

# THE NURTURING ESTABLISHMENT: GATHERING CHILDREN AND PARENTAL/ CARER VIEWS OF THEIR EXPERIENCES OF A NURTURING ESTABLISHMENT

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## ABSTRACT

Glasgow City Council has stated its aspiration to move 'Towards the Nurturing City' where all establishments have implemented a whole school nurturing approach. This paper seeks to document the experiences of children and parents/carers, captured through semi-structured questionnaires in focus groups, in 'nurturing establishments'. Nineteen children and 21 parents/carers, randomly selected across two local authority primary schools and one local authority early years centre, took part in focus groups where they were asked about their daily experience of nurture in their schools and early years centre. The three establishments were selected by the Educational Psychological Service to exemplify good practice in embedding nurturing approaches with all staff. The 11 themes, derived from a thematic analysis, came from combining the responses of the parents/carers and children. All of the responses were positive in relation to the questions asked. In addition, the six nurture principles were felt by respondents to be applied in each of the three establishments, and the children and parent/carers gave lived examples of the principles.

## INTRODUCTION

Glasgow's nurture journey is well-documented (Kearney, 2005; Gerrard, 2006; March and Healy, 2007; Reynolds et al, 2009; MacKay et al, 2010; Glasgow City Council, 2014; Kearney et al, 2016; March and Kearney, 2017) and this evolution has resulted in a movement extending beyond targeted nurture groups to whole school nurturing approaches. As well as significant financial investment, Glasgow City Council has utilised the roles of the nurture development officer and the educational psychological service to ensure that all early years' establishments and schools have access to professional development that is focused on the whole establishment approach to nurture.

Nurture groups were fully conceptualised by Bennathan and Boxall (2013) emerging from Boxall's recognition that distressed young people need extensive support to regulate difficult emotions and behaviour. Distressed behaviour was seen as the product of childhood adversity, trauma, neglect and attachment issues, and often meant that children were not able to fully access the school experience. Utilising an emotionally available and attuned teacher in a smaller class setting allowed the child to build a trusting relationship and a secure base before

being reintegrated into their mainstream class. The evidence for the effectiveness of such an intervention has continued to build (Cooper and Lovey, 1999; Cooper et al, 2001; Binnie and Allen, 2008). Glasgow Education Services introduced nurture groups in 2001, since when the number of nurture groups across early years centres, primary schools and secondary schools has expanded, but the drive to develop a nurturing approach in establishments has also advanced and is a well-documented concept (O'Connor and Colwell, 2002; Doyle, 2003; Doyle, 2004; Kearney and Nowek, 2019). A nurturing approach is located within a whole establishment where all adults have an awareness and training in relation to the nurturing principles. These principles are evident in the promotion of wellbeing for all within the establishment. In addition, there is a focus on promoting healthy, positive and trusting relationships and self-evaluation of how the nurturing principles are embedded is undertaken.

Marjorie Boxall (2002) indicated the importance of parents and their interaction with the school, noting the significance of the ethos and atmosphere, as well as mentioning that the development of staff relationships with the parents is crucial, in particular, the need for staff to be emotionally supportive to parents. This

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relationship is coupled with the explicit understanding by staff as to how the nurture principles (Lucas et al, 2006) are embedded in the establishment and their: 'relevance to normal academic achievement' (Boxall, 2002; p17). Boxall highlighted that the principles help to promote engagement with the curriculum. Boxall (2002) gave concrete examples of the application of the principles, eg staff greeting the children in the morning in a welcoming manner and making staff available to speak to the parents so that both the children and their parents feel that the establishment is a safe place. Ensuring that wellbeing is a core focus for staff, helping to make children feel happy, relaxed and, in turn, more likely to be ready to learn. Lucas (1999) demonstrated the progress that learners can make when a nurturing environment, based on the nurture principles, is provided for them. She linked the delivery of the curriculum, set in the context of staff who have high expectations for the children they are teaching, with staff having an understanding of the emotional needs that learners have and how to build in strategies to support these needs.

The views of parent/carer and children on what makes a nurturing school are not well researched, but some findings include Cooper and Tiknaz (2007), that secondary school children were clearly able to identify what aspects of the nurture intervention supported their progress, discussing such topics as anger management and bullying. In addition Garner and Thomas (2011) captured the views of eight parents and six children in relation to secondary nurture groups with the children's views captured individually rather than collectively. Some of the themes present in this paper were seen in Garner and Thomas (2011) eg the importance of relationships with staff and the need to feel safe in their school environment. Communication was also a topic of discussion.

