

Nurture in Scottish Schools: A briefing from nurtureuk

nurtureuk

Nurtureuk is the national charity supporting whole-school nurturing interventions. We work to ensure that every disadvantaged or disengaged child has access to a nurturing intervention to equip them with the skills and resilience they need to make the most of learning and school. We do this by supporting the development of nurturing interventions in schools through training, resources and support; making the case for nurture in schools with policymakers and politicians; and running an on-going research and evaluation programme to monitor evidence of outcomes.

Nurture interventions are educational psychologist-designed, teacher-led interventions for disengaged and troubled children. Nurture approaches remove behavioural barriers to engagement and attainment in schools by recreating missing or distorted early attachments and are proven to support greater academic attainment, improved behaviour and attendance, and reduced school exclusions.

The whole-school approach – National Nurturing Schools Programme

The National Nurturing Schools Programme (NNSP) is a whole-school approach that upskills teachers and other school staff to embed a nurturing culture to improve the mental health and wellbeing of all pupils and staff in a school. With one in 10 school children in the UK suffering from a mental health problem¹ and worrying levels of stress and exhaustion among teaching staff, the NNSP offers schools a way to develop a happier, more resilient and more successful school community.

We support schools to embed the six principles of nurture that have successfully underpinned nurture groups, the original nurturing intervention, for over 40 years, as the foundational element across all school functions. These principles are:

- Children's learning is understood developmentally
- The importance of nurture for the development of wellbeing
- All behaviour is communication
- The classroom offers a safe base
- Language is a vital means of communication
- The importance of transition in children's lives

Teachers are trained to focus on emotional needs and development as well as the academic learning of all pupils, and to embed the six principles of nurture throughout the policies and

“Nurture is the foundation on which everything is built. It is about how we understand, support and work with every pupil, parent, staff member and visitor at Brimmond School. When I took up my post as Head Teacher in December 2014 I said, ‘if we don’t get nurture right we won’t get anything else right’, and I still believe that this is the case. Without a true understanding of children and where they are coming from in their lives we cannot begin to get it right for them and if we cannot do this then they will not be in the right place to learn, build relationships and develop skills which will benefit them throughout their lives.”

**Michelle McKay, Head Teacher
Brimmond School, Aberdeen**

¹ Mental Health Foundation, <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/c/children-and-young-people>

practices of a school. This enhances teaching and learning and promotes healthy outcomes for children, young people and the staff in the school. We also train teachers to use Boxall Profile, the educational psychologist designed tool to identify children and young people who need additional, more focused support or interventions, such as to be part of a nurture group. This programme takes place over a two-year period and requires the commitment of both senior management and teaching staff.

The Boxall Profile

The Boxall Profile is a unique online assessment instrument enabling teachers and education professionals to develop a precise and accurate understanding of individual children's social and emotional competencies, and to plan effective interventions and support activities. The Boxall Profile is cited by the Department for Education as a key measurement and identification tool to support pupils with mental health problems (Department for Education, 2018, *Mental health and behaviour in schools*) and is the most popular measurement used in schools to understand pupils' wellbeing and support needs (Department for Education, 2017, *Survey: supporting mental health in schools and colleges*). Currently, it is widely used when teachers identify that a pupil may have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD), although increasingly schools are using the Boxall Profile to gain a better understanding of the wellbeing of their whole school populations. By profiling all children in a school, the teaching staff have a more rounded view of the children and young people in their care and their needs. The Boxall Profile is easy to use and a very cost-effective resource.

Nurture groups

Nurture groups are the original and best-known nurturing intervention. They are an educational psychologist-designed, teacher-led intervention for disengaged and troubled children, that remove behavioural barriers to engagement and attainment in schools through re-creating missing or distorted early attachments. First developed in Hackney, London nearly 50 years ago, there are now more than 2,000 nurture groups in nursery, primary and secondary schools across the UK. Within the whole school approach of the National Nurturing Schools Programme the six principles underpinning nurture groups are used to support all children and staff at the school. A classic nurture group exists to support children with more acute needs and benefit from this more intensive and focused intervention.

