



nurtureuk

Nurtureuk and London's
Violence Reduction Unit

Nurturing London VRU Programme

End of programme evaluation,
progress and impact report



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We are grateful to the Nurturing London VRU Programme associates (Siobhan Garrett, Sarah Gristwood, Nichala Johansen, Joel Kerr, Andrea Middleton, Jason O'Byrne, Zoe Warnes), participating schools and other experts and stakeholders, who along with the VRU and the nurtureuk team, helped guide and inform this work and ensure the programme's success. They used their extensive knowledge and experience to provide high quality support to schools which will ultimately result in improved outcomes for children and young people.

Context

The London Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) and nurtureuk began working together in January 2020. Their Supporting Inclusive Schools (SIS) programme, based on the findings of the Government's Serious Violence Strategy 2018, highlighted links between exclusions, truancy, and serious violence. These links were also evidenced in the Timpson Review of School Exclusions (May 2019), the All Party Parliamentary Group Knife Crime – Back to School Report (October 2019), and Croydon's Vulnerable Adolescent Review Report (2019). The SIS programme also referred to evidence that children and young people excluded from school are over represented in young offender populations and over represented as both perpetrators and victims of serious violence.

In 2017/18, 42 pupils were expelled each school day

Pupils with SEND are around six times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than their peers without SEND

Pupils eligible for free school meals were four times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than their non-eligible peers

Pupils of Black Caribbean heritage being excluded at a rate of nearly three times their White British peers

Looked-after children are five times more likely to be temporarily excluded than pupils overall

Statistics for England from The RSA's Pinball Kids: Preventing School Exclusions Report, 2020

Nurtureuk's Nurturing London programme placed our Whole School Nurturing Approach within the wider context of violence reduction.

A nurturing school is:

- one in which there is an emphasis on wellbeing and relationships, on positive social and emotional behaviour
- ambitious to support the growth and development of children and young people, many of whom are vulnerable, come from areas of disadvantage and require additional targeted support to close the gap.
- inclusive and creates safe, welcoming spaces for all members of the community
- uses evidence based approaches to support all children and young people particularly those with additional needs, meeting these children and young people where they are and supporting them all to achieve and succeed

All of nurtureuk's work is based upon the 6 Principles of Nurture.



The Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns meant we had to alter our programme and our evaluation plans. Percentage based impact data and school specific trend data was skewed by the long periods of lockdown so we agreed to collect evaluation data through more qualitative means:

- Evaluation/ feedback surveys – sent to all delegates following courses (no. of returns for these varied)
- A midpoint series of focus groups;
- Evidence based storytelling at the end of the programme

The hope was that although we couldn't look at percentage based impact data, we could collect the human stories, perhaps a more powerful indication of impact, from practitioners, delegates, wider professionals and of course the young people themselves.

Over the last 30 months:

- We have worked with a total of 43 schools across 13 boroughs with 31 schools completing the programme.
- **169** members of school staff – teachers, teaching assistants and Senior leaders, have attended core training courses – Theory and Practice of a Nurture Group, Theory and Practice of the Boxall Profile®, A day in the life of a nurture group
- network meetings have welcomed 250 delegates
- Approx. **700** members of school staff in over 30 settings have attended "Making the Links" training introducing the programme, concepts such as attachment, ACEs, and the basics of nurture practice during the delivery of the nurtureuk VRU programmes
- Approx. **250** members of school staff have received training via the bespoke hours element of the programme
- Almost **500** publications have been sent to schools on the programme
- **2,125** E-Boxall Profiles® (an individual identifier for each child – EBPs) have been created and **3,015** assessment profiles have been completed.
- We have had a potential nurturing impact on over **24000** (based on school population data) children and young people.

The following report outlines the journey we have all been on over the last 2 years – schools, staff, young people and the programme team. The impact of the Nurturing London VRU Programme is clear to see but what is more promising is that most of the schools talk about this being the start of their journey; the programme elements and the progress schools have made are sustainable and the impact will continue to be seen beyond the end of the programme.

Introduction

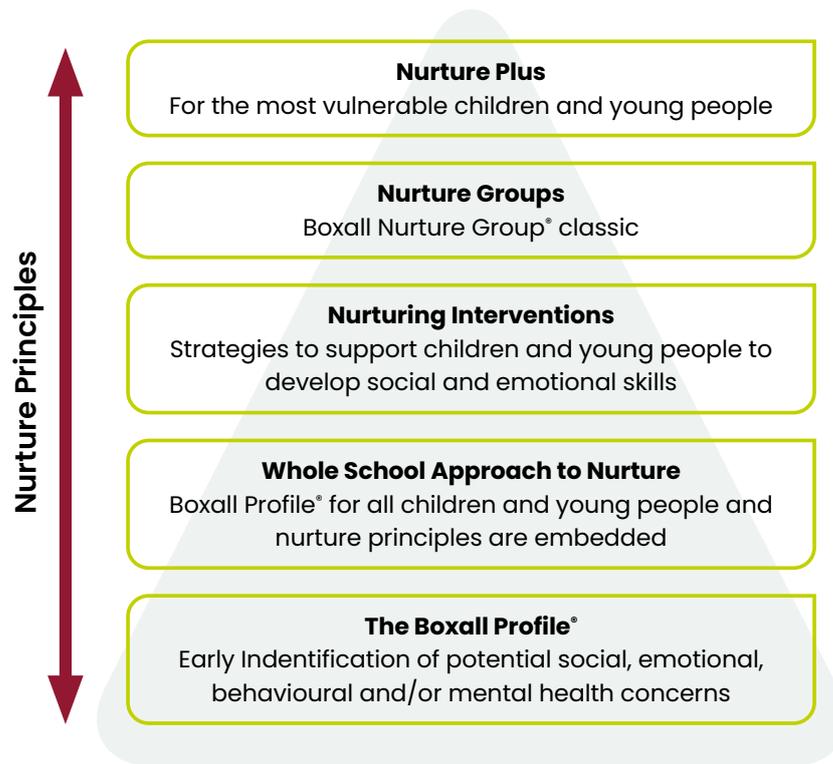
The nurtureuk “Nurturing London VRU” programme began in January 2020 and was completed on July 13th 2022. The aim was to support schools to reduce instances of school exclusion and youth violence in local communities through a programme of training, bespoke consultancy and networking to develop a more nurturing, attachment focused and trauma informed approach across the whole school.

There have been 3 grant variations with additional schools, and funding, being agreed. (Due to the unprecedented turbulence of the last 2 years there have been several occasions where informal adaptations to the programme and the cohort of schools taking part have been necessary. All of these have been discussed and signed off by the London VRU Coordinators.) We were originally commissioned to work with 26 schools which then increased to 37 and then reduced down, because of school lack of engagement and capacity pressures, to 31.



The Programme

The programme was built around our graduated approach to nurture:



The Nurturing London VRU Programme was designed to place the Whole School Nurturing Approach into the context of violence reduction. The core understanding being that nurture practice empowers adults in school to allow children and young people to engage with missing early nurturing experiences, thereby supporting the development of social and emotional skills whilst also supporting behaviour, wellbeing, attainment and achievement.

With the grant variations, and the necessary changes due to the pandemic, the programme has had additional elements added or numbers increased – as detailed below.

Programme elements	Original grant details	Following grant variations and Covid-19 related adaptations
Whole-school nurturing approach package	10 days consultancy per school plus resources	11 days consultancy per school plus resources
School audit/review days	2 half-days per school per year,	2 days across the programme duration
In-school, whole-staff Boxall Profile* training day	1 full day in the first year, and a half day in the second year	3 places on the Theory and Practice of the Boxall Profile* virtual course plus 15 e-learning competency codes
Discounted Boxall Profile* Online school subscriptions	2 years full subscriptions with unlimited in-school users	3 years full subscriptions with unlimited in-school users
Schools networking days	3 sessions offered per year	12 twilight virtual sessions including expert led sessions
Theory & practice of nurture groups three-day accredited course	accredited training offered with one place per school offered	3 places per school on accredited training plus resources
A day in the life of a nurture group one-day course	2 practitioner places offered per school	2 practitioner places offered per school
Discounted Wellbeing Toolkit for professionals resource	1 resource pack offered to each school	1 resource pack offered to each school
Nurturing Peer Supervision		2 places on training course plus additional resources
Parental Engagement programme		3 practitioner places per school
Nurtureuk membership		2 years to begin once Nurturing London Programme is completed

Key engagement figures

School recruitment	We have worked with 43 schools with 31 completing the programme.
Whole-school nurturing approach package 11 days per school	312/341
School Audit/review days (2 days)	All completed where possible.
In-school, whole-staff Boxall Profile* training day – Theory and Practice of Boxall Profile* – 3 places per school	57 / 93
In-school, whole-staff Boxall Profile* training day –Competency training coupons – 15 per school	96 coupons used
Discounted Boxall Profile* Online school subscriptions	32 subscriptions
Schools networking days (Three per year)	13 Network events/ 250 delegates/ 8 Expert speakers
Theory & practice of nurture groups three-day accredited course (Three practitioner per school)	71/ 93
A day in the life of a nurture group one-day course (Two practitioners per school)	12 delegates across 5 sessions (uptake was low despite repeated attempts to engage.)
Discounted Wellbeing Toolkit for professionals resource (One per school)	38 copies sent out to schools + copies of The Bereavement Box, Emotion Coaching, 180 minutes, The Transitions Toolbox and the Wellbeing Toolkit for Teens also sent to all schools.
Parental Engagement	17 delegates across 7 sessions – (uptake was low despite repeated attempts to engage)
Nurturing Peer Supervision	24 schools engaged with training or resources
Nurtureuk Membership – 2 years.	31 schools

Challenges and barriers

A project of this scale, across so many schools of different phases and spread over 13 boroughs; each with its own priorities and structures, was always going to be complex and have its challenges – challenges which we had risk assessed and developed mitigations for in the original planning – however none of us could have prepared for the sudden and wide ranging obstacles that a pandemic was going to place in our way. During the first 6 months of the pandemic and lockdown the Programme Manager was in regular, weekly, communication with the London VRU Education Coordinator and all adaptations to the programme were discussed and agreed with them.

The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic

It is impossible to fully evaluate this programme without taking into account the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic and the lockdowns and school closures. This added obstacles and challenges from the outset and has meant that alternative delivery models had to be designed and implemented.

Delivery Model

It became clear very quickly into April of 2020 that our existing delivery model of in-school, face to face training was not going to work so we began the process of redesigning and adapting all of our programmes and packages for the new virtual delivery model. For some programmes that was straightforward, for others, especially our accredited courses, it was more complicated and required several stages of development, standardisation and quality control. Because of this, there was a delay in the delivery of some elements from phase one into phase two. For some of the schools this delay was ideal and gave the schools 'breathing space' to adapt to the implications and uncertainty of lockdown. For a few of the schools they were never able to equalise and embrace such a full package of training despite the delay and restructure.

It also necessitated a shift from an evaluation model with a majority quantitative focus to more qualitative.

