

Nurture in Welsh 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.

We believe that if properly resourced, the new Welsh curriculum and its emphasis on wellbeing could improve not only learners wellbeing, but behaviour and academic attainment as well.

The whole-school approach – National Nurturing Schools Programme

The principles behind, and practical application, of nurtureuk's whole-school approach supports the delivery of the health and wellbeing elements of the new curriculum. 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

"Nurture provision has had a massive impact on pupils at Fitzalan. Pupils who have attended the nurture groups have managed to significantly improve their social and emotional skills which has removed barriers to learning. The skills and experiences gained in nurture has enabled pupils to reach their potential and in many cases exceed previous expectations. In many cases pupils who were at risk of permanent exclusion or becoming school refusers have remained in school throughout Key Stage 4 and in some cases Key Stage 5."

- Nurture Teacher, Fitzalan High School

November 2018

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

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. 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.

"It is vital to equip children with the skills required to enable them to be happy, confident and successful members of society. For many children, social, emotional or behavioural difficulties are preventing them from engaging in school activities, forming positive relationships and achieving their full potential. However, through a secure, safe base of nurture provision, skills necessary for positive emotional health and wellbeing can be developed and embedded so they impact on life course and their future."

-Jane Miles, Nurture Teacher,
Pillgwenlly Primary School
November 2018

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 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

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.

- **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.

Nurturing interventions in Wales

Over 40 schools in Wales are implementing a whole-school approach to nurture through the National Nurturing Schools Programme and there are numerous nurture groups throughout Wales. The importance of nurture has been recognised by politicians and policymakers:

- Estyn’s June 2019 report, *Happy and Healthy: School impact on pupils’ health and wellbeing* says that “When led well, nurture groups build positive relationships between adults and pupils as well as among the pupils, help pupils to develop their personal and social skills and increase pupils’ emotional resilience.”
- In April 2018, the Welsh Assembly Children, Young People and Education Committee published *‘Mind over Matter’*, an inquiry report on the emotional and mental health of children and young people in Wales. The report states that there was strong consensus in the evidence submitted to the inquiry that ‘it is crucial to develop a whole-school approach, embedding well-being into the entire school ethos, the curriculum, and staff training and professional development’. It also emphasises that ‘The whole-school approach needs to be a cross-sector responsibility and a step change is needed to deliver it.’ Nurture groups were highlighted repeatedly in evidence given to the inquiry which produced the report, including by Education Secretary Kirsty Williams, who cited nurture groups as an example of good practice in providing the best possible environment to support children.
- In March 2018, schools highlighted the benefits of nurture groups to vulnerable and underachieving children, and to those around them, at the evidence session for the Children, Young People and Education Committee’s inquiry into targeted funding to improve educational outcomes.
- In February 2018, nurture groups were mentioned repeatedly in evidence given to the Children, Young People and Education Committee’s inquiry into the emotional and mental health of children and young people. Education Secretary Kirsty Williams highlighted that nurture groups can provide in-school support for children with attachment issues, and cited nurture groups as an example of good practice in providing the best possible environment to support children.
- Estyn has published multiple feature articles highlighting the benefits of nurturing approaches. For example, a February 2019 article on Ysgol Llwyn yr Eos notes that

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).

nurture provision, coupled with assessing all children for social, emotional and behavioural needs has been part of a successful blend of strategies which correlate with a high levels of pupil attendance, a closure of the performance gap between girls and boys and an absence of exclusions over the past 17 consecutive years. A January 2018 article on Cadoxton Primary School cited the benefits of mainstreaming a nurturing approach, with staff “taking what they had learnt from the nurture groups and applying the same philosophy to all classrooms, where pupils feel safe and secure at all times of the day”. A June 2016 feature on Ysgol Bryn Deva stated that the school’s nurture group is “is highly effective and pupils’ skills improve very rapidly. A 2015 case study of a nurture group in Romilly Primary School states that “pupils are happier in school and at home”, “pupils’ engagement in lessons has improved”, and “pupils’ confidence and life skills have been promoted”.

- A June 2017 Estyn review of health relationships education cited nurture groups in several case studies of schools demonstrating good practice in supporting pupils’ social and emotional wellbeing.
- A July 2017 Estyn best practice report titled ‘*Raising the attainment, achievement and aspiration of children who are looked after*’ stated that nurture groups are one of the features of schools which are most effective in supporting children who are looked after.
- In June 2015, the Estyn report ‘*Education other than at school: a good practice survey*’ cited nurture groups as an in-school intervention that minimises the number of referrals to the local authority behaviour support team and improves attendance.
- A June 2015 report on ‘*Effective practice in improving attendance in primary schools*’ states that “many schools that have improved pupils’ attendance use support groups, such as nurture groups and breakfast clubs, to encourage pupils to attend school more often”. Nurture groups are also recommended as an intervention in the report ‘*Attendance in Secondary Schools*’ (2014).
- Estyn highlighted nurture groups within ‘*Guidance for using the Pupil Deprivation Grant: What really works?*’ (2014). The Welsh Government agrees that a ‘developing positive health and well-being in learners is...highly dependent on a whole-school approach’. The report contains multiple examples of good practice in embedding emotional and mental well-being support into schools and staff development.

What you can do to support whole-school nurturing interventions

- Highlight the benefits of nurturing interventions in local press, 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 support the Welsh Government’s development of its whole-school approach
- Support the establishment of nurture groups and programmes in your constituency by meeting with school leaders, writing to relevant officials, and advocating for nurturing interventions on a local level



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