A Study into the Impact of Assertive Mentoring on the Behaviour of Year 8 boys in a Secondary School in South Wales.

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This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of candidature for the degree M.A. (Educational Research & Practice)

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DECLARATION

This work is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Masters in Educational Research and Practice and has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed .......................................................... (candidate)

Date ........................................................................

STATEMENT 1

This dissertation is the result of my own work and investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly indicated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A Reference Page is appended.

Signed .......................................................... (candidate)

Date ........................................................................

STATEMENT 2

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Date ........................................................................
This was a small scale study which explored the impact of assertive mentoring on the behaviour of Year 8 boys in a secondary school in South Wales. Assertive mentoring has been noted as a successful intervention with pupils as a means of raising attainment. My hypothesis was that this principle could be used with pupils in Key Stage 3 as a means to improve behaviour and, in turn, to consider whether this then improved achievement.

A piece of action research was conducted. This was the most appropriate research method as it implemented change and examined if there was any improvement in the behaviour of Year 8 boys. Questionnaires, interviews and data from the school’s computer system were used to collect information and a sample of Year 8 boys was involved in a planned assertive mentoring intervention. The methodology was practicable and the interventions were successfully completed. At the beginning of the study only 29% of pupils considered improving their own behaviour to be important. However, following the intervention, 87% of pupils felt it was important. The assertive mentoring intervention did have a positive effect on the behaviour of Year 8 boys and all pupils who received the intervention showed an improvement in behaviour. Whilst the focus of this study was to consider the impact of assertive mentoring on behaviour, it became apparent that a by-product of improving behaviour was also an improvement in attainment. Attitudes towards behaviour changed and a more positive approach was adopted by Year 8 boys following this study.
## Contents

Tables and Figures ......................................................................................................................... v
Acronyms ............................................................................................................................................... vi
Chapter 1: Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 1
Chapter 2: Literature Review ............................................................................................................. 7
Chapter 3: Methodology ................................................................................................................... 16
Chapter 4: Results and Analysis ....................................................................................................... 25
Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................... 41
References ........................................................................................................................................... 45
Appendices .......................................................................................................................................... 48

**Words: 12,868**
Tables and Figures

Table 1: Merits & Consequences ................................................................. 5
Table 2: Behaviour Points ........................................................................ 20
Table 3: Descriptors for Study ................................................................. 25
Table 4: Behaviour Points Comparison .................................................... 33

Figure 1 .................................................................................................... 25
Figure 2 .................................................................................................... 26
Figure 3 .................................................................................................... 27
Figure 4 .................................................................................................... 27
Figure 5 .................................................................................................... 30
Figure 6 .................................................................................................... 31
Figure 7 .................................................................................................... 31
Figure 8 .................................................................................................... 37
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALN</td>
<td>Additional Learning Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BERA</td>
<td>British Educational Research Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BESD</td>
<td>Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEER</td>
<td>Centre for Education and Employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DfE</td>
<td>Department for Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAL</td>
<td>English as an Additional Language</td>
</tr>
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<td>ESK</td>
<td>End of Key Stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFT</td>
<td>Fischer Family Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSM</td>
<td>Free School Meals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
<td>General Certificate of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOY</td>
<td>Head of Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IER</td>
<td>Internal Exclusion Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KS3</td>
<td>Key Stage 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KS4</td>
<td>Key Stage 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDG</td>
<td>Pupil Deprivation Grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIMS</td>
<td>School Information Management System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLT</td>
<td>Senior Leadership Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TES</td>
<td>The Times Educational Supplement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WG</td>
<td>Welsh Government</td>
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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Target setting and mentoring are well-established practices in most secondary schools” (Younger & Warrington, 2005a: 940). Whilst mentoring and target setting are two separate methods employed by schools, they are closely linked and target setting is an integral part of mentoring; notably assertive mentoring. In Secondary School A there has been a move away from traditional mentoring towards a more business-like and firm approach; assertive mentoring. In this study assertive mentoring refers to a number of different systems implemented in schools as a collective, such as: target setting, tracking, mentoring, intervention and checking. (School Improvement Services, 2015). Assertive mentoring has been adopted in many schools across England and Wales in an attempt to raise the achievement of pupils, particularly pupils at Key Stage 4 (KS4) sitting General Certificates of Education (GCSEs) (School Improvement Services, 2015). In the current culture of data driving school improvement, many schools are under increasing pressure to reach set targets and raise pupil achievement. In Wales the recent change to banding of schools or the National School Categorisation System means, “schools are annually assessed on both their performance and their ability to improve, including data for schools to monitor progress of pupils from year to year.” (Welsh Government, 2015a) Of the initiatives schools are using to try to raise the attainment of pupils, one with impressive results is assertive mentoring as introduced by Eamonn Farrar. (School Improvement Services, 2015) This uses a combination of data including end of key stage (ESK) levels and Fischer Family Trust (FFT) data to set challenging targets for pupils.¹ Mentors have business-like meetings with pupils where targets are set to ensure pupils are reaching their potential.

¹ FFT processes the National Pupil Database for the Department for Education (DFE) and provides analysis to all schools and local authorities in England and Wales (FFT, 2015).
Assertive mentoring has mainly been successful with pupils in KS4 as a means of raising attainment in schools (Wilson, 2006). My hypothesis was that this principle could be taken and used with pupils in Key Stage 3 (KS3). Whilst assertive mentoring is a useful tool for improving attainment it was of interest to consider whether it could also be used to improve behaviour and, in turn, whether improved behaviour further improved achievement. This small scale research explored whether the use of assertive mentoring as an intervention with a group of boys in Year 8 was effective in improving behaviour.

The study was based in a large, English-medium, mixed, 11-18 comprehensive school (Secondary School A). The latest Estyn report noted that “It serves a compact geographical area that includes both affluent and relatively non-affluent communities.” (Estyn, 2009) However, a change in catchment area in 2013 meant a larger proportion of pupils from non-affluent communities attend the school. There has been a notable difference in the standards of behaviour and the overall behaviour in the school has declined. I am employed as Head of Year (HOY) 8, teacher of music and as an assertive mentor for pupils in KS4 eligible for Free School Meals (FSM). “Tackling the impact of deprivation on educational attainment is a top priority for Welsh Government and schools.” (Welsh Government, 2015b) The Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) funded by the Welsh Government offers FSM pupils extra support to try to reduce the attainment gap between FSM and non-FSM pupils. The PDG grant funds my role as an assertive mentor and this emphasises the importance placed on assertive mentoring as a tool to raise attainment of KS4 pupils in Secondary School A. As HOY I am responsible for the welfare of all pupils in Year 8 (12 – 13 years old). There were a notable number of poorly behaved boys in Year 8 with approximately 20 boys regularly exhibiting very poor behaviour. In comparison to other year groups in KS3 this was significantly higher than

2 Approximately 265 pupils, split into 9 form groups (8A-8I).
pupils in Year 7 and a little higher than pupils in Year 9. Evidence showed that their behaviour has been deteriorating since the beginning of the school year and was impacting on not only their own learning and achievement, but also their peers. As HOY it is my responsibility to tackle disruption so all pupils are able to work in a positive learning environment. These pupils were not achieving what they were capable of due to their behaviour and were at risk of not achieving targeted GCSEs at KS4. Their behaviour led me to consider initiatives that may help improve their behaviour and achievement prior to them starting their GCSE courses. One intervention I considered was assertive mentoring. As an assertive mentor for pupils in KS4 I have seen a positive impact on pupils who are part of this programme. My contention was that assertive mentoring could work with KS3 as well and so I introduced it with Year 8, most notably with the group of boys exhibiting the most disruptive behaviour. Assertive mentoring is a recognised intervention in both primary and secondary schools (School Improvement Services, 2015). It is documented as having positive impacts on pupil progress. In the A-Z of school improvement Brighouse & Woods (2013: 21) discuss how to close the attainment gap and improve achievements (particularly at GCSE): “Prompt, smart interventions designed to make an immediate difference and prevent pupils from falling behind, such as one-to-one tuition and assertive mentoring.” I questioned whether the introduction of assertive mentoring earlier, as suggested with this research, would have a positive impact on disengagement and low achievement later on in pupils’ school career.