Data collection

All of our audits requested 3-year trend data for attendance, persistent absence (PA), internal and external exclusions and violent incidents. As soon as lockdown happened data collected on these elements would immediately have been flawed data and incomparable across different schools and settings. To get around this we instead provided evaluation/ feedback surveys which were completed by delegates who attended courses throughout the duration of the programme; ran focus groups midway through the programme and collected evidence based storytelling at the end of the programme. Although quantitative data was unavailable, the data we were able to collect provided deeper insight into 'real-world' scenarios that also allowed for us to gain a better understanding around what was/wasn't working, and why, in relation to attendance related issues, exclusions and violence.

Inevitably, for multiple reasons, schools capacity for engagement in the programme was impacted.

School engagement

Our work with schools started in January 2020 where we were working hard to engage them on the project. By March, schools were facing a very uncertain

and difficult immediate future: their capacity for projects like ours fell down the priority list against the need for IT training, curriculum development for online platforms and supply cover for a Covid-19 stricken staff team. Many schools recognised the need for our work, as their pupils began to show worsening signs of mental ill health, anxiety and grief, whilst other schools needed to step back completely until they felt they had the space to commit fully. One of the 6 principles of nurture is 'Children's learning is understood developmentally' – that it is the stage that the child is at that we need to meet and not whatever chronological or 'expected' age range they are in. The same approach has been taken with all schools on the programme throughout the last 2 years, but particularly in those first 6 months of the pandemic. Whatever the schools needed, we tried to give them, and all schools varied in where they were at various points during the programme, but we knew that we could pick up schools later in the programme when they were ready and at a stage able to commit.

"Those schools whose head teachers were fully engaged and supportive of nurture and the whole school approach, and saw it as being an integral part of their School Development and Improvement Plan, have achieved far more impact and taken advantage of everything on offer..."

One of the biggest learning points throughout the programme was the vital importance of achieving buy-in and commitment from the leadership of schools and MATS. Those schools whose head teachers were fully engaged and supportive of nurture and the whole school approach, and saw it as being an integral part of their School Development and Improvement Plan, have achieved far more impact and taken advantage of everything on offer, far more than those who saw

'nurture' as one person's job or only of benefit to a small number of young people. We have had a lot of conversations with nurture leads in those schools who repeated the same wish that their SLT should have been on the training courses or part of Network meetings. This lesson will be learned from and SLT involvement will become an integral part of future programme agreements.

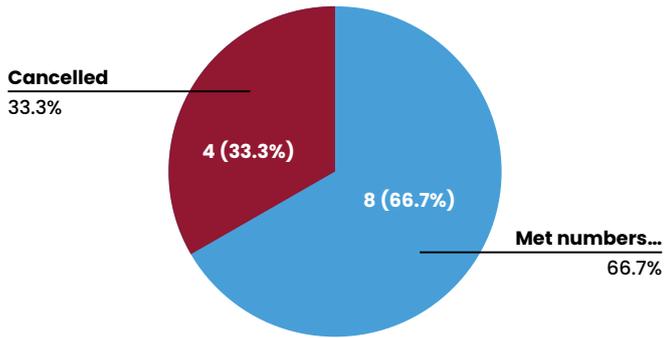
One of the most challenging aspects of the programme has been non attendance at training courses.

Course attendance

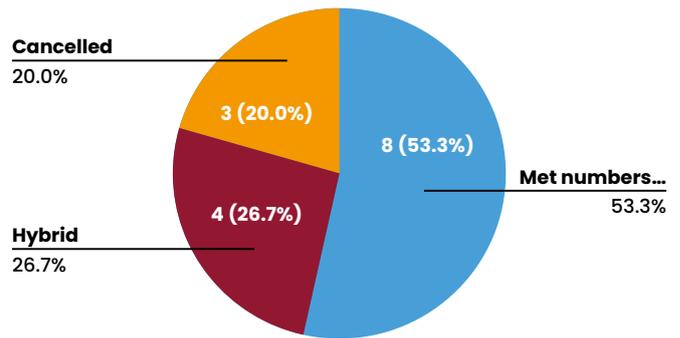
Schools can be unpredictable places, especially for senior leaders who lead on behaviour, pastoral and safeguarding, so the need for some flexibility and understanding was always going to be required, however, the high absence rates of staff at school and the consequent last minute class cover meant that at times we had less than 50 percent attendance on our courses. This meant that we had two options, one was to merge groups with national delegates in order to reach the minimum number required to run, if this wasn't possible we had to cancel but we would then put on extra catch up sessions at alternative dates. Some of the uptake figures on the tables on pages 4 & 5 reflect this, that not all places were taken and as can be seen in the charts below, non attendance, no shows without notice and cancellations was a regular occurrence. However, at all times an appreciation of the demands for the schools staff was very much in our minds and we tried to be as flexible as we possibly could, repeating training courses several times in an effort to give every school its allotted programme of delivery.

Course numbers and status

Theory and Practice of the Boxall Profile

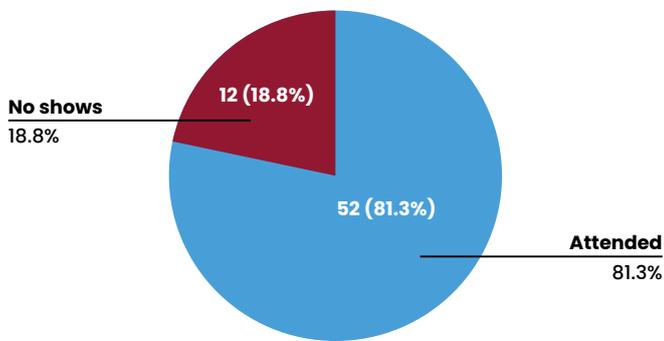


Theory and Practice of the Nurture Group

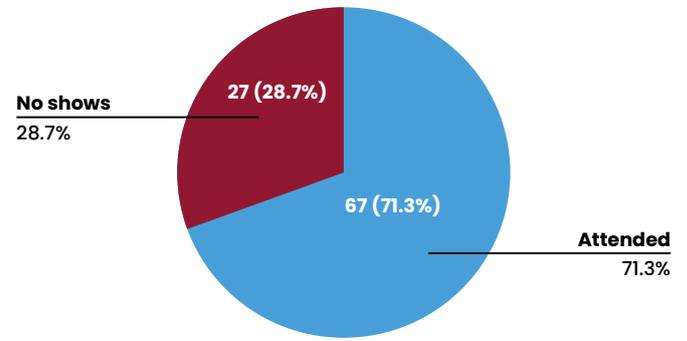


Course delegates registration / attendance figures

TPBP delegate numbers



TPNG delegate numbers



Additional Product Offer

It was very clear that even schools who wanted to get started with the programme offer wouldn't be able to find, in the spring term of 2020, the staff capacity for all of the training. We wanted to take some of the pressure off but also to provide, to whichever schools needed it, products and programmes that would immediately benefit their staff and their cyp. A product, webinar and training for the Bereavement Box, Wellbeing toolkit for professionals, The Wellbeing toolkit for teens, the Transitions toolbox, 180 Minutes Bundle (Mindful, Sensory and Motivational 60 minutes trilogy), and The Boxall Profile® training package were all made available. All of these would provide schools with tools, strategies and resources that could be used immediately with their young people. All schools were sent a video explaining the interim offer and emails with links to sign up. An interim lead consultant worked with those schools between April and August to ensure they each received whatever they needed.

"The toolboxes we received were well used during lockdown and have now been embedded into the curriculum for next year."

Impact and evaluation

A study that evaluated the Nurturing London VRU Programme was published in the paper “The nurtureuk Violence Reduction Unit programme: Exploring a model for reducing school exclusions and instances of youth violence through nurture practice” (International Journal of Nurture in Education, Vol. 8). Part of this has been reproduced below:

“The theory of change underpinning the nurtureuk VRU programmes is based on the evidence-based understanding of the underlying causes of youth violence and proposes an ‘ecological’ (Ward et al, 2013, p. 1) response. Using bespoke consultancy, training and nurturing solutions to restore and build trusted relationships in school through a greater understanding of attachment, child development and trauma-informed practice – and underpinned by the Six Principles of Nurture practice – the nurtureuk VRU programmes aim to reduce instances of school exclusion and youth violence in local communities.”

