

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL'S



ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE IN LEARNING

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SBC INCLUDES: NURTURING APPROACHES GUIDELINES

In our sight, in our minds, in our actions and being heard

A practical guide for schools and settings to develop a whole school nurturing approach and targeted nurture intervention groups.



getting
it right
for every child

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1	SUPPORTING SELF-EVALUATION OF NURTURE GROUPS IN SCOTTISH BORDERS: A FRAMEWORK FOR NURTURE GROUP STAFF
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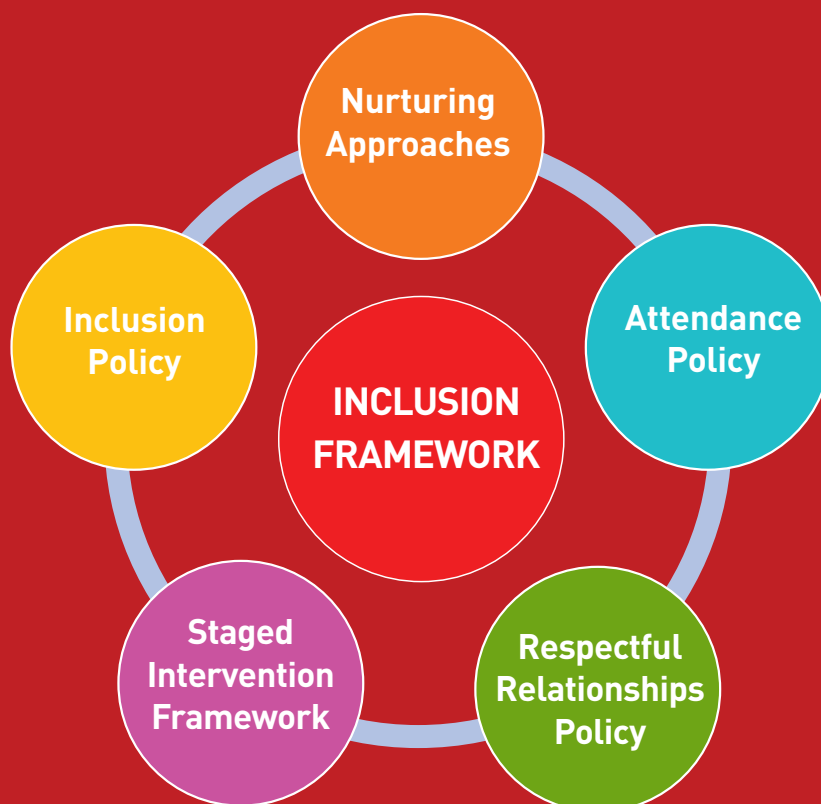


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1. INTRODUCTION

This practical guidance details the actions required by all learning establishments to ensure that a nurturing approach is used to support behaviour, wellbeing, attainment and achievement within Scottish Borders Council. It complements and is integrated within a suite of policies and guidelines which are subsumed under the Inclusion Framework and aligns with Scottish Borders Council Directorate's vision for all young people – *In Our Sight, In Our Minds, In our Actions and Being Heard*.



A nurturing approach is at the heart of our core values, vision and ethos in the Scottish Borders as this is crucial for learning, wellbeing and ensuring positive relationships are a hallmark of our communities. Nurture recognises:

- The importance of early relationships and their link to children and young people's social and emotional development.
- It is the responsibility of all to understand and develop nurturing approaches to support and connect with all children, young people and families.
- Our relationships reflect our beliefs that everyone should be valued, respected and heard.
- We model and promote positive relationships through providing a balance of care and challenge, with a focus on achievement and attainment.



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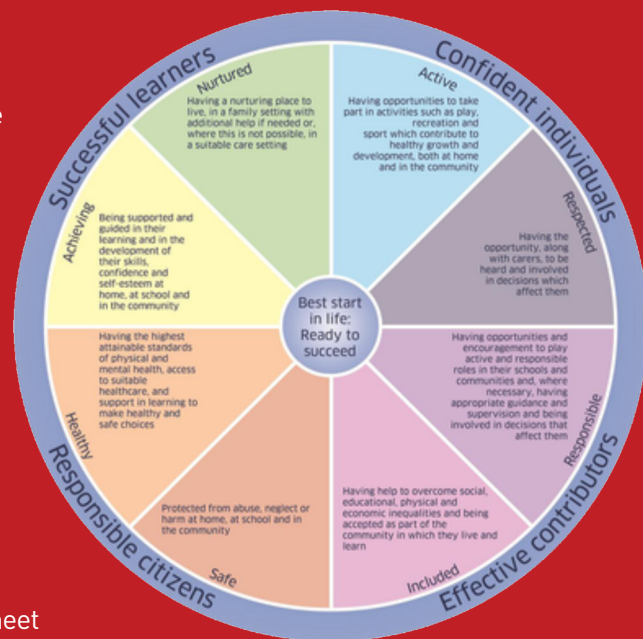
2. NATIONAL CONTEXT

Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) is the [national policy framework](#) aimed at supporting the wellbeing of children and young people. The framework embeds the articles of the [United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#) into practice and promotes a rights-based approach.

GIRFEC places children's wellbeing at the centre of planning and assessment. It is the key driver to improve outcomes for all children and young people. It recognises that all children and young people will have experienced differences in their lives and its strategic overarching framework supports all other legislation and policies related to meeting needs in our schools and early years establishments.

GIRFEC is design around four key principles:

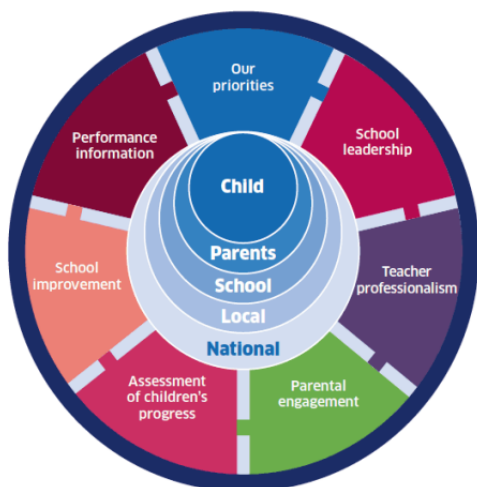
- **A child-focused approach** - ensuring the child or young person – and their family – is at the centre of decision- making and the support available to them.
- **An understanding of the wellbeing of a child in their current situation** - taking into consideration the wider influences on a child or young person and their developmental needs when thinking about their [wellbeing](#), so that the right support can be offered.
- **A preventative approach** - aiming to ensure needs are identified as early as possible to avoid bigger concerns or problems developing
- **A joined-up approach** - children, young people, parents and the services they need working together in a coordinated way to meet the specific needs and improve their wellbeing



This is now enshrined in legislation in the [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act \(2014\)](#).