Glasgow research undertaken by Healy and March (2007) concerned the parental perceptions of the progress their child had made at the end of their time in a nurture group. In summary this work found that over 77% of parents solely had positive comments to make about their child's development post-intervention and only one per cent of parents had purely negative comments to make. The themes that came from the paper were largely related to the child's skills and abilities eg increase in confidence, academic performance and emotional progress. Parents also noted positively the attributes of the nurture teacher, but the overall support by the school and the wider staff group was not researched.

The national reach of the nurturing approach in Scotland is wide and spans at least 27 of the 32 local authorities (Kearney and Nowek, 2019). Kearney and Nowek indicated that there is a growing consensus

about what is meant by a nurturing approach in Scotland but concluded that there is a: 'need to consolidate the increased appetite in Scotland for nurturing approaches to ensure that it captures evidence of impact' (ibid; p19). Making certain that part of the impact of a nurturing approach is on the child's experience in school was a driver for the research that was undertaken and reported in this paper.

The aim of the research is to further unpack the nurturing approach. To find out if the child and parents' experience of a nurturing environment, and how that environment encapsulates the nurture principles, is a positive one. In addition, to identify what parents and children think are the elements of a nurturing environment.

Glasgow City Council has invested a great deal of time and resources in developing nurturing approaches throughout its educational establishments, but little research has been undertaken with the parents/carers and children who are key stakeholders in the whole establishment nurturing approach. This paper seeks to begin to address this.

## **METHODS**

Two Glasgow City Council primary schools and one early years centre were selected to take part. Their selection was based on their commitment to embed a whole establishment approach for nurture. A number of criteria were set to establish this commitment including:

- The establishment prioritising the development of nurture as part of their improvement planning.
- Requests to the Educational Psychological Service and Nurture Development Officer for input and training on varying aspects of nurturing approaches.
- The establishments were all using a nationally recognised self-evaluation framework (Education Scotland and Glasgow City Council (2017)).
- The school senior management teams were recognised by educational psychologists and education senior managers as having a longstanding commitment to nurture across their establishments.

The research team was made up of four educational psychologists. Two of the researchers undertook all of the focus groups with one researcher consistently asking the questions and the other researcher scribing. The use of the same person to undertake the tasks was to ensure that there was consistency in how questions were asked and answers recorded. A third researcher undertook the thematic analysis with the fourth researcher overseeing this process, consulting on what constitutes a theme.

Heads of establishment were asked to invite a random selection of children and parents/carers to take part and the primary head teachers were asked to cover all stages in their primary school. Some had experienced targeted nurture support but most had not.

Nineteen children aged from five years to 12 years took part; five children were of pre-school age and 14 were of school age; a mixture of boys and girls were in the focus groups. Twenty one parents/carers took part, all of whom were female. The selection of children and parents/carers was randomly made by the heads of establishment prior to the focus groups being held. The parents/carers and children were asked if they would be prepared to take part in a focus group looking at their experience of the nursery, and how nurturing it is. They were told that their participation in the group was voluntary. In total there were six focus groups. In each of the establishments a parent/carer focus group ran as well as a children's focus group. Explicit parental/carer permission was obtained for the children taking part and it was highlighted to them that the timeline of the focus group was one hour.

Parents/carers and children were asked questions relating to the nurture principles and where they saw them in practice (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2). The questions and prompts used were not standardised. Instead, the nurture principles (Lucas et al, 2006) were used as a basis around which to construct questions. Each of the questions was mapped directly on to a nurture principle.

A thematic analysis was used to group the themes that came from the six groups. The themes and their content were then matched with the nurture principle/principles that were best evidenced by that theme.