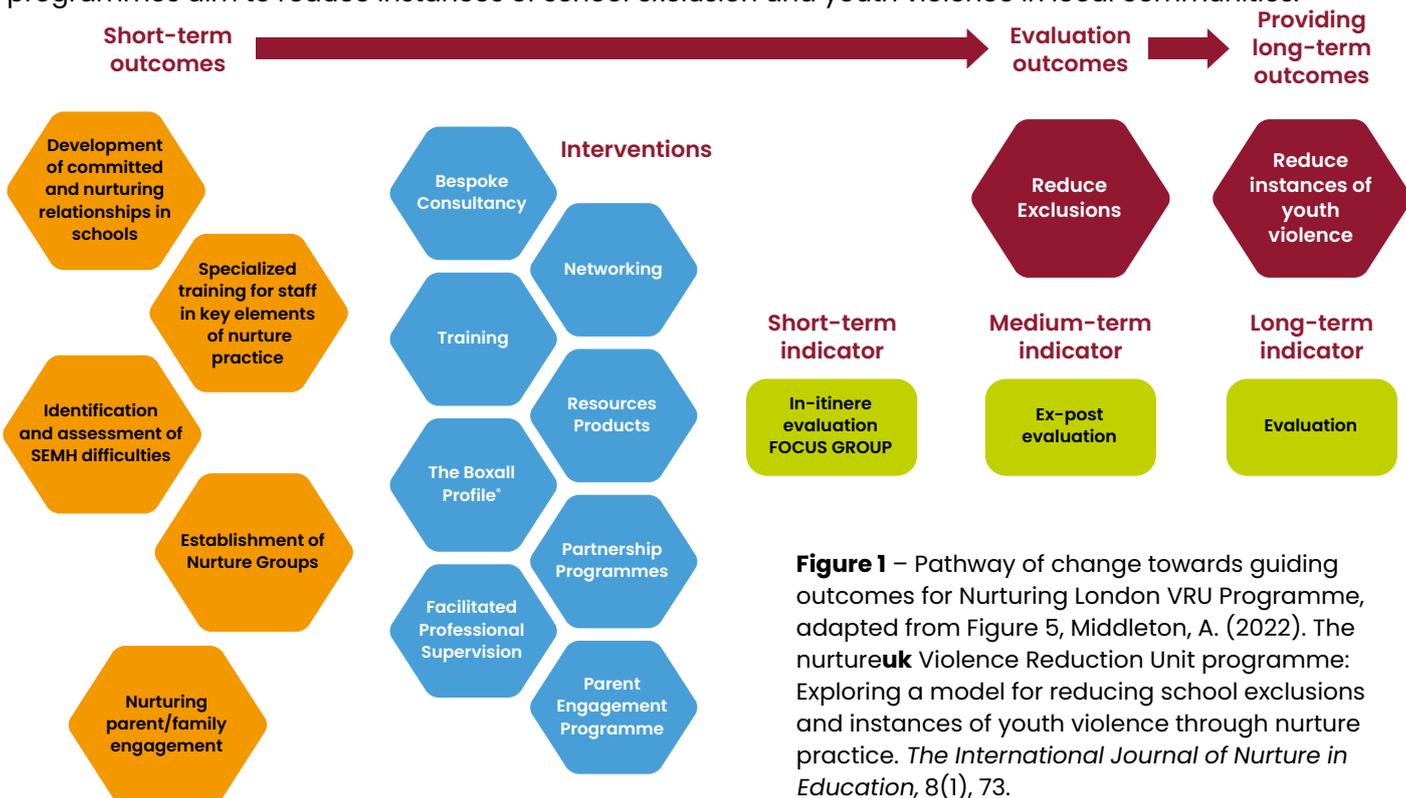
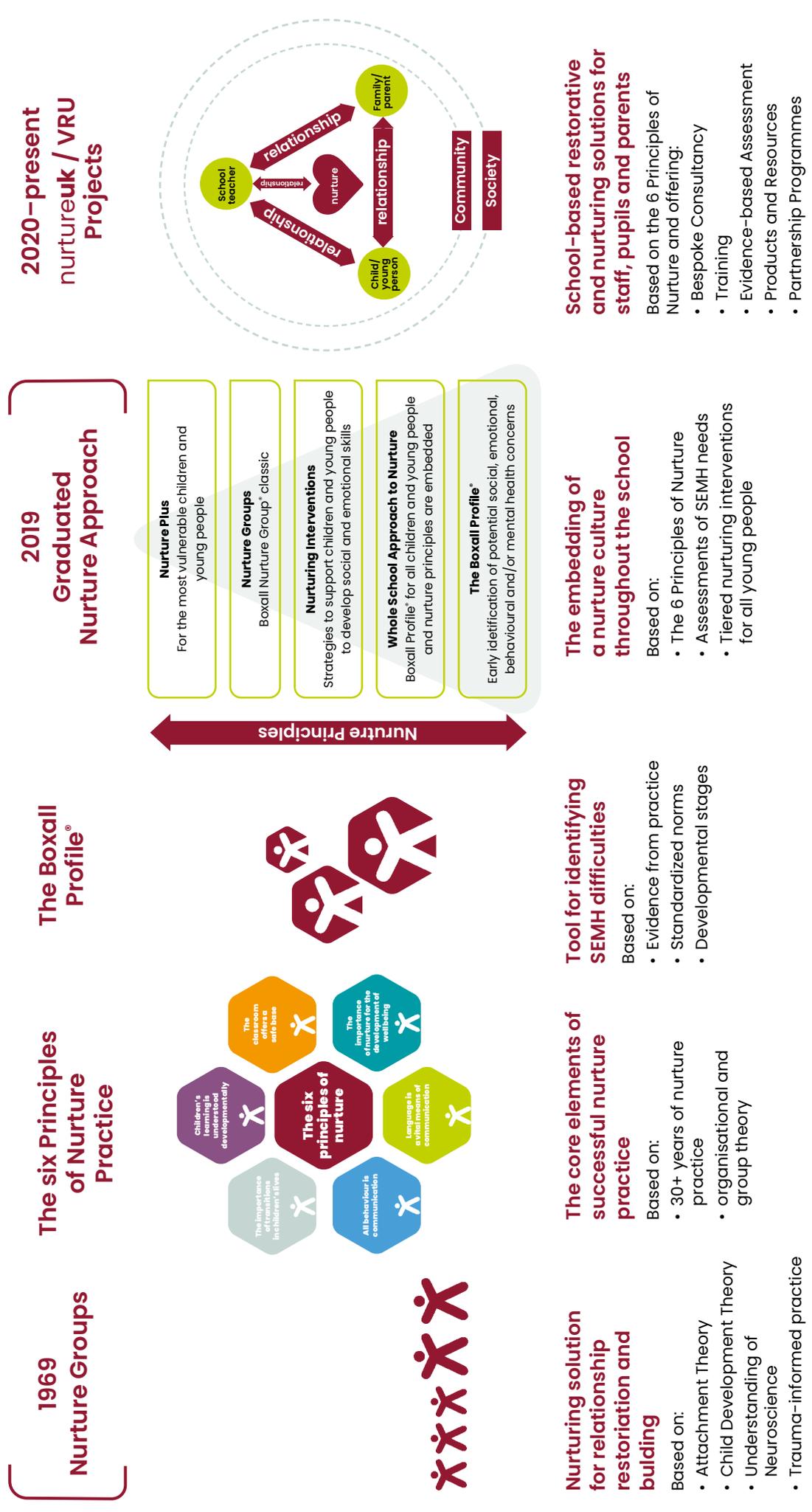


Figure 1 – Pathway of change towards guiding outcomes for Nurturing London VRU Programme, adapted from Figure 5, Middleton, A. (2022). The nurtureuk Violence Reduction Unit programme: Exploring a model for reducing school exclusions and instances of youth violence through nurture practice. *The International Journal of Nurture in Education*, 8(1), 73.

Nurture practice as a restorative solution

In the paper “The nurtureuk Violence Reduction Unit programme”, author Andrea Middleton reflects on the use of nurture practice as a restorative solution:

“... the term ‘nurture practice’ is generally described as an approach based largely on an understanding of attachment theory, child development theory and the impact of trauma and early adversity, and takes into account current advances in the fields of developmental psychology and neuroscience (Education Scotland, 2018). Using the healing potential within trusting, attuned and connected relationships, nurture practice empowers adults in school to allow children and young people to engage with missing early nurturing experiences, thereby supporting the development of social and emotional skills whilst also supporting behaviour, wellbeing, attainment and achievement (nurtureuk, n.d.; Education Scotland, 2020). Nurture practice encompasses the whole school community (including children/young people, staff and parents), is firmly rooted in the six principles of nurture, and can be applied at both the universal and the particular level within the school environment (Education Scotland, 2020)... A growing body of evidence confirms that when nurturing principles have been applied throughout schools – and when nurturing attitudes and practices are adopted by all school staff in a wider approach, and in response to local need – positive impacts for all children, including reduced exclusions, are observed (Middleton, 2021; March & Kearney, 2017; Colwell & O’Connor, 2003; Doyle, 2004).”



2020 – present
nurtureuk / VRU
Projects

2019
Graduated
Nurture Approach

The Boxall
Profile®

The six Principles
of Nurture
Practice

1969
Nurture Groups

- Nurture Plus**
For the most vulnerable children and young people
- Nurture Groups**
Boxall Nurture Group® classic
- Nurturing Interventions**
Strategies to support children and young people to develop social and emotional skills
- Whole School Approach to Nurture**
Boxall Profile® for all children and young people and nurture principles are embedded
- The Boxall Profile®**
Early identification of potential social, emotional, behavioural and/or mental health concerns

Nurture Principles



School-based restorative and nurturing solutions for staff, pupils and parents

- Based on the 6 Principles of Nurture and offering:
- Bespoke Consultancy
 - Training
 - Evidence-based Assessment
 - Products and Resources
 - Partnership Programmes

The embedding of a nurture culture throughout the school

- Based on:
- The 6 Principles of Nurture
 - Assessments of SEMH needs
 - Tiered nurturing interventions for all young people

Tool for identifying SEMH difficulties

- Based on:
- Evidence from practice
 - Standardized norms
 - Developmental stages

The core elements of successful nurture practice

- Based on:
- 30+ years of nurture practice
 - organisational and group theory

Nurturing solution for relationship and restoration and building

- Based on:
- Attachment Theory
 - Child Development Theory
 - Understanding of Neuroscience
 - Trauma-informed practice

Figure 2 – The evolution of nurture practice from nurture groups to the present day, adapted from Figure 4, Middleton, A. (2022). The nurtureuk Violence Reduction Unit programme: Exploring a model for reducing school exclusions and instances of youth violence through nurture practice. *The International Journal of Nurture in Education*, 8(1), 72

The Boxall Profile®

Understanding the needs of the young people in each setting is key to the success of the whole school approach to nurture and the Boxall Profile® online formed a major part of the programme. All schools on the programme have been given a 3 year subscription to the platform, in depth training on the theory and practice of this assessment tool and competency training on the practicalities of completing the profiles.

The two-part checklist is completed by staff who know the child best in a classroom situation. It is quick to use and is constructive. The checklist asks questions about how the child/young person socialises, plays, learns and behaves in their educational setting. This then enables school staff to build a personalised education plan for each child with achievable social/emotional targets. It also helps schools to identify activities and themes for the classroom, and whole school, to support young people in progressing and developing their skills. The Boxall Profile® can be reviewed and re-assessed periodically so progress and outcomes are measurable.

Across the 32 schools **2,125** E-Boxall Profiles® (an individual identifier for each child – EBPs) have been created and **3,015** assessment profiles have been completed. These figures show the extent to which staff have been using the Boxall Profile® Online tool in their schools but furthermore, that they have also been reassessing the same children ensuring that their evidence base is updated and their learning plans are relevant and focused on the individual child's emerging and developing needs as well as being able to monitor progress that the child is making. Reassessing of individual children is a positive sign that the tool, and the nurturing approach, is becoming embedded into the school's systems.

Midpoint Focus Groups

In April 2021 all schools were invited to take part in our mid point focus groups to explore their time on the programme so far. They were all asked a series of questions and their responses were minuted/ transcribed by a member of the VRU team.

Utilising bespoke consultancy, training, and nurturing solutions to strengthen relationships through a greater understanding of attachment, child development and trauma-informed practice – and underpinned by the 6 Principles of Nurture practice – we aim to reduce instances of school exclusion and youth violence.

1. How well do you think this project meets the needs of the children/young people in your school?
2. Does being part of the VRU project give you/your colleagues the knowledge and confidence to be able to support the children/young people in your school more effectively? What aspects of the project specifically?
3. To what extent – if any – has the relationship you/your school has developed with your Lead Consultant, helped you to understand and adopt nurturing practices as part of this project?
4. Have you seen any visible changes in the school or any positive impact on the children/young people as a result of the training/interventions staff have been offered as part of the project?
5. How has the Covid-19 pandemic changed/ altered (positively and negatively) your school's practice in terms of the relationships with your students, parents, families and the wider community?
6. What obstacles/challenges if any, have prevented you/your school from benefiting more from the project?
7. Is there anything further you would like to talk about that we haven't covered in previous questions?

Table 1 – Key findings of the nurtureuk VRU Programme midpoint focus group study

Overall, participating schools felt that the programme:

- 1. meets the needs of schools, pupils and staff** and that:
 - nurture practice is a good fit for the values and vision of schools;
 - the Boxall Profile® identifies the needs of all pupils and particularly the most vulnerable pupils; and
 - adopting nurture practices prevented exclusions, improved attitudes, improved behaviour and improved attendance
- 2. is effective in establishing relationships throughout the school community** and that:
 - the partnership between the school and their nurtureuk Lead Consultant was key for understanding the 6 principles of nurture;
 - Lead Consultants understood the unique context of schools and provided expert knowledge guidance and supports which inspired and motivated school staff; and
 - opportunities to connect with and share ideas and experiences with other schools on the programme was valued.
- 3. led to knowledge development for staff** and that:
 - training on attachment and trauma expanded existing knowledge and developed a new understanding of pupils;
 - the wide range and structure of training available developed staff's knowledge & confidence;
 - the Boxall Profile® gave insight into pupil behaviour and influenced targeted interventions, giving staff more confidence and allowing for needs to be met more effectively;
 - the resources and products supported intervention work; and
 - the audit conducted at the start of the project, with the support of the Lead Consultant, provided a vantage point for the development of wider nurturing solutions throughout the school.