Assertive mentoring is described as “A tough mentoring scheme, which encourages boys to compete for good grades at school” (Henry, 2007). Interestingly, Henry notes that assertive mentoring encourages boys, yet it is not an initiative exclusively for boys and has been used to target underachieving pupils, regardless of gender. However, as is commonly documented (Wilson, 2006; Mendick, 2015), boys are more at risk of underachievement. This
is something I have found in my own teaching and as a HOY. “The underachievement of boys has become a big issue in schools.” (Henry, 2007) This research explored the impact of assertive mentoring on boys. It was not that assertive mentoring would not work with girls but simply that boys in Year 8 at Secondary School A were exhibiting signs of challenging behaviour and underachievement which may have been tackled with the implementation of assertive mentoring. There were three research questions to consider:

- Does the use of assertive mentoring with Year 8 boys change their attitudes towards their own behaviour?
- Does the use of assertive mentoring with Year 8 boys improve their behaviour?
- Are there any particular aspects of assertive mentoring that are particularly effective?

These research questions provided a basis for this study to explore the contention that assertive mentoring could have a positive impact on the behaviour of boys in Year 8.

The rationale behind this research was that assertive mentoring has a positive impact on achievement and behaviour. As Clutterbuck (2004: 6) says:

*The notion that everyone needs a mentor is not so far from the truth. At key times in our lives, having a mentor can make a substantial difference to the choices we make, how confident we feel in making them, and how likely we are to achieve what we want.*

Mentoring is used in a variety of contexts and can be very effective in schools. As a HOY, if I could find interventions that improved behaviour, perhaps in turn it could improve attainment, allowing all pupils the best possible opportunities to succeed. Thus, my justification for this research: it could improve the outcomes of the year group and benefit pupils' learning.

Even though this was a small scale piece of research, it could still provide important insights. The sample of pupils was made up of twenty boys in Year 8 (12-13 years old) in Secondary School A. These boys were identified as having the greatest number of behavioural
problems in Year 8, using data from SIMs (Schools Information Management Systems). Secondary School A has a detailed behaviour policy and teachers use SIMs to record pupil details, attendance, achievements and behavioural incidents. The behaviour policy for Secondary School A uses merits and consequences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Merit/Consequence</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Merit</td>
<td>Adds 1 or more</td>
<td>Good work, excellent effort, contribution, academic achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequence 1</td>
<td>Subtracts 1 point</td>
<td>Failure to follow class rules or expectations. Continued disruption and failure to amend behaviour despite a warning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequence 2</td>
<td>Subtracts 2 points</td>
<td>Failure to amend behaviour following a C1 – behaviour is disrupting the whole class so pupil is moved to work in another room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequence 3</td>
<td>Subtracts 3 points</td>
<td>Serious behavioural instance. This is a call to the school’s emergency rota system where a member of Senior Leadership Team (SLT) will remove the pupil to the Internal Exclusion Room (IER), often for the remainder of the day.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Merits & Consequences*

Each pupil in the school has an overall behaviour score which subtracts any negative points from positive points. Typically pupils have a positive overall score (above 0), however, many pupils in the sample had a negative overall score (less than 0) indicating their behaviour was very poor. Poor behaviour and low achievement are linked. (Rayment, 2006; Younger et al, 2005b) My assertion that assertive mentoring may have a positive impact on these pupils’ behaviour and in turn improve their achievement was examined in this research.

This study took place over the course of a term (approximately 12 weeks). Pupils in the sample were introduced to the mentoring scheme and their progress and behaviour was monitored over the course of the research. Pupils had regular mentoring sessions, were on a monitoring report and some had extra interventions as directed by the SLT of the school. Pupils were asked to complete questionnaires and participated in interviews to judge their
attitudes and opinions throughout the process. These were vital in considering Research Question 1: Does the use of assertive mentoring with Year 8 boys have an impact on their attitudes towards their behaviour? At the end of the initial research period their progress and behaviour was compared (using data from SIMs) with their progress and behaviour from previous terms to judge whether the assertive mentoring had any impact on their behaviour and achievement. The focus group was compared to the control group in order to make judgements on the effect of the mentoring scheme. This informed Research Question 2: Does the use of assertive mentoring with Year 8 boys improve their behaviour? The impact of assertive mentoring on their attitudes was also considered as mentoring is a collaborative process which prompts positive change. “Mentoring or coaching has one clear purpose, the learning and development of an individual, a process that involves change, in this case social change.” (Brockbank & McGill, 2006: 9) In relation to Research Question 3, my analysis and evaluation considered any aspects of the assertive mentoring scheme that appeared particularly effective in improving behaviour.

Some ethical issues warranted consideration. All pupils involved and other participants (such as teachers) were made aware they were contributing to research and their involvement was optional and they may withdraw at any time. All pupils remained anonymous and were identified using code names. Questionnaires and interviews undertaken were anonymised. As pupils were under the age of 18 parental consent was obtained (appendix 2). I regularly consulted the British Educational Research Association’s (BERA, 2011) guide to research ethics and assured that I adhered to this in my research (appendix 1).
Chapter 2: Literature Review

“Thus whilst the vast growth of mentoring schemes within the last decade has involved an extensive commitment of time and energy by teachers, support staff and volunteers, it is often not clear if, how or why mentoring contributes to raised academic achievement.” (Younger et al, 2005b: 70) Whilst I agree that in general terms it is hard to judge how effective mentoring schemes have been, evidence suggests that there have been some mentoring initiatives that have made notable impacts on raising academic achievement; most notably assertive mentoring.

Assertive mentoring was initiated in the 1990s by Eamonn Farrar, Head of Hurworth Comprehensive School in Darlington. (School Improvement Services, 2015) This school became notable due to a huge improvement in academic achievement. In 1998, around 38% of GCSE pupils at Hurworth were achieving 5 A*-C and around 65% of Year 9 pupils were achieving level 5+ at the end of KS3. (Farrar, 2008) When you compare these results with 2007, the improvement is astonishing as 96% of students achieved 5 or more A*-Cs at GCSE (81% including English and Mathematics). It is of note that the percentage of pupils achieving KS3 level 5+ was around 90%. (Farrar, 2008) Surprisingly “the school’s gender gap has disappeared.” (Farrar, 2008) It appeared that this school’s mentoring systems, which were unique during the 1990s, had transformed the low performing school. A research team from Cambridge University for the Department for Education (DfE) concluded that “the single most significant factor in the school’s extraordinary transformation was the introduction of a number of systems collectively referred to as assertive mentoring. These systems include student target setting, tracking, mentoring, intervention and checking” (School Improvement Services, 2015). Farrar describes this system in the Times Educational Supplement (TES):
We devised a system called assertive mentoring, which ensures that challenging end-of-key-stage targets are set for all pupils... ‘Assertive’ mentors feedback predicted grades to their mentees; challenge under-achievement and agree interventions. These agreements are then communicated to their classroom teachers. Checks are made to ensure that interventions have been understood and implemented to the desired level. (Barton, 2007)

Hurworth’s success led many other schools to embed a collaborative approach of assertive mentoring as a means of raising standards. It is important however, to consider that this intervention worked in Hurworth during the 1990s, it may or may not work when replicated in different schools at a different time. However, the drastic improvements made at Hurworth Comprehensive offered enough evidence for many other schools to try similar approaches. Authors that support and advocate the use of assertive mentoring are Younger et al (2005b), Curee (2015), Turnbull (2009) and Henry (2007). Younger et al state: “Individual approaches, based on a coherent and integrated approach to target-setting and mentoring, have been very important in some schools in transforming and sustaining improvements in achievement” (Younger et al, 2005b: 11). This is further supported by a case study in Fitzharrys School in Oxfordshire which examined the use of assertive mentoring with underachieving students where improvement in attainment was listed as a key outcome. “Evidence collected by the school and the research team suggest that following the mentoring: target students’ attendance and attainment improved, with higher numbers of students achieving 5 A*-C GCSEs” (Curee, 2015) In another case study which used assertive mentoring as a means to raise achievement, the statistical analysis showed that pupils involved in the study “were consistently improving their academic performance” (Turnbull, 2009: 186) Thornton Grammar School in Bradford implemented the use of assertive mentoring as part of a collaborative system to improve Mathematics and English attainment. (Future Leaders, 2013) A similar scheme, the Activate Programme, set up with pupils in KS3
at risk of failing, showed that over 60% of the boys in the study either matched or exceeded their predicted results. (Younger et al, 2005b: 72-73) Henry (2007) states that assertive mentoring “is producing a dramatic improvement in results.” With this evidence it would be fair to say that it is clear that assertive mentoring can contribute to raised academic achievement, contradicting Younger et al’s statement that it is regularly not clear if mentoring contributes to improved achievement. (Younger et al, 2005b: 70) Younger et al considered the use of mentoring in general and perhaps the more interesting questions are now how and why assertive mentoring seem to have a positive influence on pupils? It is important to consider that assertive mentoring is a newer, as yet less widely researched area, so this study may not be as reliable as other larger studies.