### **THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

'Thematic analysis is a poorly demarcated, rarely acknowledged, yet widely used qualitative analytic method within psychology' (Braun and Clarke, 2006; p77). Braun and Clarke note the issues relating to thematic analysis, but give a clear structure from which to maximise robust information. The six phases of scrutiny that they outline to do this, were employed as part of the research methodology. The steps of: familiarising yourself with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; producing the report were used by an educational psychologist (EP), who was not part of the focus groups, to organise the qualitative information gathered. Most importantly, the authors had the hope that: 'themes that emerge from the informants' stories are pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience' (Aronson, 1995). Aronson also goes on to say that those individuals who are using the raw information to develop the themes have to have a detailed understanding of

the literature that underpins the area of research. The EP who brought together the 11 themes had received training and had a well-developed understanding of the area of nurture and nurturing approaches.

Parental/carer feedback recorded at the focus group, was themed first as these responses were, in general, more detailed and expansive. The information that came from the children's groups was separately themed and then aligned with the parental/carer themes. It was felt by the researcher undertaking the analysis that both sets of themes were similar although the quality and clarity of the information differed. Since the themes that emerged from the parent/carer focus group and the children's focus group were broadly similar, to give a rounded view of how a nurturing establishment is experienced the information from both groups was combined.

The researcher who themed the information used the nurture principles to undertake the initial themes, for example, when parents/carers and children talked about a welcoming environment or how staff talked to them in a way that made them trust the staff, this was initially mapped on nurture principle two. However, the experience of the environment was extended beyond the classroom, thus the titles of themes were adapted to note the wider context. Some themes were more straightforward to develop, for example communication. This was related to the first general question of the focus group, and parents/carers generally responded to it by commenting on how the establishment communicated with them and providing examples of the types of communication. The children were not asked this question. Prior to the theme being agreed, the researcher pulled all the quotes and comments together, stated what they were suggesting as the theme and discussed this with a fourth researcher who had not been part of the focus groups or thematic analysis. Once the 11 themes were established, a consultation with the researchers who undertook the initial focus groups was held. This was to ensure that the quotes/comments were not taken out of context or misinterpreted.

Once the themes were established and the data that fell under each theme considered, the themes were aligned with the relevant nurture principles identified in the responses to the focus group questions.

### **RESULTS**

A series of prompt questions were used (see Appendices 1 and 2) designed to elicit information about how the nurturing principles were being used in practice. These prompts were also designed to explore the impact of this practice on the children and parent/carers who attend the establishment. There were 11 themes that came from the combined six focus groups and the six semi-structured questions.

Themes derived from thematic analysis included:

Formal transition; Conflict resolution; Communication; Building relationships; Attunement; Ethos; Learning/development; Environment/safe base; Parental/Carer engagement; Leadership and Impact on children and their families

The following is a report of the comments that were made by parents/carers and children about their experiences of what they feel makes a nurturing establishment.

### **Formal transition**

*'It's a process more than an event'* (parent/carer comment)

*'...every day, when I come in, they (the staff) say hello and smile at me'* (child's comment)

This theme related to how the parent/carer or child is helped to negotiate transitions. From everyday transitions, such as coming into the establishment, to more significant events eg moving from primary school to secondary school.

Across the three establishments, examples were given that children and parents/carers felt supported transition. Activities such as the Primary 7 outward bound trip, 'practising' accessing the playground area, supported visits to the dinner hall, welcome time where staff are at the front door or gate of the establishment and at the end of the day and pre-school visits.

There were several comments about the importance of the establishment being 'well prepared' in how they undertake transition, as well as the timing and pace of transition ie starting the planning and process early and then building up experiences over time.

It was felt that this theme clearly mapped on to nurture principle 6 (see Appendix 3 for principles).

### **Conflict resolution**

*'The school has lots of posters on their walls about friendship'* (parent/carer comment)

Children commented: '

*It's easy to make friends after falling out' and 'Mistakes can happen but they get dealt with'.*

This theme focused on how the school responds to specific incidents where children have come into conflict with each other, as well as whole school approaches that are in place to support a relationship-based environment.

Parents/carers and children were able to name eight interventions that were used across the three establishments to support conflict resolution. Examples such as Bully busters, Friend fixers, Reflection time,

Restorative approaches, etc were used to ensure that children had access to an emotionally supportive environment or explicit time to consider and reflect on their experiences. Topics such as how they feel or how their actions may make other people feel are explored within this time.

Evidence from this theme mapped on to nurture principles 2, 3 and 5.

### **Communication**

*'The teachers are great at catching you at the end of the day to tell you what sort of day my kid has had'.* (parent/carer comment).