Further information on the findings from the mid-point focus groups can be found in "The nurtureuk Violence Reduction Unit programme: Exploring a model for reducing school exclusions and instances of youth violence through nurture practice", International Journal of Education, Volume 8.

Throughout the programme we have invited all delegates to complete feedback/evaluation forms;

Table 2 – Delegate responses from Evaluation and feedback forms throughout programme

- 1. Whole School Nurturing Approach Package:**

"Our Inclusion department is more nurturing and working towards working even more with SEND learners and their families and assessing their needs in a timely manner. The whole school INSET by the lead consultant has seen many colleagues think again about how they plan lessons and engage with our learners"
- 2. Boxall Profile® Online training and resources**

"Being a part of the VRU has allowed colleagues to attend training and then cascade that knowledge back into the wider school. This has initially been specifically true of the BPO where we have trained all TAs, set them up on the online platform and they have then completed profiles and started intervention work. This has opened up a wider range of intervention work and resources to use as well as new assessment and measurement tools."

"Having access to the Boxall Profile® Online has made it quick and easy for us to access and complete assessments for the pupils placed in our provision...We were able to identify (his) strengths very early on and were able to work with these."
- 3. Nurture Group Training and resources**

"Many thanks – the course has been very informative and given me a lot to think about! It

has also clarified my understanding of nurture groups and how we can implement this into the school so that we achieve the best for our young people. A big mountain!"

"I enjoyed the course. Loved seeing different points of view"

"The training has been amazing. very informative and I thoroughly enjoyed it"

4. Network sessions

87% of attendees who completed our feedback sheet scored us 7 out of 10 or above for '**This session met our expectations**'.

97% of course delegates who completed our feedback sheet scored us 9 out of 10 or above for '**Would you recommend our services?**'

"Thank you for organising these sessions with the authors and for providing their books too. It truly is wonderful. I learn so much from these books and networking sessions. I can't thank you enough"

"Thank you for putting on all of these sessions. I learn so much and the new 'expert' sessions with reading are going to be amazing. I am very excited".

5. Parental Engagement

100% of course delegates who completed our feedback sheet scored us 9 out of 10 or above for '**Would you recommend our services?**'

90% of course delegates scored us 8 out of 10 or above for '**This session met expectations**'.

"whole course was very clear, understandable and content was really informative"

"Great session. I feel like I have learnt so much. Looking forward to day 2!"

"...the trainers! so knowledgeable and so enthusiastic, helped our understanding greatly"

6. Partnership Programmes

PATTERNS/Ciaran Thaper

"All of the students included in the PATTERN programme were on the brink of exclusion when they started. One of those students graduated recently and another has completed their final performance and the others have moved on to their next steps of their journeys. The PATTERNS facilitators – Ciaran, Franklyn and Demetri – were relatable and resonated with the students so were able to be a mirror to them. They provided a safe space where the students could explore their intelligence and their creativity; it gave them a completely different perspective and allowed them to share the experience together. One student went from writing a single word and not saying anything in the first session, to presenting solo to a group of unknown adults at the presentation session at the end of the programme. I think this programme had a huge impact as all but one of these students was saved from exclusion.

Decolonise the Curriculum/ Pran Patel

"Two members of staff went on the 2 day Decolonise the Curriculum course and they thought it was excellent. They found it difficult and challenging but ultimately the self reflection and learning they had to do has made them rethink how they work with their pupils and how to support other staff in how to support the pupils. The two staff are going to be doing some whole staff training sessions on what they have learned from the programme.

Nurture Supervision – Nurturing the nurturers

Supervisor : Marie Delaney

- It was very helpful to express what's going on .. to look at it through the trauma lens... what can work/does work.. even it's not your version of how it can work, there are still lots of positives and you need to give yourself credit
- It was good to have time to reflect... to have that time to help to switch off... somewhere to have our safe space and feel like letting go a little bit

- It gave a chance to take a step back, to sort out our own problems
- It's good to know I'm not on my own... We're in the same boat... dealing with the same things... don't feel guilty about looking after own wellbeing ..sharing in a safe space
- It gave a 'breathing space' ..was more helpful than I imagined.. the value of speaking to people outside your school, schools can be insular.. reassured me I'm not crazy, not going mad.. it's normal to feel like this.. I don't need to be everything to everyone.. it wasn't just an echo chamber, you questioned, challenged.. don't otherwise often talk about work honestly .. particularly helpful during Covid-19 pandemic
- I looked forward to it.. it was a space to off-load and not be judged, you don't want to be a moaner but need to offload.. it gave somewhere to go with it, away from school, where feelings are valued and we were listened to
- It gave time also to savour and celebrate the positives and highlights
- It showed the value of reflection as a team.. will do more of this
- Good reflective questions..
- It helped me to put in boundaries and be more assertive

7. A day in the life of a Nurture Group

"Great strategies, will definitely share and use these in Nurture and around the school."

"Thoroughly engaging. Made to feel comfortable and happy to participate. It may be nice to share things that others are doing in their practice and what hasn't worked very well."

Table 3 – Impact on Exclusions and Attendance

Collecting exclusion data has been difficult – the impact of the pandemic and the associated lockdowns, absence rates and heightened traumatic responses from the young people have meant that not all schools have accurate statistics or trend data.

We have, however, been able to hear directly from school staff how they felt that being part of the programme has influenced practices in school which has then made a difference for some students' outcomes who were otherwise at risk of exclusion.

Schools have been asked to explain what the impact on exclusions and attendance has been across a range of qualitative mediums:

How has your engagement with the project offer prevented the exclusion of a child/ young person?

"There was one young lady... and (we) invited her to join the nurture group. We developed a strong relationship and she depended on me to support her in helping other teachers to understand her needs. I think she would definitely have been excluded if it wasn't for the relationship we established.

There was another girl with severe anxiety that wouldn't have come to school as much if it wasn't for nurture. She did sewing and crafting with my TA and it was amazing to see her laugh and have fun while doing those activities. I never saw her laugh or be happy the way I did in those sessions".

"Hugely! I've got numerous pupils who have not been excluded because nurture has changed how we meet their needs – we make more reasonable adjustments, check ins and space for them to voice their needs. Categorically! not just thinking of one child here, there are so many! They stay in mainstream, we are managing them and they are managing themselves".

"Having access to the Boxall Profile® Online has made it quick and easy for us to access and complete assessments for the pupils placed in our provision...One of our pupils attended a mainstream school where the staff body had very little knowledge and

experience of nurture. As a result of this, they had not managed to identify any of his underlying needs and was labelled as “just naughty” when he started with us...We were able to identify his strengths very early on and were able to work with these as well as establishing a warm and positive relationship with his parents. Our knowledge and our willingness to find solutions has really paid off and he is a great success story of someone who would likely have been excluded from his mainstream environment and been seen as a failure... We hope that other schools in our borough will notice and will see us as a specialist space – a therapeutic and nurturing hub, rather than merely a respite.”

“We have seen that early nurturing intervention has prevented and reduced instances of fixed term exclusions which are usually centred around one or two individuals with complex backgrounds and needs.”

“I know that for at least one current pupil ... if they had been able to attend a nurture group in Year 1, the outlook would be a different one. There is always more work to be done around exclusions, but we know where we want to be and we are headed in the right direction.”

“Since our involvement with the VRU programme, I believe the whole school is less inclined to exclude. Now there are more solution-focussed conversations with our senior leadership team where the emphasis is on identifying strategies within the nurture group that will address the underlying causes of behaviour rather than putting automatic punishments in place”.

“(There has been) more understanding from staff. One staff member reflects that she has less staff demanding answers to ‘what are we going to do about that child...; She feels exclusion is not seen as a solution to challenging behaviours anymore and staff are keen to work with the child and the family more to support them.”

“The school has a low exclusion record, but for the particular child who had a FEX in the autumn term there have been no subsequent exclusions as the more nurturing approach of the school has supported him in managing better.”

“There were high exclusion rates and low engagement. Parental support was also low. The programme has supported staff to see ‘All behaviour is Communication’ and to respond accordingly. Reduced exclusions and increased engagement by pupils and parents. (As a result of the Nurturing Provision and approach).”

Table 4 – *Impact on reduction in violence*

How the programme has *directly* supported violence reduction:

“(Staff member) can report that there are significantly less violent incidents since before the programme started, but data to reflect this is hard to find due to school closures”

“Recently a staff member (who had previously had a more behaviourist/zero-tolerance approach) witnessed an incident outside of school that could have had a very serious outcome. The staff member intervened when 1 young person pulled out a knife over a seemingly minor incident. The staff member was able to regulate and calm the aggressor by communicating clearly and calmly. The HT feels that this very positive outcome was a result of being open to a more nurturing/restorative approach that the school has been following before and during the course of this project.”

“The school is a much calmer place. There are less incidents of challenging behaviour and the children with high levels of SEMH needs are much more settled.”

Evidence-based storytelling

Towards the end of project delivery, Lead Consultants facilitated a review meeting with Project leads to conduct an end-of-project audit review. As part of a reflective process, Lead Consultants collected the experiences of the main agents of change in each setting, which were documented according to the evidence-based storytelling methodology:

Methodology:

Storytelling is an emergent research method or tool in the fields of education, social sciences and public health to gain insight into public knowledge, attitudes and behaviour and relates to people telling their personal stories of real-life or authentic experiences. The process of storytelling has several research aims, including its ability to inform the researcher (through extraction of information), but also as an intervention to facilitate a process of reflection and reworking of experience and knowledge in the research participant. This methodology can also be used to clarify misinformation, validate personal experiences and enhance learning through reflective practice.

In this instance, the methodology has been selected for its ability for this organisation to clearly and convincingly communicate the achievement of the theory of change outcomes relating to the Nurturing London Violence Reduction Programme.

The evidence and claims gathered in the storytelling process are supported by quantitative data which explains “the why” evidence to support the narratives. (The peer reviewed and field-tested method of storytelling suggested by Jankowski & Baker (2019) was employed in the story gathering process for this evaluation report.)

“We need context and a story, because evidence gives stories substance, but stories give evidence meaning. Our stories can be our context, our histories, our missions, our organisational saga, it is how we see the world and why we do what we do.”
Jankowski & Baker

Reference list

Jankowski, N. & Baker, G. (2019). Building a Narrative via Evidence Based Storytelling: A Toolkit for Practice. National Institute for Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment. Retrieved from www.learningoutcomesassessment.org

Aim of this enquiry

The aim of this enquiry was to understand the short term, and potential and hoped for, long term impact of the programme on the staff, students and school communities of those taking part. The stories collected tell us about the journeys that these key agents of change have been on since the programme began in 2020.

Key agents of change for the Nurturing London VRU Programme are shown in Figure 3.

