered were explored.

Focus of intervention

- Most respondents reported that the aim of the learning mentor service was to help children overcome barriers to learning that they were experiencing. Possible barriers to learning were said to be numerous and included attendance; punctuality; difficulties with self-esteem; behaviour or social skills; problems with literacy or numeracy; lack of parental support at home; or poor links between home and school.

Identification and referral of children

- The identification and referral of children to the service was explored. Any member of staff in schools can refer children to the service. Often

more than one reason for referral was indicated by the referrer as requiring intervention.

Structure of intervention

- The structure of the intervention was reported to differ both within and between schools, dependent upon the focus of the intervention and the decision by the head teacher as to how the service should be delivered in his or her school.

Assessment of children's progress

- Assessment of children's progress was reported to be ongoing and informal. Some respondents suggested the need to clarify the focus of interventions, to enable goals to be set and progress measured.

Exiting from the service

- Discussion about children exiting the service revealed that there can be a reluctance to exit children from the service. Some respondents considered that the exit criteria for the service needed to be defined more clearly.

Benefits

- The perceived benefits of the service related to the flexible and responsive nature of delivery, the nature of the intervention (early intervention/prevention, commonly perceived as 'quality time' with an adult), and the position of the learning mentors as external to school.

Limitations

- The perceived limitations of the service related to the limited time learning mentors have in schools, particular practical issues such as the lack of a base for the learning mentor to work from within some schools, and concerns about future funding.

Outcomes for children

- The teachers, head teachers and learning mentors described what they perceived to be the outcomes for children. These were reported improvements in children's behaviour, self-esteem, attendance and punctuality.
- Children reported that they enjoyed seeing the learning mentor. Some of the older children had an understanding of why they had been referred to the learning mentor and reported that it had helped them. Children reported improvements in reading, writing, behaviour and punctuality.

Future directions

- Respondents made suggestions for the future development of the learning mentor role, including working with gifted and talented children, organising nurture groups and offering parenting classes.

Discussion and conclusions

The evaluation took place at a relatively early stage in the development of the service. When a new service is introduced, evidence suggests it is good practice for everyone involved to be clear about roles and responsibilities and how they will be integrated with existing roles, in order for the service to develop effectively.

The response to the learning mentor service has been very positive, with many respondents expressing the view that they would like to have a learning mentor full-time in every school. However, the outcomes of the service proved difficult to measure, as systems to capture this data were not in place. On the basis of the evidence from this evaluation, the learning mentor service could move towards a model of good practice by defining a clear pathway through the service, with referral and exit criteria agreed. It is recommended that the reason for referral to the service could be made more specific, to allow the intervention to be focused accordingly. This would make target setting and measuring children's

progress easier. Clear and measurable aims of the intervention, with set timescales, would make it easier to clarify exit criteria. Each of these factors would contribute to enabling outcomes of the service to be measured and its impact evaluated. This could be used to inform development of the service, in order to maximise the benefits for children. It should be borne in mind that the learning mentor service has only been established for one year and that there was a formative element to this evaluation. Therefore the above suggestions are offered as a means of future development for the service.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

The Children's Fund is a national initiative established as a key part of the Government's strategy to support 5-13 year olds who are at risk of being disadvantaged by child poverty and social exclusion. The Fund is focused on promoting the development of local preventative strategies. As such, funding is determined locally and there is an emphasis on providing support for children within the home, the school, and in the wider community.

Cheshire Children's Fund is the local response to the national initiative. The local initiative supports a countywide programme of preventative work with children, although service provision is concentrated in areas of high disadvantage within the county. Services have been commissioned by Cheshire Children's Fund in respect of three main themes: success in school; supporting families; and, promoting social inclusion. One such service commissioned under the theme of success in schools is a learning mentor service based in a cluster of primary schools in Chester.

1.2 Aims of the study

Evaluation is a core component of local programmes of services, in order to build an evidence base. The local evaluation of Cheshire Children's Fund aims to assess the extent of progress towards the Children's Fund objectives and measure their effectiveness in meeting local needs. It focuses on capturing change and measuring impact, both in terms of outputs (goods or services that are delivered) and outcomes (the effect that a service, activity of intervention has upon individuals). Due to the short timeframe of the local evaluation, with less than three years for completion, the emphasis is on identifying a range of 'indicators of success'. Impacts will also be explored in relation to the processes that

underpinned change, by identifying those that helped and those that hindered progress.

It is the purpose of this service evaluation to explore, through various methods, the extent to which the learning mentor service is contributing to positive outcomes for those children identified as likely to benefit from the intervention. It is also anticipated that this study will add to the limited evidence on the impact of mentoring on education outcomes. The objectives of the service evaluation are to:

- describe the service;
- analyse available service monitoring data about service usage;
- consider referral pathways into the service and how service providers may act as referrers to other local services;
- identify benefits of the service to users (to include all family members);
- analyse how the service is meeting Children's Fund objectives;
- draw conclusions about the performance of the service and make practical recommendations for future development;
- feedback evaluation findings to relevant staff to promote reflection/service development.

Chapter 2

Literature review

2.1 Mentoring: definitions, development and effectiveness

Youth mentoring interventions were first developed in the USA towards the end of the 19th century (Freedman, 1995, cited in Philip, 1997) and expanded rapidly during the 1980s due to increasing popularity (Philip, 2003). Mentoring programmes have been developed to address a whole range of problems affecting young people, such as drug and alcohol use, poor academic performance, teenage pregnancy, low self-esteem and youth offending (Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001).

The concept of mentoring has proved difficult to define, as it is a term that has been widely used to cover a range of activities. However, the essence of mentoring appears to be a relationship between two people, through which the more experienced provides support for the other. According to Bennetts (2003) the traditional mentor relationship is one that develops naturally, characterised as a learning alliance grounded in mutual respect. The traditional mentor can be defined as, "A person who achieves a one-to-one developmental relationship with a learner, and one whom the learner identifies as having enabled personal growth to take place." (Bennetts, 2003, p.64). Mentoring programmes aim to establish formally this kind of relationship between a young person and an adult, through which support and guidance are provided for the young person (Jekielek, Moore, Hair & Scarupa, 2002).

Hall (2003) provides a review of different classifications and typologies of mentoring and concludes that the range of forms of mentoring can be characterised as follows:

-
1. The origin of the mentoring relationship - to what extent is it a 'naturally occurring' relationship or one that has been artificially promoted?
 2. The purpose of the mentoring - to what extent is it instrumental (akin to inducting the apprentice into a craft or profession) or expressive (guiding the naïve and undeveloped youth into responsible adulthood)?
 3. The nature of the mentoring relationship - is it a one-to-one relationship or one-to-a-group?
 4. The site of the mentoring - to what extent is it 'site-based' (for example, tied to a school or college) or 'community-based' (situated in the young person's family, community or wider social sphere).

(Hall, 2003, p.8)

Activities named as mentoring are therefore wide ranging. Examples of activities include: informal, naturally developing relationships in business settings; formal programmes within business settings; offering support to prisoners and ex-offenders; support for young people in care or leaving care; and, support for young people who are considered to be at risk of offending, unemployment, drug abuse or school exclusion (National Mentoring Network, 2004). For the purposes of the present study, the following section will focus on current literature regarding the last category: namely, mentoring interventions for young people considered 'at risk'.

The largest and longest established mentoring programme in the USA is Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBSA). This programme currently serves over 200,000 children, between the ages of five to eighteen, in 5,000 communities across the USA, through a network of 470 agencies (Big Brothers Big Sisters, 2004). There are two core programmes within this, one based in the community and one based in schools. In the community-based programmes, volunteers spend time with

individual children in their communities with the aim of providing a relationship with a caring adult through which the child can develop new skills. In the school-based programmes, volunteers spend time with individual children in schools, usually once a week, again with the aim that children will benefit from the relationship with a caring adult. A national evaluation of Big Brothers Big Sisters programmes compared young people who had participated in the programmes with young people who had not. It was found that those who had participated in the programmes showed an improvement in school attendance, attitudes to schoolwork and modest improvements in school performance. They also showed improvements in their relationships with peers and families and were less likely to begin using drugs and alcohol (Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 1995). However, it should be noted that the above study used a sample of young people between 10 and 16 years of age. Indeed, there is less known about the impact of mentoring on pre-adolescent youth (Sipe, 1996) and Slicker and Palmer (1993) have pointed out that there is a need for more research to determine the impact of early intervention on primary school age children. Furthermore, due to differences in the historical and social context between the USA and the UK, extrapolating the findings from one context to another should be carried out with caution (Hall, 2003). In a comprehensive review of mentoring schemes for young people in a range of different settings, Hall (2003, p.15) concludes that, "There is a very poor evidence base in the UK. Claims are made for the impact of mentoring but there is as yet little evidence to substantiate them."

In the UK, the National Mentoring Network's bursary programme 1999-2000, supported forty mentoring programmes, covering a wide range of types of mentoring for young people, aged seven to 19 years old. The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) evaluated the impact and outcomes of this programme (Golden, 2000). Findings suggested positive outcomes for young people mentored, in the areas of personal development, preparation for the future and skills development. However, no evidence was found to suggest positive outcomes

for young people in the areas of school achievement and attitude to learning (Golden, 2000).

