

Top Tips for Working as an Academic Mentor

What does it mean to be an Academic Mentor?

- Working with the class teachers to address the learning gaps of identified pupils. They will be your first point of contact in your role (and the SENCo and senior leadership team on occasion).
- Your tuition delivery will be focused on addressing learning gaps and supporting bespoke intervention programmes for pupils.
- Developing and delivering engaging sessions to pupils with clear learning objectives, considering any barriers to learning or additional needs.
- Delivering measurable outcomes from each session to track progress.





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Our top tips to support you in achieving these goals:

1

Support independent learning

One of the most important things for an academic mentor to remember is that they are not there to do a pupil's work for them. Although it might be tough to watch a child struggling to solve a problem, that pupil gains nothing by being given the answer. It is essential to have that level of empathy and patience, but the key to being a good mentor is being able to find ways to teach your pupils to learn to do things for themselves.



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Understand individual needs

It's important for academic mentors to remember that there's no one-size-fits-all solution for children who need support. As a mentor, you'll often find yourself supporting pupils with complex needs, who will all engage with different learning techniques. Being able to recognise this and be flexible in your approach is important. Look for ways which will engage pupils in the tasks you want to do to capture their interest.



Our top tips to support you in achieving these goals:

3

Outline Expectations and Routine

Routines can be crucial in making sure that students are comfortable and able to best achieve in education, so it's a good idea to put one in place to help both yourself and your students. Outline your expectations when starting with a new group, such as: active listening, be respectful, raise hand, collaborative learning. You can decide these with your pupils in the first session so you can all agree a way to best work together with respect.



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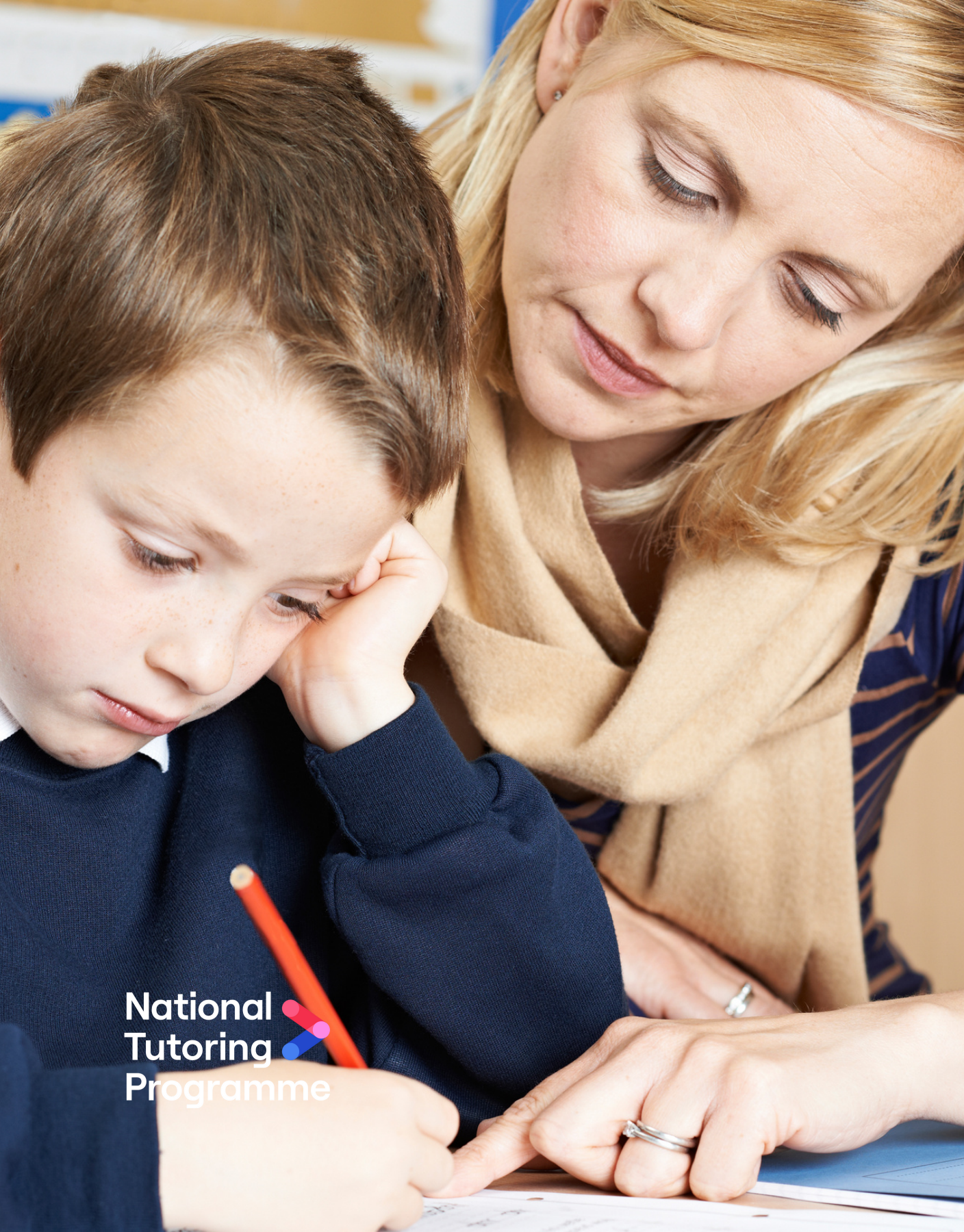
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Stay calm and positive