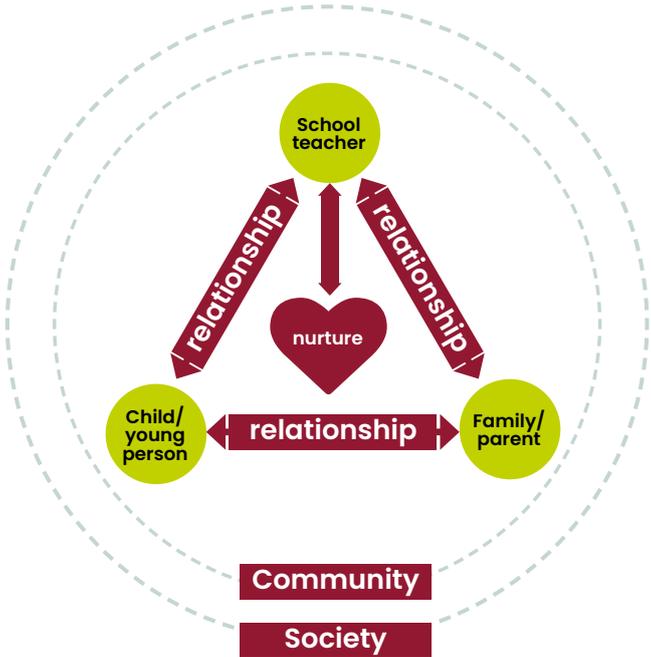


Figure 3

12 stories were collected and they represent the journeys of a lead consultant, a borough lead, school leaders, nurture leads and pupils. All participants were asked the same questions and their responses were written up into the narratives you will see below.

How has any of the nurture practice (training, consultancy, networking meetings, products, partnership programmes) offered by the Nurturing London VRU project reduced instances of school exclusion in your setting?

1. Describe your role in the setting taking part in the project
2. On a scale of 0 to 5, how nurturing were you when this project began (0 = least nurturing, 5=most nurturing)?
3. What was your understanding and knowledge of nurture practice like BEFORE the project started?
4. What do you think were the internal and external barriers to you being more nurturing before the project began?
5. What was the specific project offer (training, consultancy, networking meetings, product, partnership programme) that changed your outlook to a more nurturing one?
6. On a scale of 0 to 5, how much did the project offer (above) affect the change (0=least, 5=most)?
7. When did you see or notice this change?
8. How has your engagement with the project offer prevented the exclusion of a child/young person?
9. On a scale of 0 to 5, how much have exclusions been prevented in your setting since the start of this project?

The numeric, scaled questions, were included to give a statistical sense of starting points and progress made.

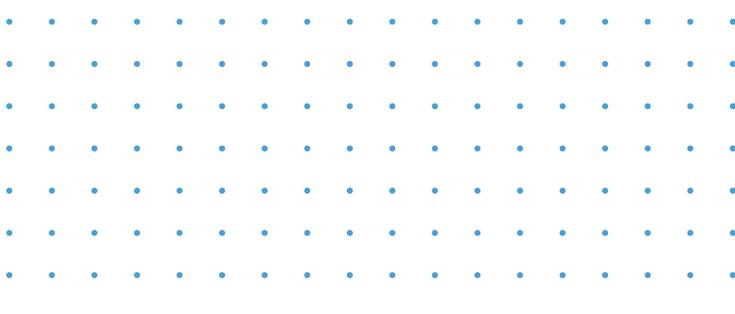
Responses to questions 2, 6 and 9:

90% of Project Leaders (PLs) scored themselves as 2–3 in terms of how nurturing they were BEFORE the programme began

100% of PLs scored the changes they saw in their schools attributed to the programme as 4–5

70% of PLs scored the prevention of exclusions in their settings since the start of the programme as 4–5

The stories have been divided into themed areas and linked to the key elements of the programme.



Story 1

Relationship built with nurtureuk Lead Consultant

The storyteller has been the headteacher of a small primary school situated in one of the most deprived boroughs in London's Eastend for the past 8 years. Under her leadership, the school has a strong ethos built on the principles underpinning restorative approaches.

The school joined the project at its halfway point when another school was not able to continue, so has only had one year actively engaged in the programme. When the school was offered the opportunity to join the Nurturing London Project, the staff training for the year was already set in place, but the headteacher was determined to enable her staff members to access the opportunities this programme presented, particularly in terms of training. The headteacher wanted to link the VRU offer to their school development plan and to use the tools the programme offered strategically in order to reach their objectives in the long term. In the past year the school has absorbed everything the programme had to offer and now needs the time to integrate all of the learning. The school is considered locally as being nurturing in nature and is part of a local community school partnership which shares knowledge and resources around good practice so the opportunity exists for the knowledge gained to be shared more widely with other practitioners in the borough.

“Our school already had a toolbox in terms of our approach to social and emotional learning and this project gave us even more tools than we had. Now we have to decide how exactly we use these tools and who should operate them – you can't just pick up a new tool and use it immediately without knowing how. Now we need time to process and integrate everything we have received.

In terms of nurturing practice, before joining the programme, as a school we were a bit tentative in our approach – meaning that **we were reactive to the challenges we faced and had to seek help externally a lot of the time. This was because we didn't understand the underlying causes of the challenging behaviour we were seeing from some pupils, so we were unable to 'own' it and find the right kinds of solutions that would make the difference.** The challenges were pushing us to find different ways of doing things, and we had already started that journey when the programme came along. **The whole-school training given in person by our Lead Consultant (LC) validated the approach that we had already begun and I was so proud to see my staff realise “this is who we are” and really own the nurturing way in which we work with our pupils.**

Having the budget to release leaders from teaching responsibilities to concentrate fully on integrating what has been learned and putting solid plans in place is our biggest barrier to being more nurturing and restorative

in our practice. What is needed now is to take the time to develop the relationships that are at the heart of nurturing practice. Curriculum objectives and goals can shift easily, but truly restorative work takes time and you only see the fruits of those changes over a longer period of time.

The personal relationship we built with our LC has been key and has brought nurture to the agenda in our school. Their approach has been positive, engaging and adaptable, and the relationship we have formed has really mattered to us. Having someone who is interested in us as a school and who is interested in our context has made a massive difference; staff tend to listen more if the trainer is interested in you. In-person training and virtual training sessions led by the LC facilitated the formation of personal connections to certain staff members which has increased their engagement further.

I see the success of the nurturing approach reflected in the story of one of our Year 1 pupils who joined our school at the same time as our school joined the programme. The pupil was experiencing physical abuse at home and the resulting engagement with the authorities resulted in a lack of trust between home and school. **In the beginning it was extremely difficult to get this anxious and angry young person into school and the classroom. With a nurturing approach, his class teacher was able to identify the emotional need behind the behaviour observed.** Alongside the individual support he received from our on-site Play Therapist, his teacher was able to offer him a nurturing approach in the classroom. Trust was built by the teacher's consistency, her ability to project a sense of calm, and by her adapting expectations and lowering task demands. This small-steps approach, along with consistent reassurance and praise slowly built the pupil's confidence to tackle tasks and to build peer friendships independently. **After 4 months of this approach, we started to see a much less angry young person – one who was coping, who only needed occasional reassurance and who had the ability to work with different adults. Now, almost 9 months later, we have a young person who loves their school and who comes in most days.** Their learning is still a level lower than age expectations, but they are willing to engage and to try.

For me, this was a case of “self-exclusion” resulting from the violence experienced at home and school feeling unsafe to a scared and vulnerable young person. I believe that our nurturing response, particularly that of the class teacher and the play therapist made the difference to this young person's experience of school.”

Story 2

The impact of The Theory and Practice of Nurture Groups Training

The storyteller is a senior leader of a large community primary school located in north-west London, who has responsibility for the whole-school development plan, including the school's approach to nurturing practice.

At the start of the programme, our challenge was to see how we could include nurture practice to complement our existing practice. Previously, our school had adopted the Paul Dix approach in which behavioural expectations and boundaries are exemplified by the adults in the environment. The Nurturing London Project offered us the opportunity to look at our whole-school practice. We saw it as a perfect fit which allowed for the capacity for a nurturing approach to grow right across our school through the training and upskilling of our nurture group staff, in the first instance, and then for all staff. The programme never felt like an add-on, but rather a way of embedding and galvanising our vision of the practice we valued.

We had a foundational knowledge of attachment theory learned from our previous engagement with a children's mental health charity, but we felt that a consistent nurturing approach in our classroom and curriculum was just not there. Our staff had a mixed understanding of the principles of nurture, so there was a lack of consistency based on different beliefs of how behaviour should be managed. I think this was a result of a combination of misconceptions that viewed nurture as a "soft approach, and also a lack of specialist knowledge and training in the concepts underpinning it. Staff needed to see what the actual work looked like and to observe for themselves the links with their existing practice. If this didn't happen, we would be fighting against a tide of "zero-tolerance" philosophy.

I would say that this binary view of having to choose between the opposing "soft" approach and "zero-tolerance" in addressing behaviour was our biggest obstacle in our whole-school nurturing journey. I believe that this view is prevalent amongst our parents too, and it became more prevalent during the pandemic when we were quite isolated from parents. What we know is that there is always an individual story and context behind all behaviour, but this is sometimes hard to "sell" to parents. What I have seen is that when a teacher has a greater understanding of and experience with a nurturing approach, then it is easier to get the parents on board. We encourage nurture across the board, meaning that nurture infuses all of our relationships and our priorities as a school. We constantly make reference to nurture practice and its underlying principles to our parents.

At the start of the programme, we didn't fully realise the breadth of what was being offered to us. Our Lead Consultant (LC) was instrumental in supporting us in the implementation of the training, staff capacity, timing and roll-out of everything we had access to. The LC was able to guide us at each point along the journey as to

how we could build on our nurturing capacity by utilising the project offer. **We knew right from the beginning that we wanted to build a lasting nurturing practice and the Theory and Practice of Nurture Groups training really helped us to build the capacity for long-term, sustainable practice; the cost of doing that outside of the project would have been prohibitive.**

Utilising the Theory and Practice of Nurture Groups training offered as part of the programme to upskill 3 male members of staff in nurturing practice has been a core element of our success in creating a broader and wider perception of using this approach. The training and using the Boxall Profile[®] to create a depth of understanding of the roots of behaviour really demonstrated to them that this was not a "mumsy" approach, but something very powerful to create change. We've seen these members of staff transform from using a "military approach" to adopting more playful, meaningful and rich connections that has been hugely successful.

We have seen that early nurturing intervention has prevented and reduced instances of fixed term exclusions which are usually centred around one or two individuals with complex backgrounds and needs. Something that really stood out for me was seeing the "PRU to prison pipeline" that was shown to us at one of the monthly networking meetings. It really hit home, because before seeing this, I had always viewed exclusions and its consequences as a secondary school problem. I know that for at least one current pupil – with a very complex story – that if they had been able to attend a nurture group in Year 1, the outlook would be a different one. There is always more work to be done around exclusions, but we know where we want to be and we are headed in the right direction.

Story 3

The impact of Nurturing Resources

The storyteller is the Head of Inclusion and additionally, leads a nurturing primary specialist support centre from the school's site set in a diverse borough in North London.