Project CHANCE (now Chance UK) is a mentoring programme that was supported by the Home Office Programme Development Unit. It is a preventive intervention programme, focusing on primary school-aged children who exhibit behaviour problems, and aims to prevent long-term antisocial behaviour, social exclusion and criminal offending. The project provides trained mentors to meet with individual children in the community, usually for two to four hours weekly, over a period of one year. During the initial stage of the intervention, the mentor aims to establish a trusting and supportive relationship with the child. Once this is achieved, the second stage is the delivery of a solution-focused intervention to the child. The solution-focused approach seeks to identify and change the problem behaviour, rather than try to discover the original causes of that behaviour. Findings from a three-year evaluation of this project by St James-Roberts and Samlal Singh (2001) demonstrated positive outcomes of the intervention, as children, their parents and the mentors all reported an increase in children's confidence, self-control and relationships. However, the evaluators also used standardised assessments of behaviour, academic performance, school attendance and exclusion and found that improvements following the mentoring intervention were only equal to improvements demonstrated by a comparison group of children who did not receive the intervention. The report raises the possibility that a longer period is needed to facilitate behavioural change in children but also that the findings could reflect difficulties with delivery of the solution-focused stage of mentoring. It was also highlighted that benchmarks need to be developed with regard to competencies and behaviour, to enable mentors to identify significant improvements (St James-Roberts & Samlal Singh, 2001).

In 1999, the Government's Department for Education and Skills (DfES), introduced an Excellence in Cities (EiC) programme, with the aim of improving the

educational achievement and social inclusion of children living in disadvantaged areas. Learning mentors were brought into schools as a main strand of this initiative. The aim was for learning mentors to work with staff in schools to identify, assess and support pupils who are experiencing barriers to learning. Barriers to learning were deemed to include behavioural problems, persistent absenteeism, problems with transfer from primary to secondary school, bereavement, difficulties at home, and poor study or organisational skills (Department for Education and Skills, 2001). The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), evaluated the effect of the Excellence in Cities initiative over a two-year period (Ofsted, 2003). In secondary schools, learning mentors were found to have a significant impact on pupils' attendance, behaviour, self-esteem and progress and the scheme was valued by pupils and parents (Ofsted, 2003). In primary schools, it was found that learning mentors had a positive impact on the attainment and inclusion of the children they work with. However, there was no positive impact on attendance and exclusions. The report recommends that, "Learning mentors need to be targeted more effectively at improving rates of attendance and reducing the number of pupils excluded from primary schools" (Ofsted, 2003, p.23).

The learning mentor strand of the Excellence in Cities initiative was also evaluated by a consortium commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). This study found that learning mentors had a positive impact on pupils' self-esteem and confidence in their abilities. Pupils were reported to have demonstrated improved behaviour and motivation in school. However, there was not sufficient evidence of a positive impact on the academic achievement of those pupils (Golden, Knight, O'Donnell, Smith, & Sims, 2003).

In conclusion, while the popularity of mentoring as an intervention for young people has been growing in a range of settings, including in an educational context, there has been limited research into the impact and outcomes of these

interventions. Where there has been evidence to suggest positive outcomes, these have usually been reported by the young people, their parents, teachers or mentors but have not been measured using standardised assessments. Furthermore, differing contexts, approaches to mentoring and focus and aims of the interventions make it difficult to generalise any findings.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In evaluating a service, two areas are of particular interest, namely process and outcome. Process evaluation refers to how the service is organised and delivered and will include the collection of output data that relate to the activities (Bowling, 2002). The evaluation of the processes involved can provide a sounder basis for outcome evaluation, as an understanding of what occurs in the service can enable causal links to outcomes to be identified (Robson, 1993). Outcome evaluation refers to measuring how effective the service is in achieving its aims. This allows examination of whether the service has made a difference to the people it serves. An evaluation during the relatively early days of a service enables a formative element as service development can be informed by the timely feedback of findings to service providers.

In planning the evaluation of the learning mentor service, it was necessary to consider the aims and structure of the service, in order to determine the process and outcome indicators to be used. The learning mentor service was commissioned to serve nine primary schools in the Blacon, College Ward and Boughton areas of Chester. The service consists of three learning mentors who work 30 hours a week, and a senior learning mentor who works 35 hours a week and has management responsibilities for the team. Mentors work part-time in the nine schools, typically carrying a caseload of approximately 12 children in each school. However, this has been variable and, if group work is incorporated into a mentor's work, the caseload can be as many as 40 children.

The overall aim of the learning mentor service, as identified in the service proposal submitted to the Cheshire Children's Fund, is to respond to and support children within the education system who are at risk of underachieving. The

learning mentors work with targeted groups of pupils in each of the schools in order to both identify barriers to learning and support children in overcoming them. Possible barriers to learning identified include attendance, punctuality, and lack of engagement in learning. The service also aims to develop positive links with home, school and other agencies, such as the Education Welfare Service, Behaviour Support Team, Sure Start and Family Education. However, the service proposal did not identify any specific outcome measures or milestones against which monitoring of progress could take place. This also posed problems for the evaluation since it was not clear what outcomes were being actively worked towards, nor what systems were in place for recording data relating to outcomes. Furthermore, limited outcome data was available from service providers and so the benefits of the service were self-reported, not based on systematic evidence. Therefore appropriate process and outcome indicators were developed for the evaluation, based on the general aims of the service. These indicators are described below. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were used. These are outlined in detail in the following sections.

3.2 Qualitative data collection

Qualitative data collection methods were used to provide both process and outcome indicators of success. Process indicators consist of comments from service providers and service users about their experiences relating to the implementation of the service in respect of its structure and delivery. Qualitative outcome indicators comprise the perceptions of service providers and service users with regard to the impact of the service.

3.2.1 The sample

Given the breadth of the learning mentor service, which covers nine schools in Chester, it was necessary to select a sample of schools within which the qualitative element of the evaluation would take place. As each learning mentor is allocated to different schools, a sample was selected that represented a school

from each of the mentor's allocation. In addition, the schools selected were illustrative of the different types of schools and demographic areas included in the cluster and comprised an infant school, a Church of England primary and two other primary schools in differing locations.

Each school in the sample was visited in order to collect qualitative data. Purposive sampling was used to select participants. Purposive sampling is a deliberately non-random method which is often used in qualitative work. It seeks to select people who have knowledge of a subject which is of value to the research process (Bowling 2002). Purposive sampling constitutes a judgement by the researcher as to who can provide the best information to achieve the objectives of the study. This type of sample is considered extremely useful in order to construct a historical reality, describe an event, or expand upon something about which only a little is known (Kumar, 1996).

Qualitative data collection therefore took place in participating schools with the following individuals: the link teacher for the learning mentor service, who is usually the head teacher or special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO); another teacher who had direct experience of the mentoring service; and a sample of children who had experienced an intervention from a learning mentor. In the case of child participants, the gatekeeper was the head teacher of the school, and access was negotiated at this level. The head teacher, the link teacher or other relevant teacher if the head teacher was the link teacher, and four children of varying ages who had received a learning mentor intervention, were interviewed in each school. Schools involved identified relevant teachers for participation, and children within the school who had received a learning mentor intervention. From this the researcher selected a sample of four children from each school for participation, which incorporated differing ages, genders and reasons for the intervention. In total, interviews were conducted with eight staff in schools and 16 children. All four learning mentors were also interviewed.

3.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

Qualitative data collection took place in the form of semi-structured interviews, in order to explore respondents' perceptions of, and responses to the intervention, and issues concerned with processes of delivery. Semi-structured interviews have a 'loose' structure consisting of open-ended questions that define the area to be explored, but allow the interviewer or interviewee to diverge in order to follow up particular areas in more detail (Britten, 1995). Thus, although the topics and questions that lead to exploring these areas may have been defined initially, the semi-structured format allows interviewees to express ideas that are important to them, and answers can be clarified and more complex issues probed than would be possible using a more structured approach (Bowling, 2002). Different interview schedules were developed in order to explore the position of the interviewee. See Appendix A for the three interview schedules used.

With the permission of the respondents, interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed to ensure accurate reporting of what was said. A thematic analysis was conducted on the interview transcripts, with data being coded by theme.

Adult respondents were provided with written information about the study prior to the interview. Participation in the evaluation was by voluntary informed consent, obtained by the researcher, following the opportunity to ask questions. As head teachers were the gatekeepers responsible for the child participants in their school, access to children was negotiated via them. All parents were informed by the school/head teacher of their child's participation and were given the right to object to participation and withdraw their child from the study.

3.3 Quantitative data collection

Quantitative data collection methods were also used to provide both process and outcome indicators of success. Quantitative data collected by service providers, which related to service outputs and (short term) service outcomes were collected

and analysed for the period between January 2004, when learning mentors began work in schools, to July 2004, the end of the academic year.

Referral forms for all children referred since the service started were collected and analysed to examine the profile of service users in terms of age, gender and reasons for referral. These data were used as process indicators to describe the implementation of the service through its activity.