Many of the key components of GIRFEC can be found within a nurturing approach, including a focus on wellbeing, an understanding of resilience and a need to implement a holistic assessment approach to support children and young people's wellbeing needs.

The [National Improvement Framework \(NIF\)](#) sets out clear priorities to deliver excellence and equity, including: closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people and improving children and young people’s health and wellbeing.

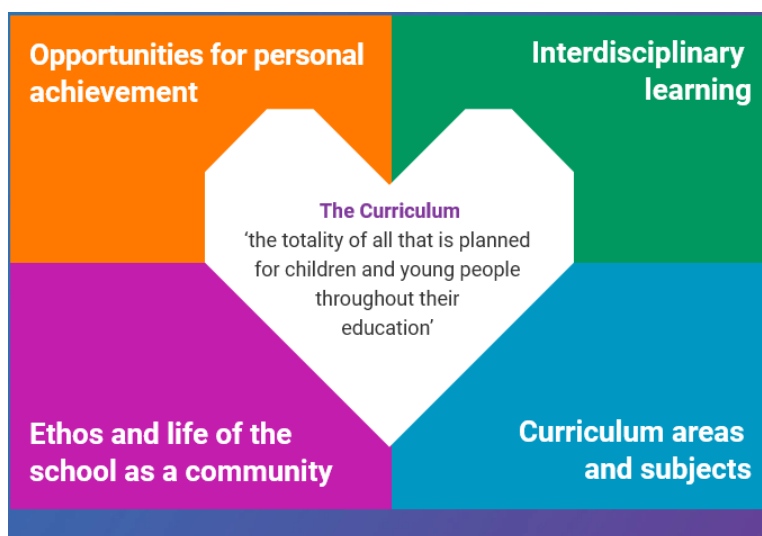


A nurturing approach places both of these priorities at the heart of schools and settings.

The NIF also has a number of key drivers for improvement which feeds into a school or settings self-evaluation process. A nurturing approach impacts on all aspects of schools and settings and when fully implemented, can impact on each of these drivers but in particular; School Improvement, School Leadership, Teacher Professionalism and Parental Engagement.

Our ***Scottish Curriculum for Excellence*** places learners at the heart of education. As part of their learner journey, all children and young people in Scotland are entitled to experience a coherent curriculum from 3 to 18, in order that they have opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes they need to adapt, think critically and flourish in today’s world. Schools and settings plan learning that is experienced by learners across [four contexts](#):

However, the starting point for all learning is **a positive ethos and climate of respect and trust** based upon shared values across the school community. All learning establishments should promote positive, supportive relationships where children and young people will feel that they are listened to; promoting a climate in which children and young people feel safe and secure; modelling behaviour which promotes effective learning and wellbeing within the school community; and by being sensitive and responsive to each young person’s wellbeing.



A focus on a nurturing approach provides schools with a framework to help develop and achieve these aims. Using self-evaluation to develop a nurturing approach can also help schools and settings to determine how culture and ethos impacts on overall attainment and achievement.

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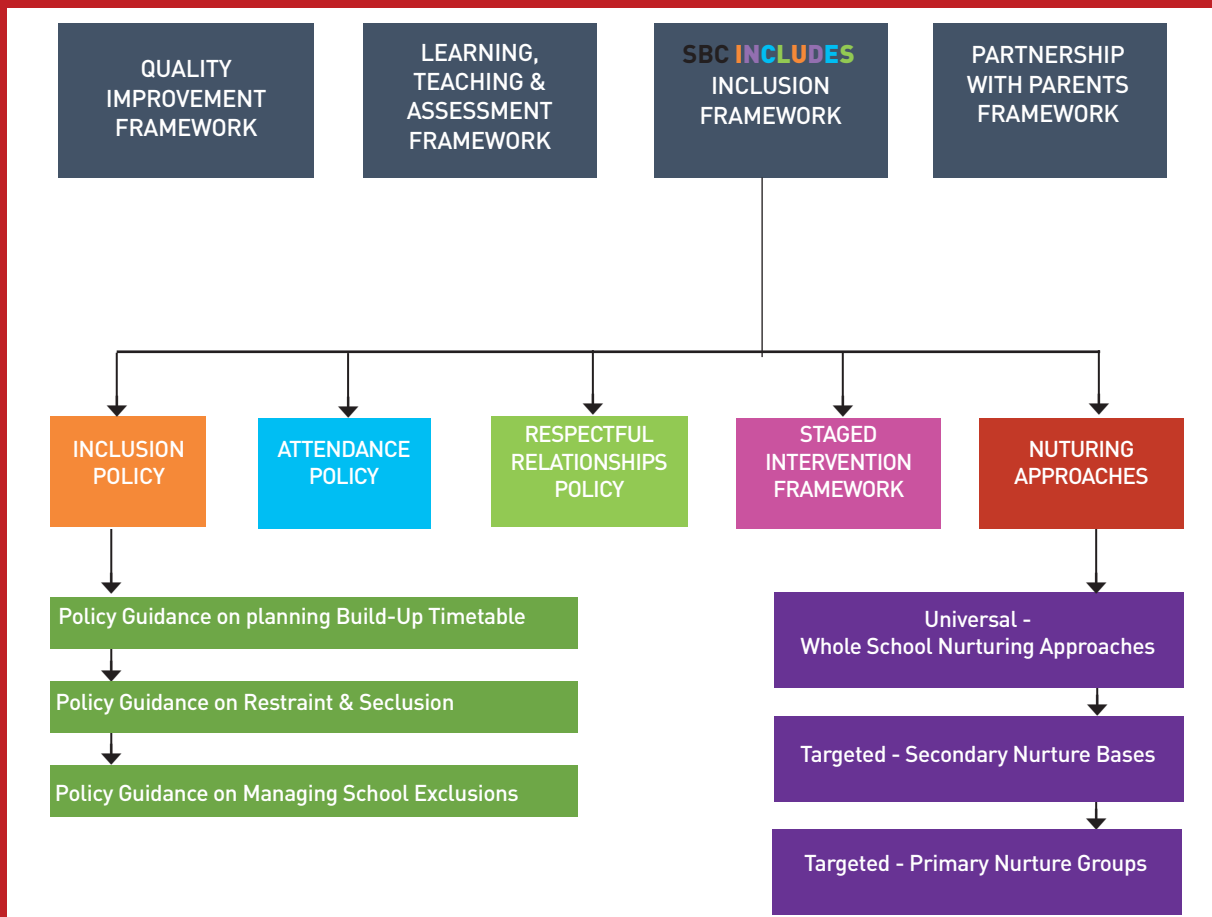
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3. LOCAL CONTEXT

Nurturing approaches reflect our core values within Scottish Borders Council.