Our school had already embarked on a journey to transform our behaviour policy towards a much more nurturing approach that reflected our values and objectives as a school. My role was to facilitate this transformation with our members of staff, so when the programme came along I recognised the potential for what was offered to help us move the transformation along. The big difference for me was that this was tried-and-tested practice that provided a solid evidence base going back 50 years; I knew that having the kind of evidence you can't argue with would help to convince some reluctant staff members that there was value and merit in adopting a more nurturing and trauma-informed approach to understanding and dealing with behaviour.

Before we joined the programme, there were pockets of excellent nurturing practice already happening in the school, but this was by no means across the board. Our school is lucky to have a Therapeutic Wellbeing Practitioner on staff who works with both children and staff. All staff had received previous training in supporting our pupils' social and emotional development but I noticed that it was the ethos of individual teachers who were naturally more nurturing in their approach that was making a difference with individual pupils.

I feel that the main internal barrier we had as a school in terms of becoming more nurturing, was the fixed behaviourist mindset that many staff had in understanding behaviour. Some staff had pre-existing opinions about nurture somehow being a "soft approach that is all about cuddles". This attitude as well as the pressures to deliver the curriculum, which is target based, left little inclination or time for staff to consider a more nurturing approach.

An external barrier to being more nurturing included the financial costs of EHCPs and the necessity for the school to employ more pastoral-focussed staff members which is difficult to balance. Additionally, the pandemic and resulting lockdowns and bubbles was a really big challenge to our whole school community. We experienced illness, with many of our staff becoming unwell and we also experienced loss, with 2 of our pupils losing parents to the virus.

There are 3 elements of the programme that have been key to our school becoming a more nurturing place – training, resources and the relationship we have built with our Lead Consultant. The **Wellbeing Box** of resources was very well received by staff and pupils in our nurture centre, particularly the puppets. We find these very useful in communicating with our pupils. The **NurtureABC with LEGO** has been invaluable for our nurture centre staff as a useful tool to facilitate conversations and give pupils

an effective way to voice their feelings and emotions. Completing the **Theory and Practice of Nurture Groups** training fortified and solidified our practice in the nurture centre and gave me the confidence and knowledge to set up the physical environment in the most effective way. The course gave us the building block to inform more nurturing thinking and gave us the knowledge to explore the factors behind behaviour and to discuss and find solutions in-house. I found the relationship we built with our **Lead Consultant** through the project to be really helpful and this was also true for the wider staff who met her during in-person training sessions. They felt that they could approach someone with specialist knowledge who could provide advice and answers for our specific context.

(29 schools across London received Wellbeing Boxes containing essential resources for nurture practice for primary and secondary-age children and young people.

35 staff members from schools in London attended the NurtureABC with LEGO course during the Programme

67 practitioners from schools in London attended the Theory and Practice of Nurture Groups during the Programme)

After we completed the nurture group training, I noticed positive changes in the way we practised in the nurture centre. This was especially evident in the work of the nursery nurses now as they are more empowered to integrate the curriculum into the daily practice. We discuss the planning for individual pupils together as a team and each staff member supports each other in implementing the plans, which is much more effective.

Having access to the Boxall Profile® Online has made it quick and easy for us to access and complete assessments for the pupils placed in our provision for a usual period of 12 weeks. The information from the Boxall Profile®, particularly from the Developmental Strands, makes it possible for us to focus the support and identify strategies that will be effective. Using the information, we are able to understand the complex needs behind the behaviour preventing the pupil from attending their mainstream classes at the time that they come to us. We are able to communicate to the school and the parents some of that insight into understanding the need better and we are also able to set expectations about the progress we hope to make in the time that the pupil is with us.

One of our pupils attended a mainstream school where the staff body had very little knowledge and experience of nurture. As a result of this, they had not managed to identify any of his underlying needs and was labelled as "just naughty" when he started with us. He was very explosive and appeared to need to maintain absolute control with both the adults and the other children in the classroom. He had a complicated family environment where there was a history of addiction and also a history

of learning difficulties. We were able to identify his strengths very early on and were able to work with these as well as establishing a warm and positive relationship with his parents. Our knowledge and our willingness to find solutions has really paid off and he is a great success story of someone who would likely have been excluded from his mainstream environment and been seen as a failure. His success in our environment has seen him

accepted at a smaller 1-form entry school that has an established nurturing ethos, which was facilitated by our staff. His parents are overjoyed seeing his progress and seeing him settled in an environment where he will thrive. We hope that other schools in our borough will notice and will see us as a specialist space – a therapeutic and nurturing hub, rather than merely a respite.

Story 4

The impact of partnership programmes for 16+ Students

The storyteller is the Nurture and Wellbeing Lead of a Further Education College catering for approximately 200 students (16-20+ years) situated in North-West London.

As the Project Lead for this programme, I work in collaboration with the individual tutors, as well as the whole wellbeing team. I make sure that our wellbeing agenda and the programme are aligned, and I work with the team to identify students who are at risk of exclusion who may benefit from engaging with this work. **We currently spend 6-8 hours per week working with 45 of our students, in 8 nurture groups, to develop their experiences of nurture and wellbeing. I see nurture work as being different to wellbeing – nurture provides the space for them that enables them to work on themselves and their wellbeing.**

At the start of the programme, I was already very nurturing in my natural approach, but I had no clue about the context or concepts that formed the foundation of nurture practice. I also was not aware of the developmental stages or how developmental needs could be met and I had never heard about The Boxall Profile®. As I also do coaching work outside of my school role, I naturally followed the tenets of this approach – identifying the end result and the clear steps that need to be taken in order to achieve and end result – with my students. So, it was me who decided where they needed to be and what steps they needed to take in order to get there. **But now I feel that my patience has increased tremendously and I have also noticed that I am more knowledgeable about how to provide a safe base that allows for the students to work through their own needs independently, but with my support.**

I completed the Theory and Practice of Nurture Groups training and felt that the nurturing space created by the trainer was calm and a safe place for all of us to be. During the course we looked at the neuroscience underpinning nurture practice and it really clicked for me. **It was very insightful and powerful and gave me a greater understanding of the impact of the mind on the body and how all humans work this way.** The training provided the science behind the approach, but also gave me the language to process this knowledge and to grow my understanding of the concepts. **The principle of nurture “all behaviour is communication” is literally integrated into both my professional and my personal life now!**



I really noticed the impact of this learning when I delivered my first session of nurture practice and two of my learners broke down and cried tears of joy and told me that they had never had a space like it before. I think this was a release from the young people because it was a safe space. **The impact is visible to colleagues too and teachers have come up to me and told me that they can really see a difference in the young people they work with.**

The programme offer that has made the biggest impact is the PATTERN partnership programme. All of the students included in the PATTERN programme were on the brink of exclusion when they started. One of those students graduated recently and another has completed their final performance and the others have moved on to their next steps of their journeys. The PATTERN facilitators – Ciaran, Franklyn and Demetri – were relatable and resonated with the students so were able to be a mirror to them. They provided a safe space where the students could explore their intelligence and their creativity; it gave them a completely different perspective and allowed them to share the experience together. One student went from writing a single word and not saying anything in the first session, to presenting solo to a group of unknown adults at the presentation session at the end of the programme. I think this programme had a huge impact as all but one of these students was saved from exclusion.

If we did not offer the range of nurturing interventions we have developed since the start of the programme, many of our students would have excluded themselves from education by leaving. I have seen students come back from the brink because of this work.

Story 5

The impact of The Boxall Profile®

The storyteller has worked as SENCo for 5 years, and also leads the nurture group provision, at a large community primary school located in north-west London.

Before we joined the programme, the nurture approach was not fully integrated with our school's SEN policy and practice as a holistic approach. **What we recognised from the start, was the potential for this programme to link what was previously a stand-alone practice into the school's vision for inclusion as part of our school's development plan.** The Nurturing London Project has enabled us to embed a clear, whole-school nurturing approach based on assessment points to determine need and to track progress effectively. Working in this way meant that we were able to return to our key priorities as a school. **The training we received cemented what we already knew – that the building blocks of the safe base, the importance of early play and language development need to be in place before anything else will work.** Missing blocks can be identified in the developmental strands of The Boxall Profile® and being able to see this evidence has facilitated conversations with teachers when understanding behaviour has been difficult. We had already established the foundations in the nurture group, but the challenge was for teachers to see their role as fundamental to building the same in the classroom.



We had an established nurture group before we joined

the programme and the parents had a certain view of that provision as being “the naughty group” – this was a big barrier in widening the approach. They had a perception of nurture being a place where bad behaviour would be copied and placement in the group as a reward for bad behaviour, so were reluctant to have their children included. Allowing them to come in and to see how nurture works along with the curriculum and how structured it is, is helping to change that misconception. **I would say that around 80% of parents have changed their views having seen for themselves the positive impact the nurture group is having.** Observing success has also had an impact on the class teachers and they now talk to each other about the positive impact of the nurture group.

The project offer that has had the biggest impact is the access to The Boxall Profile® Online. Using this tool has enabled us to identify and assess the SEMH needs of our pupils and has provided us with clear data as evidence for practice. The class teachers have really embraced this tool and I notice that they now are eager to complete a Boxall Profile® for individual children, knowing the impact it can have to identify need, find solutions to fully include that pupil and to get the parents on board.

The Theory and Practice of Nurture Groups training consolidated all of our previous learning and knowledge into an understandable and practical framework that has been essential for our practice.

Another extremely useful and impactful resource is the “Nurturing Success” manual for nurture groups, supplied to us as part of our Wellbeing Box. We use it for the planning of every nurture session and find the speech and language activities and games especially helpful. It is easy for learning to become too curriculum-focussed and some of the tried-and-tested practice to be forgotten and lost in the classroom. We have found that this fundamental practice is needed even more after the return to school post-pandemic and the resources have helped us to integrate that into daily classroom planning.

I see the positive effects of the application of the training we have received as part of the project in the **improved attendance at school.** I believe we now have a wider view of what inclusion means and we now have the theory behind the practice we want to see throughout the school. I have also seen these positive effects reflected in the stories of individual pupils who were at risk of fixed-term exclusions. I feel like we, as a school, have a different understanding of children and their parents from working with them in the nurture group. The successes have allowed for reintegration back into their mainstream classes. **One pupil is almost a different child from attending the nurture group and now has a teacher who understands them better because the understanding of the underlying needs and what to do about it is there.**

The impact of whole-school Making the Links training

The storyteller is a senior leader in charge of behaviour and attendance for a large all-through academy located in a diverse northern borough of London. The school joined the project at its halfway point when another school in the borough was not able to continue its engagement, so have only had one year to integrate the programme.

The Nurturing London project came along at an interesting time after a year of lockdowns due to the pandemic; as a leadership team, we had begun a journey that began during that difficult year. The pandemic made us realise that we needed more inclusive, wrap-around care in order to really make a difference in the lives of our young people in our community. Our school believes in the absolute right of each child to access education and we recognise the importance of our role as a school in uplifting our community – good comes from good! In this way, our values as a school match the mission of nurtureuk and the objectives of the programme.