Unlike more traditional approaches to mentoring which generally took a gentle and encouraging style, assertive mentoring has a different tone. “Another distinctive aspect of the target-setting and mentoring in these successful contexts was the extent to which the tone of mentoring changed as the cycle progressed.” (Younger & Warrington, 2005a: 105). This means a more formal and business-like meeting where pupils are reviewed against targets set and held accountable for their own learning and attainment. My understanding from the literature is that a key factor in the success of assertive mentoring is that pupils are enabled to take more responsibility for their achievements and are held accountable when they are not reaching expectations. Mentors develop close relationships with their mentees where they can be honest and give a frank account of their achievements and set targets for improvement. Younger and Warrington agree that it is the sense of responsibility that seems to generate success: “This assertive mentoring attempts to establish a high level of personal involvement and to create a sense of responsibility among the students, to establish the notion that the students have a personal responsibility not only to themselves, but to honour
the commitment they are making to their mentor and to their subject teachers.” (Younger & Warrington, 2005a: 107) An emerging theme from the literature is that pupils are encouraged to take more responsibility towards their own learning. This is mirrored in my own experience as an assertive mentor in Secondary School A. Whilst pupils are supported with strategies and guidance to reach set targets, they are also expected to work diligently to reach these targets and to do so by agreed deadlines.

Particular expectations were conveyed from mentor to student, and it was made clear to the student that a challenge had been set and that commitment was expected. These instances, usually in mentor sessions with specific under-performing students (mostly but not always boys), embodied a more direct interventionist style of mentoring, offering strategies and negotiation but making assertive demands in return. (Younger & Warrington: 2005a, p.106)

More traditional mentoring schemes were less personalised and therefore less successful. As Farrar himself described:

Under our old system, mentors lacked hard evidence to challenge pupils. Pupils picked up on this and often bluffed their way through meetings making vague commitments to work harder in future. Very few real measurable outcomes emerged. So nothing really changed. (Barton, 2007)

This important difference between traditional mentoring and assertive mentoring could go some way towards explaining Younger’s earlier statement that it is often unclear if mentoring contributes to a positive change in achievement (Younger et al, 2005b). With an assertive approach pupils are challenged on underachievement, the reasons for it identified and solutions offered. “One of the main aspects of assertive mentoring is that it makes big demands on students. It sets them significant challenges.”(Henry, 2007) Pupils should know that they will be held accountable for how they are performing by their mentor and this provides a more personalised style of mentoring. “Mentors identify underachievement and solutions to it with pupils. Interventions are agreed, but these are not optional. Pupils know they will be checked on immediately and regularly. If they aren’t carrying out their part of the
agreement, they will be challenged strongly.” (Barton, 2007) D. Allen from Thornton Grammar School, where assertive mentoring has been successfully implemented, agrees: “Assertive mentoring is not just a cosy chat or catch-up, but a meeting directly linked to academic goals and progress. The aim is to discuss students’ attainment in a way that is friendly but ultimately holds them to account for their work.” (Future Leaders, 2013). The elements within assertive mentoring of accountability, intervention and challenge give an indication of why it might succeed.

It is interesting to note that Curee (2015) suggests pupils who have been receiving assertive mentoring often exhibit an improvement in attitude towards their learning. (Curee, 2015) The literature seems to tell us that pupils begin to see the value in what they are trying to accomplish and therefore are more motivated to try to reach the agreed, achievable targets. The literature suggests that this is the reason why assertive mentoring is successful: it holds pupils responsible but ultimately also makes them more self-aware and instils a greater sense of responsibility to achieve. In one case study which used assertive mentoring, pupils were described as “gaining in self-awareness, motivation and confidence” (Turnbull, 2009: 186).

The disengagement of boys is a noted as a problem across England and Wales in all types of school. (Younger et al, 2005b; Epstein et al, 1998) The gender gap (the differences in achievement between boys and girls) can be seen in the national statistics. In 2014, in schools across Wales, 51.4% of boys achieved 5 A*-C GCSE grades (including Mathematics and English) compared with 59.7% of girls. (WG, 2014) Arnett builds upon this: “The gap between the proportion of girls getting A*-C and boys is at its highest rate since 2003 despite boys getting a slightly higher share of A* grades.” (Arnett, 2014; CEER, 2014) Whilst the gender gap may be well documented, it must also be noted that this does not necessarily mean that all
boys underachieve. Whilst literature suggests that boys are often more disengaged than girls (Wilson, 2006; Younger & Warrington, 2005a; 2005b), it is also important to remember that this is not true of all boys. “Many boys continue to achieve extremely well at school, both academically and in community, extra-curricular and sporting fields; equally, there are some girls whose needs are not recognised within schools and who under-achieve.” (Younger et al, 2005b: 8) However, the underachievement of boys is still a widely recognised issue in education today. There are a range of views as to how to tackle the problem of boys’ underachievement. My contention is that assertive mentoring may address behavioural and motivational issues with boys and in turn, improve achievement.

As Wilson said: “Boys need reminding of their social and learning responsibilities, but by the least confrontational means possible, not via constant and essentially negative means but via the reinforcement of positive behaviour” (2006, 48) Whilst I agree, I question if it contradicts slightly with the focus on a more formal tone taken with assertive mentoring. It is important to focus on the positive but there is also a need to challenge pupils about their learning. “Young people, and particularly young boys, need the opportunity to reflect on their learning on a very regular basis.” (Wilson, 2006: 62) Assertive mentoring allows this by providing pupils regular reflection consider strategies for improvement (with the help of their mentor). “Assertive mentoring, where pupils are made to focus in monthly meetings on the marks they should be getting and the practical means of achieving them, is banishing the anti-learning culture that has developed in some schools, particularly among boys.” (Henry, 2007)

In Secondary School A, I have also seen a strong link between boys who have behavioural problems and boys who are underachieving. “Underachievement and behaviour issues are a somewhat cyclical and connected problem.” (Rayment, 2006: 5) Younger et al (2005b) also note that more boys are disengaged and cause more discipline problems. Whilst
it is not fair to say that all boys who underachieve are badly behaved, it often follows that boys who are badly behaved also underachieve. “A student with behaviour issues is often an underachiever, and an underachiever often has behaviour problems. While there are some exceptions to this rule, I find it helpful to consider the two together when approaching the problems” (Rayment, 2006: 5) I explored whether assertive mentoring had a positive impact on poorly behaved and underachieving boys. In a case study of poorly behaved pupils being reintegrated to school many pupils said that “Mentoring and supportive relationships with adults” were some of the most important strategies to their successful return to school. (Riley & Rustique-Forrester, 2002: 63-64) “Where target-setting and mentoring have been successful in transforming the achievements and attitudes of students, there appears to have been a crucial focus on the individual, on gaining and acting upon detailed knowledge of the potential of individual students, and conveying a sense of what might be possible.” (Younger et al, 2005b: 78)

One key theme in the literature is the relationships between pupils and teachers. (Vizard, 2009) This seems to be of great influence on behaviour and, in turn, achievement. Pupils need to feel safe, valued and able to succeed in their lessons. “Teachers, particularly the younger ones, felt that establishing trusting relationships between pupils and their teachers were critical, if disaffected pupils were to be re-engaged in learning. Mentoring was a key element of this strategy.” (Riley & Rustique-Forrester, 2002: 57) By developing a relationship with a student where the student feels that their mentor is actively interested in what they are achieving and how they are doing will, in turn, motivate the student to try to succeed. “Students will connect with those who they believe are there to assist or empower them. Empowering students means building upon the strengths the student has rather than concentrating on what is wrong with them.” (McDonald, 2010: 36) Riley and Rustique-
Forrester (2002: 29) agree that “relationships with teachers were key.”

Many of the studies of assertive mentoring discuss the impact of this type of intervention with KS4 pupils. I used this process with younger pupils (Year 8). I agree with Wilson, that we need to tackle the problem of underachievement earlier to allow more time to intervene and improve attainment:

*It is still not uncommon for intervention to occur as late as Year 10 or even Year 11, and often just with the boys who are borderline C/Ds. The truth is the boys on the borderline are exhibiting signs far earlier than that and we must begin, as they say, at the beginning.* (Wilson, 2006: 120)

By introducing initiatives as late as Year 11 it seems that we are not allowing pupils the appropriate chance to improve. If we introduce initiatives such as assertive mentoring and challenge underachievement earlier, for example Year 8, we may allow more time to embed better learning attitudes in our pupils, allowing them time to make positive changes to succeed. Pupils in Year 8 are exhibiting signs of underachievement and low motivation and this is also recognised in the literature. “Shortly after transition to the high school, signs of underachievement arising from peer pressure, disaffection or low self-esteem need to be recognized and acted upon.” (Wilson, 2006: 120)

Assertive mentoring uses data to inform mentors of progress and achievement and forms the basis of target setting and discussion in mentoring sessions. This is vital in engaging learners with their own progress. “Using data to identify and develop strategies for learning with individual students is essential and is a move towards a personalized approach in engaging students with their own learning and development” (Crossley & Corbin, 2010: 78)

Other authors agree:
We believe that target-setting can make a powerful contribution to improving students’ achievements, and that the definition of realistic grades, regularly reported and contextualised within value-added data, has been crucially important because it has enabled teachers (as well as students) to raise their own expectations and aspirations. (Younger et al, 2005b: 78)

Mentoring can be successful where students “understand that potential data creates realistic expectations of what is possible, and gain a sense of self-esteem and confidence as learners when they realise what is indeed possible” (Younger et al, 2005b: 78)

It is important to acknowledge that assertive mentoring is a collaborative approach often used with other initiatives.