The development of this document is part of a suite of essential documents that promote the principles of Scottish Borders inclusion agenda, ensuring all of our young people have access to an education that takes full account of their needs, celebrates who they are and supports them to flourish.

All schools, settings and staff should be aware of the following documentation:-



Nurturing Approaches is about developing the ethos and culture in all our schools and settings. But it is not just another thing we are going to try. It fits well with other developments already in place in our schools: Growing Confidence, Restorative Practice because it emphasises the importance of relationships and the potential of all adults in our schools, who interact with children and young people daily, to be protective factors in their development.



As an authority, SBC has planned a twin-track approach:

Universal - provide introductory, universal training on nurture to all adults working in schools or settings so that all our learning establishments can develop nurture as an everyday part of whole school life. The aim is to enhance our understanding of and relationships with pupils and support inclusive practice across all our schools.

Targeted - training teachers and support staff who will be using this as a targeted intervention in nurture groups in primary, secondary and Early Years settings for children and young people identified as having significant emotional difficulties.



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4. KEY PRINCIPLES OF NURTURE

A nurturing approach in a school or setting recognises that positive relationships are central to both learning and wellbeing. A key aspect of a nurturing approach is an understanding of attachment theory and how early experiences can have significant impact on a child or young person's development.

It recognises that all staff in a school or early years setting have a role to play in establishing the positive relationships that are required to promote healthy social and emotional development and that these relationships should be reliable, predictable and consistent where possible.

A nurturing approach has a key focus on the school environment and emphasises the balance between care and challenge which incorporates attunement, warmth and connection alongside structure, high expectations and a focus on achievement and attainment. It is based on the understanding of six Nurturing Principles:

NP1. Children and young people's learning is understood developmentally

NP2. The classroom/playroom offers a safe base

NP3. The importance of nurture for the development of wellbeing

NP4. Language is a vital means of communication

NP5. All behaviour is communication

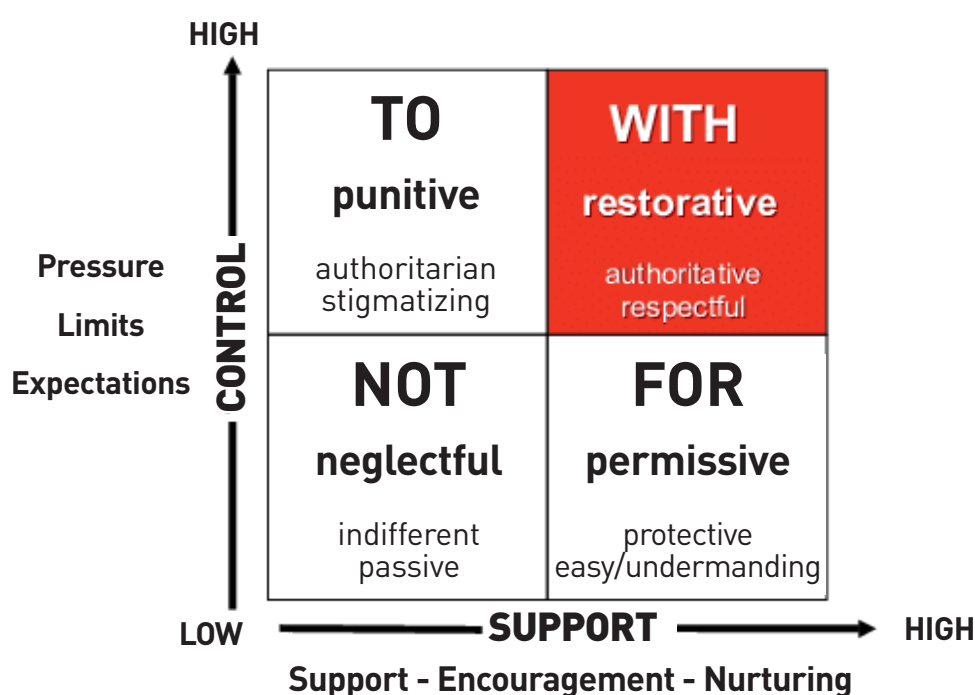
NP6. The Importance of transition in children and young people's lives

These principles are individual principles, but are all also interlinked. How we manage one impacts on the others.

They are essentially about how we do things as an individual, a school or setting, a community and as a local authority. We need everyone to exude nurture, to be nurturing and to develop a nurturing environment in everything they do.

A nurturing approach can be applied at both a universal level – across a whole school community and setting and also a targeted level – targeting groups of children and young people, where a more intensive nurture programme is required to meet needs.

Nurture builds on all the evidence about the effectiveness of relationships, wellbeing approaches, health improving schools, but is it distinct and the biggest danger is we give it a cursory look and say “we are doing that already”, because unless we have looked specifically at it, we almost definitely are not. For example, nurture is an attachment based intervention, and thorough understanding of attachment principles is an essential feature. We need to take a whole child perspective. Nurture is not, as some would think, about providing just the care and empathy, without any structure of boundaries. There is no evidence base for this and nurture is placed firmly in the authoritative quadrant of the “social discipline window”, which offers strong emotional support but also challenge and high expectations.



Evidence of an understanding of nurture would mean that schools and settings are able to differentiate when to vary more mainstream pedagogical practice like praise and feedback to avoid shame. Attachment theories such as attunement, claiming and promoting belonging and connectedness are very relevant.

Nurturing approaches are not overly permissive and are not the road to anarchy and chaos, providing there is a balance of care and warmth together with structure, boundaries and expectations. Many of the nurturing strategies and practices can be implemented for no cost in seconds, for instance daily greetings, checks in, whilst others will need planning and resources, e.g. effective calm spaces.

Not all schools and settings need to have a distinct nurture group to evolve to be a nurturing school. In many schools the whole school approach should be the first starting place and will have the most sustainable impact.

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5. HOW TO IMPLEMENT A UNIVERSAL, WHOLE SCHOOL NURTURING APPROACH


Professional Learning

In Scottish Borders, all staff in schools and Early Years settings received training through accessing an online presentation called “**SBC INCLUDES: Introduction to Nurturing Approaches**”. This presentation was developed by SBC Educational Psychologists, Glasgow Educational Psychologists and the SBC Nurture Steering Group. This presentation can and should be accessed by all new staff joining a learning community. It will also form part of Induction training for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) joining Scottish borders Council. The link to the presentation can be found [here](#) or by simply typing “**SBC INCLUDES: Introduction to Nurturing Approaches**” in the YouTube search bar.