This theme brought together the different approaches the establishment took to make parents aware of what was happening in the establishment as well as individual information they wanted to share about a child.

The consistent message that came largely from parents/carers was that the communication between them and establishment was very good and took a variety of forms. Media such as newsletters, tweets, displaying the lunch for the day in a way that was easily visible for parents/carers, a communication book, general information-sharing boards that were accessible were used by the primary schools and early years centre.

Evidence from this theme mapped on to nurture principles 2 and 6.

### **Building relationships**

The theme related to how staff and parents/carers and the children establish relationships. In particular, what the staff did to engender trust in the parents/carers and children. It also included the quality of the relationships that exist between the children in the establishment.

This theme was further divided into the relationships between staff and parents/carers; staff and children and peer relationships.

### **Staff and parents/carers**

*'As a parent they have reassured me that it's going to be fine'* (parent/carer comment)

Parents/carers described the staff as warm and welcoming and people who helped engender trust in them. The parents/carers reflected that it was the flexibility and helpfulness demonstrated by staff that supported the building of the relationships between home and establishment. In particular parents/carers commented on the time that staff took to have informal discussions or handovers that was reassuring, thus helping them feel respected and reassured.

Evidence from this theme mapped on to nurture principles 2 and 4.

## **Staff and children**

*'...(we can)...trust teachers with our emotions'*  
(child's comment)

Replicated in the remarks made by the children, the issue of trust arose. The staff took the time to find out what the children liked and children felt their opinions were valued. They described staff members as: 'generous and kind' and demonstrated an openness about feelings. In addition, the staff helped them develop and scaffold peer relationships.

Evidence from this theme mapped on to nurture principles 1, 2, 3 and 5.

## **Peer relationships**

*'I've got loads of friends'* (child's comment)

Parents/carers and children noted several embedded approaches that the establishments used to support peer relationships; some structured such as buddy systems, others that were more general to the ethos. For example, being welcoming to all and including everyone in activities and taking on board the children's own ideas as to how they can develop friendships.

Evidence from this theme mapped on to nurture principles 1, 2, 3 and 6.

## **Attunement**

*'Children's individual personalities are nurtured'*  
(parent/carer comment)

*'When I feel sad my teacher can tell.'*  
(child's comment)

Attunement was not a word that was used in the focus groups or in the semi-structured questionnaires that were the focus of the groups. Rather, the researcher who themed the information selected it as a construct based on a knowledge of psychology.

Attunement describes the process of what happens when an adult gets 'in tune' or 'in synch' with a child, non-verbally or verbally. It is the experience of attunement that facilitates co-regulation (that is, being soothed and regulated by another), which then leads to the child learning how to self-regulate. Being understood in this way begins the process of self-awareness, and thus the capacity to empathise (Bomber, 2017, p69).

Parents/carers and children commented on what skills and abilities they saw staff demonstrating. They noted that the staff listened to the children, noticed when they were stressed, picked up on body language and facial expression. The staff gave both the parents/carers and children time for interaction and looked interested when engaging in dialogue.

Evidence from this theme mapped on to nurture principles 1 and 5.

## **Ethos**

*'Kids are at the heart of it'* (parent/carer comment)

*'There is always lots of nice things going on in my school'* (child's comment)

This theme was developed in relation to what the parents, carers and children experienced generally in relation to the establishment. That is, how they described the 'feel' of the school.

As well as discussing the inclusive nature of the ethos and how it permeated across the whole establishment. Other parents/carers, as well as children, went on to describe the establishments as family oriented, that it was a place where individual differences were understood, there was community involvement and that they felt a consistency in how they were spoken to, approached and dealt with.

Evidence from this theme mapped on to nurture principles 1, 2 and 4.

## **Learning/development**

*'Teachers make sure children are happy and emotionally ready'* (parent/carer comment)

*'Children can go to the playground to see their siblings [and this] decreases stress'* (parent/carer comment).

*'I love reading'* (child's comment)

This theme was constructed as parents/carers were asked directly about their child's learning. Although the children were not asked explicitly about learning, many of them were keen to discuss their classroom/playroom experience and what they enjoyed doing in that environment.