Existing outcome data were collated in respect of a cohort of children who had received a learning mentor intervention in the schools selected for qualitative work. An intended outcome of the service, as identified in the service proposal, is to improve attendance and punctuality. Attendance and punctuality are therefore outcome indicators of success for the learning mentor service, and as such, this information was compiled for each child in the sample. Attendance and punctuality statistics were compared for each of the three terms of the current academic year. Figures for the last term of the previous academic year were also requested from schools, in order to provide a comparison. However, these were not used as the figures were not available in three of the four schools visited. The data collected were examined to assess the impact of the learning mentor service.

3.4 Ethics

In order to conduct this study, ethical approval was obtained from the Centre for Public Health Research Departmental Research Ethics Committee at University College Chester.

Chapter 4

Findings

Implementation of the service

4.1 A description of the learning mentor service

The learning mentors came into post in September 2003, having been appointed following an interview with three head teachers representing the head teachers from all nine schools. They were employed on a part-time basis as the head teachers considered this to be the only way to cover the number of schools in the cluster with the given budget. The learning mentors came from a variety of backgrounds with two having worked in teaching, one in nursing and one in management. They spent the first school term establishing the learning mentor service. Meetings were held with the head teacher and/or special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) in each of the nine schools to find out what was expected from the service. The learning mentor team leader was then tasked with compiling this information, while also investigating good practice regionally and nationally for learning mentors. The learning mentors decided who would be allocated which schools. This decision was based on pupil roll numbers in each school and resulted in all schools being offered a learning mentor for two or two and a half days per week except the smallest school, which was granted half a day per week. Consequently, three of the learning mentors, including the Team Leader, work in two schools each, while the fourth learning mentor works in three schools. In addition, the learning mentors meet together as a group for half a day per week, for information sharing and supervision purposes.

The learning mentor team put together documentation about their service, such as an information booklet for schools, and a referral form for use in schools (See Appendix B for an example referral form¹). Schools were provided with

¹ The original referral form has since been revised. Both versions are included in Appendix B.

information about who their learning mentor would be, which days they would be in school and how to make a referral. Head teachers were asked to designate a member of staff in school to act as the lead link between the learning mentor and school. This is usually either the head teacher or the SENCO but can be any teacher. Referral forms for the service, designed by the learning mentors, list the following range of difficulties and ask the person making the referral to select the focus of intervention needed:

- attendance;
- punctuality;
- social skills;
- standard of work/underachievement;
- low self-esteem/withdrawn;
- poor concentration;
- poor behaviour;
- bullying behaviour;
- other.

Any member of staff within schools can make a referral using the appropriate form. The referral is passed to the learning mentor who discusses it with the lead link in school. A decision is then made as to if and when the child is added to the caseload, depending on the learning mentor's current caseload and the child's needs. Once the decision is made to offer the child a service, a letter is sent home to parents, who are asked to sign a consent form if they agree to their child seeing a learning mentor. It is reported that, to date, no parent has declined to give consent for their child to see a learning mentor.

During this first half-term, the learning mentor team leader also made contact with other relevant agencies, such as the Behaviour Support Team, to network and increase awareness of their services. The learning mentors undertook training at this time, such as training in anger management, to equip them for their work in

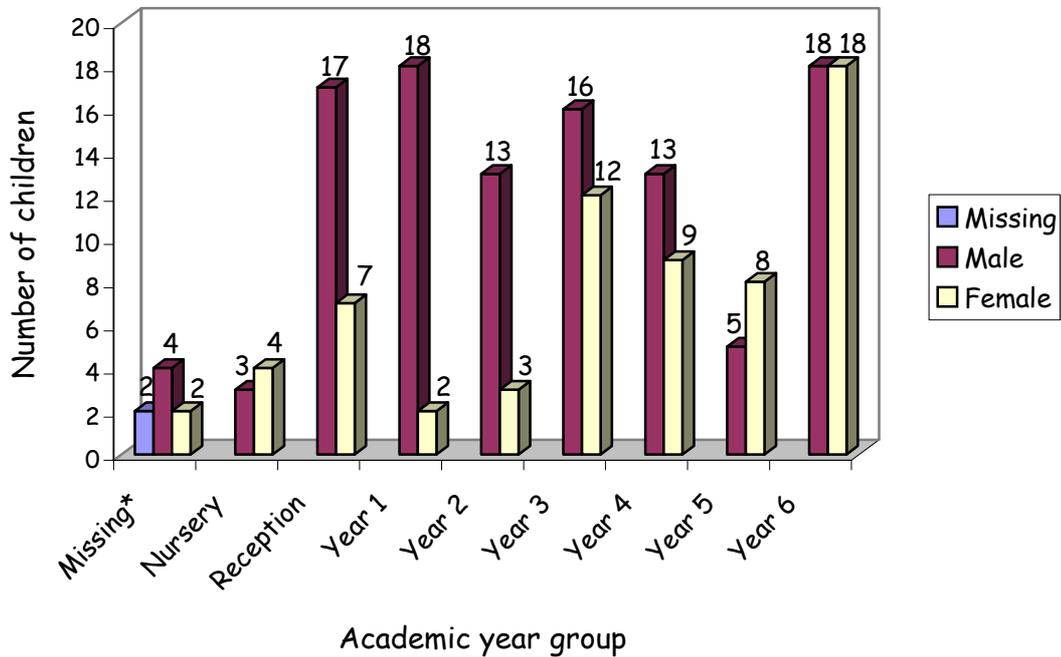
schools. A list of all training undertaken since September 2003 can be found in Appendix C. During the second half-term, in November and December 2003, the learning mentors began to spend time in their allocated schools, familiarising themselves with the schools, staff and children. They began to accept referrals and work with children in January 2004.

The learning mentors work with individual or groups of children, either in the classroom or outside of the classroom, dependent upon the focus of the intervention and the requirements of the individual school. Since January 2004, when the learning mentors began accepting referrals, until the end of the academic year in July 2004, a total of 174 children had accessed the service. Of these, by July 2004, 20 children had exited the service. Table 4.1.1 presents a summary of the number of children who have accessed the learning mentor service, grouped by academic year group. Figure 4.1.1 demonstrates the number of referrals by gender and year group.

Table 4.1.1 Number of children who accessed the learning mentor service between January 2004 and July 2004 in the nine cluster schools

Academic Year	Total
Nursery	7
Reception	24
Year 1	20
Year 2	16
Year 3	28
Year 4	22
Year 5	13
Year 6	36
Year group not recorded	8
Total	174

Figure 4.1.1 Gender and age group of children who accessed the learning mentor service between January 2004 and July 2004



* On 2 referral forms the child's gender was not indicated. On 6 referral forms, the child's year group was not indicated (4 boys and 2 girls)

It is evident from Figure 4.1.1 that more boys than girls were referred to the learning mentor service in every year group, except Nursery and Year 5, where more girls than boys were referred, and in Year 6, where equal numbers of boys and girls were referred. Overall, 107 boys accessed the service compared with 65 girls (gender was not indicated on two referral forms).

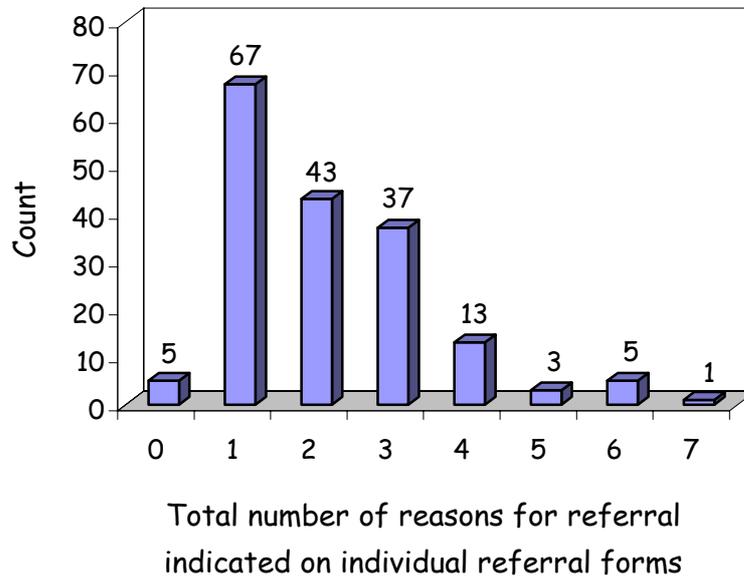
The reasons for referral for each of the children who accessed the learning mentor service between January 2004 and July 2004 are summarised below (see Table 4.1.2). It should be noted that the majority of children were referred for more than one reason, as illustrated in Figure 4.1.2.

Table 4.1.2. Reasons for referral to the learning mentor service

Focus of intervention requested	Number of referral forms on which this focus is indicated
Standard of work/underachievement	60
Poor concentration	57
Low self esteem/withdrawn	52
Other	51
Social skills	47
Poor behaviour	38
Attendance	24
Punctuality	24
Bullying behaviour	15
Total number of reasons indicated	368
Total number of children referred	174

Where the reason for referral included 'other', the actual reason was not always specified. However, on 23 referral forms where this was specified, the focus of intervention requested was reading. Other reasons given included English language development, 'TLC', issues regarding delayed development and concerns about children being tired or agitated.

Figure 4.1.2. Number of different reasons for referral of individual children



Of the 67 children who were referred for just one reason, for 24 children the reason for referral was 'Other' (18 of these were referred for help with reading); for 17 children the reason was 'Standard of work/underachievement'; and for 13 children the reason was 'Low self-esteem/withdrawn'.

