

# Applying nurture as a whole-school community approach: an interim report into developing a universal programme to support the practical implementation of whole school nurture within a local authority in Scotland

**Rachel Rennie and Leah Smart**

**Corresponding author:** Rachel Rennie, [rachelrennie@pkc.gov.uk](mailto:rachelrennie@pkc.gov.uk)

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## Abstract

This article starts with an outline of how the core concepts of attachment, child development, neuroscience and the impact of trauma have influenced the educational landscape in Scotland. An account is provided of how key Scottish education policies promote nurturing relationships as beneficial for children and young people's wellbeing and healthy growth. The article continues with an account of the process undertaken to create a universal whole-school nurture programme that interweaves professional learning through action research and improvement methodology. The programme known as 'Nurturing Relationships' is intended to provide schools with a framework to embed the Six Principles of Nurture into the heart of their school communities over several years through training supported by a coach-consult model. Action research has been used to continually review and develop the programme; this interim evaluation captures progress to date through feedback gathered using a mixed-method approach. Findings suggest the programme has supported practitioners to increase their confidence, knowledge and understanding of the application of nurture. Limitations related to longitudinal data around the impact of the approach on school communities are discussed alongside implications for practice. The article aims to contribute to the limited body of research and national sharing of practice associated with universal nurturing approaches.

## Introduction

'Nurture' is an evidence-based approach grounded in an understanding of attachment as "a lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (Bowlby, 1982). Secure nurturing relationships between an infant and their primary caregiver are critical for the optimal development of children's cognitive and social functions (Gillibrand, Lam and O'Donnell, 2016). Nurture

groups were developed as a short-term, targeted intervention to support children whose additional support needs were associated with their early attachment experiences (Boxall and Lucas 2012). Over the past three decades nurturing approaches have continued to be developed within schools and a significant amount of research has been undertaken to explore the benefits on children's social and emotional functions (Cooper, Arnold and

Boyd, 2001; Colwell and O'Connor, 2003; Binnie and Allen, 2008; Kearney and Nowek, 2019; Nolan, Hannah and Lakin, 2019).

International research suggests relationships are key for children's wellbeing and developmental growth (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015). This has been conceptualised from an understanding of attachment theory, child development, impact of trauma and adversity, alongside recent advances in neuroscience (Education Scotland, 2018). Ongoing research into resilience highlights the rationale for relational approaches within education, where the impact of adversity can be mediated through positive relational experiences with key adults (Leitch, 2017; Perry and Winfrey 2021). In addition, Durlak et al. (2011) carried out a meta-analysis of over 200 studies into universal, school-based social and emotional learning programmes and found that universal approaches had a positive impact on attainment, emotional wellbeing and behaviour.

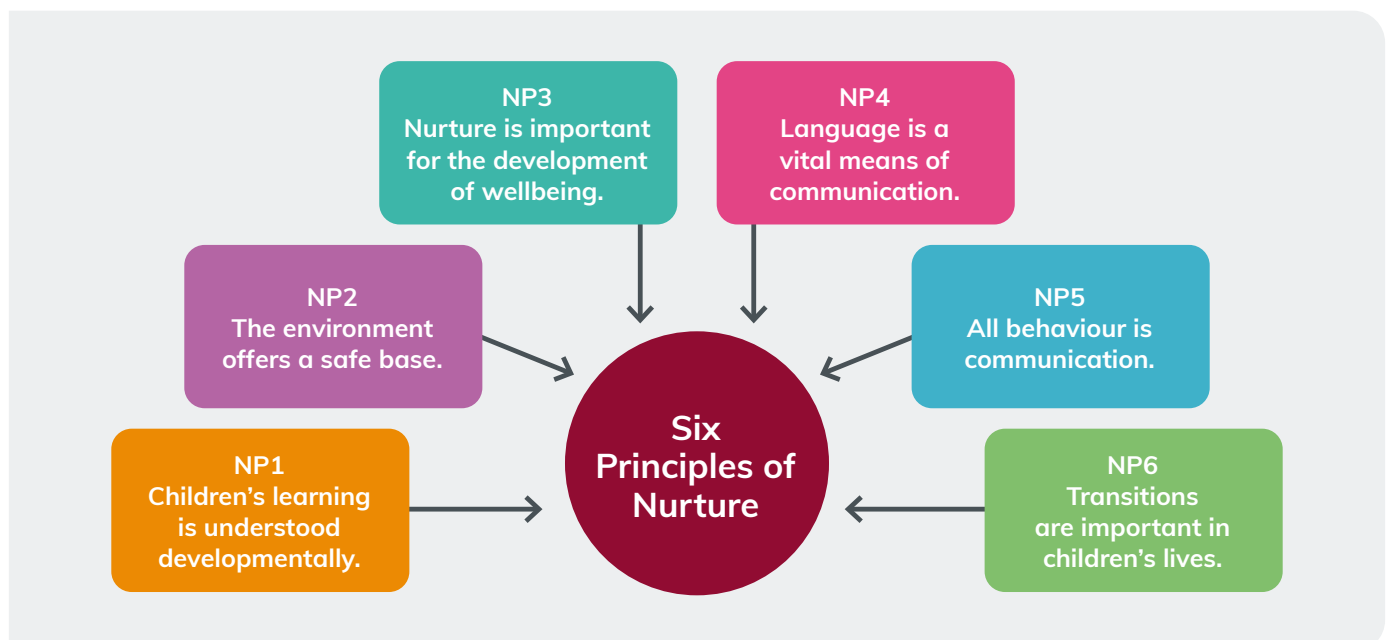
#### Where does a 'nurturing approach' sit within the current Scottish education system?