Essential documents

All staff should be familiar with and have full access to:

- **SBC INCLUDES: NURTURING APPROACHES GUIDELINES (2020)** – these provide a guide for all staff on SBC’s expectations around Universal and Targeted approaches and the expectations for all schools and settings. It details the purpose of a Nurturing approach, makes links with current national and local guidance and also details the purpose and benefits of a Nurture Group and what this can look like in a primary and secondary setting.
- **Applying Nurture as a Whole School Approach: A framework to support the Self-Evaluation of Nurturing Approaches in schools and Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Settings** (Education Scotland 2018) - This self-evaluation framework provides a tool to support schools and early learning and childcare (ELC) settings who are applying a whole-school approach to nurture. It provides:
 - links to the Scottish drivers and policy context;
 - a definition of nurturing approaches;
 - a guide to the self-evaluation process and a framework that links nurturing approaches to the Quality Indicators used in How Good is Our School (HGIOS) 4? and How Good is our Early Learning and Childcare (HGIOELC)?;
 - explicit links between the Quality Indicators and the Nurturing Principles so that schools can link their self-evaluation with these principles.



It also provides a range of practical tools that can be used to triangulate self-evaluation information and support the implementation of nurturing approaches, along with focus group prompts, a questionnaire for staff and parents, and readiness checklists.

This can be downloaded in full as a document or can be found online [here](#).

SBC's Online Surveys

In Scottish Borders, we have developed two online surveys for staff:

- An **Individual Staff Readiness Questionnaire** – This survey will serve two main purposes. It will enable the Nurture Steering Group and SBC Educational Psychology Service to design specific bespoke training packages for schools, settings and clusters to support the development of a whole school nurturing approach over the next three years. Once completed a second time, it will also evidence impact of training and highlight further developments.

The links to this online surveys have been sent out to all Headteachers.

- **How Nurturing is our School or Setting?** – this online survey is a self-evaluation tool, based on the environmental checklists from “*Applying Nurture as a Wholes School Approach*” document. It is designed to be used by educational practitioners who work in a classroom or early years setting. The purpose of this is to highlight strengths and areas for development in schools. This is one of three surveys. Each survey will include self-evaluation questions from two Nurture Principles. Over three education sessions, all the Nurture Principles will be addressed. The first survey will focus on:

NP 2 - The classroom/playroom offers a safe base

NP 5 - All behaviour is communication

The first survey is to be completed by staff by the end of term **December 2020**.

Results for this survey will be collated by school/setting. It is expected that the results will provide baseline information for each school, inform and support improvement planning and evidence improvement and further developments.

The links to this online surveys have been sent out to all Headteachers.

Improvement planning

It is expected that all schools and settings will use the self-evaluation toolkits as part of their school Improvement Planning cycle.

All schools and settings are expected to feature Nurturing Approaches in all schools and settings' Improvement Plans in the next three sessions (**Session 1:** 2020 – 2021, **Session 2:** 2021 – 2022, **Session 3:** 2022 – 2023), as part of the authority's Inclusion agenda.

Quality Assurance

Using *SBC's Nurturing Approaches Guidelines*, *Applying Nurture as a Whole School Approach* and *How Good Is Our School/ELC 4*, we will build in a Quality Assurance programme for schools as part of their Quality Assurance/Attainment meetings throughout each Educational session.

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6. ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF A NURTURING SCHOOL OR SETTING

The Nurture Principles should be embedded and communicated every day in schools and settings. Using the self-evaluation toolkits in the “Applying Nurture as a Whole School Approach” document will support this, but here are some suggestions:

- o Agree Vision and Aims statements around Nurture (at cluster, school/setting, classroom/playroom level). Set firm boundaries and expectations around high standards of behaviour – creating a whole school/setting charter and displaying these in corridors, classrooms, playrooms etc. Don't be afraid to provide firm, but fair boundaries and consequences, or “authoritative limit setting” but always go for a restorative approach and avoid shaming and punishment- this is really counter-productive to your overall goals.
- o Ensure that there is a named “lead” in your school or setting for Nurture. In secondary schools, the responsibility is expected to lie with a DHT. They will have responsibility for Pupil Support as a whole and Quality Assurance around Nurturing Approaches will be part of their remit. Progress should be monitored in line with the School's Improvement Plan and be embedded into the school. In Primary schools, this could lie with one of the Senior Leadership Team and/or Support for Learning Teacher. In Early Years Settings, the responsibility may lie with the Centre Manager or lead officer.
- o Design and display posters highlighting the Nurture Principles and what this looks like in your setting – use photographs to convey real life examples.
- o Involve parents and partner agencies. Plan and develop nurturing approaches with parents and partners – work with them. Set out clear expectations for your school or setting and how will you evidence success. Regularly share nurturing approaches with them e.g. on a notice board or through a leaflet, newsletter.
- o Highlight the links with SBC's Inclusion agenda (**SBC INCLUDES** poster), our Health & Wellbeing Curriculum and Growing Confidence/Building Resilience programmes already in school.
- o Include and highlight nurturing approaches in assemblies.

- o Agree on a shared language that all adults adhere to. Encouraging mutual respect between staff and pupils – clear expectations about what this looks/sounds like. Use symbols from Boardmaker or photographs to include everyone and support the message. Schools and settings also need to agree and be mindful of language used at pupil review meetings, parent consultation meetings and emails. Messages such “We can’t meet your child’s needs” or “your child’s behaviour is not appropriate” simply sets a cycle of anxiety in motion. Suzanne Zeedyk reports that changing the language we use can be a real vehicle for systemic change - noting the powerful impact of changing a way of description across a school of behaviour from “challenging behaviour” to “distressed behaviour”- this not only reflects better understanding and can generate empathy, but needs to sit within systems change in all settings.
- o A nurturing classroom or playroom has to provide the pupils with a safe and secure environment that provides the right conditions for emotional, social and cognitive development – designate “quiet”, cosy area where children and young people can go to if feeling overwhelmed.
- o The nurture of self-esteem is an important focus. This will not come through mere praise and positive feedback. In fact young people who have lacked nurture in their early experiences may struggle with praise /regard as they do not believe themselves worthy of this. Environments which promote some choice/independence are associated with higher self-esteem and nurturing classrooms should seek to encourage choice and cooperative learning. The focus should be on routine, well-paced, high quality relationship building and positive regard. We cannot **give** children and young people self-esteem but we need to set the conditions to make it more likely. This is way beyond praise and reward. It is radically different from behaviour management programmes or assertive discipline.
- o Children and young people are encouraged to explore language in nurturing schools and settings and the use of relaxed activities is a way of encouraging discussion/self-expression. There is explicit use of vocabulary of emotion and of problem solving issues. Really focus on the communication side of things, including language to support the young person to feel;
 - *You belong here*
 - *You are welcome here*
 - *I like you*
 - *You are safe here*
 - *I am here to help and support you*
 - *You can explore and learn*
 - *Your feelings are okay with me*
 - *You can work with me on this problem that is getting in the way right now*
 - *I will be thinking about you, and keeping you in mind*

In a nurturing relationship, when confronted with angry physical or verbal outbursts, staff will be asking **“what is this child or young person trying to communicate to me?”** and will try to understand the behaviour this way. An example might be a pupil who goes into a tantrum when confronted with a piece of work he/she cannot do. This is not just a way of avoiding work. This is potentially communication of feeling out of control as they are confronted with something they cannot do and they feel in chaos/unsafe/. Staff should model the ways in which they communicate and model ownership of their own feelings, not ‘you are making me upset’...instead ‘I am feeling upset when I think about what just happened’. In situations like these, there should always be an opportunity for a restorative conversation to take place, where all parties are able to express how they were feeling. Adults should be able to move on from challenging situations after they have occurred by behaving in a clam and fair manner with the pupil and modelling that working relationships can be restored.