The process of children exiting from the learning mentor service varies between schools. In some schools it was the intention to establish a set timescale of six weeks for the delivery of the intervention, whereas in other schools the child continues to see the learning mentor until the learning mentor and lead link teacher consider that the child no longer requires the service.

4.2 Attendance and punctuality data

An intended outcome of the service is to improve attendance and punctuality. Attendance and punctuality figures for each of the four children interviewed in each school were requested from the four schools in the sample. The figures for the final term of the previous academic year were also requested to provide a comparison. However, as these were found to be only available from one of the

four schools, they were not included. The attendance and punctuality figures for the 16 children included in the sample are presented below.

4.2.1 Attendance figures for the school year 2003-2004

Attendance figures for schools in England and primary schools in Cheshire for 2003/04 are presented in the following table. This puts the data from the children from the specific schools into context as it provides a comparison with local and national absence rates.

Table 4.2.1.1 Pupil absence in primary schools in England and Cheshire in 2003/04. (Source: Department for Education and Skills, 2004)

	Maintained primary schools in England	Maintained primary schools in Cheshire
Authorised absences	5.08%	4.38%
Unauthorised absences	0.41%	0.39%
Total absences	5.49%	4.77%

Attendance figures for the sample of children are given below. Children for whom attendance was selected as a reason for referral are indicated by emboldened text.

Table 4.2.1.2 Attendance figures for the school year 2003-2004 for children included in the sample

School A			
Percentage of total absences			
	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Child 1	6.2	0	6.2
Child 2	11.6	3.4	4.2
Child 3	0	7.6	3.2
Child 4	17.8	6.3	26
School B			
Percentage of total absences			
	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Child 1	7.5	6.8	16.0
Child 2	33.6	12.7	17.9
Child 3	27.1	14.4	22.6
Child 4	0.7	3.4	5.7
School C			
Percentage of total absences			
	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Child 1	6.9	2.5	13.0
Child 2	11	8.3	7.4
Child 3	8.6	5.0	5.6
Child 4	0	0	1.9
School D			
Percentage of total absences			
	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Child 1	20.5	45.3	34.0
Child 2	6.2	18.8	24.5
Child 3	4.8	2.6	0
Child 4	1.4	0	7.5

Analysis of these figures has proved difficult as attendance figures were not available for the period before the intervention. Attendance figures for each child for the periods prior to and following the learning mentor intervention are needed in order to assess the impact. It should also be noted that the majority of children have not yet exited the service and it would be attendance figures for the period following the intervention that would be used as an outcome measure. However, these figures do demonstrate that schools are targeting children with

serious attendance problems and so the potential exists to show the impact of the intervention if these figures were to be recorded.

4.2.2 Punctuality figures for the school year 2003-2004

Children for whom punctuality was selected as a reason for referral are indicated by emboldened font.

Table 4.2.2.1 Punctuality figures for the school year 2003-2004 for children included in the sample

School A			
Percentage of school sessions that child arrived late			
	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Child 1	0.7	0.8	0
Child 2	0.7	0.8	0
Child 3	9.6	8.5	2.8
Child 4	17.1	7.6	14.6
School B			
Percentage of school sessions that child arrived late			
	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Child 1	0	0.8	0
Child 2	3.5	0	4.7
Child 3	1.4	0.8	3.8
Child 4	0	0	0
School C			
Percentage of school sessions that child arrived late			
	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Child 1	2.1	0.8	4.6
Child 2	4.1	4.2	1.9
Child 3	0	2.5	1.9
Child 4	0	0	0
School D			
Percentage of school sessions that child arrived late			
	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Child 1	22.6	26.5	26.5
Child 2	7.6	19.7	15.1
Child 3	0	0.9	8.5
Child 4	0.7	0	0

As was the case with attendance, punctuality figures were not available from the period preceding the learning mentor intervention. These figures are needed, along with figures following the intervention, to assess the impact of the intervention on punctuality. As was also noted with regard to the attendance figures, the punctuality figures show that children with serious punctuality problems are being targeted and therefore the potential exists to show whether the learning mentor intervention is effective in tackling punctuality and attendance, if the relevant data were to be collected.

Chapter 5

Findings from the interviews

5.1 Introduction

The analysis of the interviews with learning mentors, teachers, head teachers, and children is presented in a number of sections. Firstly, issues relating to establishing the learning mentor service are explored. The next section examines service delivery. The perceived benefits and limitations of the service are then presented, followed by an examination of the outcomes of the service for children. The final section focuses on issues to consider and possible future directions for the service.

The term respondent is used to refer to the learning mentors, teachers, head teachers, and children interviewed. Quotations from respondents are presented to illustrate the findings.

5.2 Starting out

The issues raised by respondents in relation to the introduction and establishment of the learning mentor service are presented in the following section.

5.2.1 Establishing the service

Respondents indicated differing expectations between learning mentors and head teachers with regard to the establishment of the learning mentor service and the guidance to be given. The learning mentors had anticipated that they would receive guidance from the head teachers as to how the service should be developed but reported that this was not the case. One respondent, a learning mentor, commented:

'... I think initially I don't particularly think that they wanted to take ownership of the project. I think that's for all of them. I think they thought it was a really good idea but didn't really know what the mentoring role was or how they envisaged it working in their own particular schools... I was quite disappointed because nobody actually wanted to, or seemed to want to, take a lead in the project at all.' (007).

All of the learning mentors reported that they had anticipated that some initial arrangements for the service would be in place when they started in post and had been surprised to find this was not the case. One learning mentor described the initial establishment of the service in the following way:

'Challenging, difficult, we didn't have a room initially, we had to borrow a room in (name of school) and it was basically left up to us. I don't think anybody actually knew what, once they'd had the money and the okay, I don't think they quite knew then what was going to develop. And we were basically, we've done it ourselves, we've had no guidance... I think we would have just appreciated a bit more input or for them to have had more idea of what they actually wanted before it started.' (008).

The learning mentors spent the first school term establishing the service, undergoing training and familiarising themselves with the schools they would be working in. They all considered this time was crucial, although they reported that they felt some pressure from head teachers who were keen for them to begin accepting referrals sooner. One learning mentor explained:

'And I felt the head teachers were thinking, well when are they coming into school, when are they starting?... But I think the preparation we did was absolutely essential. Obviously those first few months we met here every day together as a team and planned what we were going to do. We did all our networking... So now in school obviously for signposting and things like that you feel that you have got a little bit of an idea and I would advise learning mentors not to sort of rush in.' (001).

5.2.2 Management structure

The introduction and development of the learning mentor service has raised issues regarding communication and the co-ordination of the project. The learning mentor team leader manages the service on an operational level, while also working in schools. Two head teachers act as project leads, on behalf of all the head teachers involved, and have ultimate responsibility for the project. It has reportedly proved difficult due to time constraints for the head teachers involved with managing the service and the learning mentor team leader to meet to discuss issues relating to the introduction and delivery of the service. The view was expressed that decisions affecting the service, such as matters relating to the budget, are made at times without the involvement of the learning mentor team leader.

5.2.3 Introduction into schools

Before beginning work in schools, the learning mentors met with each head teacher to discuss what the role of the learning mentor would be in his or her school. The introduction into schools had its difficulties, for both the learning mentors and staff in schools, perceived to be due to the lack of clarity about this new role. One learning mentor made the following comment on this issue:

'I think because we are new and the teachers weren't too sure, head teachers weren't too sure because it was a new scheme in Cheshire, they really weren't too sure what our role was - where we would be working, how we were going to work with the children, even whereabouts in school we were going to be working. So that was quite hard.' (002).

Teachers and head teachers also spoke about a lack of clarity about what the role of learning mentors was going to be in school, as illustrated by the following quotation from a SENCO:

'Initially when the learning mentor came to us, myself and the head teacher and the learning mentor had a meeting to try and define the role which we found quite hard because it was a completely new role. We found it very difficult that the learning mentor had quite a wide understanding of her role and it would have been more helpful if her role had been more prescribed to us. So we identified areas in the school that we felt were cause for concern and weren't being addressed in that meeting and we then decided then how we felt that she could best address them...' (O12).

Attitudes among respondents to the time spent by the learning mentors on establishing the service and undergoing training were mixed. Some respondents were sympathetic to the situation of the learning mentors. One respondent commented:

'I think it took a while to get, I mean I think they've had a really difficult job, you know they've been thrown into a job that didn't exist, they've had to develop their own job. And I think that's difficult. I think its working quite well now but it was quite a slow start and it wasn't anybody's fault.' (O06).

Other respondents said they would have liked the learning mentors to begin working in schools earlier than they did but indicated that the time spent on training and establishing the service was necessary. Others felt that it encroached on time the learning mentors should have spent in school. However, one respondent thought that the preparation was not adequate, saying:

'We weren't too happy initially. We felt they had been put into schools too early and we felt that their role should have been more clearly defined. They should have had greater training and greater guidance coming into schools.' (O12).

5.3. Service delivery

The views of respondents regarding the way in which the learning mentor service has been delivered are explored in the following sections.