It is difficult with any intervention strategy, to disentangle the specific impact of any one strategy, and to make claims for one intervention in isolation from its context. We cannot be sure, in any school within any triad, that the effect of a particular intervention, in isolation, has been responsible for transforming attitudes, motivation and achievement. (Younger et al, 2005b: 74)

This was considered when drawing conclusions from this study.

Much of the literature supports the use of assertive mentoring as a means to improve attainment. The literature also describes the use of assertive mentoring as a tool with pupils at GCSE level but there is less documented discussion about its use with younger pupils or its effect on other areas such as attendance, behaviour or well-being. It begs the question, would the use of assertive mentoring with Year 8 have a positive impact on their behaviour and achievement?
Chapter 3: Methodology

“Action research is a powerful tool for change and improvement at the local level.” (Cohen et al, 2003: 226) In order to evaluate the impact of assertive mentoring on the behaviour of Year 8 boys a piece of action research was conducted. This was the most appropriate research method to undertake as it allowed me to implement change and examine if there was any improvement in the behaviour and achievement of Year 8 boys. Action research involves taking action: what you do in your practice to improve something. (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009: 11) I considered various methodologies and other research strategies but chose to complete a piece of action research as it would be beneficial in my role as HOY and for Secondary School A if it meant an intervention could be identified that would support the improvement of behaviour within the school. If successful, this could be a strategy employed with other year groups and by other teachers. Cohen et al (2003: 226) support the use of action research and describe it as an impressive method that can be used in a variety of settings where change is needed.

Action research is often chosen by educators in school settings as it provides the opportunity to better pupils’ learning. Koshy (2010: 1) agrees: “action research supports practitioners to seek ways in which they can provide good quality education by transforming the quality of teaching-related activities, thereby enhancing students’ learning.” Sagor (2000: 3) also supports the use of action research in educational settings to improve the efficiency of teaching and learning. Action research was the most suitable research strategy for this project as it promotes reflection. As noted by McNiff and Whitehead (2011: 7):

*Action research is a form of enquiry that enables practitioners in every job and walk of life to investigate and evaluate their work. They ask ‘What am I doing? Do I need to improve anything? If so, what? How do I improve it? Why should I improve it?’*
Sagor (2000: 7) notes the three main purposes for action research within a school setting are: building the reflective practitioner, making progress on schoolwide priorities and building professional cultures. This is true of this study as it was relevant to my role as HOY, was relevant to the school as improving behaviour may also improve achievement. It may also have offered new methods for whole school change. Action research was the most appropriate method for this study as it meant the point of the study was especially relevant to the researcher and participants. “Practitioners who engage in action research inevitably find it to be an empowering experience. Action research has this positive effect for many reasons. Obviously, the most important is that action research is always relevant to the participants.” (Sagor, 2000: 3)

The ability of the action research process to satisfy an educator’s need for ‘fit’ may be its most powerful attribute. Because the data being collected came from the very students and teachers who are engaged with the treatment, the relevance of the findings is assured. (Sagor, 2000: 5)

Koshy (2010: 25) notes that “action research is a powerful and useful model for practitioner research because researchers can be participants – they don’t have to be distant and detached from the situation.” This was particularly relevant to this study and helped to justify why action research was the most relevant choice for this investigation.

This research was designed to examine whether the use of assertive mentoring with Year 8 boys had a positive impact on their behaviour and, in turn, their achievement. I believed that Year 8 would be a good time to implement initiatives as pupils had already made the adjustment from primary to secondary school education. Wilson (2006: 120) agrees. “If mentoring is to be used, Year 8 is a good time to begin, not Year 11. Pupil tracking systems allow far earlier recognition of academic underperformance than they have ever done before.” I used assertive mentoring with a focus group of pupils in Year 8 and then examined
whether their behaviour and achievement had declined, remained similar or improved over the course of approximately twelve weeks. I compared the boys in the focus group with boys in a control group, who broadly speaking, had a similar profile. The behaviour and achievement of both groups was compared to judge whether the use of assertive mentoring had positively or otherwise impacted on the pupils’.

This research took place over two half terms: spring term 2 (February – April 2015) and summer term 1 (April – May 2015). Initially this research was intended to take place during the entire spring term from January to April. However, due to a delay in obtaining parental consent the research time frame was necessarily moved. The research was completed in Secondary School A, a large comprehensive in South Wales with approximately 1600, 11-18 year old pupils on role. Over the past three years an average of 61% of pupils have achieved 5 A*-C GCSEs (including English and Mathematics). This school recently changed its catchment area and serves pupils from a diverse range of socio-economic backgrounds. It accommodates pupils of all abilities with some pupils having statements of Additional Learning Needs (ALN). Approximately 12% of pupils at the school receive Free School Meals (FSM), including a number of pupils in the study. This secondary school has a designated behaviour support base with specialist behaviour teachers (BESD teachers).

In this study a variety of different research methods were used: pupil questionnaires, pupil and teacher interviews, observations and field notes. To triangulate, the action research is supported by pupil data from SIMS. A focus group of pupils were selected and interventions were implemented. The impact of the interventions put in place were judged by comparison against a control group, results of questionnaires, interviews and pupil data analysed.

A focus group of eight pupils was selected. They were all boys in Year 8 who were considered to have poor behaviour as indicated from data using the school computer system.
SIMS. I used SIMS to create a report which identified the pupils in Year 8 that had the most negative points documented. Interestingly, of the top twenty pupils, there were eighteen boys and two girls, suggesting that my hypothesis that the behaviour of boys in Year 8 was worse than girls, was correct. This confirmed my decision that this research should be gender specific. The selection of the focus group had to be objective. As I knew all pupils personally there would have been a risk of bias had I just selected a focus group. Also, taking just the top few pupils on this list would not be providing a random sample and I felt that I would be limiting the success of this piece of research. Using SIMS to create a report of the twenty boys in Year 8 with the most negative points documented, a random generator was then used to select the focus group. These pupils were numbered 1-20 and the numbers put into a randomiser (Kind, 2015). Eight numbers were selected to give me a random sample. The pupils with the selected numbers were used as the focus group (highlighted in green in table 2). The other twelve pupils were used as a control group. This process allowed for an impartial selection of the focus group which in turn would not impact on the validity of the results.
Variables such as gender, attendance, consistency of approach, timing, pupils’ circumstances and the possibility of dual interventions were considered.

Over the research period I mentored the boys in the focus group, spending time with each boy regularly and setting them targets by the next mentoring session. I put strategies in place to support the boys in reaching these targets, liaised with parents/guardians (where possible) so that the boys were supported at home and spoke with the pupils’ teachers. Each boy in the focus group would spend at least ten minutes with me per week for an individual mentoring session. Where needed, I would invest more time with an individual pupil if there was a specific issue that needed addressing. This was different from the mentoring that other pupils in the year group received. Form tutors are responsible for mentoring pupils in their form and each pupil would typically receive a short mentoring session (around five to ten minutes) per half term (i.e. 1 session every six to eight weeks). The mentoring that pupils
received from their form tutors tended to be more general whereas the assertive mentoring that the boys in the focus group received was specifically focused on behaviour and achievement. All pupils in the focus group were mentored by the same person (myself) and this meant there was no discrepancy of approach. Different approaches to mentoring taken by different members of staff could result in inconsistencies despite school policies and guidance on the delivery of mentoring. For this study it was imperative that the focus group were all mentored by a single member of staff for consistency. If there had been more than one member of staff mentoring the boys this would have been a variable which may have impacted on the results. It was not practicable to involve a larger group of assertive mentors as there was not the time or resources available for quality training of mentors to ensure consistency. Also, as there were only eight boys in the focus group, it was not necessary to employ more than one mentor. An advantage of the chosen methodology was that it could be repeated with different groups of pupils in future.