Within Scottish education, the phrase 'nurturing approach' encompasses a holistic understanding of the range of social and environmental factors that can impact on children's development. This understanding has emerged from national legislation, frameworks and priorities which govern

children's services in Scotland. Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) (Children and Young People's Act, 2014) recognises that children and young people's lived experiences are unique, and it is their right to receive appropriate support from all professionals which nurtures their growth. This wellbeing agenda is firmly rooted within two key education policies. 'Realising the Ambition: Being Me' and 'The Curriculum for Excellence' (CofE) (Scottish Government, 2019 and 2020) both advocate health and wellbeing as critical to supporting children and young people to flourish as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

In 2009, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland (HMIE) published a report which proposed that nurture should be further integrated as a universal approach to address the wider needs of the pupil population (HMIE, 2009). The Scottish Government has since created a legislative and policy landscape for nurturing approaches to be further developed (Scottish Government, 2016, 2017, 2019, 2020 and 2021). The publication of 'Applying Nurture as a Whole-School Approach' (Education Scotland, 2016) provides a framework which assists schools in meeting their wellbeing responsibilities. It outlines the Six Principles of Nurture (Figure 1) and demonstrates how these are linked to the quality indicators to ensure that wellbeing is at the heart of school improvement (Education Scotland 2018).

Figure 1. The Six Principles of Nurture (Education Scotland, 2016)



This framework advocates the creation of an education environment supporting children and young people to develop capabilities, attributes, skills, knowledge and understanding which they need for optimal mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing. Subsequently, local authorities across Scotland have endorsed nurture as a key, universal approach to promoting wellbeing and closing the poverty related attainment gap (Education Scotland, 2016; Coleman, 2020; Kearney and Nowek, 2019), which continues to remain a concern within Scotland (Sosu and Ellis, 2014). Nurture has been found to promote the development of positive relationships and supportive ethos which create optimal conditions for educational attainment to be improved (Hattie, 2008; March and Kearney, 2017).

## Nurturing practice

'Nurturing practice' describes an approach which is based on a balance between high warmth and challenge (Gill, Ashton and Algina, 2004; Dinham and Scott, 2008; Gregory, Cornell and Fan, 2012; Kearney and Nowek, 2019). This approach incorporates containment, co-regulation, positive relationships and attunement alongside structure, routine, high expectations and attainment (Kennedy, Landor and Todd, 2010; Boxall and Lucas, 2012; Education Scotland, 2016; Kearney and Nowek, 2019). Nurturing practice could be described as 'a way of being' and subsequently requires professional development to implement effectively (Boxall and Lucas, 2012). To achieve this, practitioners need to understand the ethos and values of nurture and be confident they can incorporate the nurture principles into everyday practice (Kearney and Nowek, 2019). 'Applying Nurture as a Whole-School Approach' provides a framework to support schools in the development of a universal approach (Education Scotland, 2016) and contains a range of self-evaluation tools underpinned by theory (Bowlby, 1982; Kennedy, Landor and Todd, 2010; Boxall and Lucas 2012). These self-evaluation tools can support practitioners to reflect, review and develop their own style of nurturing interaction and support leaders to review their wider contexts from a nurturing perspective (Education Scotland, 2016).

Education Scotland (2016) established key values that underpin a whole-school nurturing approach (Figure 2) which were developed in consultation

with education staff, pupils and parents and are derived from research around nurture and the broader literature on social and emotional learning.