- o Transitions at all levels should be supported by including the child or young person in arrangements. Information needs to be shared with the right people at shared at key transition points. Smaller transitions can be significant for pupils. Think about periods of transition, is there inexplicable behaviour just before the end of the day? Do staff feel frustrated by pupils who cause disruption as they move around the school? Consider this in the light of transition being an important and possibly stressful time - particularly for a child where the relationship with a teacher is the one reliable adult in their life.

On a daily basis there are numerous transitions every child/young person makes e.g. transition from home to school, between classes and working with different adults. Also at key stages in education there are 'big' transitions e.g. between stages, settings and moving schools. It is important that we recognise that these transitions need to be carefully planned and prepared for so that children/young people are prepared for changes.

- o All staff need to fully understand "attuned de-escalation" and the impact of trauma, and attachment and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES). Use this and your knowledge of child development and GIRFEC to develop deep understanding of the children and young people in your care - how many ACEs have they experienced? Explore the reading recommendations in the **Further Reading** section of this document. Contact your allocated Educational Psychologist - they can provide bespoke training around ACES to suit your school or setting's context.
- o Aim for consistency across all staff in your school or setting. It's important to address and tackle the interschool variability (class to class/playroom) which, as we know is a bigger factor than between school variability.
- o It's important that as a whole school or setting, you develop a "whole" school culture", but recognise that some staff may need a nurturing approach shaped, modelled and supported, as new practices develop. This also includes adult to adult interactions - how staff manage other staff. In a whole school approach this is about the culture of the whole school so interactions between adults should be conducted in the same way as those between adults and young people.
- o Be clear about what (adult) behaviours, practices and policies do not fit into your nurturing school culture, for example, where do punishment exercises fit in and what impact do they have in terms of motivation and engagement? Consider long "rows" from promoted members of staff - with a heavy emphasis on monologue. There is evidence that the language processing part of the brain is not engaged significantly through monologue but the emotional bit of the brain is more likely to be engaged (negatively) - especially for teenagers. There is a time for talk and remonstrance absolutely, but restorative approaches and philosophy again can guide this.
- o Ensure that even for our most vulnerable children, we work towards at least having one "good adult" who has an attachment-informed relationship with the child in your school or setting.

General Nurturing Strategies for classes/playrooms

To support feeling secure:

- Maintain structured predictable routines, rules and responses. Provide visual timetables, notes in planners.
- Create firm boundaries – expectations need to be clear, this is about containing individuals when they are unable to do it for themselves.
- Introduce new ideas in a familiar / repetitive context'

- Provide a safe place for the pupil to go when they feel a heightened state of arousal. There should be an agreed, and consistently applied approach that lets them access this, e.g. time out cards (they may not always use it, but they like to know they have an exit).
- Body mapping activities may help them identify the signs that their emotional state is becoming heightened.
- Safe spaces, positive looks, smiles.
- 5 senses tour of the school (e.g. smell of the dinner hall, fire alarm bell).
- Think about the displays in the classroom – they should be purposeful and not too “busy” or overwhelming.
- Consider your tone of voice – not shouting or using too angry an expression.
- Create calming boxes.
- Adults who think about behaviour as communication - recognise the signs of heightened stress through a change in body language and anxiety and help to bring these down.
- Grounding (to help keep someone in the present): counting breaths in and out, watching clouds, counting backwards from 20, how many steps can they walk with a bean bag on their head.
- Let the child know they are safe and secure - "I can see you and I'm going to stay near you and make sure you stay safe."

Over time the reliability of the classroom and the whole school will become the secure base and enhance emotional development and, therefore, engagement in learning. The key point here is that things won't change overnight! You have to keep at it!

Building relationships:

A shared focus on the task can protect the pupil from exposure to the relationship. Over time this enables the pupil experience the sensitivity of the teacher to their anxiety and to begin to feel understood and hence the beginnings of a more secure experience. Greater trust in the teacher makes it more possible to ask for help and so over time learning can be greatly enhanced.

- Use a high ratio of positive prompts and praise for reassurance
- Give the child special jobs and roles of responsibilities
- Board games can be used to teach turn taking and teach independence within the context as well as managing hostility when losing
- Reassure the student that you will get back to them i.e. “try the first three questions on your own then I will come back and check” (repeated experiences of being ‘held in mind’). Make sure you come back, and if you get distracted let the student know. For example “I’m sorry I didn’t get back to you, you might have thought I had forgotten you but I hadn’t” (remember the ‘good enough’ principle).
- Attuned adults: To support children with attachment needs, they require adults who are ‘tuned in’ to their behaviour and respond to their underlying needs (at whatever developmental stage required).
- Develop social skills with the key adult and then with peers, facilitated by the key adult before managing independence (dependence, interdependence, independence).
- Experience laughter and joy – use humour. Savour the moment, share the moment. Hold on to these special times together by photos, video clips and a personal ‘book of success.’

:

Learning/work activities:

- Use tasks to mediate a positive relationship between the child and the adult. Work through a task to develop a relationship around it, be collaborative.
- Provide tasks with clear structure, rules and set outcomes.
- Differentiate task to suit needs – these still need to have the right amount of challenge, but with added support where needed.
- Design tasks which involve a product rather than a process – this will support a feeling of success.
- Give the child some choice over what they do – tasks which they enjoy and can be fairly ‘self-directed’ with.
- Organise group and project work – give the student a specific task, for example writing notes for the group – a task where they can be involved without having to interact too much with the group (cooperative learning).
- Involve students in the routines of the class by giving tasks such as sorting, organising categorising etc.
- Break longer tasks down into short independent steps; well differentiated and small steps.
- Set small timed tasks, gradually increasing the duration of the tasks.
- Avoid the temptation to over-help.