The boys in the focus group knew I was monitoring their behaviour and setting targets with an expectation of seeing an improvement in their behaviour. When there was no improvement they were challenged and set new, realistic targets for the following week. One of the ways pupils’ behaviour was monitored was by using a report which pupils had to show me and their parents on a daily basis. The monitoring report, information from SIMS and teacher feedback was used to form the basis of discussions in assertive mentoring sessions and to measure whether the pupils were improving their behaviour.

I collected data from pupil questionnaires (appendix 3). “The questionnaire is a widely used and useful instrument for collecting survey information, providing structured, often numerical data” (Cohen et al, 2003: 245). By using a questionnaire I was able to gain some
basic statistics as a benchmark for my research. After the interventions all pupils in the study were asked to complete the same questionnaire and the results were compared.

I interviewed a cross-section of pupils and staff to obtain more in-depth responses for analysis. “One major advantage of the interview is adaptability. A skillful interviewer can follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings, which the questionnaire can never do.” (Bell, 2005: 157). McNiff et al (2003: 124) agree “Interviews have distinct advantages over questionnaires because they can provide richer data as a result of being able to probe further.” As Bell (2005: 157) noted, in an interview the way a participant responds can also provide interesting information: “The way in which a response is made (the tone of voice, facial expression, hesitation, etc.) can provide information that a written response would conceal.” To mitigate against potential personal bias, other members of staff were consulted when wording the questions for the interviews and no leading sub-questions were asked.

As well as using interviews and questionnaires I also used observation and field notes. I observed pupils in the study in lessons and around the school, so that I was able to triangulate the information I had from interviews and questionnaires. I was able to see if the pupils did and said what they stated and behaved in the way they had claimed. (Bell, 2005)

In order to get a range of data and to triangulate it I collected information from more than one source. To accommodate different types of learner and communication preferences, considering the Theory of Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1993) and preferences in Learning Style (Fleming & Mills, 1992), pupils were also interviewed. I took pupils’ behaviour point analysis from SIMS but also observed these pupils in lessons so that I was able to make further judgements about their behaviour to ensure better validity of data and results.
Some issues concerning the validity of data needed to be considered. I had to be aware that some pupils may not have been entirely honest with their answers in the questionnaire and interview. In order to address this, questionnaires were coded before they were given to pupils so that pupils did not write their names. For the interviews I recorded the audio (not using video) and coded these. All interviews were completed on a one-to-one basis so that pupils did not feel pressure to express a certain opinion in front of their peers. Pupils were aware that all answers were anonymised so no one else would know what they had said. Pupils’ honesty was integral to the validity of my results so it was vital that I took steps to ensure the most reliable outcomes that I could. The fact that I used a focus group of eight pupils allowed for a range of views.

When considering ethical issues I adhered to the BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, 2011 (appendix 1). All participants were aware that they were part of this research and that their participation was voluntary. All pupils were told that they would remain anonymous throughout the process. As the participants were a ‘vulnerable group’ (all under 18 years), parental consent as well as individual consent was sought before undertaking any interventions (appendix 2). I considered the subject-matter of my research and was sensitive that this may be contentious and embarrassing for pupils who may feel they were perceived as poorly behaved. For this reason the research project was not discussed with other members of staff. It was important to consider the needs of the pupils in the focus group. None were identified as English as an additional language (EAL), however, some pupils in the sample had weak literacy skills. I ensured I was able to support pupils when completing questionnaires. For example, I told pupils that they could ask for help with spelling or grammar. I used a mini-white board and wrote any words or sentences the pupils’ wanted on this for them to copy. All questionnaires were coded (using a numerical system) and pupil’s
personal information was never included on any questionnaire. During interviews pupils were introduced using their numerical codes and this process was explained to the pupils so that they understood that the data was anonymous. Pupils were asked not to refer to any peers in their answers and any teachers that pupils referred to were anonymised when the interviews were transcribed. Numerical codes were not shared with any other member of staff or participants in the project. The data was stored electronically but was not saved on any school computer system where other staff or pupils may inadvertently gain access. Pupils’ personal information was coded and encrypted with a password.

In summary this was a small scale action research study using a sample of twenty students from which a focus group of eight pupils was randomly selected. The pupils in the focus group received an intervention in the form of an assertive mentoring programme. Pupils’ behaviour was compared to their own previous behaviour and to the behaviour of the control group.
Chapter 4: Results and Analysis

The findings from data collected for this study will be presented and analysed to evaluate the impact of the assertive mentoring scheme. Data was collected using questionnaires, interviews and SIMs. All pupils (focus and control group) completed a questionnaire (appendix 3) at the beginning and at the end of the study. Some teachers of core subjects in Secondary School A and all pupils in the focus group completed interviews.

For the purpose of this study the following descriptions will be used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>All 20 selected pupils (sample + focus group)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group – These pupils were involved in the assertive mentoring interventions.</td>
<td>8 Selected pupils (Nos 1,4, 7, 9, 10, 14,16,18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group – These pupils were not involved in the assertive mentoring interventions.</td>
<td>Non-selected pupils (Nos 2,3,5,6,8,11,12,13,15,17,19,20)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Descriptors for Study

Each research question will be considered in relation to the findings from this study:

**Research Question 1: Does the use of assertive mentoring with Year 8 boys change their attitudes towards their own behaviour?**

In questionnaires pupils were asked “Do you think it’s important to try to improve your behaviour?” The graph (Figure 1) shows pupils attitudes towards their own behaviour at the beginning of the study:

![Figure 1: Pupil's opinions on behaviour before the intervention](image-url)
Initially many of the pupils in the study did not see the importance of improving their own behaviour (Figure 1). All but one pupil in the focus group selected “No” for this question when asked.

When pupils were asked again at the end of the study there was a change in the pupils’ response (Figure 2). This was approximately 12 school weeks later, after at least 12 mentoring sessions with the focus group.

At the end of the study all but one pupil in the focus group selected “yes” as well as the same pupils who had selected “yes” initially. This shift suggests that assertive mentoring does change boys’ attitudes towards their own behaviour as the increase in the percentage of pupils who answered “yes” increased by 36%. Interestingly the increase was solely from pupils who were part of the focus group which adds weight to the supposition that assertive mentoring contributed to the change in pupils’ attitude towards their own behaviour. As the questionnaire pupils were given was the same at the beginning and the end of the study, the yes/no question “do you think it’s important to try and improve your own behaviour?” did not allow for further response, such as the reasons why the attitudes changed.
Pupils in the sample were asked at the beginning of the study “How would you rate your behaviour in school?” Many pupils rated their behaviour as poor or worse (Figure 3).

All pupils in the focus group rated their behaviour as poor or very poor. When pupils in the focus group were asked at the end of the study to complete the questionnaire the results are shown in Figure 4:

At the end of the study pupils in the focus group clearly rated their behaviour as better than when they completed the questionnaire initially (Figure 4), indicating that the change in the boys’ attitudes towards their own behaviour may have led to an actual change in behaviour.
These findings are replicated in staff interviews and through SIMS data. The importance of this attitude shift will be discussed when considering Research Question 2.

Discussions during the assertive mentoring sessions focused on getting the boys to reflect on their own behaviour. The reasons why it is important to improve behaviour were also discussed, as was the relevance and benefit to them personally. Most of the boys in the focus group began to see benefits of improving their behaviour and this is reflected in the final interviews done with pupils:

**Do you think it’s important to be well behaved in school?**
**PUPIL 1:** No but it’s easier isn’t it? I don’t think it’s important to be well behaved but it’s just easier coz teachers don’t bug me and the other kids leave me be and I don’t have to go to detentions and stuff.
**PUPIL 14:** Yes because you do better. Since I’ve stopped messing about so much my teachers are pleased with me and I got a better level in my work.
**PUPIL 18:** Yes because it’s not fair because I’m not bothering anyone else

**What things have helped you to improve your behaviour?**
**PUPIL 4:** I had to go into the behaviour unit and I went on report and lots of teachers were watching me all the time and what I was doing.
**PUPIL 10:** I was on report and had to show I’d been good all day and then mum gave me a present if I got all ticks on my report for the whole week.