5.3.1 Focus of intervention

Most respondents reported that the aim of the learning mentor team is to help children to overcome barriers to learning that they are experiencing. Possible barriers to learning were said to be numerous and included attendance, punctuality, difficulties with self-esteem, behaviour or social skills, problems with literacy or numeracy, lack of parental support at home or poor links between home and school. Some respondents commented that the service aims to provide early intervention, as the following quotation illustrates:

'I have to say, it is very little to do with attendance but the effects, I would say it is more for the possibility of children who could become disaffected with school. It is trying to aim from predictions that these children might later on not want to come to school and the role, it is really very wide.' (009).

Some head teachers have chosen particular areas that they wanted the learning mentor to focus on in their school, as one learning mentor explained:

'My role as a learning mentor in school is to help children and their families, well especially for the children who are underachieving in school, to achieve. The role of the learning mentor in school is to look at attendance, punctuality and sort of 'behaviour', which is things like self-esteem, motivation, organisation. You know it covers a vast area and not all schools actually want you to do all those things. So in individual schools you know your role is quite diverse and a little bit more complex.' (007).

The way in which the learning mentor service has developed differently in individual schools appears to be linked to the initial lack of understanding about what the role of the learning mentor would be. However, some respondents expressed the view that this resulted in a positive outcome as it has led to flexibility in response according to the needs of the individual schools. One of the respondents, a head teacher, commented:

'What I will say, one of the difficulties of setting up a scheme and hitting the ground running, has been that we've had this notion of what a learning support mentor did, none of the head teachers had personal experience of what a learning support mentor did. We had job descriptions of what they could do, and it was really trying to negotiate what was best for our own schools. And I think you'll find if you were to ask all nine schools they use the learning support mentors in a totally different way.' (O11).

5.3.2 Identification and referral of children

Any member of staff in school can make referrals to the learning mentor, using the referral form designed by the learning mentors (See Appendix B for an example referral form.) The learning mentor discusses referrals with the SENCO in school or the lead link if this is not the SENCO. Often more than one area is indicated on the referral form by the referrer as requiring intervention. A learning mentor made the following comment on this issue:

'So they refer to me for lots and lots of different reasons. Most of the time they tick every box. Low self-esteem, behaviour problems, social interaction. They probably just tick everything. So you have got everything to deal with there.' (O02).

The overarching reason that children are identified and referred to the learning mentor is, therefore, that they are underachieving in school because they are experiencing 'barriers to learning'. Some respondents described these 'barriers to learning' as being distinct from special educational needs. Children identified as having special educational needs are supported by the SENCO, although in some schools this does not exclude them from also receiving support from the learning mentor. One respondent, a SENCO, explained that the role of the learning mentor and the focus of the interventions differ from her own role in the following way:

'So its anything that's stopping them from learning really, or achieving, but separate from the learning aspect of it because that's what I do basically. So I don't, she's not there to teach the children literacy skills, she's there to talk about other barriers as to why they're not learning or why they're not coming to school, or why, you know, they're late for school.' (006).

5.3.3 Structure of intervention

The structure of the learning mentor intervention can differ both within and between schools, dependent upon the focus of the intervention and the decision made by the head teacher as to how the service will be delivered within their school. The learning mentors work with individual children, pairs or groups of children. They work within the classroom or withdraw the children to work with them outside of the classroom. Sometimes they may work in the playground. In some schools the learning mentor also aims to develop links with parents.

The content of the work they undertake with the children differs according to the focus of the intervention and can be very varied, as the following quotation, from one of the learning mentors, illustrates:

'The main areas I am working in one school are attendance and punctuality. So those children are identified and I meet with them for a half hour session a week and we set plans to what would help them get to school on time and things like that. I am heavily involved in working in the playground developing new ideas, new playground games, just bringing back traditional games. Organising all the children to be involved with other children. I do some things in class, things like listening to children read or the teacher has identified that there is a specific problem in class and she wants some support in the class with a particular difficulty... to remind them how to behave in class, that sort of thing...and then I see children individually on self-esteem issues or behavioural issues.' (001).

The content of the work when the focus is self-esteem was said by some respondents to be secondary to the opportunity for children to have someone to talk to. One learning mentor commented:

'Self-esteem I've done quite a bit on. There are quite a lot of children out there who've got so many problems that a lot of my day is spent simply just talking and they might be drawing a picture or doing a worksheet but that's almost secondary to the fact that they feel comfortable enough to just talk about anything and everything or some specific issue.' (008).

A further issue that affected the structure of the intervention was the accommodation and resources available to the learning mentor in school. One learning mentor explained that in one school she has been given her own room, where she can work with children and store her equipment. However, in the other school she does not have a base and therefore works in the classroom or the playground.

Some view the learning mentor intervention as a 'rolling programme' of support that can be accessed as and when children need it. One respondent commented that:

'...some children will need to be seen you know for a considerable amount of time, others would just be on and off depending on what's going on in their lives at the time.' (006).

In contrast, another respondent explained that in his/her school

'Well, we have an agreement that there will be, because of the number of referrals, we can only give them six weeks worth and then we move on.' (011).

5.3.4 Assessment of children's progress

The assessment and review of children's progress while receiving the learning mentor intervention tends to be ongoing and informal. As one respondent, a SENCO, explained:

'At the moment it's, it's really between the class teacher and (the learning mentor). So they will discuss how it's going, if it's not working out then we'll all talk about different strategies that they can try, or that (the learning mentor) can try.' (006).

Target setting and the measurement of outcomes for children was perceived to be more straightforward for certain areas of intervention, such as behaviour or reading, than for other areas. In particular, self-esteem was judged to be an area that respondents found difficult to measure. This is illustrated by the following quotation, from a learning mentor:

'It can be as simple as - I will sit on my chair for 5 minutes this week and not get up. That can be a real milestone for some of them because they're up and down all the time. Others have learning outcomes specifically some that I see for reading because they might not read very much at home so we do one to one reading sessions. Some of those their reading's been quite good because they have improved, you can see the progression and they can see the progressions themselves between the various levels on the reading scheme... Behaviour outcomes I think are more easy to see than the more emotional and self-esteem outcomes, they can be really quite hard to quantify whether you've been successful or not. And quite often it's only through hearsay from what people have said that you know somebody's much more engaged in the playground and is playing with peers rather than being isolated. But it can be quite difficult to actually physically pinpoint or say yes that's been met because it's a very delicate balance.' (008).

However, some respondents did suggest the need to clarify the focus of learning mentor interventions, which would then enable goals to be set and children's

progress measured and evaluated. One respondent made the following comments about the work of the learning mentor in school with regard to this issue:

'... so I find that a little more difficult because I think to measure success you need a success criteria really... So I think on that side I just think that needs perhaps tweaking a little bit and perhaps you know tightening up a bit. So we know and we all know what their, you know including (learning mentor), what the focus is, why is she seeing them and what are they working towards... I mean its difficult to evaluate isn't unless there's some success criteria at the end of it... We all know yes improve self-esteem but perhaps a bit more focused on why we're doing it, what we would like to see at the end... But some sort of measurement I think is important, proof that it is actually working, although we all know and we can all say we've got this gut feeling. And we've seen the children happier and ... but just have that written down somewhere perhaps a formal evaluation.' (006).

5.3.5 Exiting from the service

Discussion about children exiting the learning mentor service raised several issues. Some respondents, who work from children's individual education plans (IEPs), said that children would be ready to exit the service if they had met the targets on their IEP. Other respondents referred to the aim of the intervention, saying that children would exit the service if these aims were met. The decision as to whether or not children have reached their aim tends to be made as a judgement on the part of the professionals involved, rather than being based on formal assessment. As the following respondent, who is a SENCO, stated:

'So it is a discussion between (the learning mentor), the class teacher and myself... It would depend on whether she felt the aim had been reached or if the aim was unachievable. So it is down to professionalism and down to judgement, which is quite subjective.' (012).

Respondents indicated that there is sometimes a reluctance to exit children from the learning mentor service. This reluctance was said by respondents to occur with

children wanting to continue, or parents, teachers or the learning mentors feeling that the child should continue. One learning mentor said of a child she was seeing:

'He seemed a lot happier but even though now I feel that perhaps I can back away a little bit, he still wants me to be there. He still needs to spend time talking to me.' (002).

Another learning mentor described how she had told one child that if she does have any problems in the new academic term she can meet with her to discuss them, rather than not come to school. Similarly, this learning mentor explained that sometimes when parents are involved, it can take a while for them to become comfortable and then they may ask for support with another issue. Some respondents felt that at times the teacher wants the intervention to continue because the children 'need a lot of input' (008). This learning mentor talked about how she has started seeing some children less frequently, as a 'gradual exit strategy' (008).

Some respondents described a difficulty in achieving a balance between not exiting children before they are ready and meeting the demands of other children who would benefit from a service. This is illustrated in the following quotations, from a teacher and a learning mentor respectively:

'So it is when they get to a certain point and the next round comes through and you think, right well these children need to go soon, so which children are ready to move on? So it might be that in some situations we are perhaps moving them on quicker than they need to but you are conscious all the time that you have only got this certain slot, and it is such a valuable thing and you want to share it with as many children as possible really.' (004).