Supporting transitions:

- Transitions and endings need to be carefully planned and acknowledged (e.g. between classes, key stages and schools). Some children may need even more support with transitions (i.e. transition between home and school).
- Create memory boxes, photo books, whole class activities, countdowns to endings – really important youngsters are prepared.
- Transitional objects lets the pupil know they are ‘kept in mind’ by adults at home or at school. Objects can also be used to ‘hold them’ to aid concentration. They need repeated reminders that they are ‘held in mind’ by the teacher.
- Flag up any changes to the routines in advance, and acknowledge with the student how difficult this may be for them. Let them know that they will still have their needs met.
- If there are going to be staff changes to a session, consider allowing the student to complete the tasks with a trusted member of support staff.
- Some pupils may also have experienced prolonged absences and their sense of time and distance can be confused. The use of diaries and calendars in the classroom can begin to establish a sense of dates and times and forthcoming events – especially endings and beginnings of the week and terms.
- Transition planning tools. Communication and sharing of knowledge – agree how to share information with parents/carers.
- Be proactive, rather than waiting for problems to arise. Think about support at unstructured times as well as curriculum-based needs.

Organisational skills:

- The rational brain needs to be well-developed and well-connected for taking in, analysing and responding to information from a range of sources so reasoning and organisational skills may take time and require specific help to develop.
- Use situations that arise naturally to explain any links or logic as generalisation can be difficult.

- Give explicit, practical and repeated help with self-organisation skills and don't expect adolescents to manage this on their own! Ask staff to be patient. Might need to show them how to use their diary planner. Work with them to set up a system, highlighting key information, homework deadlines – planning and organisational skills that we might all take for granted but they often don't come naturally to some young people.

Language:

- Use literal language and give concrete examples.
- Develop the child's emotional literacy wonder with them e.g. 'I wonder if you are feeling frustrated because you didn't finish in time?'
- Wonder with them about options e.g. 'I wonder if we did this' - when offering support.
- Use metaphor and stories to explore issues rather than asking them to speak directly about themselves.

Physical/sensory needs:

- Sensory boxes - water beads (from Amazon).
- Sensory circuits.
- Activities to regulate the lowest part of the brain. This needs to be achieved through patterned, rhythmic activities or somatosensory activities - pushing, deep touch pressure, weighted blankets, running, jumping, dancing, deep breathing, colouring, trampolining, swinging, drumming, tug of war, bouncing on a fitness ball, walking along balance beams, balance board, measuring heart rate.

General points:

- Do not reject the student.
- Do not blame yourself if things don't work immediately, accept that things will work sometimes and not at other times.
- Use running commentaries to describe feelings and behaviour – this gives a good model of language and particularly "feelings" vocabulary.
- Think about what underlying defence mechanisms might be in operation – think about it for yourself – what comes from you and what comes from the student?
- Practise using all your senses to notice what is happening. Put yourselves in their shoes - what could be a threat in the environment for a student?
- Develop real active listening skills – taking time to listen rather than jumping to solutions is a powerful way to help a student feel validated and build on your relationship with them.
- Notice staff who are working well with pupils and learn from them. What do they believe about these young people? How do they act around them? How do they respond to incidents?

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7. HOW TO DEVELOP TARGETED, NURTURE INTERVENTION GROUPS


What is a Nurture Group?

A nurture group is a small class of 6 – 8 pupils in either a mainstream primary or secondary school, but further development is being considered about setting up similar groups in Scottish Borders in early years settings. A child or young person will spend a substantial part of their week in the group but remain part of their mainstream class, joining the other children in their class or year group daily for planned activities. It is essential that all staff in schools understands the purpose and workings of a nurture group so that the child or young person is given consistent support.

At times, children and young people need extra support to help them with their learning, making friends and growing into confident and successful individuals. Nurture groups can help provide that support for children and parents to give them the skills they need to do well at school, and deal more confidently and calmly with the trials and tribulations of everyday life. Most children start school with confidence and enthusiasm but not all. Some do not respond to teachers or teaching methods, leaving them disengaged from their surroundings. This can evidence itself in a child being withdrawn and inward-looking, or 'acting out', behaving aggressively to teachers, fellow pupils or others around them. These behaviour traits limit the child's ability to absorb information and learn and may even reach the stage of exclusion from school, a damaging and emotionally charged experience for both child and parents. The behaviour of these children also impacts adversely on others in the class, disrupting lessons and taking up a disproportionate share of the teacher's time and attention. Class morale suffers, learning is inhibited and standards and levels of attainment can fall. In many cases this can be prevented.

For more than 40 years, research and evidence shows nurture groups have demonstrated that, with the right help, support and resources applied, these children and young people can be taught successfully, cost-effectively, and reintroduced to mainstream classrooms to continue their education with their peers. The development of nurture groups led by trained practitioners, offers an effective intervention both in primary and secondary education (indicating that it is never too late). The nurture group solution has been shown to be effective in enabling emotionally vulnerable children to engage in, and benefit from, mainstream education.

Many studies have found that the use of nurture rooms have improved children's social, emotional and mental health needs that they may have been experiencing. It also shows improvement in areas such as pupils' self-management, social skills, behaviours, and self-awareness.



A nurture group is aimed to help to boost confidence and self-esteem and provide children with additional support to improve social skills and independence, for example:

- To engage
- To settle
- To listen
- To concentrate
- To share and take turns
- To accept losing a game or failure
- To build friendship with their classmates
- Gives opportunities to talk about and understand their feelings
- To work on curriculum based activities from their classrooms
- To experience and practice the development of positive relationships

Nurture Staff

A nurture group can only be supported by adults who have attended the accredited four day Nurture training. This is provided by Glasgow Psychological Services, Glasgow Online Training or by Nurture UK.

Nurture groups should be run by at least two adults – and one of these adults must be a teacher. These adults need to have a good understanding of the nurture principles and should be carefully selected. The role of nurture staff is to form an explicitly supportive relationship with members of the nurture group and provide good models for children and young people to observe and learn from. They will be skilled at encouraging children and young people to better express themselves through language – rephrasing and extending things that a student has said to extend their vocabulary and self-awareness. When disagreements take place in a nurture group, staff can support talking these through and enable children and young people to think of better ways to deal with similar situations in the future. The staffs' job is to make the children feel accepted and valued. They will do this by engaging them in learning and in the life of the class – helping them relate to each other and using the group's dynamics to foster good relationships. As the child or young person becomes more confident, they will hopefully respond to teaching which should be aimed at their development level and linked to the curriculum and the rest of their class.

Referral Process

Children and young people are offered places in groups following a screening process. A simple screening tool, the Boxall Profile, will be used to identify children and young people who would most benefit from inclusion in a nurture group. The profile should be administered by the trained nurture staff pre and post intervention. The post intervention profile is used to demonstrate improvement.

