

## **THE SIX PRINCIPLES OF NURTURE GROUPS**

### **1. Children's learning is understood developmentally**

In a nurture group staff respond to children not in terms of arbitrary expectations about 'attainment levels' but in terms of the children's developmental progress assessed through the Boxall Profile Handbook. The response to the individual child is 'as they are', underpinned by a non-judgemental and accepting attitude.

### **2. The classroom offers a safe base**

The organisation of the environment and the way the group is managed contains anxiety. The nurture group room offers a balance of educational and domestic experiences aimed at supporting the development of the children's relationship with each other and with the staff. The nurture group is organised around a structured period of time with predictable routines. Great attention is paid to detail; the adults are reliable and consistent in their approach to the children. Nurture groups are an educational provision making the important link between emotional containment and cognitive learning.

### **3. Nurture is important for the development of self-esteem**

Nurture involves listening and responding. In a nurture group 'everything is verbalised' with an emphasis on the adults engaging with the children in reciprocal shared activities e.g. play / meals / reading / talking about events and feelings. Children respond to being valued and thought about as individuals, so in practice this involves noticing and praising small achievements; 'nothing is hurried in nurture groups'.

### **4. Language is understood as a vital means of communication**

Language is more than a skill to be learnt, it is the way of putting feelings into words. Nurture group children often 'act out' their feelings as they lack the vocabulary to 'name' how they feel. In nurture groups the informal opportunities for talking and sharing, e.g. welcoming the children into the group or having breakfast together are as important as the more formal lessons teaching language skills. Words are used instead of actions to express feelings and opportunities are created for extended conversations or encouraging imaginative play to understand the feelings of others.

### **5. All behaviour is communication**

This principle underlies the adult response to the children's often challenging or difficult behaviour. 'Given what I know about this child and their development what is this child trying to tell me?' Understanding what a child is communicating through behaviour helps staff to respond in a firm but non-punitive way by not being provoked or discouraged. If the child can sense that their feelings are understood this can help to diffuse difficult situations. The adult makes the link between the external / internal worlds of the child.

### **6. Transitions are significant in the lives of children**

The nurture group helps the child make the difficult transition from home to school. However, on a daily basis there are numerous transitions the child makes, e.g. between sessions and classes and between different adults. Changes in routine are invariably difficult for vulnerable children and need to be carefully managed with preparation and support.