

Nurtureuk policy briefing 2019

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; raising awareness of nurture interventions; 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.

Nurture groups

Nurture groups are the best-known nurture intervention, first developed in Hackney nearly 50 years ago. There are now more than 2,000 nurture groups in nursery, primary and secondary schools across the UK.

'Nurture children' are carefully selected using the Boxall Profile. Once in the group, a nurturing philosophy rooted in attachment theory is used to ensure that children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) are provided with the early nurturing experiences that are vital to prepare for learning. In a survey of 100 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).

*“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 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.**”*

Caroline McKinley, Nurture Teacher, Ysgol Uwchradd Fitzalan

A nurture group will comprise six to 12 children or young people supported by two trained adults. On average, nurture groups 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. The average pupil will return fully to their mainstream classes after two to four terms.

There is great emphasis on language development and communication. Nothing is taken for granted and everything is explained, supported by role modelling, demonstration and the use of gesture as appropriate. The relationship between the two staff, always nurturing and

supportive, provides a role model that children observe and begin to copy. Food is shared at 'breakfast' or 'snack time' with much opportunity for social learning, helping children to attend to the needs of others, with time to listen and be listened to. Nurture groups are always about teaching and learning, boundaries, and building resilience.

The Boxall Profile

The Boxall Profile is a unique online assessment instrument enabling teachers to develop a precise and accurate understanding of individual children's social and emotional competencies, and to plan effective interventions and support activities. It is a highly regarded diagnostic and assessment tool that was recently cited by the Department for Education (Department for Education, 2018, *Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools Guidance*) and is the most popular measurement used in schools to understand the wellbeing and support needs of their pupils (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), though 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.

We are working with schools in Wigan, Halton, Barking and Dagenham to research the benefits of using the Boxall Profile on all children in their schools. This is the Boxall Childhood Project and has now run for four terms, starting with the summer 2017 term. The results of this pilot, to be published in Spring 2019, will enable government, local authorities and schools to better plan support and interventions to address the needs of some of our most vulnerable children and young people.

The National Nurturing Schools Programme

The National Nurturing Schools Programme (NNSP) is a whole-school approach that upskills school leaders to embed a nurturing culture to improve the mental health and wellbeing of all pupils and staff in a school. With one in eight 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 almost 50 years. These 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 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.

Nurture and school exclusions

Over the last three years, school exclusions have risen by more than 40%. An October 2017 report on the links between school exclusion and social exclusion published by IPPR showed that excluded children are the most vulnerable. They are significantly more likely than their peers to be in the care of the state, have grown up in poverty, and suffer from mental health problems. The report also argues that every cohort of permanently excluded pupils will go on to cost the state an extra £2.1 billion¹.

*“We have run a Nurture Group for a number of years and this ethos has been extended across the whole school. In Summer 2017 we achieved the Nurturing Schools Award as a result of a thorough audit of our provision across school. **We have seen a huge reduction in exclusions at our school**, with just 1 day in the past academic year, compared with 4 days the previous year (2016-17), and 12.5 prior to that (2015-16).”*

Marsh Green Primary School, Wigan

Overall since the first year the Nurture group began we have reduced exclusions in our school by 84%.... Our significant reduction in exclusions has been down to the impact Nurture provision has had in our school, and a large part of this impact has also been down to developing a whole staff understanding of SEMH needs, attachment and the 6 Nurture Principles and establishing these as a whole school ethos. We also now assess the whole school (all 336 children) with Boxall Profiles, to ensure staff have a full understanding and are able to prioritise the emotional and behavioural needs of their class. In May 2017 we enrolled as a school on the National Nurturing Schools Programme and as a result, from the start of this current academic year, we have achieved 3 out of 4 terms with no exclusions at all.”

Landsdowne Primary School, Kent

In its response to the Education Committee’s recent report on alternative provision, which identified several factors contributing to the shift, including a lack of expertise, funding, and resources in schools to support troubled children, a rise in zero-tolerance behavior policies, and an increasing number of pupils with mental health needs² the government recognised that some of the most vulnerable pupils are also the most likely to be excluded from mainstream schools³. The government also recognised that “effective behaviour strategies across all schools, where children feel safe and stimulated in their education, are key to ensuring that all children are able to achieve their full potential”⁴. Our Chief Executive Kevin Kibble gave evidence to inquiry, arguing that many exclusions can be prevented through in-school support.

Nurtureuk believes that, where possible, children should be supported to access mainstream education with their peers. We are concerned about the rising numbers of exclusions across schools in England and believe that a lot more could be done in early intervention and prevention within mainstream schools to support children and young people at-risk of exclusion to remove barriers, so they can continue to access mainstream education.