SBC will be registering and purchasing an Authority-wide, online licence for Boxall Profile so that each school will have access to this screening tool.

Practice Considerations for Setting up and Running of a Nurture Group

A Nurture Group will only be effective when offered within a whole school nurturing approach and supported by clear policy and practice guidelines. All schools in the Scottish Borders are expected to fully embrace the training and self-evaluation tools in whole school nurturing approaches. The accredited, four day, professional learning training provided for Nurture group staff is intended to support participants to both take forward nurturing approaches at a whole school level and at a Nurture Group level. Clear support for this is provided within the training. However, there are a number of key considerations that school leaders must consider when setting up a Nurture Group. In particular, policy and practice guidelines will need to give clear consideration to the following:

- The role of the Senior Leadership Team of the school – identify who will have responsibility for managing and coordinating the nurture groups.
- On-going training and coaching for all staff in an establishment, including inducting new staff, and maintaining skills of established staff.
- Liaison arrangements within the establishment to ensure progress of children and young people across the establishment. The overall approach should be the responsibility of all – but planned regularly.
- Liaison within the staff group of the nurture group – this should be planned and regular.
- Where intervention in the nurture group sits in terms of staged intervention and children’s planning, and what assessment resources are used. (A child or young person accessing a Nurture group will be at least at Stage 2 of the Staged Intervention process)
- Partnership working with other agencies
- Partnership working with parents – Involving parents at every stage of their child’s involvement in the school’s nurture group is vital. Build parental confidence by making it clear that should the evidence at any point tell us that the child no longer needs the on-going support of nurture, then you will contact them to discuss the next stage in supporting their child’s learning and development. Parents must be in agreement.
- Learning follows a wellbeing plan, each child works towards their own individualised targets.
- Children’s learning approached in a developmentally appropriate way.
- Staffing arrangements, most establishments operate with 2 or more staff – one staff should be a teacher, but support members of staff could be an ANA, Home Link Worker, Youth Worker etc. In secondary schools, a nurture group will be staffed within the Pupil Support Department.
- Clear plans for the role of adults and consideration of who the significant adult will be after the child or young person has left the group – for example, who in the school or setting will provide ongoing “touch base” support as and when needed. This can be flexible and is in line with attachment based practice.
- Referral pathway and assessment arrangements – Rigorous assessment is used to identify children and there should be a structured access and exit strategy. The aim is to see each child or young person progress from bespoke supported learning to independent learning within a differentiated, quality-first environment – from a supported normal way of working to an independent one.
- Numbers of pupils - most common practice is 6-8 young people
- Age / year group focus
- Length of time of intervention – children and young people usually attend a nurture group for 3 – 4 terms.
- All aspects of the nurture groups are informed by the six principles of nurture.
- The nurture room is a carefully planned physical environment that has many home like features (see below for more information)
- There are clear routines and rituals in the nurture group that support children’s feelings of safety.
- There is a clear understanding of the relationship between the Nurture room and the mainstream classroom.
- Regular and recorded arrangements for quality assurance (see below)

Self-evaluation, Improvement planning and Quality Assurance

Scottish Borders Council has developed a self-evaluation toolkit specifically for Nurture Groups - ***Supporting Self-Evaluation of Nurture Groups in Scottish Borders***: Guidelines for Nurture Group Staff ([Appendix 1](#)).

This tool is designed to support Nurture staff in self-evaluating the Nurture Group in their establishment. The document should be completed by the Nurture staff, and where appropriate, with the support of an Inclusion Officer.

It is expected that all schools and settings with an established Nurture Group/Base will use the self-evaluation toolkit (Appendix 1) as part of their school Improvement Planning cycle.

The Quality Indicators should be evaluated by the Nurture staff on an annual basis, as part of the Improvement Planning process, grade themselves using the six-point scale and next steps regularly evaluated and updated.

Using *Supporting Self-Evaluation of Nurture Groups in Scottish Borders* and *How Good Is Our School 4/ELC*, SBC will build in a Quality Assurance programme for schools and settings as part of their Quality Assurance/Attainment meetings throughout each educational session.

It is recognised that Nurture group staff should be well-supported. A centrally appointed Inclusion Officer, with responsibility for coordinating Nurturing approaches across Scottish Borders, will provide support and challenge to schools with nurture groups and the nurture staff. Nurture group staff and Senior Leaders with a responsibility for Nurture, will meet as a team and participate in regular on-going training that continue to build and enhance their understanding and application of nurturing approaches. Nurture group staff have a key role in developing nurturing approaches across the wider schools.

What should a Nurture Room look like?

The nurture room where classes meet, is a bridge between home and school. It should provide a warm and welcoming environment. A nurture room should provide a comfortable environment where the child feels safe and relaxed. When a child feels more relaxed it relieves a lot of pressure that may be holding them back. The primary aim is to improve the emotional wellbeing of children and young people who are struggling. It is important for a child or young person to receive help in order to grow and maximise their potential.

Creating a relaxing environment

A sofa, bean bags or comfy chairs is essential for providing a nice, comfy, relaxed space for a child or young person to relax. You can use any size or shape of sofa, however, make sure that there is enough room for everyone to sit down and also enough space for a child or young person to have their own space and not feel suffocated.

Bean bags are common in nurture rooms. Smaller ones for a seated area to chill, and larger ones, if you have space, which a child or young person can crash on are useful to have. Having different areas where they can relax reinforces the idea that the room is a comfortable and safe environment.

A small coffee table, depending on the space you have it can either be a small one that can be moved easily or one that stays, this is a good place to put drinks, food, etc. To maximise storage space try to find one with storage space included underneath.

Creating a working environment

It is essential to include a learning environment – so create an area for desks and chairs, where children and young people can work, separate from the fun play area, so they associate this area with learning.

A noticeboard to showcase children and young people's work and progression will allow for reflection on progression and opportunities to share success.

A bookcase for reading for enjoyment or to hold files.

A few extra bits to consider if there is space

- A mirror, which is important for both self-image and speech therapy, one that can lean against a wall, and turn around to reduce distractions.
- Storage space, enough so all toys and anything that could distract the child from working is able to be put out of sight to maximise concentration.
- Hooks to hang the chairs on, this is to create more space, the desk and chair are easy to move to one side to maximise play space.
- Hooks for coats, this adds to the homely feel. We also used 'no more nails' to stick the hooks to the wall. Any posters to the wall can be easily removed/ changed.
- A white board – either fixed to the wall or a roll away whiteboard. This is useful for working on, and is easily wipeable.
- Plants for the window, to create a more comfortable and chilled out environment.
- A few posters/photographs/artwork on the wall, both big and small – to add to a relaxed atmosphere.