'So once they're referred, we discuss with the teacher, you know, what we are going to do, six weeks is normally a good time, because that's a half term. And it's kind of like, at the discretion of me and the teacher really. If we think that that child for some reason could do with continuing for another six weeks after the half term, then that's what we

do... then I've got different children that they want to refer, so we've got to try and find a balance, which is probably quite hard really...' (001).

However, some respondents felt that the exit criteria for the learning mentor service needs to be defined more clearly. As the following respondent explained:

'Now that is something I think we have got to develop as well and I have talked to the learning mentor about it because I felt we hadn't got a point of them leaving her. We haven't actually had any children who have finished seeing her yet and I feel we have got to develop that next term because obviously they can't go on forever... I think she and I need to work together to see when it stops and when we make room for other children as well. We haven't got a leaving criteria. There could be so many different criteria really for leaving but I feel that that is the major thing we haven't sorted out.' (009).

One respondent described how once children leave the learning mentor service, there are times that the work that has been done can be continued in class:

'And then perhaps, things like, with our talking partners games and things, once they have done their time with our learning mentor, they might say OK we will get our classroom assistant to start talking partners group up here with three of these children and carry on that way because had they not had the time before they wouldn't be ready to do talking partners because it is the whole listening and doing thing. So in some respects she is sort of the stepping stone to that really.' (004).

Another respondent, who is a SENCO, commented that if the learning mentor intervention is not successful for a child, then that can be an indication that the child needs to be referred to a different level of support:

'But you know say it's a behaviour concern and its not working and they're not any better in class then I would probably pick that up and take that further because that's one sort of element that we would try sort of wave 1, wave 2 and then I would pick it up from there really.' (006).

5.3.6 Working relationships between learning mentors and teachers

The relationship between learning mentors and teachers also emerged as a theme. Respondents made the point that the pastoral care of children in school has traditionally been part of the teacher's role but that it is increasingly difficult for teachers to address this fully, due to the pressure of delivering the curriculum and growing demands on their time. The following comments on this issue were made by a teacher and a learning mentor respectively:

'It's always happened, its just that there hasn't been somebody there with the special hat on, if you know what I mean. We're all aware of the children who need particular, its just a time issue really, that you are spreading yourself a little more thinly.' (010)

'... I think they see us just as an extra, teachers today it takes them all their time to actually teach and they knew that they've got children in their class who need some pastoral care or something extra. And they physically haven't got the hours to do it.' (008).

One learning mentor explained that while some teachers are happy to share this role, others have been more reluctant to pass on information about the children's history and background. This learning mentor felt this was a result of lack of understanding about her role, exacerbated by the fact that she is only in school part-time. She commented:

'I think it is probably quite difficult for some teachers who feel quite protective of their class maybe to tell somebody that they don't really know very well and aren't completely sure about the role and I feel that is something that will develop. We are only in school two and a half days a week and as I say we are not part of staff meetings. So perhaps that is something that would help really.' (001).

Indeed, some respondents commented that as teachers came to understand the role of the learning mentors and have seen them working in school, they have become more positive about their work.

The importance of communication between learning mentors and teachers was highlighted. One respondent, a head teacher, explained that they are going to build in time next year for the learning mentor to meet with staff to provide feedback about her work. Equally, the following quotation, from a learning mentor who would like more feedback from teachers, illustrates the importance of communication between learning mentors and teachers. It also raises consistency of approach between the two as being important to enable joined up working within the school setting:

'And I think sometimes you needed the teachers to come back, more feedback from the teacher. How they wanted you to work and what area of self-esteem. And also you wanted the teacher to give you a time and also then to come back, sort of feedback, and then strategies you both could adopt. Because I think, with mentoring, you can have your own little strategies, your own targets, but they also need to be carried through in class as well.' (002).

This respondent went on to say that the teachers she works with have now begun to adopt strategies she suggests and are very supportive of her role but that finding time to have discussions is a difficulty.

5.4 Benefits

The perceived benefits of the learning mentor service related to the structure of the service, the nature of the intervention and the position of the learning mentors as external to school. These are discussed in the following sections.

5.4.1 Structure of the service

Benefits of the learning mentor service, according to respondents, include the flexible nature of its delivery. One respondent commented that in school, staff had appreciated being able to change and develop the structure of the service over time, to best meet the needs of the children. Another respondent explained:

'... that's the great thing about having them in school, you can have an informal arrangement as well, you say, right can we adjust your timetable this week? We had a child who was a school refuser, and she worked with this child for a couple of weeks as he got in a phased return back to school and that worked really well.' (O11).

This ability of the learning mentors to respond quickly to referrals was perceived by respondents to be particularly beneficial. The service was contrasted favourably with certain other services that schools refer children to, which respond considerably more slowly due to long waiting lists.

5.4.2 Quality time

Respondents also considered having an extra adult in school, with time to dedicate to individual children, as a benefit of the service. One respondent, a head teacher, commented:

'I think the fact that she's got time to give children that busy class teachers with 30-odd haven't got time to give them. Because I think, you know a lot of situations do actually need that sort of either one-to-one or small group situation.' (O05).

The time children spent with learning mentors was perceived by some respondents as 'quality time', with the benefits arising from individual attention from an adult.

One respondent commented:

'And when you see particularly these children, when you start understanding what is happening in the background. They bring with them so many things on their shoulders and very often that is all they need, that person to speak to them, giving them the time and really focus on their needs. Not the curriculum and are you getting through it. It is what is that child's needs whether it is talking to them about issues that they want.' (O03).

5.4.3 Early intervention/prevention

Some respondents stated that the learning mentors are able to offer support to children who would otherwise be unsupported, as their needs would not be severe enough to warrant referral to any other service. This is illustrated in the following quotation:

'She works with the children who nobody else either has the time or specifically can't take on an individual basis... And some children who we are quite concerned about, there is not such great concern that we can refer them to social services or there is no neglect there but we feel that they need some greater input that we haven't got the time to give. We can give behaviour targets and we can do the circle time and if they have got learning difficulties, we can do the particular programmes but when it is more specific for individuals, we can't do that really. The resources don't allow it but (the learning mentor) can.' (O12).

Early intervention and the possible prevention of the development of future problems were therefore perceived to be benefits of the service. Some respondents expressed the hope that the service would prevent children from becoming disaffected.

5.4.4 Learning mentors as external to school

Further benefits of the service were seen to stem from the fact that learning mentors are external to school, they are not employed as teachers or as members of the school staff. This was thought to have benefits for children, parents and school staff. The benefit for children was said to be having someone in school they can approach for help, who is not a teacher and who they can therefore relate to in another way. One respondent, who is a learning mentor, explained:

'Having somebody they can turn to at any time as a friend. Somebody that they can tell their problems to there and then. They don't have to wait until the end of the class. You are not judgemental at all in any way. If they are unhappy about something you do your best to help them. Often you can. Often it is something that is worrying them and you can resolve that problem.' (O02).

Parents were perceived to be more comfortable in engaging with the learning mentors because they are external to school. Respondents commented that some parents are anxious about coming into school, due to their own negative experiences of schooling. It was reported that as learning mentors are not teachers, they have been able to develop positive relationships with parents whom school staff have previously found it difficult to engage. One respondent, who is a head teacher, made the following comments on this issue:

'... a lot of parents still have the view that you know I will only see them if there's trouble. But it isn't always the case. And I think a lot of that's down to people's own experiences of schools themselves. So I think somebody like (learning mentor) is seen as more of a neutral person, whereas you know she's not coming in any sort of threatening way, you know she tries to be very, very supportive in her approach. So I think that's a real strength.' (005).

Learning mentors being external to school was also thought to have benefits for school staff as the learning mentor could provide an additional point of view. One respondent commented:

'The strengths are, it's firstly, someone from the outside looking in, which is always useful, fresh pair of eyes, and secondly somebody that's not tied to the classroom, which means that's somebody that can take time to look at these children.' (011).

5.5 Limitations

Respondents named the limited time learning mentors have in schools, particular practical issues, and concerns around funding, as limitations of the service. These are explored in the following sections.

5.5.1 Limited time in schools

Limitations of the service were considered by respondents to include the limited amount of time that learning mentors spend in each school. As each learning mentor is allocated two or three schools and half a day a week is spent meeting as

a team, each school receives between half a day to two and a half days per week of learning mentor time, depending on the size of the school. Respondents commented that it can be difficult to find time for learning mentors and staff to have meetings, due to the limited time that learning mentors are in school and the fact that they are only contracted to work school hours. One respondent explained:

'... the fact that she's not here after school but again we're talking about hours aren't we then, you know more hours. Because if she was paid more hours then she could stay after school. That's when we tend as teachers to have our meetings and things because it's hard, well you can't when you're teaching. And you could catch more parents after school. I mean at the moment she's catching parents after school in her own time. So there's that issue really.' (006).

Similarly, the point was made that as learning mentors are not in school everyday, it could be that they are not able to respond immediately to issues that arise, as they may not be due to return until the following week. These difficulties were felt both by staff in schools and the learning mentors themselves. One learning mentor commented:

'I find it so frustrating. I would love to be in one school Monday to Friday and I would also like to be in there longer because it's very difficult, usually if you're seeing parents out of school it's out of the, you know it's out of your 30 hours, it's extra. So I would like to work full-time in one particular school and for every school to have one mentor.' (008).

