

East Renfrewshire  
Educational Psychology  
Service

## Practitioner Enquiry

Theme One: Learning and  
Teaching

Activity Descriptor: Peer Mentor  
Project - Focus Group

Date: Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> January 17

Time: 1.30 – 3.30 pm

Venue: St. Luke's High School

## VSE Briefing Paper

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## Theme One Key Question

*What impact is our contribution to **practitioner enquiry** and professional learning with schools having on learning and teaching, particularly for our most vulnerable pupils?*

## Background

### **What information, knowledge and data do we have?**

The Scottish Government launched the National Improvement Hub to tackle issues relating to educational inequity which were outlined in the National Improvement Framework. The aim of the Hub is to develop an evidence base of what works in the Scottish context by: synthesising existing educational research with local information; developing practitioner enquiry skills; and, giving a platform to action research that contributes to the field and which can be shared across local authorities to improve our education system as a whole. Nationally, educational psychologists are coming together to contribute research articles to this National Improvement Hub, forming an Educational Psychology Action Enquiry Programme (EPAEP). Research is a key function of the educational psychologist in Scotland (Scottish Executive, 2002). Educational psychologists have unique skills and knowledge which can inform and promote best practice by conducting research in educational settings.

The Educational Psychology Service (EPS) is participating in the EPAEP and has been working with Education Scotland to explore the impact of a peer mentoring system on the wellbeing and attainment of disadvantaged children and young people in one of our local high schools.

A local study found that pupils attending secondary schools in East Renfrewshire were more likely to speak to peers about issues concerning their mental health and wellbeing than to adults or teaching staff (How are you? Mental Health Survey, 2016). In addition, there is an increasing evidence base for the impact of school based peer mentoring schemes on the attainment and wellbeing of vulnerable pupils e.g Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (2010), DuBois and Karcher (2014).

### *The Peer Mentor Project*

Fourteen S6 mentors were recruited to support 14 S1 pupils who were identified by Pupil Support Teachers. All S1 pupils were SIMD 1-3 or LAC and were considered to require support with their emotional wellbeing. S6 mentors were trained in 2 half day sessions covering active listening skills, resilience, cognitive behavioural principles, solution oriented approaches, child protection and confidentiality. Mentors were provided with activities to work through with their S1 mentee during their twice weekly sessions. These activities focused on relationship building, increasing confidence and enhancing resilience. Mentors attended group supervision sessions weekly with an educational psychologist with the purpose of discussing experiences, sharing ideas and providing peer support. Mentees completed pre-questionnaires prior to meeting with their mentor and these will be repeated at the end of the project. Qualitative information will also be gathered from school staff, parents and the mentors and mentees themselves regarding the impact of the project.

Key strengths of the EPS approach to the project are emerging:

- Staff who are enthusiastic about embracing the challenge of conducting research that would be to an appropriate standard for the National Improvement Hub;
- Recognised the importance of supporting, and trying to raise the profile of, educational

psychology services nationally through the EPAEP;

- Addressed research questions that fit with national and local priorities and build on information that we know about local service users;
- Clear focus on improving outcomes for children and young people from SIMD 1-3 and / or who are Looked After;
- Developed a replicable approach to our intervention that would enable us to roll it out and build capacity across secondary schools in the locality if the evidence suggests that the intervention impacts positively on attainment and wellbeing outcomes for vulnerable children and young people;
- Allocated service time for practitioners to ensure that they can meet the deadlines and standards set by Education Scotland;
- Recognised the importance and value of participating in Education Scotland training and development sessions, and sharing our research questions and interventions with other services that support the EPAEP project.

### **Challenges**

The hard work and ongoing contribution of educational psychology services has been somewhat overlooked in Scotland, particularly in recent years, where funding has been cut to training courses and the Association of Principal Educational Psychologists has struggled to make progress with politicians in delivering a sustainable EPS workforce. The EPAEP is therefore an important opportunity for services to demonstrate that there are practitioners already in the Scottish education system who have the research skills required to lead advancements in localised research and practitioner enquiry to bring about improvement in the attainment of vulnerable groups of learners. The EPS therefore considers the EPAEP to be a high priority and critical to the national profile and therefore the future of the profession. Essentially, the EPS recognises that it shares in the responsibility of meeting the challenges that are facing the discipline and services across Scotland.

## Activity Outline, Rationale and Outcomes

### **What are we doing?**

Key themes from focus groups which recently took place with the mentors and mentees will be presented via PowerPoint to stimulate discussion about the peer mentor project and the contribution of the EPS to it.

The group will then have a wider discussion to further explore the EP contribution to the peer mentor project and the impact of this contribution on staff and young people. The discussion will be guided by a SWOT framework which aims to identify strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities of EPs leading action research projects such as the peer mentor project. Analysis of these factors is an essential component of self-evaluation and will inform how we move forward.

### **Why have we chosen this activity?**

The activity provides the opportunity to explore how EPs can have a role in developing practitioner enquiry practice through directly conducting action enquiry in a secondary school. The activity is

designed to gather information from a wide variety of stakeholders and jointly consider the impact of conducting research in an educational setting. The SWOT framework will support reflection and thinking around how EPs can continue to improve our practice with regards to conducting research and building the capacity of teaching staff in conducting action research.

**What is the evidence base for this type of activity?**

SWOT analysis has been successfully applied in many settings to evaluate internal and external factors impacting positively or negatively on a project.

**What key questions do we intend to answer in this activity?**

- How can an Educational Psychology led action research project promote and support practitioner enquiry practices and skills in other professionals?
- What impact will a peer mentoring system have on the wellbeing of disadvantaged children and young people?
- What impact will a peer mentoring system have on the attainment of disadvantaged children and young people?
- Can a peer mentoring system contribute to tackling educational inequity?
- Is an action enquiry project a beneficial use of the EPS for supporting the teaching and learning of vulnerable pupils?

Activity Facilitators	
Name	Role
Willie Inglis	Head Teacher
Vicky Flores	Educational Psychologist
Carolynne McKendry	Health and Wellbeing Development Office, EPS

Participants	
Name	Role
Chris Atherton	Senior Educational Psychologist
Ainsley McGoldrick	Educational Psychologist
Christine McGovern	Educational Psychologist
Jennifer Hunter	Educational Psychologist
David Gordon	Depute Head Teacher
Margaret Pollock	PT Pupil Support
Kristina Azubalyte	Psychology Assistant
Fiona Inglis	Education Development Officer, Corporate Parenting
Andrew Nelson	Social Worker
Jennifer Norval	Trainee Educational Psychologist
Michael McGarry	Principal Teacher
Alison Borland	Principal Teacher

References
DuBois, D.L., & Karcher, M.J., (2014) Youth Mentoring in Contemporary Perspective. In DL. DuBois & M.J. Karcher (Eds.), <i>Handbook of Youth Mentoring</i> . Second Edition. (pp3-13). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
Mentoring and Befriending Foundation. (2010). <i>Peer Mentoring in Schools: A review of the evidence base of the benefits of peer mentoring in schools including findings from the MBF Outcomes and Measurement Programme</i> . <a href="http://www.mandbf.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Peer_Mentoring_in_Schools.pdf">http://www.mandbf.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Peer_Mentoring_in_Schools.pdf</a>
Scottish Executive (2002). Review of Provision of Educational Psychology Services in Scotland.

Thank you for participating in this activity.