Working with children always comes with challenges, which is heightened by a range of needs, learning difficulties, and accommodations that need to be made. It's important that you keep up a positive mindset and don't let challenges bring you down, always remaining calm. You might find yourself feeling frustrated with a student, be mindful of your body language, tone of voice and non-verbal cues when dealing with the situation. Make sure you have open communication with other staff that can assist you. Treat each day as a new day and start with a good mindset ready to help your pupils learn.

As time goes on, share the progress made with the pupil and celebrate each accomplishment. Positive reinforcement means a lot when dealing with pupils who have been singled out for falling behind. Emphasise progress not perfection!



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Start out slow

If you're working one-on-one with new pupils then it's a good idea to ease them into working with you and allow your pupils to familiarise themselves with you, as well as you with them! Build up a rapport with them, learn what they like and don't like. Share your rules and expectations. You can adapt your approach from there as you build a mutual understanding and relationship. Don't feel like you have to have everything figured out right away.



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Be mindful of your language

When working with pupils who may be struggling, it's important that you use appropriate language and don't undermine or demean them. Try to frame their learning in a positive way, rather than emphasising their struggles. Don't gloss over the issues your pupils are facing, as that's why you're there in the first place, but be mindful of how you address it both with them and their parents or carers, as well as teachers and other staff. Use language like "catching up" rather than "behind", leading with positive rather than negative but still acknowledging that there is progress to be made.

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Build a good relationship with teachers

Depending on whether you're in a primary or a secondary school, you could end up working with one teacher or a dozen. Our top tip is to establish a rapport with your teacher and SENCo colleagues, as they may be able to give you some ideas on what works with your pupils and what doesn't.



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Don't be afraid to ask for help

If you're facing any issues in the workplace, it can be good to air them out and get advice. Try and coordinate with other staff members on solutions to problems. If you're feeling overwhelmed by the work, make sure that you don't keep it to yourself; there are always people willing to help, you have to reach out. Reaching out for help isn't a sign of weakness, and, if you're struggling with a particular aspect of the job (like a pupil's disruptive behaviour), then getting the help that you need can actually fix the issue and also shows initiative on your part.



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Get to grips with edtech

A modern classroom contains lots of technology, some of which can play an important role in teaching children with special needs and disabilities. Getting to know some of the tools and how they work will help you and your students make the most out of the tools on offer. Ask for training on the new technology – voice-activated software, reading pens – and make yourself aware of what can and can't be used in an exam.



Our top tips to support you in achieving these goals:

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Take some time for yourself

Just because your job involves dedicating yourself to others and their progress doesn't mean that you shouldn't focus on yourself when you can. To avoid burnout and letting everything that you deal with in the job overwhelm you, take time out to do things that you enjoy and blow off steam. Take steps to manage your stress levels and deal with issues as they arise. Maintaining a good work-life balance is crucial when working in a job like this where your state of mind can potentially impact the pupils that you're working with.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will I have to prepare my own lessons and resources?

Many schools will have programmes and systems in place for you to follow which will help you meet objectives in lessons and deliver measurable outcomes which you record to show progress. At times you may be asked to deliver and design your own lessons. Don't panic! You will receive training that will support you to be able to carry out these tasks.

How many hours will I have to teach?

Your working hours will vary depending on the school you are placed in and their requirements. The hours are typically structured around a school day, but this will be discussed and agreed prior to your start date in your school.