

## Nurture in schools - A briefing from nurtureuk

### nurtureuk

Nurtureuk is the national charity dedicated to improving the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people and removing barriers to learning by promoting nurture in education. Nurture approaches remove behavioural barriers to engagement in schools by recreating missing or distorted early attachments and support greater academic attainment, improved behaviour and attendance, and reduced school exclusions.

### Nurture groups

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Nurture groups are the original nurture intervention, first developed in Hackney almost 50 years ago. Children identified by teachers as needing to access the nurture group have their SEMH needs assessed using the Boxall Profile to ensure appropriate support can be planned. A nurture group will comprise six to 12 children or young people supported by two trained adults. On average, they are provided five times a week for two to three hours per day per child and are the only intensive psychosocial intervention available full-time that allow students to remain a part of their mainstream class. Once in the group, a nurturing philosophy rooted in attachment theory is used to ensure that children are provided with the early nurturing experiences that are vital to prepare for learning. There is great emphasis on language development and communication. Nothing is taken for granted and everything is explained and supported by role modelling and demonstration. The relationship between the two staff, always nurturing and supportive, provides a role model that children observe and begin to copy. The average pupil will be able to return fully to their mainstream classes after two to four terms.

'In a survey of 100 nurtureuk-accredited nurture groups, the majority of children were shown to have experienced significant trauma such as separation from family, exposure to family conflict, abuse, divorce, a new home or school, illness and hospitalisation, death of a loved one, parental substance abuse exposure and maternal depression – 19% of primary school students in primary school nurture groups and 42% in secondary school have a diagnosed psychiatric disorder, most commonly ADHD (Scott Loinaz, 2014).

### Evidence of outcomes

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#### Improved behaviour:

The 2016 Queens University Belfast evaluation of 30 Northern Ireland Department of Education-funded nurture groups: '[The Impact and Cost effectiveness of Nurture Groups in Primary Schools in Northern Ireland](#)', found:

*'We've had less risk of internal exclusions. There are a few children this year who probably would have had internal exclusions, had it not been for nurture. What we've done is send them to get provision from me [the nurture lead], or deal with it in other ways.'* - **North 1 Primary School**

*'It contributed to a change of mindset in that people understood more that, to deal with behaviour, we needed to look at the child's needs.'* - **South 6 Primary School**

*'[The Boxall Profile] is a way of evidencing [children's] emotional progress in the same way their academic progress is managed and assessed.'* - **South 11 Primary School**

**Feedback from schools which were part of the Boxall Childhood Project, a pilot using the Boxall Profile to measure the social and emotional needs of all pupils**

- **“77.7% of children who entered nurture groups as part of the trial were exhibiting difficult behaviour (as measured by the SDQ total difficulties score), and this reduced to just 20.6% at post-intervention test over one academic year. For those children in the control schools, 62.8% of children exhibited difficult behaviour at the start of the year and this remained largely unchanged at post-test (61.9%)”**
- Nurture groups to be **cost effective** and the project to be **“highly successful in its primary aim of achieving improvements in the social, emotional and behavioural skills of children from deprived areas exhibiting significant difficulties”**.
- **“Whilst it is important to treat these estimates with some caution, they do suggest that investment in Nurture Group provision is likely to pay for itself after just two years for each child whose problem behaviour is reduced to the normal range.”**

#### **Increased attainment:**

*[‘Nurture groups: a large-scale, controlled study of effects on development and academic attainment’](#)* (Reynolds, MacKay and Kearney, 2009), found that there **was a 26.7% increase in academic attainment in children attending nurture groups over a six-month period**, an increase of 10.3% compared to the control group (control schools were selected that matched the socioeconomic background of the schools with nurture groups).

#### **Reduced exclusions:**

A 2017 Glasgow Psychology Services [report](#) found that **“Nurture has been a substantial part of a success story in education in the city which can point to a clear reduction in pupil exclusions, an increase in attendance and a dramatic improvement in Glasgow establishments’ capacity to hold on to the most vulnerable young people.”**

#### **Case Study: Marsh Green Primary School, Wigan**

In 2004, Marsh Green Primary school in Wigan had 32 children at risk of exclusion. Since adopting nurture interventions in 2005, the number of exclusions at the schools has dropped dramatically: last year the school had just one day of temporary exclusion for a pupil. In February this year Marsh Green was congratulated in a [letter](#) from the Secretary of State for Education and Minister of State for School Standards as, in terms of progress made by between Key Stage 1 and the end of Key Stage 2, Marsh Green is in the top 3% of schools nationally.