Cooking facilities

Food is seen as one of the most fundamental expressions of care which engages every child. In nurture groups, “breakfast time” or a shared break where food can be jointly prepared, is a formal routine which will provide opportunities for social learning – helping children wait their turn, attend to others and learn acceptable ways of making their needs, likes and dislikes known. It would be helpful for nurture rooms to have basic cooking facilities either in the room or nearby, but this is not essential.

Secondary Nurture Groups

Nurture groups are an approach to inclusion designed to open up learning for children who are struggling for a variety of reasons. They usually take the form of a small discrete class, offering a safe, structured and predictable environment.

Essentially, there are four stages of setting up and developing a secondary nurture group:

- Identifying need.
- Finding a name and an identity.
- Identifying a way of working to suit your school.
- Developing your version of the group.

Progress depends on provision – which in turn depends on identifying need. You can't really have a nurture group unless you can identify the need for one. If you are going to assess and evidence the impact of your group, you must be clear what provision you will have – and therefore what needs the provision is intended to meet. Base plans on the following.

- Early planning with associated primary schools and transition information you have is crucial. Plan specific cluster transition meetings to identify P7 pupils who might need additional, different and alternative support to adjust to the expectations and culture of a high school.
- Also key is effective identification of needs in the first instance. Work as partners with primaries on the basis that this should be done not solely on the basis of formal assessments but increasingly from closer and more regular meetings and conversations with parents.
- Involving parents at every stage of their child's involvement in the school's nurture group is also vital. They may have accessed a nurture group in primary school and have some knowledge of the process, but they equally, they not have and the needs around a nurture group are to do with the transition to secondary school.



Name and identity

Creating a name and for a secondary nurture group sends a clear message of ethos and values. The choice of name needs to be simple and direct.

Staff leading the nurture provision in a secondary school need to be good communicators, not only to children and parents but also to other staff – teaching and non-teaching – across and beyond the school. Some suggestions are:

- Be pro-active: involve colleagues at every level and at every stage of your plans.
- Meet with colleagues across the curriculum to promote and facilitate understanding of how a nurture approach can have a positive impact on both the learning of their students and on their work as professionals. Meet with them at the outset and at regular intervals.
- Share strategies with your colleagues: how can understanding child development affect learning, how can difficulties be overcome and problems solved?
- Invite colleagues to visit, have an open-door policy and think about “open mornings” when your students can learn how to receive visitors, how to provide refreshments and show off their achievements.
- How can you develop understanding and experience of a nurture philosophy among trainee teachers and other adult students?
- Be prepared to work constructively with any doubters: a control group can be a useful way of tracking the impact of a nurture group on learning, comparing outcomes with similar students not in the group.
- Be the consultant with an open door on how to differentiate – visibly and with impact – and how to innovate to meet the needs of a child: guide, coach and advise colleagues.
- Be pro-active when it comes to advocacy for students – and even better if you can successfully facilitate them to self-advocate in terms of their needs and meta-cognition. A self-written student passport is ideal for this – person-centred practice in action.

Identify a way of working

Every nurture group, particularly in secondary schools, is different in terms of how it works. Decisions on this are instrumental in building parental and staff confidence in your group: clarity and transparency are crucial, as is the flexibility to adapt your provision within a framework which responds to ever-changing need.

Your approach will be a cornerstone to the partnership element of your group and so always remember that your way of working, your model of provision, will need to adapt each time you have a new intake of young people because their needs will be slightly different.

The key questions you should ask

- What should the pattern of attendance for the group be? When do they attend?
- Should being in the nurture group be full-time until each individual is able to re-engage with the full range of learning opportunities across the curriculum? What are the pros and cons of this for each of your young people?
- Should young people be in the group for a fixed time so that you can be sure that skills are embedded?
- Should there be a maximum size of the group? If so, what is your rationale for this?
- Can you build a provision which is subject-based and is this appropriate for your students' needs?
- In this respect, how can you make best use of the subject background and experience of your nurture group staff? This can be reflected in your programme of study and schemes of work.
- What does the room need to look like?
- What rules/expectations do you need and how do you communicate them?

Key features to bear in mind

- Rules of the room ideally need to be few and simple. They work better if everyone in a nurture room, including visitors, can see that the rules apply to them – not just to the young people. Rules or expectations need to be printed and displayed using a large, clear font and at eye-level.
- Your room should be large enough to enable flexible working methods: how you set out your room, possibly moving things around regularly, is an excellent and visible means of differentiation.
- Your room should be welcoming, reflecting the needs and the achievements of your students. Displays of work promote ownership, meta-cognitive thinking and remind students of your belief in them – that you and the whole-school are proud to see their work displayed for everyone to see.

Develop your school's version of nurture groups

Your nurture group philosophy will remain the same. However, your practice will need to develop as you respond to the changing needs of your young people, both on entry to the group and as they move through stages.

Your curriculum map and programme of study will need carefully designed and justified to meet the needs of each group, not just for the Senior Leadership Team, central Quality Improvement staff or HMIs where appropriate, but more for your own thought processes in how the nurture course can progress over time to meet needs. Reflective marking and self-evaluation can inform how your provision should develop.

Be pro-active in receiving feedback from mainstream colleagues on the impact of your nurture group across the curriculum.

Be open to constructive criticism and encourage colleagues to ask for certain concepts or vocabulary to be pre-taught; this is an excellent way of embedding the ethos that nurture provision is whole-school.

Use SBC's self-evaluation toolkit *Supporting Self-Evaluation of Nurture Groups in Scottish Borders: Guidelines for Nurture Group Staff* ([Appendix 1](#)) to support this.



ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE IN LEARNING

SBC INCLUDES: NURTURING APPROACHES GUIDELINES

8. FURTHER READING

Author	Publication
Louise Bomber	Inside I'm Hurting: Practical Strategies for Supporting Children with Attachment Difficulties (2007)
	What About Me?: Inclusive Strategies to Support Pupils with Attachment Difficulties Make it Through The Day (2011)
	Settling Troubled Pupils to Learn: Why Relationships Matter in School (2013)
Marjorie Boxall	Nurture Groups in Schools: Principles and Practice (Revised 2010)
Debbie Garvey	Nurturing Personal, Social and Emotional Development in Early Childhood: A Practical Guide to Understanding Brain Development and young Children's Behaviour (2017)
Daniel A Hughes	Teenagers and Attachment: Helping Adolescents Engage with Life and Learning (2009)
Steve Peter	My Hidden Chimp (2018)
Suzanne Zeedyk	Sabre Toothed Tigers and Teddy Bears: The Connected Baby Guide to Attachment (2020)

You can get this document on audio CD, in large print, and various other formats by contacting us at the address below. In addition, contact the address below for information on language translations, additional copies, or to arrange for an officer to meet with you to explain any areas of the publication that you would like clarified.

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