Again, the parent/carers itemised several approaches that were used to support learning and development. Some, related to the quotes above, were about altering the environment or using staff knowledge of child development, others were national or evidenced based methodologies eg Book BugPATHS and Seasons for Growth. Parental/carer discussion also took place in relation to ongoing encouragement when aspects of the curriculum are more challenging, ensuring that activities are engaging and creative and the use of play to develop children's learning.

Evidence from this theme mapped on to nurture principle 1.

## **Environment/Safe base**

*'The staff are good at picking up if my wee one isn't feeling great'* (parent/carer comment)

*'Nice staff help you learn'* (child's comment)

This theme emerged due to the direct question about what made the environment feel safe for the young people. Children said they feel happy and secure when staff are around. The children stated that they know that staff will respond to them if they are upset, distressed or stressed. Children also felt that in these situations staff responses were predictable and consistent.

Evidence from this theme mapped on to nurture principle 2.

### **Parental/carer engagement**

*'I really enjoyed helping out, and it was nice to get an inside view of what my child's day is like'* (parent/carer comment)

*'My mummy came to my class to read with us all'* (child's comment)

The parents and carers gave lots of examples about events they were invited to by the establishment, or when they were asked to contribute to the nursery or school day. This theme brings these examples together.

The establishments had engaged parents/carers to contribute to the school day in different ways. Some parent/carers had helped out with paired reading, others to speak about the jobs that they have. Opportunities such transition events, informal coffee mornings and play sessions were also available to parents/carers to attend.

Evidence from this theme mapped on to nurture principles 2 and 3.

### **Leadership**

*'The head teacher knows the name of every kid. My boy thinks that's amazing'* (parent/carer comment).

*'She (the head of establishment) always smiles at me'* (child's comment).

Parents/carers and children were keen to discuss the heads of establishment. This indicated the importance of the position of senior management in their collective eye.

Children across the establishments felt that the head of establishment knew their name and was familiar with everyone's 'story'. Parents/carers stated that the ethos of the school was set by the senior management team and there were several comments made about the tone of the environment: 'coming from the top'. Leadership was seen as important and positive in creating a nurturing environment.

Evidence from this theme mapped on to nurture principle 5.

### **Impact on children and their families**

*'My child is more confident, at first he wouldn't leave my side, and then after one week he came in fine. He is now a confident boy in school with no issues'* (parent/carer comment).

*'My dad tells me to listen to my teacher. He says she seems sensible'* (child's comment)

This theme emerged from comments that parents/carers and children made in relation what it felt like, as a family, to be part of the establishment. How their family were noticing the impact of the school or nursery in terms of changes to the parent/carer or child.

From the parental/carer perspective they identified that children appeared happy, seemed to be 'thriving' and they were more caring to others. The parents/carers further went on to say that they are very confident in the establishment. Children said they feel comfortable in their establishment, they feel safe and they feel that there is a whole team around to support them.

Evidence from this theme mapped on to nurture principles 1, 2 and 5

### **DISCUSSION**

While some researchers have commented on the importance of the individual classroom and the positive climate that the young person experiences within that classroom (Frederickson and Petrides, 2013) this research project sought to report on the wider school experience for children, parents and carers. Most of the themes that were elicited from the interviews describe the supportive ethos for children and their families, ie that there are feelings of trust towards the staff, being welcomed and encouraged (again, for both children and their families) and the happiness that the children exhibit. This helps to illustrate what the nurture principles look like for families and children in establishments that are recognised as being nurturing. These principles are likely to be experienced by a child and their family, in totality, as a sense of belonging to an early years centre or school. It may be reductionist to distil the principles down to a 'sense of belonging' however, the impact on children of this sense of belonging warrants further scrutiny. 'Research suggests that children's sense of belonging has significant implications for schools, as it is likely to be positively associated with important outcomes such as engagement with learning, mental health and happiness' (Prince and Hadwin, 2013; p242).

In addition, Moallem (2013) noted that the feeling of belonging is associated with increased student motivation and engagement as well as attendance, school completion and academic achievement. When there is a sense of belonging across the establishment, there are also lower levels of aggression and bullying

recorded (Bond et al, 2007; Duggins et al, 2016). Given this information, unsurprisingly, children and young people who have experienced a sense of belonging to their establishment, have stated that they are hopeful about the future; they experience positive mental health and a reduction in reporting of suicidal thoughts (Kidger et al, 2012; Marraccini and Brier, 2017, Van Ryzin et al, 2009). 'Of most significance in nurturing a sense of belonging was that of interpersonal relationships – including both those with peers and with staff' (Midgen et al, 2019, p12).