¹ IPPR, October 2018, Making the Difference, <https://www.ippr.org/publications/making-the-difference>

² House of Commons Education Committee, July 2018, <https://bit.ly/2OfX13r>

³ House of Commons Education Committee, July 2018, <https://bit.ly/2OfX13r>

⁴ Department for Education, Government response: alternative provision, October 2018, <https://bit.ly/2DI6RPP>

Nurture, the CAMHS Green Paper and NHS Long Term Plan

We welcome the plans set out in the government's CAMHS Green Paper to introduce mental health support teams in schools, intended to provide specific extra capacity for early intervention and ongoing support. We were also pleased to see the recognition that a whole-school approach, backed by commitments from senior leadership and supported by external expertise, is "essential to the success of a school in tackling mental health". At nurtureuk, we know that a whole-school approach is crucial to improving young people's wellbeing, allowing schools to improve educational outcomes for pupils while also supporting their long-term character development and emotional growth.

Alongside other measures set out in the NHS Long Term plan which support the implementation of the Green Paper, the Government and NHS England announced their shared ambition to explore whether enhanced preventative measures, including "better information sharing and the use of digital interventions", can help to "moderate the need for specialist mental health services".

The implementation of the Green Paper proposals is an opportunity to make progress in supporting schools to understand the social, emotional and wellbeing needs of their pupils. Understanding children's needs at the earliest stage is essential to supporting them with evidence-based interventions before problems escalate.

The Boxall Profile, a unique online assessment tool enabling teachers to develop a precise and accurate understanding of individual children's social and emotional competencies, could be a cornerstone of the new digital prevention strategy cited in the Long Term Plan.

Nurtureuk will be discussing the benefits of the Boxall Profile with mental health and educational practitioners within the 'trailblazer' areas identified to lead the roll-out of the government's CAMHS proposals.

Evidence of outcomes

On school exclusions

- **Ofsted 2009:** [The exclusion from school of children aged 4 to 7](#), states "Nurture groups, where they were used, were highly effective in improving children's behaviour and preventing exclusion".
- **Scottish Government 2017:** [Included, Engaged and Involved Part 2: A Positive Approach to Preventing and Managing School Exclusions](#). This paper recommends "whole school nurturing approaches based on nurturing principles, including nurture groups in early years, primary, and secondary and specialist provision" and states, "nurture groups can also be used to support pupils as a targeted intervention to prevent exclusion".
- **Glasgow Psychology Services (2017):** [A psychological service contribution to nurture: Glasgow's nurturing city](#), Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties 2017, volume 22, number 3, pp.237-247. This report details the work undertaken in Glasgow to develop a range of nurturing approaches across establishments. It notes that since 2006 there has been a 71% reduction in exclusions and finds 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."

On improved behaviour

- A 2016 Queens University Belfast study '[The Impact and Cost effectiveness of Nurture Groups in Primary Schools in Northern Ireland](#)' evaluated the impact of 30 groups in Northern Ireland and found them to be cost effective and "highly successful in its primary aim of achieving improvements in the social, emotional and behavioural skills of children from deprived areas exhibiting significant difficulties". **The evaluation 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 test.**
- Nurture groups are highlighted as an intervention where "**pupils made considerable progress from their starting points, both in behavior and with their reading and writing skills**" in the Ofsted report '[Pupil premium: how schools are spending the funding successfully to maximise achievement](#)' (2012).

On mental health

- '[The effectiveness and rationale of the 'nurture group' approach](#)' (O'Connor, Tina and John Colwell, 2002), demonstrates **mental health improvements are maintained over two years post-intervention.**

On 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, an increase of 10.3% compared to the control group.

Our recommendations

1. **Schools should monitor the social emotional and behavioural needs of all pupils and address them at an early stage.** Resources such as the **Boxall Profile** allow teachers to understand a child's social and emotional competencies, and to plan effective interventions and support activities where needed. We are delighted that the Boxall Profile was cited in the recent refresh of the DfE's *Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools Guidance* as a key measurement and identification tool to help identify mental health needs and plan appropriate support. Increasingly, **we would like to see schools using the Boxall Profile to assess their entire student body.** We are piloting this approach through our Boxall Childhood Project, and will publish the results of the project in March 2019.
2. Schools should adopt a **whole-school approach** to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of all pupils and staff, **which explicitly aspires not to exclude children.** By understanding and responding to children's behaviours and the social and emotional pressures they are under, schools can de-escalate situations which might otherwise lead to exclusion. With the right support and training, many of these issues can be dealt with in a mainstream school setting.
3. **Improvements should be made to teacher training around the impact of unmet attachment needs and adverse childhood experiences on behaviour.**

Challenging behaviours are often rooted in unmet attachment needs and / or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Teachers should be trained, through initial teacher training and continuous professional development, to understand the impact of unmet attachment needs and ACEs on a child's development and behaviour. This upskilling can help teachers to feel empowered to address the causes of behaviour and to diffuse difficult situations by supporting teachers to understand what a child is communicating.

4. Children with additional social, emotional and behavioural needs should have access to a classic **Boxall Nurture Group**, which have been proven to improve the social, emotional and behavioural wellbeing of children and young people, and to reduce exclusions.