**Figure 2. Key features of a nurturing approach (Education Scotland, 2016)**

**Whole school community included within inclusive and respectful schools.**

**Opportunities for second chance learning are provided.**

**Balance of high expectation/high warmth (2 Pillars of Nurture).**

**Positive relationships underpin learning and teaching.**

**Staff view behaviour from an ecological perspective.**

**Nurturing approach embedded and underpins school priorities.**

In terms of practical application, the topic of whole-school nurture has been relatively unexplored, with only a limited number of studies beginning to address this gap (Warin, 2017; Kearney and Nowek, 2019; Coleman 2020; Nolan, 2020).

## Nurturing practice across Scotland

Glasgow City Council was bold in its ambition to apply the Six Principles of Nurture across its entire local authority with the ultimate vision for Glasgow to become 'a nurturing city.' Significant development work has taken place and its vision has been delivered using a staged approach with 8,000 members of education staff across 313 establishments having undertaken nurture training (Kearney and Nowek, 2019). While Kearney and Nowek (2019) expressed that measuring

the impact of an approach on this scale brought challenges, there were several positive findings attributed to the approach. School staff reported holding an increased understanding of the theory of nurture and confidence putting this into practice (Kearney and Nowek, 2019). Across the local authority there were significant improvements in inclusive practice evidenced by reduced exclusion rates, higher levels of attainment and attendance, and an increase in pupil engagement beyond school (Kearney and Nowek, 2019).

In Renfrewshire Council, an empirical research evaluation was undertaken to explore the impact of Renfrewshire's nurturing relationships approach (RNRA) which aims to build the capacity of mainstream school staff through training and coaching (Nolan, 2020). The evaluation found that school staff who engaged in the programme benefited from an increase in skill, knowledge and understanding related to nurturing approaches, which led to changes in practice and new interventions. In addition, staff held a better understanding around the complex causes of behaviour, reflected by a shift in mindset and language with both pupils and staff reporting improved relationships (Nolan, 2020).

Within the research by Kearney and Nowek (2019) and Nolan (2020), their whole-school nurturing approaches are incorporated into a wider picture with other key inclusion initiatives which promote trauma informed and rights-based practice rather than being stand-alone interventions. The wider links are to avoid a fragmented approach, which the Scottish government recommends for effective implementation (Scottish Government, 2018).

From the literature (Warin, 2017; Kearney and Nowek, 2019; Nolan, Hannah and Lakin, 2019; Coleman, 2020), a consensus has emerged on the critical factors for developing and embedding whole-school nurturing approaches:

- All staff to hold an informed understanding of the underpinning concepts of nurture.
- A need for quality ongoing professional development.
- Committed leadership teams.
- A strong vision that is shared by the wider staff base.

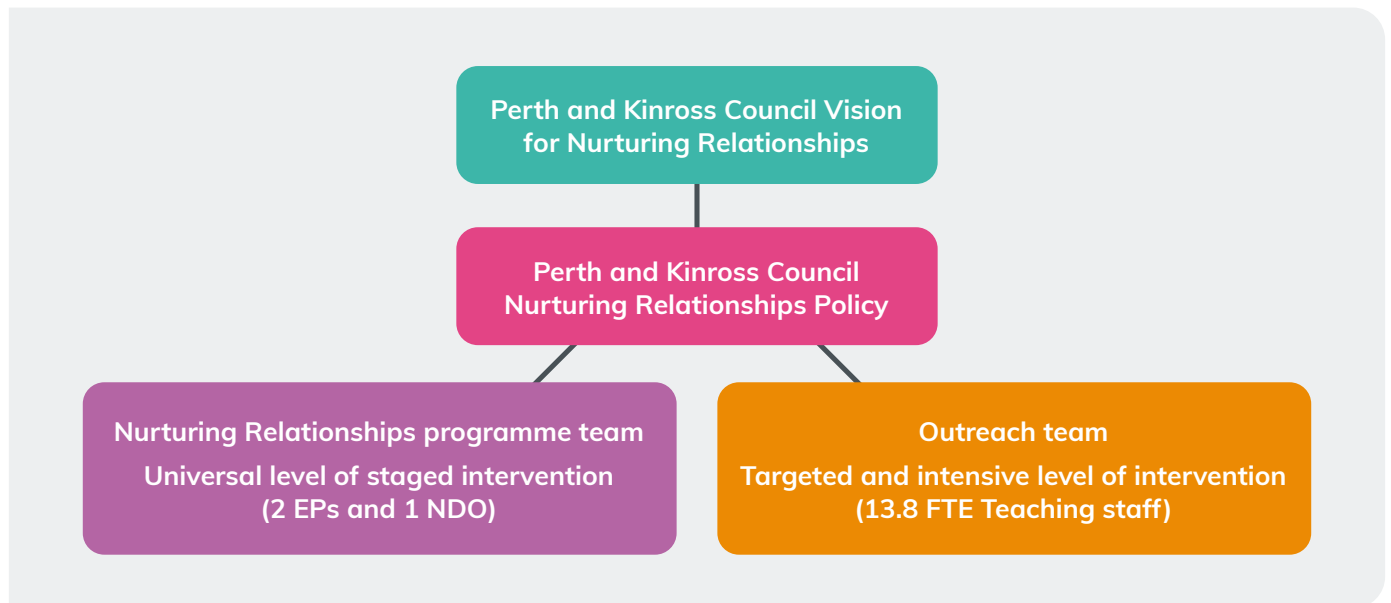
## Nurturing practice in Perth and Kinross