The majority of respondents commented that they would like an increase in the amount of learning mentor time that the school is allocated. The ideal situation was perceived to be having one learning mentor working full-time in each school.

5.5.2 Practical issues

Learning mentors also described some practical issues as having a constraining factor. These included the lack of a base for the learning mentor to work from

and store equipment in, within some schools. Also, they have experienced some difficulties in setting timetables, as teachers are reluctant to allow children to be withdrawn from certain lessons, such as literacy and numeracy.

5.5.3 Funding

A further restraint on the introduction and delivery of the learning mentor service was said to be uncertainty around funding from the Cheshire Children's Fund. Respondents reported difficulties encountered with planning and managing the budget, due to changes in the allocated funding. One respondent made the following comment on this issue:

'... we set the budget in April, only to be found at one point they were actually going to terminate the scheme in September. Then to be told in May we were going to have it back but were going to be six thousand short, having already committed ourselves to a budget. And we're still wrestling with that problem of how to maintain the budget...' (O11)

This uncertainty with regard to funding was thought to have had implications for the recruitment and retention of the learning mentors.

5.6 Outcomes for children

The outcomes for children are discussed in the following sections, firstly from the adults' perspectives and then from the perspectives of the children.

5.6.1 Comments from teachers, head teachers and learning mentors

The teachers, head teachers and learning mentors outlined what they perceived to be the outcomes of the service for children. There were perceived improvements in children's behaviour, self-esteem, attendance and punctuality.

In one school, the learning mentor had been working with the children on the playground and has supported midday assistants. The head teacher commented on the positive effects this has had on children's behaviour:

'So I've noticed an impact out there. I've noticed that, not only are children behaving better, they're just co-operating more as well. So there's a better ethos on the playground as a result.' (O11).

This head teacher also commented that there had been a 'marked drop' in the number of lunchtime exclusions as a result of the work the learning mentor has done.

Some respondents reported that the punctuality and attendance of certain children had improved due to the learning mentor intervention. A head teacher commented that number of unauthorised absences from school had decreased since the previous year.

There was a general feeling expressed by respondents that children had benefited from the service in a variety of ways. The comments were mainly anecdotal in nature and the point was made that improvements could not necessarily be attributed to the learning mentor intervention, or at least solely to it. One respondent explained:

'I think my children that have gone and worked with our learning mentor, they have all made, I mean obviously they have made different leaps and what have you, but they have all definitely improved. You can't ever obviously determine whether it is just because of that or whether they would have anyway but it has made a difference to those children. So that is the only benchmark that I have got really.' (O04).

Children's self-esteem was said by some respondents to have improved, although this similarly was considered to be difficult to measure, as illustrated by the following quotation:

'And there are children that have had their self-esteem raised, I know it's a difficult thing to quantify, but you can just tell when you look at those children that they are not as inward as they were. And they're responding much better in group situations, making better choices as well... And children that, going back to the self-esteem again, children that have their self-esteem raised, they generally behave better, work better as a result of it. And attend better.' (O11).

5.6.2 Findings from the interviews with children

Children in the younger age group (Reception, Year One and Year Two) reported that they enjoyed seeing the learning mentor. The reasons given for this included that they were able to play games and draw and that they receive stickers from the learning mentor. The children in this age group did not demonstrate an understanding of the purpose of their time with the learning mentor. Where children did suggest reasons why they see the learning mentor, they thought it was because they were good at a particular activity or because the learning mentor chose them. When asked about the activities they do with the learning mentor, most children said that they play or they play games and some children said that they draw.

Children in the older age range (Years Three, Four, Five and Six), reported doing the following activities with their learning mentor:

- making a poster about friends and partners;
- making masks;
- designing things;
- playground pals;
- playing games;
- reading;
- doing hard words.

All children said they enjoyed seeing the learning mentor, most saying this was because they did things that were fun or that they received stickers or certificates. One child said she enjoyed the opportunity to read to the learning mentor. Another child said she enjoyed being out of the classroom:

'Well it's good for me because we then, we don't have to sit in class.' (027).

Some of these children were not able to say why they were seeing the learning mentor and gave the reason that a letter was sent home requesting their parents' permission. Other children in this older group did have an idea of why they had been referred. Several children gave the reason that it was because they found reading difficult, as in the following example:

'So I can learn better... reading, sometimes I can't read.' (027).

One child said it was for reasons to do with his behaviour, explaining it in the following way:

'Because say if you've been like naughty, say if like someone's teasing you and instead of taking it out on your own hands and you go in and like talk to her and say that.' (028).

The children who said that they were seeing the learning mentor for support with their literacy reported that they had benefited from the intervention and that their reading or writing had improved as a result. This is illustrated in the following quotations:

'... and then I left her because I was good at reading... I was good at reading now, when I come and saw (learning mentor) and then I left (learning mentor) because I'd read all the books that was on the stages, so I could read them proper.' (023).

'I've got on with my reading better and I've got on with my writing better.' (027).

One child commented that on the days she sees the learning mentor, she tells her mum that she does not want to be late for school because she is seeing the learning mentor first thing in the morning. She said that this helps her to get to school on time, as her mum tells her:

'Yes, alright, but you have got to go to bed early, and things like, if you go to bed early then you will wake up in the morning dead early.' (O10).

Children also thought there had been some positive outcomes for behaviour, with improvements in behaviour on the playground due to the introduction of games and activities by the learning mentor. The child who reported that he was referred to the learning mentor because of his behaviour thought that there had been positive outcomes from the intervention, as his behaviour had improved:

'She's like, she's helped me by like being good and not like naughty... Well like, because normally I always normally get told off, and like it's less now.' (O28).

5.7 Future directions

Finally, respondents discussed possibilities for the future development of the learning mentor role. Some respondents suggested it would be important for the learning mentors to continue to receive on-going training in different areas. Individual respondents suggested ways they would like the service to develop. Possible areas included working with gifted and talented children, anger management courses for children, organising nurture groups and parenting classes and increasing the amount of liaison with parents.

Chapter 6

Discussion of findings

6.1 Introduction

The objectives of this evaluation were to describe the learning mentor service, to analyse service usage, to identify benefits of the service for users, to draw conclusions about the performance of the service and to make practical recommendations for future development. In this chapter the findings from the previous chapters will be discussed and suggestions offered relating to the development of the service.

6.2 Establishing a new service

In the service proposal it was stated that the senior learning mentor would be expected to liaise with schools, decide the criteria for referral to the learning mentor service, develop assessment procedures and exit criteria and be responsible for liaison arrangements with the management committee (consisting of head teachers). Therefore, when the learning mentors came into post little was in place. They had no accommodation initially. Furthermore, there had not been any decisions made as to what the role of the learning mentor would be or how the service would operate within schools. The initial lack of clarity with regard to the role of the learning mentor led to difficulties for both the learning mentors and teachers in schools. This highlights the need for an infrastructure to be in place to support the introduction of a new service, and for a core framework, with clear objectives for the service and its operation. Furthermore, the time needed to establish a new service and a new team at the same time should not be underestimated, dedicating time initially to building the team is recognised as valuable (Griffiths, Austin, & Luker, 2004).

Once the role of the learning mentors was negotiated and understood by all concerned, teachers in school have become more positive about the service than

they were initially. This illustrates the importance of establishing and maintaining communication between the learning mentors and staff in schools. It has proven difficult for learning mentors and teachers to find time to meet, exacerbated by the fact that learning mentors are only contracted to work school hours and so are not available after school. It also makes meeting with parents more difficult, as the learning mentors are not available before or after school. However, several respondents identified this meeting time between learning mentors and school staff as vital for 'joined up' working and are considering ways to build in this time as a priority. This difficulty was echoed at a management level, with the project leads and the learning mentor team leader finding it difficult to meet due to time constraints.

6.3 The benefit of early intervention

The rationale of the learning mentor service appears consistent with the view of Jekielek et al. (2002) that mentoring programmes aim to establish formally a relationship between a young person and an adult, through which the young person receives guidance and support. Quality time with an adult was raised as a major benefit of the service for children. It was also noted that such time was difficult for others working in school to provide and was therefore a valuable added dimension of school life for referred children.

The learning mentors aim to support children within school who are at risk of underachievement and help them to identify and overcome the barriers to learning they are experiencing. As such, the service provides early intervention for children with the possibility that this will prevent problems escalating in the future. The service appears to be meeting a diverse number of needs (as indicated by the referral forms), as some of these children would otherwise remain unsupported unless their difficulties became more severe.

6.4 Service pathway

The evaluation raised some issues with regard to the pathway through the service. The referral process, measurement of progress, and exit criteria are discussed below.

6.4.1 Referral process

While the referral form for the service lists a range of areas that the referrer can indicate as the focus of intervention needed, the areas, such as 'poor behaviour', 'standard of work/underachievement' or 'social skills', are very broad ranging. Furthermore, the referrer often ticks more than one box, with some referrers having indicated up to six or seven of the reasons. Even though the list on the referral form is comprehensive, 51 out of the 174 referral forms has 'other' indicated as one of the reasons for referral and for 24 of these referrals 'other' was the only reason for referral indicated. Therefore the reason for referral can be unspecific. Being more specific about what the problem is would make it easier to focus the intervention accordingly and develop appropriate support. This could be achieved through a variety of means, such as altering the referral form to request more specific information, asking what the main reason for referral is and asking the person making the referral to outline the aim of the intervention requested.

