



## Systematic review of NG literature

*8 October 2014 - Dr Hanna Bennett*

The NGN conducted a systematic review of previous nurture group research collating data starting from the 1990s until March 2014. The review intended to highlight the key determinants that make Nurture Groups successful and to contribute to the continuous development of the NGN's practice.

62 evaluative quantitative, qualitative and mixed studies were selected for the review - including PhDs, official reports, academic articles and books - the majority of which focused on analysing primary schools. They evidenced nurture groups' ability to increase Social Emotional and Behavioural Development (SEBD) in children, improve the whole school ethos and positively impact on home-school relationships and also the wider societal context.

### ***Nurture Groups' Impact***

Both younger and older pupils and those with internalising and acting out behaviour benefitted from Nurture Groups, which were demonstrated in increased SEBD scores measured through Boxall profiles, SDQ and qualitative interviews (Binnie and Allen 2008; Bishop and Swain 2000; Colwell and O'Connor 2002; Cooper and Tiknaz 2005; Cooper and Whitebread 2007; Reynolds *et al* 2009; Sanders 2007; Scott and Lee 2009; Seth-Smith *et al* 2010).

Nurture Groups also contributed to the whole-school environment through creating calmer classrooms and empowering teachers to meet the needs of children (Binnie and Allen 2008; Bishop and Swain 2000; Cooper 2001, 2004; Cooper and Tiknaz 2005; Cooper and Whitebread 2007; Doyle 2001, Doyle



2003; 2004; Lucas 1999; Reynolds *et al* 2009; Sanders 2007; Scott and Lee 2009).

Home-school relationships benefited from pupils' attitudes towards school to their parents feeling that they were given support and full recognition of the children's needs (Binnie and Allen 2008; Sanders 2007; Seth-Smith *et al* 2010).

Overall, NG provision was found to be cost-effective in comparison to other educational interventions. They were estimated to reduce the cost in comparison to complex needs placements (£13,000), out-of-borough day schools (£17,000), out-of-borough independent schools (£40,000) and full-time LSA support (£14,000) to £1,883 per child in an established classic nurture group that has up to 30 children throughout the year (with no more than 12 children at any given time) (According to 2009 figures by Enfield's Local Authority).

### ***Key Determinants for Nurture Groups' Effectiveness***

While identifying a need for future research to clarify the key determinants that make Nurture Groups effective, the review was able to pinpoint some important conditions at child, Nurture Group, school and organisational levels.

It found that variations in children's fluency in English and national curriculum attainment can explain variance in children's progress (Cooper and Tiknaz 2005). Further research is nevertheless needed to understand to what extent child characteristics such as age, SEB challenges and gender matter, as no consensus on these factors has been reached.

Moreover, some Nurture Group characteristics, such as class environment, balanced group composition, good peer relations, and stability of staff and



teacher partnerships were found to be important for successful Nurture Groups (Cooper and Tiknaz 2005; Whitehead 2012; Cooper *et al* 2001; Dowsell 2011; Garner 2010; Kourmoulaki 2013). Teacher experience and size of the class have not attracted much attention, although are hypothesized to have importance in Nurture Group effectiveness and require further research.

A whole-school policy was also found to be fundamental to the success of Nurture Groups and reintegration of pupils to the mainstream. Those schools where the whole-school community is committed to pupils' needs were found to make the most out of Nurture Group provision (Cooper and Tiknaz 2005).

Organisational factors such as the time the group has been in existence, the proportion of the time spent in the group and the length of time spent in the group has attracted the most attention in past research. Findings showed that the groups that have been in existence for two or more years have been most efficient (Dowsell 2011; Papamichael 2012) and that both full and part-time groups have been equally beneficial in supporting children's SEBD (Cooper and Whitebread 2007; Cooper and Tiknaz 2005; Garner 2010; Scott and Lee 2009). The two first terms were found to be the most important for SEBD improvements while cognitive progression seems to continue within the third and fourth terms (Cooper and Whitebread 2007).

### **Conclusions**

- Gains in social and emotional functioning are maintained over time by NG students (O'Connor & Colwell, 2002);
- Children who attended a NG had a significant chance of improving their learning skills (Gerrard, 2005), including language and literacy skills (Hosie, 2013);
- NGs resulted in an improvement in pupils' behaviour and social skills (Cooper & Tiknaz, 2005);



- Pupils with SEBD in mainstream classrooms improved in behavioural terms significantly better than pupils with and without SEBD attending schools that did not have NG provision (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007);
- NGs resulted in a positive change to SEBD in school, at home and an increased ethos at school (Binnie & Allen, 2008);
- NGs result in a positive attachment to school (Walker, 2010);
- The best results have been achieved when the nurture group has been in existence for at least for two years (Cooper and Whitebread 2007; Rautenbach 2010; Garner 2010)