These interviews raised an interesting concept of pupil motivation. Vizard (2009: 48) notes that “Students of all ages appreciate rewards” as also expressed by Pupil 10. There is much research exploring the role of motivation in attainment. “Researchers interested in the factors that influence student’s achievement and academic success are more commonly studying the concept of motivation, due to increased evidence that motivation plays an important role in attainment.” (McGeown et al, 2014: 278) Looking at how Pupil 10 described a reward if he achieved his targets, it is interesting to consider whether as the pupils in this study are quite young (Year 8), they are more extrinsically motivated: “engaging in learning due to external factors, such as reward or recognition.” (McGeown et al, 2014: 278) The links found in this research to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation would be an interesting further study.
It is important to consider why we are concerned with the boys’ attitudes towards their own behaviour. Research shows that attitude has a significant influence on behaviour. Miller (2002: 36) notes that “Positive behavioural change is more likely to follow from a change in attitude...” A concept also supported by Riley & Rustique-Forrester (2002). Initially, the boys in this study showed a poor attitude towards their behaviour and it appeared that during the course of the interventions this changed. These findings are supported by Curee’s online article “Using Coaching and Mentoring to Support Students” (2015) where pupils who had received assertive mentoring demonstrated an improvement in attitude towards their learning. This was also echoed in teacher interviews at Secondary School A:

_Have you seen any notable changes in the following pupils over the past 12 weeks?_

**ENGLISH TEACHER 3:** Pupil 9 has been very silly in lessons in the past and rarely showed any remorse for poor behaviour, often finding classroom scenarios very funny. Recently pupil 9 came to find me at lunch to tell me he was going to try harder in my lessons and he followed through with his promise! He does still find it hard to concentrate but he really does try and asks for help and I try to give him smaller chunks of work to complete so he doesn’t lose focus. He seems to have had an overnight attitude shift

This leads to the second and fundamental research question of whether the use of assertive mentoring can actually improve boys’ behaviour rather than just improving their attitude towards it.

**Research Question 2: Does the use of assertive mentoring with Year 8 boys improve their behaviour?**

To answer this question data from the school computer system, SIMS, was analysed. To recap, every pupil in Secondary School A has a ‘behaviour score’. The sample was selected as they had the most negative points recorded. In order to see if there was an improvement in behaviour, pupils’ scores at the beginning and the end of the study were compared. It would be unrealistic to expect pupils to gain no extra negative behaviour points during the course of the study. If the interventions were effective one would expect to see that pupils involved in the assertive mentoring programme gained less negative points during the
research period in comparison to the points they gained before assertive mentoring began and less than pupils in the control group.

The raw data for the study was based on two periods of time (Sept-Feb and Feb-May). The initial period of September – February totalled 21 weeks in school compared to the research period February – May of only 12 weeks in school. Therefore, an adjustment was made to average the behaviour points received prior to the research period. Pupils’ behaviour score for the 21 weeks was averaged to a score per week and then multiplied by 12 to achieve an average behaviour score (rounded to the nearest whole number) for a 12 week period so that a fair comparison could be made. This adjustment has been applied to all relevant data in order to ensure a like with like comparison.

The graph (Figure 5) identifies all the pupils in the sample and their behaviour points in February (start of study) and May (end of study). The grey line highlights the difference between the two numbers.

![Figure 5: Behaviour points comparison](image-url)
Pupils in the focus group showed a small increase in negative behaviour points (Figure 6):

![Figure 6: Behaviour Points Comparison for the Focus Group](image)

Pupils in the control group (Figure 7) generally show a greater number of behaviour points between the two points in time. Whilst we have to consider that there may have been other factors involved, it is possible that pupils in the focus group, who received the intervention, improved their behaviour as a result of the assertive mentoring.

![Figure 7: Behaviour Points Comparison for the Control Group](image)

The control group (as a whole) received 58% of their behaviour points during the period of September – February (prior to the study) and 42% of their behaviour points during
the research period February to May suggesting similar trends in behaviour across the two time periods. By comparison the focus group (as a whole) received 75% of their behaviour points during the period of September – February (prior to the study) but this reduced to 25% of their behaviour points during the research period of February to May. This suggests that behaviour in the focus group was positively influenced by the assertive mentoring programme.

Looking at the data in more detail there are two anomalies in the control group – Pupil 8 and Pupil 2. Pupil 8 stopped attending school in February (at the start of the research period). He did not return to school for the rest of the academic year so could not have acquired any further behaviour points during the research period. If Pupil 8 is discounted then the control group (as a whole) received 54% of their behaviour points during the period of September – February (prior to the study) and 46% of their behaviour points during the research period February to May, reducing the difference between the two periods even further for the control group. Pupil 2 was absent from school for six weeks (during the research period) due to a significant injury. This pupil’s behaviour prior to and subsequent to his absence was very poor so it is likely that had he attended school for the entire research period the difference between the control and focus group may have been even greater. If both anomalies (Pupils 2 and 8) are discounted, the remainder of the control group shows a very consistent pattern in relation to behaviour points awarded for both twelve week periods (51% Sept-Feb and 49% Feb-May).

Conversely the focus group showed a greater difference in behaviour points received during the two periods (75% of their behaviour points prior to the study and 25% of their behaviour points during the intervention). Data of individual pupils in the focus group is illustrated in Table 4:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pupil Number</th>
<th>Adjusted % Behaviour points received prior to research period</th>
<th>% Behaviour points received during to research period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Behaviour Points Comparison

As can be seen in Table 4, Pupils 7, 9, 10, 14 and 16 had broadly similar outcomes. These pupils received between 31% and 36% of their behaviour points during the study in comparison with pupils in the control group, on average, receiving 49%. This indicates that the behaviour of the pupils in the focus group improved during the intervention. It should be noted that the results for Pupil 14, who had a smaller difference within this sub-group, may have been impacted by poor attendance. Pupil 14 had the lowest attendance rate of pupils in the focus group meaning that there were occasions when he missed mentoring sessions so did not receive as much intervention as the other pupils. This may explain the slight difference in outcome for this pupil though a larger study, which considered pupil attendance, would be needed to ascertain more clearly, the impact of attendance on mentoring schemes.

Pupils 1, 4 and 18 showed the greatest improvement in behaviour during the two periods (Figure 5). However, some variables meant that some caution was needed when judging the impact that the mentoring scheme alone had on these students. Pupils 1 and 4 had an extra intervention that other pupils in the sample did not. It can be difficult to “disentangle the specific impact of any one strategy” (Younger et al, 2005b: 74). Pupils 1 and 4 were part of a “revolving door” programme in the school which identified the worst behaved pupils and targeted their behaviour with the help of specialist behaviour teachers.
and teaching assistants. These pupils had extra support in lessons, along with group sessions which addressed some of their specific behavioural problems. The decision to put these pupils in the “revolving door” programme was made by SLT, based on SIMS data. This happened after they had been selected as part of this study and was outside the control of the researcher. These pupils still received assertive mentoring but the expectation of behavioural change was also reinforced by other members of staff within the “revolving door” programme. It is beyond the scope of this study to apportion the influence of each project. Given that the whole focus group showed improvement it is feasible that these pupils may still have improved without the extra intervention. An interesting consideration is whether the combination of the two interventions was the reason for the greater improvement in behaviour. Pupil 18 also showed a significant improvement in behaviour during the research period. Towards the beginning of the research period Pupil 18 moved form group. This was discussed with the pupil in mentoring sessions as a “fresh start” for him to improve his behaviour and consequently, his academic achievement. Whilst this was not an extra intervention per se, this factor may have had some influence on outcome. This was not an extra intervention (like with Pupils 1 and 4) as Pupil 18 did not receive any extra support or time from staff. However, this again raises the question as to the proportion of improvement that is attributable to the mentoring scheme and suggests that further study is needed to tease out how the different circumstances of pupils may impact on the effectiveness of assertive mentoring schemes. It is also of note that there may be a difference in behaviour at the end of a school term. It would be interesting to consider the ebb and flow of the school year and the impact that this has on a programme such as this. Further research, over a longer period of time, would be needed to make these judgements.
Having examined the data from all of the pupils in the focus group, including the possible impact of additional interventions with Pupils 1 and 4 and a differing circumstance for Pupil 18, it is reasonable to suggest that the assertive mentoring programme had a positive impact on the boys’ behaviour. This can lead us to question whether some of the specific aspects of assertive mentoring, as discussed in the literature, were influential in this study.

**Research Question 3: Are there any particular aspects of assertive mentoring that were particularly effective in improving the behaviour of Year 8 boys?**

Some of the key aspects of assertive mentoring have been noted as: target setting informed by data, business-like meetings, good working relationships between pupil and mentor and challenging pupils’ attitudes towards learning.