When I first met with our nurtureuk Lead Consultant after being offered a place on the programme, I was taken aback by the whole nurturing approach and how it could positively affect exclusions and the prevalence of violence involving young people. **The meeting caused me to look at my own approach, which at the time I can see was quite punitive and mostly a sanctions-based response to any behaviour issues that arose.** When I took on the role of Behaviour and Attendance Lead, I had no grounding in a nurturing approach, but I read the work of Paul Dix, whose stance is that when you work with students and when you train your staff, you can make a positive difference. The rhetoric of the programme provided us with deeper insight into behaviour and the training gave us the deeper understanding we lacked, as well as solutions we could relate to and take ownership of in our own practice. **What we will do going forward is review our behaviour protocols and incorporate, share, adapt and fit everything we have learned during the course of the programme to make it work for us.**

An example of how we have used a more nurturing model to adapt our practice is how we deal with the use of mobile phones on site. Before, if we had seen or heard a pupil using a mobile phone, we would have confiscated the device immediately. This was not working in that it was not stopping the use of phones during the school day, so we decided to adopt a new approach. We decided that instead we would embrace the use of technology on site and that we would take on the responsibility of actively teaching our students how to use devices appropriately and safely – the result has been

a huge reduction in instances that may have escalated previously.

When I started in the leadership role, I inherited a team consisting of seasoned “Blockers” – good pastoral leaders but who were set in their ways – and a small number of “Drivers” – new staff members who had the energy and drive to approach challenges in different ways. At the start it was hard to maintain balance between the opposing factions and our daily meetings were forums to discuss mainly incidents and resulting sanctions. What I realised is that my leadership needed to provide the strategic direction that allowed the team to work in a way that was aligned with the academy’s vision and my vision for the team. Now I can challenge the Blockers respectfully, yet directly. I believe this is possibly because of the support I receive from my line managers and the principal in implementing the academy’s vision and values.

The most impactful element of the programme for us occurred in January when our Lead Consultant delivered a virtual INSET session to our pastoral team. The training covered the root causes of violence, the ecological model around violence reduction and the basics of the nurturing approach. Each staff member that attended the session was very impressed by what they heard and it made a huge impact on each one individually. As a result of the interest, I was asked to share what was presented to a wider leadership audience. All staff that attended also received a workbook of notes covering all the concepts presented in the session. The graphic representation of some of the concepts, e.g., the learning triangle and attachment in the classroom, and the results of the “Now you see us” study was particularly helpful and resonated well with the team.

The timing of this session was really key, being at the beginning of a calendar year, after students had been away from school and were out of sync and out of routine. The understanding we had from the session gave us greater impetus to offer a more nurturing approach from the start. This has been particularly reflected in the practice of one member of my team who gained a lot of insight from that session.

(In 2019, nurtureuk released the findings of a large-scale study in which primary schools assessed the social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs of every pupil in their settings and found that 1 in 3 pupils had a moderate or severe level of SEMH needs. The study also demonstrated how gaining an understanding of the SEMH needs across the whole-school population empowered teachers and schools to do something about it.)

Story 7

The impact of Staff Training and Resources

The storyteller is a Borough Lead working in the Behaviour Support team for a large borough of London with oversight of a number of Secondary schools in the area.

My role within this programme is working in partnership with nurtureuk to identify schools most in need of what the programme has to offer in order to reduce the number of fixed-term and permanent exclusions in the borough. I used my knowledge and awareness of my school's needs and matched these needs with what the Nurturing London VRU Programme had to offer.

Before this role, I worked as an Inclusion Support Assistant in a mainstream secondary school, supporting young people with SEND and SEMH. The interventions we offered were based in a Nurture Room, so although I wasn't specifically trained in nurture practice, I was aware of it and how it blended into the ethos of the school community. It was obvious to me that the relationships built between the adults and the young people in the Nurture Room was very different to anything I had seen in practice before. The Nurture Room was a little community in itself; the teachers knew the young people inside out and the special connection they established remained when the young people integrated back into mainstream. The nurturing adults would still advocate for those young people once they had left the Nurture Room.

The schools in my borough taking part in this programme both have identifiable internal and external barriers that prevented them from being nurturing environments at the start of the programme. One of the secondary schools is situated in one of the most deprived wards of the borough where families experience severe poverty. At the start of the programme this school had recently recruited a new SENCo, who was relatively inexperienced and not yet equipped to cope with the high levels of undiagnosed SEMH needs amongst the students.

Another school is situated in an area where there have been a number of serious instances of youth violence, with many of these traumatic events witnessed by students after school. Many of the students attending this school are at risk due to the activity of a number of high-profile gangs that operate in the surrounding area.

I know that in order to make a difference, practice in school needs to be more nurturing. The training offered as part of this programme can do that, particularly the training around attachment and trauma-informed practice. This brought an awareness about how these concepts affect not only the students directly, but also how staff are affected themselves. **The Nurture Group training and the Boxall Profile® training were wonderful and I believe that having even a few people who are specially trained and can support other staff with this knowledge can and are making a difference.**



The **Bereavement Box** was another helpful and practical resource that was very well received by schools throughout the borough during the pandemic.

I noticed a marked change in one of the schools immediately after the nurtureuk Lead Consultant had delivered the in-person training to the entire staff body about attachment. At this time a number of new staff had joined the school and morale amongst existing staff members was at a low point. I believe that the connections made in-person during the training made the concepts more real and relatable for staff and allowed for new approaches, especially amongst the Student Support Managers, to be adopted. **The training sparked and ignited a passion in staff to want to do things differently.**

At the start of the Nurturing London VRU Programme, one of the participating schools had one of the highest exclusion rates in the borough. I believe that the engagement with the Nurturing London VRU Programme shifted the mindset of the professionals in that school. Now the schools have more in-depth knowledge and understanding of the needs of their young people. **As the Borough Lead, I find that the nature of the school's engagement with me has changed. Now there is more dialogue and they reach out to me; they find it easier to ask for the support they need as they have taken ownership of finding the origins of distressed behaviour themselves. As a result, both permanent and fixed-term exclusions have reduced significantly in this school.**

We have made really good progress but there is still more we can do to utilise the training offers before the end of the programme.

Story 8

The impact of Networking Meetings

The storyteller is a Lead Consultant working for nurtureuk managing the Nurturing London VRU Programme implementation for 3 primary schools, 1 secondary school and 1 secondary Alternative Provision setting across 5 boroughs in London.

I work closely with the leadership and Inclusion Leads within each of my schools to implement nurture practice for reduced exclusions and violence reduction. I adopt a different approach for each of my schools, which requires me to understand their “nurturing story” early on to inform my approach. As the work I do is with the staff, not directly with the young people, I need to understand their systems very well. I visit each school in order to meet the wider staff – this allows me to put faces to names and to help me to align nurture practice to all elements of the school.

Belonging is a key concept for me to understand the wider school context – do the staff feel like they belong? I support the school to help staff feel and see how they belong and what this looks like for their students. Doing this helps me to establish a connection with each school so that I belong and then we can explore the objective of this programme together.

At the start of the Nurturing London VRU Programme, the primary schools I worked with were familiar with a nurturing approach and had already embedded nurturing practice within their settings, however the secondary schools required an introduction to nurture practice before the link with violence reduction could be understood. In terms of my own understanding, I know nurture very well as I have a professional history of nurture practice in schools, based on the 6 principles of nurture. However, my understanding of violence reduction was not as established and needed to be aligned with my own experience and knowledge of nurture. My connection and exposure to my nurtureuk team helped me to increase and expand my understanding, particularly around neuroscience and research evidence.

The biggest barrier was the lack of personal interaction during the pandemic as all meetings with my team and with my schools were held virtually. Having the opportunities to meet in person post-lockdowns helped overcome this barrier and allowed me to forge greater

connections with the programme leads in each school. Another barrier is time; I work for myself and worry if my diary is not full, so I frequently overstretched myself and had to work hard to try to find a point of balance.

Of all the programme offers, I feel that the regular networking meetings have been the most impactful. These meetings provided the opportunity for schools, guests and our team to share experiences and practice from a breadth of settings. For me, these discussions provided significant personal learning and deepened my understanding of concepts that I hadn't been aware of. My deepened understanding of this wider knowledge allowed me to apply nurture to other contexts and afforded me the opportunity to support my own schools better.

I noticed a significant change in the practice of 2 schools after they attended a particular networking meeting. The staff that attended this meeting had not been there previously but had decided to join this one because they were able to bring questions and issues they were experiencing directly in practice. Staff were able to bring the case of 2 children they were concerned about to the “networking surgery” and found that it was a safe place within which to explore and discuss the issues. They felt heard during the discussion and were empowered by the suggestions offered to implement ideas and move forwards. **I know this meeting was the catalyst that significantly and directly impacted their practice as nurture has now been adopted as a whole-school approach in both settings, with one school working towards the Marjorie Boxall Quality Mark Award and the other school implementing the National Nurturing Schools Programme.**

Staff from these settings have reported specific instances where the nurture groups that have been initiated and strengthened by this programme have “saved” particular children from exclusion and will continue to do so in the future. The leadership teams of these schools facilitate support between schools, which allows nurture practice to thrive and grow. My mission is to move this forward into secondary practice so that young people can experience more seamless nurturing.

Story 9

The impact of whole-school Facilitated Supervision for Staff

The storyteller was previously a full-time class teacher completing the National Professional Qualification for Middle Leadership (NPQML) and following the attendance of a training course about behaviour the previous year, had set a target of establishing a nurture group. When the programme was offered to the school and she was designated the Project Lead, she recognised the opportunity to attain the target as part of her qualification requirements. Her role now includes Nurture Lead, Lead Practitioner and Mental Health Lead in her primary school situated in North-West London.

Personally, I always had a focus on building strong relationships with the pupils in my class and was well-liked by them. Before the Programme, I had some minimal knowledge of nurture practice from my previous school. This was mainly from observing a lunchtime group run in a nurturing way by another member of staff. The group was made up mostly of young boys with Caribbean heritage and was a place where they could remain calm through chatting, participating in meditation, etc.

My own confidence was my main barrier to being more nurturing in my practice. Managing the pressures and stress of work and not wanting these to impact on my pupils were also a challenge. Another barrier is the lack of time as a full-time class teacher, having to juggle workload with never enough time. In terms of external barriers, getting other staff to “buy-in” to more nurturing practice is always difficult, even with constant communication regarding the importance and impact of this approach. Similarly getting the senior leadership team to value the approach and to justify the expense of it can be difficult.

The training as part of this programme has one thousand percent changed my practice! The science behind the approach has made me think differently and has transformed me as a practitioner. The **Theory and Practice of Nurture Groups** course was amazing and expanded my knowledge of neuroscience, attachment and the 6 principles of nurture. Our **Lead Consultant** has been a God-send; she is approachable and can use her expertise and ability to explain the science behind what may be going on for an individual child, which helps me to understand what the behaviour is about. Her ability to identify the positives has boosted morale and highlighted small gains.

The Practitioner Supervision Sessions facilitated by an Educational Psychotherapist has been key in making connections with other practitioners and has helped me to keep balanced and grounded.