The themes identified in this study align with factors encapsulated in the wider concept of 'sense of belonging'. These include: the importance of communication, building relationships, managing transitions for children and staff attunement to the children. Our research also suggests that these elements are indicative of whether an establishment is experienced as nurturing.

Feedback from the respondents on the three establishments, stated the importance and quality of the staff as a recurrent theme, as well as the quality of relationships the family has with the staff. The impact of 'one good adult' is noted for supporting young people, particularly those who have experienced adversity in their life. Bellis et al (2017) found that having an adult a child can trust is vital to developing resilience in children who have had negative childhood events, and to mitigate against the mental and physical health issues that can come from these events. Our research detailed some of the implications of experiencing adversity in childhood ie poorer impulse control, a difficulty dealing with stress as well as trust issues and needing support to socialise.

Access to a trusted adult in childhood may dramatically reduce the impact of childhood adversity on mental wellbeing and the adoption of health harming behaviours...these relationships are apparent across all socio-economic strata' (Bellis et al, 2017). Melter et al (2018) further indicate the importance of trusted adults for those who are in young adulthood, thus the need for positive relationships can be seen to be crucial throughout the time (as well as before and after) that a child or young person is within their statutory education career.

Noting all of this research, it should be highlighted that the children and families who took part in the study consistently discussed the staff group rather than individuals (although the head of establishment was referred to individually). Staff acted as a consistent group who welcomed the children as they came into the school, used consistent language and approaches; were approachable and supportive, and respectful of parents and carers. The children and families

were indicating that they were enrolled in education establishments where there was a team of trusted adults to support them. This feedback chimes clearly with Dix's (2007) thoughts about ensuring: 'certainty' for children and their families all the way up the hierarchy of an establishment.

Despite the links between a sense of belonging and attainment outlined above, comments on attainment were not part of the responses of any of the children, parents or carers who took part. In relation to parents and carers, it was their child's wellbeing that seemed to be the central focus. The lack of reference to attainment may have been due to how the questions were constructed, that is, using the nurturing principles as a base. Possibly using other standardised measures (eg Resnick et al, 1997; Frederickson et al, 2007) alongside the semi-structured questionnaires would have generated information relating to attainment. It should be noted however, that the links between wellbeing and attainment are well documented (Durlak, 2016).

The limitations of the paper should be highlighted prior to the conclusion. As noted, the limited research base that the project was drawing from was apparent and also impacted on the materials that were used in the focus group. In addition, standardised materials would have given more weight to the findings and more structure to the thematic analysis. The establishments that were chosen to take part in the study were selected as examples of good practice. This means that there was less balance than there would have been for the average local authority establishment. So, for the average establishment the feedback is more likely to have a mixture of good practice as well as areas for development. The feedback from the focus groups was universally positive.

More detail as to who took part in the group would also have been helpful in relation to understanding the demographics of the focus group population. Also, grading the quality and quantity of the answers based on the child's age would have allowed more understanding of how children interpret their context based on their age and stage.

## **CONCLUSION**

There has been little research to date on parents/carers and young people's experiences of a whole school nurturing approach. However, this research demonstrates that there can be a shared experience by many of the parents/carers and children and young people of a nurturing approach that helps them to feel a sense of belonging to an establishment. The implications for this are significant in that a nurturing approach, across all establishments, could generate this engagement in education for many disenfranchised families.

The import the research team got from working with children and their families in establishments Glasgow would recognise as nurturing, was a strong sense of belonging to that establishment. A nurturing approach can help to support skilled and attuned staff who can encourage belonging via good communication bolstered by a leadership team who plan for and self-evaluate the nurturing approach in their environment. While this type of nurturing practice may not be consistent across every establishment, there is a clear aspiration that all Glasgow children will experience an establishment where nurture is embedded in all aspects of their day. The positive experiences of children and young people and parents/carers of a nurturing approach, in establishments where a clear nurturing approach is recognised, can be a useful springboard from which to help generate more consistency of practice. The leaders of establishments who supported this research already contribute heavily to the strategic nurture planning in Glasgow, and could further help support an understanding of how to implement a nurturing approach successfully, in the larger national context. There are clearly leadership skills that contribute to the implementation of such an approach and a further step might entail exploring what these are so this can be shared this more widely.