A nurture group is a small group of 6 to 12 children or young people supported by two trained adults. Nurture groups are, on average, provided 5 times a week for 2.5 hours a day per child and are the only intensive psycho-social intervention available full-time while allowing students to remain a part of their mainstream class. Placements in the nurture group can be either short or medium-term with the average pupil returning fully to their mainstream classes between two and four terms.

'Nurture children' are carefully selected using the Boxall Profile. Goals are set and outcomes and progress are captured using the Boxall Profile online, which gives nurtureuk access to outcomes data. Once in the group, a nurturing philosophy rooted in attachment theory is used to ensure that children with social, emotional or behavioural difficulties are provided with the early nurturing experiences that are vital to learning. Nurture groups turn children's lives around, ensuring no child is left behind, and are also an excellent 'sharp end' intervention. By allowing teachers dedicated time, and by providing a framework through which to work with individual children, staff are able to more accurately identify whether pupil's needs could be

met in school or if another course of action is necessary, such as an assessment for SEN support.

Proven Outcomes

- **Greater academic attainment:** Children and young people attending nurture groups have been shown in quasi non-randomised trials to have significant gains in academic attainment as measured by their total scores on their baseline assessment.² In a report by Ofsted, nurture groups are highlighted as an intervention which saw pupils make “considerable progress from their starting points” in their “reading and writing skills”³.
- **Improved behaviour:** Nurture groups resulted in an improvement in pupils’ behaviour and improved social skills at school⁴ and at home.⁵ An evaluation of 30 groups in Northern Ireland shows that while 77.7% of children who entered nurture groups as part of the trial were exhibiting difficult behaviour, this reduced to just 20.6% at post-intervention test⁶.
- **Improved attendance and reduced exclusions:** Nurture groups have proven to significantly improve attendance⁷ and reduce exclusions⁸.
- **Attachment to teachers, school and community:** Nurture groups help develop affective bonds between teachers and students,⁹ result in an increased nurturing ethos at school¹⁰ and result in positive attachments to schools and the community.¹¹
- **Long-term mental health improvements and resiliency:** Controlled studies have concluded that students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties are significantly more likely to improve in social and emotional functioning by attending nurture group provision in school rather than remaining in their mainstream classroom, gains that were found to be maintained over time.¹² The Northern Ireland study concluded nurture groups are “highly successful” in their “primary aim of achieving improvements in the social, emotional and behavioural skills of children from deprived areas exhibiting significant difficulties”¹³.

² Reynolds, S., Kearney, M. and MacKay, T. (2009). Nurture Groups: a large – scale, controlled study of effect on development and academic attainment. *British Journal of Special Education*, 36 (4): 204 – 212; Seth-Smith, F., Netali L., Richard P., Fonagy p. and Jaffey, D. (2010). Do nurture groups improve the social, emotional and behavioural functioning of at risk children? *Educational and Child Psychology*, Volume 27, No 1.

³ Ofsted (2012) 'Pupil premium: how schools are spending the funding successfully to maximise achievement'. www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130016.

⁴ Cooper, P. and Tiknaz, Y. (2005). Progress and challenge in Nurture Groups: evidence from three case studies. *British Journal of Special Education*, Volume 32, Issue 4, pages 211–222

⁵ Binnie, L.M., and K. Allen (2008). Whole school support for vulnerable children: The evaluation of a part-time nurture group. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, volume 13, no. 3: 201–16.

⁶ Sloan, S., Winter, K., Lynn, F., Gildea, A. & Connolly, P. (2016) The impact and cost effectiveness of Nurture Groups in Primary Schools in Northern Ireland. Belfast: Centre for Effective Education, Queen's University Belfast.

⁷ Sanders, Tracy (2007). Helping Children Thrive at School: The Effectiveness of Nurture Groups. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, Volume. 23, Issue 1, 45-61.

⁸ Cooper et al (2001). The effectiveness of nurture groups: preliminary research findings. *British journal of Special Education*, 28 (4), 160-166

⁹ Cooper, P. and Whitebread, D. (2007). The Effectiveness of Nurture Groups: Evidence from a National Research Study. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, volume 12, n3 p171-190.