6.4.2 Measuring progress

Focusing the intervention would make setting targets and measuring progress easier and more transparent. A related issue, as identified by St James-Roberts and Samlal Singh (2001) following their study of a mentoring programme, is that the development of benchmarks with regard to competencies and behaviour would enable mentors to identify significant improvements in children. In order to measure the success of the service, clear and measurable outcomes, along with timescales, need to be specified and recorded. Self-esteem was viewed as an area of particular difficulty in relation to measurement and target setting, although

one impact of the service was said to be improved self-esteem. There are published materials available in the area of raising children's self-esteem, including tools for measuring self-esteem, which service providers could utilise.

6.4.3 Exit criteria

A clearer focus to the intervention, with targets by which progress can be measured would in turn make the clarification of exit criteria possible. Between January 2004 and July 2004, of the 174 children who had accessed the learning mentor service, only 20 children had exited the service. This appeared to be partly due to a reluctance to exit children, by the learning mentors and some teachers, but was also the result of a lack of clear exit criteria being used consistently within the service. The reluctance to exit children could be explored as an issue in itself as this has implications for the nature of the intervention. Involving the children in setting realistic targets and celebrating their achievement would be one way of moving towards a culture of empowerment, enabling children to recognise their barriers to learning, and supporting them in overcoming them and learning strategies to deal with future problems.

6.5 Outcome measurement

While the reported outcomes for children tended to be very positive and included improvements in children's behaviour, self-esteem, attendance and punctuality, it is important to note that these were, in the main, perceived outcomes reported by respondents and were not objectively verified. This is not to say that the outcomes did not occur but that these views were not supported by evidence of impact. This is consistent with the literature on mentoring which states that claims are made as to positive outcomes of mentoring that are based on reports, not evidence (Hall, 2003). Difficulties with outcome measurement are related to the issues discussed above. In order to evaluate the outcomes of a service, it is vital that this data is collected. It is therefore strongly recommended that systems be put in place to capture information about outcomes of the service. For

instance, it would be possible for service providers to collect and record attendance and punctuality data for every child referred to the service, before and after they have received the intervention. However, some agreement is needed as to what the appropriate outcomes are.

6.6 Conclusion

The evaluation took place at a relatively early stage in the development of the service. When a new service is introduced, evidence suggests it is good practice for everyone involved to be clear about roles and responsibilities (Vanclay, 1996, cited in Freeth, 2001) and how they will be integrated with existing roles, in order to facilitate collaboration and effective service development.

The response to the learning mentor service has been very positive, with many respondents expressing the view that they would like to have a learning mentor full-time in every school. However, the outcomes of the service proved difficult to measure, as systems to capture this data were not in place. On the basis of the evidence from this evaluation, the learning mentor service could move towards a model of good practice by defining a clear pathway through the service, with referral and exit criteria agreed. It is recommended that the reason for referral to the service could be made more specific, to allow the intervention to be focused accordingly. This would make target setting and measuring children's progress easier. Clear and measurable aims of the intervention, with set timescales, would make it easier to clarify exit criteria. Each of these factors would contribute to enabling outcomes of the service to be measured and its impact evaluated. This could be used to inform development of the service, in order to maximise the benefits for children.

It should be borne in mind that the learning mentor service has only been established for one year and that there was a formative element to this

evaluation. Therefore the above suggestions are offered as a means of future development for the service.

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Appendix A
Interview schedules

Interview Schedule - Learning Mentors

Background

- When did you begin work as a learning mentor and have you worked as a learning mentor previous to this?
- What were you expecting when you came into post?

Role of the learning mentor

- What does your work as a learning mentor involve?
(clear about input to achieve outcomes)
- What outcomes do the learning mentors hope to achieve?
(assessment procedure/exit criteria)
- How are children referred to you?
- What is the criteria for referral?
(prevention/early identification/intervention)
- Do you have links with any other agencies in the area?

Process of setting up the service

- Could you tell me about what it was like developing the service?
(management system/reporting structure)
- Did you encounter any difficulties in setting up the learning mentor service?
- With hindsight, would you do anything differently if you were beginning again?
- How have others supported the introduction of learning mentors? What role have others played?
(head teachers, teachers, children, families)

Perceived outcomes

- What do you feel have been the benefits of the introduction of learning mentors so far?
(children, families, school staff - Whole school impact?)
- Have you referred any children on to other services and if so which services?
(multi-agency working)
- Are there any changes that could be made that you feel would increase the benefits of your service to the children it serves?

Further comments

- Is there anything else you would like to say in relation to your work as a learning mentor?

Interview Schedule - Head teachers / teachers

Background

- Could you tell me about your role and responsibilities within school?
- What involvement did you have in establishing the learning mentor service in your school?

Role of the learning mentor

- What is the role of the learning mentor in your school?
(clear explanation of the intervention - input/context/outcomes)
- How are children initially identified for the service?
(criteria)
- How does the referral system work?

Process of setting up the service

- Are you happy with the way the learning mentor service is developing?
- What are the strengths of the service?
- Have there been any difficulties with the introduction of the service?

Perceived outcomes

- What do you feel have been the benefits of having a learning mentor in school so far?
(children, families, school staff - Whole school ethos - too early?)
- Could anything be done differently to increase the benefits?
(ways of working etc)

Mainstreaming

- How did you support these children in school prior to the introduction of a learning mentor?
- As the Children's Fund is a time limited initiative, how would you support these children in school without a learning mentor, if the service were to end?

Further comments

- Is there anything else you would like to say in relation to learning mentors?

Interview Schedule - Children

- Do you remember when you used to see? (Learning mentor's name)
Can you tell me what you thought about that?
- Do you like seeing? (Learning mentor's name)
Why / why not?
- How often do you see
- What kind of things do you do when you see
- Why do you do
- Why did you start seeing
- Has seeing helped you?
How has it helped you? / Why not?
- What do Mum and Dad think about it?

Appendix B
An example referral form

Learning Mentor: Referral Form

Name	DOB	Gender M/F	Class/ Key Stage/ Year
Address		Ethnicity (state source. child/parent/carer/other)	
		F.S.M Y/N	
<i>Focus of Intervention needed (Please Tick)</i>			
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Attendance</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Low self esteem / withdrawn</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Poor behaviour</i>	
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Punctuality</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Standard of work / underachievement</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Bullying behaviour</i>	
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Social skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Poor concentration</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Other</i>	
<i>Strengths and achievements</i>			
<i>Medical Information</i>			
<i>Additional information/background</i>			
<i>S.E.N. Support</i>			
<i>Statement of Special needs</i>			
<i>Any Disability?</i>			
<i>What has been done so far?</i>			
<i>Any contact with home? Yes No</i>		<i>Outside Agencies Yes No</i>	
<i>Details:</i>		<i>EWO Speech & Language</i>	
		<i>Social Services Child Protection</i>	
		<i>Ed. Psych. Behaviour Support</i>	
		<i>Learning Support</i>	
<i>Focus on Intervention Requested.</i>		Signatures	
		Person Referring	
		Head	
		Learning Mentor	

Learning Mentor: Referral Form

Name	DOB Gender M/F	Class Key Stage/ Year
Address	Ethnicity (Source.-child / parent/ carer / other) f.s.m ? y / n	Parent / guardian name
<i>Focus of Intervention needed</i>	<i>(Please tick)</i>	
<i>Attendance</i>	<i>Low self esteem / withdrawn</i>	<i>Poor behaviour</i>
<i>Punctuality</i>	<i>Standard of work / underachievement</i>	<i>Bullying behaviour</i>
<i>Social skills</i>	<i>Poor concentration</i>	<i>Other</i>
<i>Strengths and achievements</i>	<i>Medical Information</i>	
Additional information/background	<i>What has been done so far</i>	<i>No other support to date S.E.N. SUPPORT? Statement of special needs? Any disability?</i>
<i>Any contact with home? Yes No Details:</i>	Outside Agencies Yes / No	<i>EWO Speech & Language Social Services Child Protection Ed. Psych. Behaviour Support Learning Support</i>
<i>Focus on Intervention Requested</i>	Signature of person referring L. Mentor Date	Date mentoring started Exit date

Appendix C

List of training undertaken by the learning mentors

Blacon and Central Chester Primary Schools
Learning Mentor Team

Training record

DATE	TRAINING
2.9.03	Child protection
2.9.03	Meeting with EWO's at E.Port
4.9.03	Mileage claim form training
8.9.03	Excellence in Education
17.9.03	Learning Mentor Training
3.10.03	Learning Mentor Training
21.10.03	Learning Mentor Training
17.11.03	Learning Mentor Training
11.12.03	Learning Mentor Training
13.1.04	Learning Mentor Training
18.9.03	Prof. Development award. Skills and strategies for managing behaviour 0-15 yrs
24.9.03	Behaviour management training
4.11.03	Anti Bullying conference
21.10.03	Child development
10.11.03	2 weeks induction into schools
11.12.03	Child protection
12.1.04	Talking Partners
13.1.04	Emotions and Feelings
27.1.04	Circle time
5.7.04	Anger Management