Pupils in the focus group each received an individual assertive mentoring session of approximately 10 minutes each week. If feasible, pupils were given more time where needed. This is another variable to note, as some pupils, especially those who were part of the revolving door, did have more support and this may have impacted on the results. In the assertive mentoring sessions the boys were presented with their behaviour logs and scores to better inform discussions between pupil and mentor. Instances of poor behaviour from the previous week were discussed and data from SIMs used to create attainable targets. The report reminded each boy of his personal targets for each lesson. Paper monitoring reports were used for each pupil in the focus group. These seemed to be an aspect of the study which was particularly effective. Paper reports worked well because each pupil had a constant visual reminder of what had been agreed. This encouraged self-management as it was their responsibility to present the paper report to their teacher rather than the teacher’s responsibility to remember to complete the report electronically. The other advantage of a paper report was that pupils could see what targets they had achieved for each lesson – if this
was electronically recorded the boys would not necessarily remember whether they had achieved their targets in every lesson. The reporting system was most effective when it was supported by parents/guardians of the boys in the focus group. Around 50% of pupils had their reports signed regularly by a parent/guardian and these boys seemed to take the report system more seriously and strived for better behaviour so that they could show their parents/guardians an improvement. This was reflected in their attitude and dialogue in mentoring sessions.

The regularity of weekly, business-like mentoring sessions seemed particularly effective as pupils knew that they would be held accountable for their behaviour during these sessions and would have to answer questions and discuss any notable incidents. Whilst pupils were on report they were required to present their report daily to be checked. This allowed opportunities to discuss any significant behavioural instances from the day before or to praise pupils for good behaviour. This reinforced the concept of accountability which underpins assertive mentoring as an ideal. During interviews pupils expressed awareness of the effects of regular invention:

**What have been the biggest changes lately?**

*PUPIL 4:* You’ve been keeping a close eye on me – watching me all the time and stuff.

*PUPIL 9:* Miss you always ring my dad and he always knows when I’ve been bad in school coz you’ve told him and then I get in trouble at home too….. so I’ve just tried to be good.

*PUPIL 10:* I have to show you my report every day and you always print off my behaviour log to show me.

*PUPIL 16:* Yeh you’ve been nagging me loads about being less silly.

One of the notable features of assertive mentoring is that it offers pupils a chance to reflect regularly. It is the regularity of the sessions which perhaps underpins some of the success of the project. An opportunity to challenge poor behaviour quickly after the event seemed to have a more positive effect than if there was a delay. There were occasions when the pupil...
was challenged as the behaviour incident occurred, or within a few hours after. On these occasions pupils were able to be very reflective as the incidents were clear in their minds. Pupils seemed to take more responsibility for their poor behaviour the sooner the intervention took place. On occasions where pupils did not have to reflect on the behaviour incidents until perhaps a week later, they had often lost significance to the pupil and no longer seemed relevant. This emphasises the importance of regular mentoring meetings to reflect and review agreed targets.

The importance of a good working relationship between pupils and staff is widely recognised. “Positive relationships with students are the precursor to success in the classroom” (McDonald, 2010: 33). In the questionnaire pupils completed at the start of the study (appendix 3) participants were asked what effects their behaviour in school. The results of the whole sample are presented in Figure 8.

![Figure 8: Pupils’ opinions on what effects behaviour](image)

It is clear that pupils felt that teachers have a big impact on their behaviour. During interviews pupils indicated that the relationship with the mentor was also important as a good pupil-mentor relationship helped them to reflect on, and subsequently change their behaviour.
What are the benefits to you of our meetings?
PUPIL 1: I get to give my side of the story because sometimes I get blamed for stuff that weren’t even me.
PUPIL 10: You talk to me about how I can do better and then I try to do it.
PUPIL 14: Sometimes we talk about things I didn’t even think about and stuff I didn’t think I could even do but you think I can.

In interviews pupils talked of valuing the meetings with the mentor because they felt listened to and were not shouted at, even when they had done something wrong. They also talked about the importance of feeling that the mentor was “on their side” and would be fair. The importance of a successful pupil-mentor relationship is noted (Younger & Warrington, 2005a) and this is echoed in this study where the pupil-mentor relationship had a direct influence on improving the behaviour of the boys. A relationship built on mutual trust and respect, openness and honesty, seemed to be crucial. (Wilson, 2006; Henry, 2007) Distrust or dislike of a mentor may result in pupils disengaging in the mentoring process with subsequent risk that stated targets would become unachievable. The role of the mentor is different to that of the teacher and ultimately pupils will build a different relationship with a mentor. In this study pupils were able to engage with the mentor and build a robust relationship with them. From that platform they were able to discuss and accept their targets as fair and then show a willingness to work towards them.

The final aspect of this study into the impact of assertive mentoring was challenging attitudes towards learning. This concept was explored when considering Research Question 1. As explored in the literature review, it is widely accepted that assertive mentoring is an effective tool for raising achievement. With this study the impact of assertive mentoring on behaviour as opposed to achievement has been explored. What is notable from teacher interviews is that with improved behaviour there is often also an improvement in achievement.
Have you seen any notable changes in the following pupils over the past 12 weeks?

**ENGLISH TEACHER 1:** Pupil 10 has come on leaps and bounds. He had a rocky time around Christmas and I did phone home and raise my concerns with his mum but lately I’ve seen a big improvement. He no longer tries to act the class clown but instead focuses and tries a lot harder. He gets more done in the lessons as he is chatting less which in turn, means I have been able to move him up a NC level. He had been stationary on Level 4 but is now regularly meeting the criteria for Level 5 so I will be able to move him to a 5L in the next set of data entry.

**ENGLISH TEACHER 2:** Pupil 1 has made an excellent start in his new class. He even read out loud to the class last week – something we have not seen him do in the department all year. Really pleased with his progress and he is on target to improve his NC level.

**MATHS TEACHER 2:** Pupil 14 has been amazing this term. He asked me if he could take his folder home to show his mum what he had achieved as he was so proud of his own work.

**MATHS TEACHER 3:** Since February Pupil 18 has really knuckled down, he seems happier and more confident and this is reflected in his work.

**MATHS TEACHER 4:** Pupil 4 struggles in Maths, it is not a strength of his and he often misbehaves as a way to avoid the work. He has been doing a lot better in lessons recently as he has been asking for help when he doesn’t understand. He will be moved up a level in the next data entry as he had an improved test result recently.

In further research it would be interesting to explore if other students also benefitted from this study because of the improved behaviour of the disruptive classmates. Did the achievement of non-disruptive pupils also improve as teachers were able to spend more time teaching than managing behaviour?

This small scale study opened up some interesting insights to a fairly new area of research. However, its small scale inevitably means that the findings are somewhat limited. A more in depth study would be needed to explore this area further to see if the results can be replicated. The sample size of this study meant that there was a limited amount of data for comparison and the time-frame in which the study was conducted did not allow for consideration across a whole academic year. One of the difficulties encountered in implementing the methodology was time-tabling. For example, some pupils in the study were receiving extra literacy or numeracy support sessions. It was inappropriate to remove pupils from this extra support to attend mentoring sessions, so on occasion some pupils missed a
mentoring session. Furthermore, being able to address behavioural issues as they arose was particularly effective, however, it was not always possible to do this due to teaching commitments of the mentor. It would be interesting to consider if a full-time mentor would have a greater impact than a teacher-mentor whose flexibility is limited by their teaching commitments.

There were many successful aspects of this study: pupils generally engaged in the process and almost all of the boys in the focus group described the benefits to themselves of their mentoring sessions when asked. The methodology was successfully implemented and interviews provided some interesting insights which further validated the data gathered. Having considered each research question in detail, including the limitations to the study, the research suggests that the use of assertive mentoring with Year 8 boys does improve their behaviour.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

This study began with the hypothesis that assertive mentoring can have a positive influence on the behaviour of Year 8 boys. I will now draw some conclusions about the extent to which this is true.

This small scale study involved a sample of twenty boys in Year 8 in one secondary school in South Wales. An intervention was implemented over the course of two half terms and results analysed. The twenty pupils were split into a control group (twelve pupils) and a focus group (eight pupils). The same member of staff acted as mentor to all pupils in the focus group.

In general the implementation of the study went well. The methodology proved to be practicable and the interventions were successfully completed. All pupils seemed engaged with the process and the intervention did not interfere with their other commitments in school. Participation in the assertive mentoring scheme seemed to offer positive benefits to pupils.