I have loved every minute of this programme and am so sad that it is coming to an end. My dream would be to work for nurtureuk.

Although I had some elements of nurture in my classroom practice before, the understanding of neuroscience and attachment following the training has changed

the quality of my relationships with my pupils and has allowed me to look deeper into situations and behaviour. For example, I work with a couple of children in a maths group and their behaviour is often challenging. I remember a recent instance where one of the pupil's behaviours was becoming difficult; previously I would have reacted in a punitive way, but **I remembered what I had learned about the negative impacts of shame and shaming and decided to take a different approach, which yielded a different outcome.** Another instance in the classroom comes to mind when the behaviour of some children was causing me to feel frustrated and angry. I chose to describe to the pupils about how I was feeling – emotionally as well as physically – and described how my palms felt hot and sweaty and that I wanted to walk out of the room. I asked them what they thought was happening to me and if they had ever felt this way. I got a lot of responses, with them identifying that I was feeling angry and that I should take a deep breath, count to 10 and take a walk. This calmed everyone down, including me, and diffused the situation.

At the beginning of this school year, both my assistant and myself were ill with Covid-19 and consequently there was no nurture group for the period of 3 weeks whilst we recovered. Every child in the group was either involved in a serious behaviour incident or received either an internal or external exclusion during that time, which clearly demonstrated why the nurturing approach is absolutely necessary to create different outcomes.

Since our involvement with the programme, I believe the whole school is less inclined to exclude. Now there are more solution-focussed conversations with our senior leadership team where the emphasis is on identifying strategies within the nurture group that will address the underlying causes of behaviour rather than putting automatic punishments in place.



Reducing exclusions through a whole-school nurturing approach

The storyteller is a Senior and Safeguarding Lead of a large secondary and sixth form community school situated in North-East London.

My role throughout this programme has been a facilitator for nurture practice in our school. My wider goal is to drive the narrative of a more holistic approach to education across our setting and it was for this reason that I was appointed to take on the programme and to widen its reach.

Before we joined the programme, nurture practice was not really recognised as a legitimate approach. Normal school processes – assessments, data, numbers, results and targets – guided teachers' decisions more than a pupil's wellbeing needs. We never gave the time to meaningfully ask a pupil how they were and want to know the answer. The Covid-19 pandemic helped to change this prevailing attitude as it demanded a wider societal recognition of trauma and meeting needs. All levels of society were made to reflect on what really matters to people and schools had no option but to witness the partial breakdown of society and social norms whilst we were all being affected by the pandemic.

At the start of the programme, my knowledge of nurture practice was quite good, but now it is completely embedded in my practice. All decisions affecting a young person in our school are now made with a nurture focus, and relationships with staff and the way I frame conversations with them has also changed. Since adopting a more nurturing approach I feel that I have more support from our local authority services around social, emotional and mental health and I think that since the pandemic, there is a greater recognition of these needs from other agencies too. **We may have arrived at this point regardless, but the programme allowed us to embed nurture practice earlier so that we could respond to the needs created by the pandemic at an earlier stage.**

The school leadership recognised that if we continued our previous approach, we would continue to see the same results, so **our school completely changed our behaviour system at the start of this year, moving away from exclusions and moving towards creating a space where young people build and rebuild relationships with staff across the school.** We have numerous pupils who

have not been excluded because nurture has changed the way we meet their needs. Now we check-in more, make space for them to voice their needs and make more reasonable adjustments and we find that we are managing them, they are managing themselves and they are staying in mainstream education. The unseen work of the nurturing approach is reaching across the school and our pupils are aware that things have changed. This approach is visible to pupils too and they have more faith in the system in which they find themselves in. If they have made a mistake or are in trouble for something, now they don't question that they aren't punished or excluded – they trust that there will be a conversation or a reflection, rather than a sanction.

The PATTERN partnership programme afforded us the opportunity to have inspiring young people come in and work with our young people. Having adults that pupils could relate to, speak to and be honest with became such an important outlet for these vulnerable young people who were on the cusp of exclusion or big educational changes. They were made to feel secure and at ease which made them want to turn up! **The pupils attending were at risk of truancy, but they attended consistently each week and enjoyed the sessions.** I was constantly asked each week if the sessions were taking place and what the topic of discussion might be! These pupils already have excellent English teachers, but I think they got so much more from the PATTERN sessions than they were from their English classes

The staff training offered by the programme really resonated and has helped us to spread the message of nurture and the importance of building relationships across staff teams. **The Networking meetings that I attended were excellent and really valuable for my own development. The toolboxes we received were well used during lockdown and have now been embedded into the curriculum for next year.**

The new Headteacher will be moving the school further in the nurturing approach because of the impact of the programme. **The small things we have done and changed as a result of this programme – those small things have moved mountains for our young people and for the school.**

Conclusions and next steps

The Nurturing London VRU Programme set out to support schools in improving outcomes for their students, namely in reducing exclusions and tackling youth violence.

Designed pre-pandemic, the programme had to make fast, effective changes to its original structure, not only to get around new practical delivery requirements but also to meet the newly emerging needs of the students and school staff as a consequence of the pandemic. Delivery models were redesigned to be delivered virtually and schools received extra, additional, elements to try to support them with those emerging needs. There was also an increase across most of the original programme elements for training days and subscriptions to the Boxall Profile® online SEMH assessment tool. One thing that has become clear during the programme is that there is no 'one size fits all' for schools when it comes to the needs of their students. Some schools want to be Nurture Group focused and have channelled their energy and resources into steering their school and staff towards providing this, taking the training and materials on offer from the programme. Other schools rely more heavily on The Boxall Profile® tool across wider cohorts and have invested time and resources into embedding the whole school nurturing approach. The programme was designed to deliver a 'bespoke' package to all of our schools and to help them all to build on what was working and support them in developing solutions to areas where change and improvement was needed. The role of the lead consultant was key to this bespoke approach and has often been described as one of the most powerful elements of the programme. Having someone who they knew, who could be their coach, cheerleader, sounding board and teacher meant that staff developed the confidence to start this journey and to more successfully continue it once the official project had finished.

This package was very broad as we wanted to offer our schools whatever they needed. This was greatly appreciated by schools but came with its own difficulties – not the least one being that it became extremely complex to manage.

A lot has been learnt from the successes and challenges of this programme.

- **Nurtureuk** have a whole school nurturing approach, the National Nurturing Schools Programme, which wasn't included as part of the Nurturing London VRU package as it didn't have a wide offer of additional training, however, we have learned the benefit of this additional aspect and our nationally accredited NNSP programme now has a menu of options for additional training – because of this the NNSP will form an integral part of future programmes and the challenges of complexity we faced will no longer be there.
- We also recognise the vital importance of having the full support of both the boroughs/LA and Senior School Leadership (SLT). Without the support from local authorities and MATs from the outside and buy-in and engagement from SLT at the top of schools then progress, momentum and lasting and sustainable change will be incredibly difficult. For the whole school approach to be truly embedded then it needs to come from, and impact, all stakeholders.
- We know that there is a correlation between school exclusion and the pathway to violent crime and prison. Children who are excluded are more likely to be both victims and perpetrators of crime. Creating a school culture

which encourages trusting relationships, safe spaces, and an understanding that behaviour is always communicating something will enable young people to thrive in education settings and will, we believe, reduce exclusions and increase school engagement and attendance.

Our involvement with these schools came at a time that meant original plans had to be scrapped, this, from everyone's perspective, was challenging. However, it could also be argued that our involvement with these schools came at the best time for them. We were able to provide, to the best of our ability, support for them and their students at a time of enormous emotional strain and extra pressures.

We leave schools having introduced them to different perspectives on how they view the children and young people in their schools and alternative ways to deal with any areas of concern, these new Nurture focussed approaches, based upon the 6 principles of nurture and built around the graduated approach, will be more sustainable and will guide them towards adopting similar approaches and changes within their school and the wider community in the years to come.

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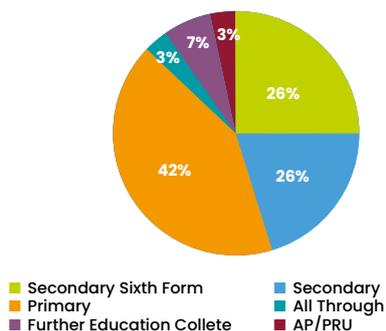
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Appendices

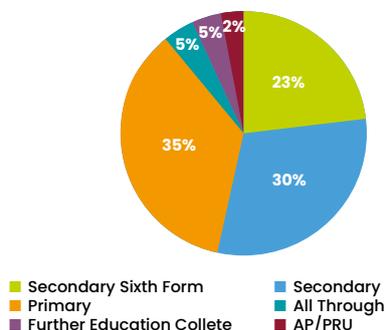
Grant variations

Date	Amount/ uplift	No of schools on programme – total	End of programme –revision
15/01/2020	£300,000	26	30/09/2021
01/12/2020	£424,904 (£124,904)	37	30/09/2021
01/04/2021	£470,904 (£46,000)	31	31/03/2022

Phase of 32 schools who completed programme



Phase



Schools involved in the programme:

Borough	School (<i>schools in italics did not complete the programme</i>)
Barking & Dagenham	All Saints
	James Cambell
	Jo Richardson
	Robert Clack
	<i>Goresbrook</i>
Brent	Elsley Primary
	Mitchell Brook
Croydon	Norbury Manor Primary School
	<i>Norbury Business and Enterprise College</i>
Ealing	Greenford High
	<i>Ellen Wilkinson</i>
	<i>Alec Reed Academy</i>
Enfield	Lea Valley
	Oasis Academy Hadley
	<i>Heron Hall Academy</i>
Greenwich	Eltham Hill
	Plumstead Manor
	Wize-up
	<i>Thomas Tallis</i>
Haringey	Haringey Learning Partnership
	Seven Sisters
Lambeth	Fenstanton
	Richard Atkins
	Van Gogh Primary
Lewisham	Forster Park
	Rangefield
	Urban Mission School (TLG)
Newham	Sarah Bonnell
	<i>Royal Docks</i>
Southwark	Alfred Salter
	Grange Primary
	<i>Cobourg Primary</i>
	<i>Inclusive Learning Service (PRU)</i>
	<i>Brunswick Park</i>
Tower Hamlets	Bishop Challenor
	William Davis
	<i>Oaklands</i>
	<i>Bow</i>
Waltham Forest	Big Creative Academy
	Chingford Foundation
	Heathcote School
	South Chingford
	Waltham Forest



About nurtureuk

Nurtureuk is a registered charity working tirelessly to promote access to education for all. With rising levels of mental health problems and increasing numbers of children and young people affected by social, emotional and behavioural difficulties that inhibit their progress and limit their life chances, nurtureuk is at the forefront of combatting barriers to learning and development.

Our charity has developed a range of evidence-based interventions and support, delivered in schools and other educational settings, that give disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people the opportunity to be the best they can be.

Whether it is delivering certified training for professionals, supporting whole-school nurturing approaches, providing accurate assessments of need, or promoting rigorous research-based evidence, nurtureuk is providing the quality support and resources that make impactful, nurturing, education provisions a reality for children and young people throughout the UK and beyond.



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