Headteacher Gill Leigh said: “Nurture has been absolutely instrumental in the reduction in exclusions and in the success we’ve had recently. When there’s so much focus on results it takes a lot of bravery to recognise that in order to get those results, you need to prioritise children’s social emotional and mental health needs”.

Nurture teacher Jill Weatherston says: “If pupils don’t feel happy and safe within school, they won’t learn anyway, so you can all carry on teaching till your heart’s content but they won’t take it in if they don’t feel happy, secure and the basic needs aren’t being met.”

#### **The Boxall Profile**

The Boxall Profile is an educational psychologist-designed, teacher developed assessment tool which enables teachers to develop a precise and accurate understanding of an individual child’s social and emotional competencies and behavioural needs and the levels of their skills to access learning, in order to plan effective interventions and support activities, and monitor

progress. Completed online, the Boxall Profile is currently the most popular measurement used in schools to understand the wellbeing and support needs of their pupils (Department for Education, 2017, [Supporting mental health in schools and colleges: Quantitative survey](#)) and was recently highlighted in the Department for Education's 2018 [Mental health and behaviour in schools](#) advice.

### ***The Boxall Profile for every child***

The Boxall Profile has traditionally been used by teachers to assess pupils they already believe may have social emotional or behavioural difficulties. However, we are clear that **all** pupils should have access to assessment with the Boxall Profile to ensure those with less pronounced or developed SEMH needs are identified and can be supported to prevent their needs escalating and to enable them to access the curriculum.

The Boxall Childhood Project piloted the use of the Boxall Profile with every child in pilot schools during 2017/18. It was conducted across four terms in 25 primary schools in England - teachers in the pilot used the Boxall Profile to assess the SEMH needs of more than 6,800 pupils. Data from this project show that:

- 36% of more than 6,800 pupils assessed had moderate or high levels of SEMH needs:
  - 10% of children assessed had severe SEMH needs. Whilst this is in line with government figures for diagnosable disorders like ADHD and behaviour difficulties, the study also found that a largely hidden 26% of all children were found to have moderate SEMH needs.
  - The majority of schools that assessed all their pupils told us that this allowed them to identify *all* pupils with SEMH needs, not only those with evident difficulties.
- The biggest difficulties identified by the Boxall Profile were children's ability to give purposeful attention in class (28% of children experiencing difficulties) and feeling emotionally secure/self-confident (29% of children experiencing difficulties).
- As well as uncovering previously unidentified need, the pilot showed how gaining an understanding of the SEMH needs of the whole-school population empowered teachers and schools to do something about it. Teachers who took part in the study reported that not only did their understanding of the children's underlying needs that caused difficult behaviour improved, but they were able to adapt their practice to better support children's needs within the class.
  - If support was put in place following assessment, there was a 23% increase in the number of pupils who had no apparent SEMH needs after just five months.
- 92% of schools that successfully assessed all their pupils using the Boxall Profile found it very valuable and would recommend other schools do the same.
  - Schools indicated that assessing all their pupils had a positive impact across the school: more children with SEMH needs were identified, teachers better understood the importance of SEMH and how they could support pupils, and as a result more SEMH support was provided to children who needed it, leading to improved wellbeing.

## **The National Nurturing Schools Programme**

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The National Nurturing Schools Programme (NNSP) is a whole-school approach that upskills teachers 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 suffering from a mental health problem 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. The NNSP is based on the six principles of nurture that have successfully underpinned nurture groups for over 40 years.

These are:

- Children's learning is understood developmentally
- The classroom offers a safe base
- The importance of nurture for the development of wellbeing
- Language is a vital means of communication
- All behaviour is 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 practices of a school. This enhances teaching and learning and promotes healthy outcomes for children, young people and the staff in the school. Through the Boxall Profile, the NNSP supports schools 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 Timpson review of school exclusion**

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The [Timpson review of school exclusion](#) published in May 2019 highlighted nurture groups, saying: “they support children who have not had strong early nurturing experiences, by providing a safe and structured environment where children are encouraged to develop positive and trusting relationships with both teachers and other pupils” and that **“Done well, as I have seen during this review, they can be an effective approach in reducing children’s social, emotional and behavioural difficulties while strengthening their academic performance.”** ([Timpson Review p. 70](#)).

The Timpson Review’s Recommendation 8 called for the establishment of: “a Practice Improvement Fund of sufficient value, longevity and reach to support LAs, mainstream, special and AP schools to work together to establish effective systems to identify children in need of support and deliver good interventions for them” One of the areas it highlighted for developing best practice is the “effective use of nurture groups and programmes” (Timpson Review p.13)

### **Contact**

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For more details or to visit a nurture group or nurturing school in your area, please contact [becky@nurtureuk.org](mailto:becky@nurtureuk.org)