Boys’ attitudes to their own behaviour was shown to be important in influencing a change in their behaviour. This study showed that boys in the focus group embraced a more positive attitude towards their own behaviour and were more reflective about the importance of changing their behaviour after receiving assertive mentoring. At the beginning of the study only 29% of pupils considered improving their own behaviour to be important. Following the intervention 87% of pupils in the focus group felt that it was important to improve their own behaviour. These figures show a clear change in attitude towards behaviour following the intervention. A positive attitude towards behaviour is key in helping pupils strive for improvement. The concept of a change in attitude as a precursor to an actual change is supported by Curee (2015); Wilson (2006) and Turnbull (2009).
When considering the fundamental question posed for this study, it appears that assertive mentoring did have a positive effect on the behaviour of Year 8 boys. All pupils in the focus group demonstrated improved behaviour when compared with the control group who had a similar behavioural profile. Pupil behaviour was measured using the school computer system, SIMS, which records behavioural instances logged by teachers. Pupils in the sample were selected as they had the most negative behaviour points in Year 8. All pupils in the sample showed a high number of negative behaviour points prior to the study. Interestingly, pupils in the focus group demonstrated a decline in the number of negative behaviour points given during the study period in comparison with the pre-intervention period. Of the total number of behaviour points received by pupils in the focus group, three quarters of these points were received prior to the study and only a quarter during the intervention, showing a marked decline in the number of instances of poor behaviour of pupils in the focus group. This indicates that the assertive mentoring intervention may have led to an improvement in behaviour.

Challenging poor behaviour is an important factor in raising achievement. It has been noted that underachievement and behavioural issues are strongly linked (Rayment, 2006; Younger et al, 2005b). Whilst the focus of this study was to consider the impact of assertive mentoring on poor behaviour, the data suggests that there is a cause and effect link as it seems a by-product of improving behaviour was raising achievement. During interviews many teachers of the pupils in the focus group indicated that the improvement in these pupils’ behaviour had in turn, had a positive impact on their academic achievement. In showing how improving behaviour can pave the way to raising attainment, this study indicates that assertive mentoring could feed into the wider agenda of raising standards at GCSE Level. The use of this intervention with boys may have a positive influence on the noted gender gap
(Welsh Government, 2014) and the use of this intervention in Year 8 as opposed to Year 10 or 11 would allow more time for pupils to benefit from the intervention and ultimately make positive changes to their academic journey. (Wilson, 2006)

It was found that there were some aspects of assertive mentoring worked particularly well. Regular mentoring sessions made pupils more accountable for their actions. The use of a paper monitoring system gave the boys a tangible reminder of what they were trying to achieve. Of great significance was the fact that the boys were directly involved in setting their own targets which increased their sense of ownership and accountability. “Linking new work to recent successes, reinforcing effort and persistence, and helping students create personally important goals may also positively impact on academic motivation.” (McGeown et al, 2014: 284) Assertive mentoring seemed especially effective when there was parental support for the programme. Pupils engaged well with the formal and business-like tone of the mentoring sessions.

Acknowledgement must be made of this study’s limitations which include: a small sample size and a limited time period (part of academic year only). I would have liked to conduct this study over the course of a whole academic year with a larger sample and it would have been useful to have compared results over a longer time frame, ideally two academic years. It would add weight to the findings to repeat the study and see if the results were similar for a new set of pupils. More research would be needed to consider the wider research questions raised. It would be interesting to consider whether assertive mentoring would be equally effective with girls who exhibit problematic behaviour. It would also be useful to find out if assertive mentoring would be beneficial to other year groups. As discussed earlier it would be interesting to explore further the impact of dual-interventions as by nature, assertive mentoring is a collaborative approach. (Younger et al, 2005b). In a larger scale study
there may be other variables which impact on the outcomes of an assertive mentoring programme and these may include: choice of mentor, pupil attendance and parental support. These factors may warrant further research in their own right.

As further opportunities for research present themselves, it should be possible to add weight to the findings of this study. Even so, these current findings add value in themselves in the opening up of further research questions which, in time, will hopefully be answered more comprehensively.

The promising results of this study will be disseminated and discussed with the SLT of Secondary School A. Through the SLT, the study’s potential can be shared with a wider audience both locally and further afield in the hope that further resources be made available to build on the findings discussed here.
References


Appendix 1: Ethics Form

When undertaking a research or enterprise project, Cardiff Met staff and students are obliged to complete this form in order that the ethics implications of that project may be considered.

If the project requires ethics approval from an external agency such as the NHS or MoD, you will not need to seek additional ethics approval from Cardiff Met. You should however complete Part One of this form and attach a copy of your NHS application in order that your School is aware of the project.

The document Guidelines for obtaining ethics approval will help you complete this form. It is available from the Cardiff Met website.

Once you have completed the form, sign the declaration and forward to your School Research Ethics Committee.

PLEASE NOTE:
Participant recruitment or data collection must not commence until ethics approval has been obtained.

PART ONE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of applicant:</th>
<th>Felicity Sullivan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor (if student project):</td>
<td>Paul Herrington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School:</td>
<td>Cardiff Metropolitan University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student number (if applicable):</td>
<td>ST10000398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme enrolled on (if applicable):</td>
<td>MA Educational Research &amp; Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Title:</td>
<td>A study into the impact of assertive mentoring on the behaviour of Year 8 boys in a secondary school in south Wales?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Start Date:</td>
<td>19/01/2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate Duration:</td>
<td>4-6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding Body (if applicable):</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other researcher(s) working on the project:</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will the study involve NHS patients or staff?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will the study involve taking samples of human origin from participants?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In no more than 150 words, give a non technical summary of the project
Assess the impact that assertive mentoring has on disaffected/poorly behaved Year 8 boys in secondary school. Implement an assertive mentoring programme with a control group (approximately 8) Year 8 boys and assess whether this has a positive impact on their behaviour.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does your project fall entirely within one of the following categories:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paper based, involving only documents in the public domain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laboratory based, not involving human participants or human tissue samples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice based not involving human participants (eg curatorial, practice audit)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsory projects in professional practice (eg Initial Teacher Education)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you have answered YES to any of these questions, no further information regarding your project is required.
If you have answered NO to all of these questions, you must complete Part 2 of this form.

---

**DECLARATION:**
I confirm that this project conforms with the Cardiff Met Research Governance Framework

Signature of the applicant: **Felicity Sullivan**
Date: **15/01/2015**

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**FOR STUDENT PROJECTS ONLY**

Name of supervisor: **Paul Herrington**
Date: 
Signature of supervisor: 

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**Research Ethics Committee use only**

Decision reached: 
- Project approved
- Project approved in principle
- Decision deferred
- Project not approved
- Project rejected

Project reference number: Click here to enter text.

Name: Click here to enter text. Date: Click here to enter a date.

Signature: 

Details of any conditions upon which approval is dependant: Click here to enter text.
Appendix 2: Parent Consent

01.02.2015

Dear parent/guardian of __________________________________________

Following our recent phone conversation I would like to invite ______________________ to take part in an Assertive Mentoring Programme in school over the course of 12 weeks. I am currently completing this piece of research on the behaviour of year 8 boys and whether this can be improved using assertive mentoring. It is my belief that ________________ would benefit from being part of this research.

Pupils who have been selected to take part in this programme are at risk of underachievement due to poor behaviour in school. Please find attached ______________’s behaviour log from September – January. I hope that you will use this opportunity to discuss this log with ______________ and I am sure you will share the concerns that I have.

Pupils involved in the programme will be asked their opinions on behaviour and their own behaviour will be discussed in weekly sessions with myself. Pupils will be on an initial monitoring report which should be checked daily by parents/guardians. Pupils will have targets set each week which they will be expected to reach and failure to do so will be discussed and further actions taken. Their views will remain anonymous and confidential. Being part of this research is voluntary and pupils are free to withdraw from the programme at any time.

If you are willing for your child to be part of this research please complete the slip below and return it to the school. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me. I will be in contact towards the end of the programme to discuss ______________’s participation and the outcomes of this programme.

I appreciate your support in this matter.

Kind Regards,

Year Team Leader for Year 8

Pupil Name:_______________________________________________________Form:_____

I am willing/not willing for __________________________ to take part in this research.

Signed _____________________________________________________________________
Appendix 3: Questionnaire

1. How would you rate your behaviour in school? Please circle one.
(1=Very well behaved, 2=Well behaved, 3=Poorly behaved, 4=Very poorly behaved)

   1    2    3    4

2. Which of the following effects your behaviour? Please circle one for each.
(1 = Very big impact, 2 = Fair impact, 3 = Some impact, 4 = No impact at all)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seating plan/who I sit by</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day of the week</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson time (i.e morning/afternoon)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please state)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. What is currently in place to improve your behaviour? (Please tick all that apply)

   Assertive mentoring
   On report
   Interventions (such as anger management sessions)
   Detentions
   Time-out card
   Other (please state)

4. Do you think it is important to try and improve your behaviour?

   [ ] Yes   [ ] No

5. What would be the benefits of improving your behaviour?

   ____________________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________________