



THE CHALLENGE IN SCHOOLS

Across the UK, schools are facing a marked rise in complex behaviour, emotional dysregulation, and disengagement from learning — particularly among students with SEND and SEMH profiles. According to the NHS, **one in six children now presents with a probable mental health disorder**. Department for Education data shows that **pupils with SEMH needs are four times more likely to be excluded** and **five times more likely to become persistently absent**. Post-pandemic, **45% of school leaders report a noticeable increase in emotional and behavioural needs**, and “persistent disruptive behaviour” remains the leading cause of permanent exclusion in England. These pressures stretch already overwhelmed school staff, creating a growing demand for targeted, consistent intervention that supports both the student and the wider school community.

WHY MENTORING MATTERS

Mentoring provides a relational, preventative framework that supports both emotional and behavioural development. Evidence from the Education Endowment Foundation shows that mentoring can **improve attendance by up to 15%** and **reduce behavioural incidents by 30%**. Pupils with a trusted adult in school are more likely to succeed academically and less likely to face exclusion. Longitudinal studies have also linked sustained mentoring with a **130% increased likelihood of taking leadership roles** and a **55% higher rate of participation in further education**. For students with adverse childhood experiences, attachment difficulties or low self-esteem, a consistent, supportive mentoring relationship can build **self-regulation, resilience and a renewed engagement with learning** — outcomes that matter deeply to every teacher and SLT team.

THE POWER OF SPORTS BASED ENGAGEMENT

When mentoring is combined with structured physical activity, the impact is amplified. **Sport naturally encourages teamwork, resilience, discipline and emotional regulation** — essential attributes for students struggling with behaviour or attention difficulties. A Youth Sport Trust study found that **70% of pupils engaged in sport-led mentoring programmes reported higher self-confidence**, while over **60% demonstrated improved classroom behaviour and focus**. Neuroscientific research confirms that **physical activity enhances working memory, mood regulation and executive function** — all key to managing impulsivity and frustration. By combining movement with conversation, coaching and reflection, sport-based mentoring creates a powerful context for students to safely develop the skills they need to thrive in and beyond the classroom.