Unfortunately capturing what makes a nurturing leader is not something that can be done easily – although parents/carers and children recognised the importance of leadership in such an approach. Kearney and Nowek (2019) and Coleman (2019) suggest that leadership is key to embedding nurturing approaches as it ensures that the implementation and planning is done effectively. Glasgow is at the early stages of piloting an input that nurtures staff wellbeing, perhaps developing nurturing leadership is the next stage in moving towards the nurturing city. Capturing children's, young people's, parents' and carers' views is an important way to ensure that we are identifying key aspects of a nurturing approach and the impact it can have.

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# APPENDIX 1: Parents semi-structured questionnaire for focus groups

The researchers introduced themselves, the purpose of the focus group and welcomed the parents to the group. The researchers checked that everyone had consented to taking part in the group and then asked the following questions. The very first question was a general question to find out whether the establishment had spoken to parents about nurture and what it is.

Has the establishment talked to you or informed you about nurture?

**1. Children learn in lots of different ways.**

What have you noticed about how the establishment helps your child's learning?

*Nurture principle 1*

**2. Children need to feel safe to learn.**

How does the establishment help your child feel safe?

What do they say about adults in the establishment?

Do you feel welcome in the establishment – how?

*Nurture principle 2*

**3. What children learn is really important but their emotions, social development and feelings are important too.**

What does the establishment do to support wellbeing, eg friendships, wider achievements?

*Nurture principle 3*

**4. Using positive language is a really important part of nurture.**

How do adults talk to children in the establishment and give praise?

*Nurture principle 4*

**5. There is a principle all behaviour is communication, this is about adults understanding children's behaviour but also adults being aware of their own behaviour.**

Do establishment staff know your child well?

Do they know if any help is needed?

What do you notice about how staff interact with pupils?

How do you see children interacting with each other?

*Nurture principle 5*

**6. Transition is all about changes.**

How does the establishment prepare for changes eg changing class, going on a trip, changes in teacher or keyworker?

*Nurture principle 6*

Additional prompts – What do you see, hear, and feel?

How would you want this to happen in a school?

## APPENDIX 2: Children's focus groups

The children's focus groups were undertaken by using two activities. An icebreaker activity called the 'the emoji game' and a second activity called 'new to school'. The researchers led the activities.

### **Ice breaker activity – 'The Emoji game'**

This game was undertaken first. There were 20 cut outs of emojis laid out on the floor. The emojis represented different feelings and emotions. Children were invited to pick an emoji they like and say why they chose it. This activity acted as a warm up and allowed the children to say how they were feeling in relation to being part of the group. The researchers then led a discussion about why feeling anxious was a standard emotion to have when meeting new people. The children were encouraged to indicate verbally or via emoji if they felt uncomfortable in the group. They were also encouraged to ask any questions they may have.

This game was accessible to all of the young people who took part. Emojis, as well as verbal discussion, were used to identify the children's own feelings about taking part in the discussion and reassure them of what was expected of them. Additional reassurance was given in relation to how their information would be used and that they could opt out of the group at any point and that would be okay.

### **New to school activity**

The second part of the focus group involved a drawing activity and asking children what someone new to the establishment might experience. Prompt questions that were related to the Nurture Principles (appendix 3) were used to draw information from the children. The aim of the questions was for the children to identify what was nurturing in their environment and how a new person would experience that environment. Below each question is the Nurture Principle that is most relevant.

The questions were as follows:

1. What would happen if the new child needed to find a safe place in the school or nursery? What would they do? Where would it be?  
*Nurture principle 2*
2. What would happen in their school if that new child was worried about something?  
*Nurture principle 3*
3. Who would notice if they needed help and how would that person speak to them?  
*Nurture principles 4 and 5*
4. Who would they talk to if the work was too hard?  
*Nurture principle 1*
5. Who would they go to if they needed help making friends?  
*Nurture principles 3 and 6*

Responses to these prompts differed according to developmental stages with younger children able to give words that described feelings in different situations but less able to give examples of behaviours/practice.

# APPENDIX 3: The six principles of nurture



Lucas, Insley and Buckland (2006)