¹⁰ Binnie, L.M., and K. Allen (2008). Whole school support for vulnerable children: The evaluation of a part-time nurture group. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, volume 13, no. 3: 201–16.

¹¹ Walker, L C (2010). *The impact of nurture group interventions: parental involvement and perceptions* (Unpublished PhD thesis). University of Sheffield, United Kingdom.

¹² O'Connor, Tina and John Colwell (2002). The effectiveness and rationale of the 'nurture group' approach to helping children with emotional and behavioural difficulties remain within mainstream education. *British Journal of Special Education*, Volume 29, Issue 2,

¹³ Sloan, S., Winter, K., Lynn, F., Gildea, A. & Connolly, P. (2016).

Nurturing interventions in Scotland

The importance of nurture has been recognised by policymakers:

- In June 2018, Education Scotland published the policy document document *Nurture, Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma informed practice: Making the links between these approaches*¹⁴. The document sets out examples of good practice in applying nurturing approaches and cites the benefits of nurturing interventions in supporting young people who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).
- In February 2018, Education Scotland published the guidance *Applying Nurture as a Whole School Approach*¹⁵. It states that “research clearly demonstrates the impact that Nurture Groups can have on attainment as well as social and emotional competences”. The guidance also sets out in detail how nurturing approaches are aligned with the Scottish Government’s national approach *Getting it Right for Every Child*, which places children and young people’s wellbeing at the centre of all assessment and planning.
- A nurturing approach is promoted as an effective intervention to reduce school exclusions and support positive relationships and behaviour in the Scottish Government’s strategy *Included, Engaged and Involved, part 2*¹⁶. The document states there is a “long established evidence base for the use of Nurture Groups as a targeted approach to support children and young people but schools and local authorities are also increasingly seeing the benefits of using a Nurturing approach at the whole school level.”
- Education Scotland has featured good practice case studies on nurturing approaches, stating that “Local Authorities are increasingly promoting whole school Nurturing Approaches as a means of supporting both Health and Wellbeing and attainment. A whole school Nurturing Approach is a helpful framework for schools to enhance their knowledge and understanding of how all children and young people develop and learn whilst focusing on those who need specific targeted support”¹⁷.
- The use of nurture as an intervention that has a positive impact on reducing the attainment gap is cited in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report *Closing the Attainment Gap in Scottish Education* (2014)¹⁸.
- Nurture groups are mentioned as a socially beneficial intervention in the Scottish Government paper *‘What Works to Reduce Crime? A Summary of the Evidence’* (2014)¹⁹. The paper states “Of wider policy interest is the use of nurture groups to promote positive behaviours, evidence from which suggests a range of positive outcomes in terms of the social, emotional, behavioural and educational functioning of children.”

¹⁴ <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/self-evaluation/inc83-nurture-adverse-childhood-experiences-and-trauma-informed-practice>

¹⁵ <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/documents/inc55applyingnurturingapproaches120617.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/included-engaged-involved-part-2-positive-approach-preventing-managing-school/>, 2017

¹⁷ <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/practice-exemplars/Developing%20whole%20school%20nurturing%20approaches>

¹⁸ <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/education-attainment-scotland-full.pdf>

¹⁹ <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0046/00460517.pdf>

- Scottish Government policy guidance *Better Relationships, Better Learning and Better Behaviour*²⁰ cites nurturing approaches as a widely-used intervention which promotes positive behaviour.

What you can do to support whole-school nurturing interventions

- Visit a nurturing school to see first-hand the positive impact of whole-school nurturing interventions
- Highlight the benefits of nurturing interventions in the media, especially by speaking out about the achievements of schools using nurturing approaches in your constituency
- Seek out opportunities to highlight the importance of whole-school nurturing interventions to the Scottish Government's ongoing development of a national approach to young people's wellbeing
- Support the establishment of nurture groups and programmes in your constituency by meeting with school leaders and advocating for nurturing interventions on a local level
- Meet with the nurtureau policy team to find out more about our work

For support on any of these next steps or for further information, please contact becky@nutureuk.org.

²⁰ <https://www2.gov.scot/Publications/2013/03/7388/downloads#res416217>