In 2020 Perth and Kinross Council set about creating a vision of inclusivity centring on excellent relationships within schools. A core understanding of nurture and attachment through attuned and healthy relationships were created as the bedrock from which children and young people can get the most out of their education. To bring this vision alive, all classrooms should offer an inclusive environment underpinned by an ethos of nurture and positive relational approaches, while taking care of each other as staff. The 'Curriculum Learning and Education Collaboration' (CIRCLE) (Maciver et al., 2020), was used as a universal approach for schools with all education staff receiving training and support around implementation and the tools within. Alongside CIRCLE, there was a refresh in the way Perth and Kinross used trained teachers working within nurture groups in designated schools. The refresh brought staff into a central resource that all schools could draw on, with nurture teachers continuing to offer teaching support on a needs-led basis. This was to allow for a wider reach and equity of service to all pupils, as not all schools had a nurture group.

A further element of the local authority vision required a mechanism through which all staff could be upskilled in terms of applying nurture across the school and be supported to adopt each of the Six Principles of Nurture (Education Scotland, 2016). The aim is to have 100% of schools enrolled on their nurturing relationships journey by June 2026. Once enrolled, the length of an individual school's journey will depend on their contexts. However, it is anticipated that schools will take between four and six years to complete the programme.

The role of nurture development officer (NDO) was created to support the work of the educational psychology service (EPS) and schools involved in the programme. The NDO and two educational psychologists formed the nurturing relationships programme team (Figure 3) and created a sustainable programme that promoted positive outcomes.

Figure 3. Strands in Perth and Kinross Council



### Nurturing relationships vision

The strands of the vision provide an all-round model of implementation of support for all children, young people and staff at all levels and stages of intervention (Figure 3), with both strands supported by the Perth and Kinross (PKC) nurturing relationships policy.

Perth and Kinross Council is the fifth largest local authority by geographical area in Scotland, with schools spread across a vast area covering 5,286km<sup>2</sup> which is mainly rural except for Perth City. 54% of schools are classified as rural (Table 1). With the wide variety within our educational establishments, the programme needed to be flexible and easily adaptable to meet the needs of all learners.

The programme team reviewed existing research around applying nurture as a whole-school approach which influenced the resulting programme. In addition, research around steps to create transformational change were factored into the design process to promote opportunities for success (Kotter, 1995). An evaluation strategy and accreditation process were designed alongside the programme to provide both evidence of impact, support commitment and ensure sustainability.

As the long-term programme started with a pilot group in autumn 2021 all schools are currently in the early stages of embedding nurturing approaches within their contexts. This article includes a summary of the impact of the approach to date; however caution should be applied as longitudinal data required to triangulate findings

Table 1. School demographic details for Perth and Kinross as of May 2022.

Total Schools	Primary	Secondary	Specialist	Urban	Rural
87	70	11	1	35	47*
Pupil Population					
Total Pupils	Early Learning and Childcare	Primary	Secondary	% ASN	% FSM
21,010	2930	10240	7840	34%	11% Primary 8% Secondary

\*Classified as accessible rural, remote rural or very remote rural areas (Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010).

are currently in the early stages of collection. In contrast, a significant amount of evaluative data have been gathered around the process of developing and delivering the programme for quality assurance purposes. Subsequently, this interim report is primarily focused on the 'process evaluation' and seeks to explore the following research question: How can using improvement methodology in developing a whole-school nurture programme improve the confidence of staff in their delivery of nurturing relationships.

## Perth and Kinross model and implementation science

### Setting aims

The programme team was clear that for any programme to be successful it would require interweaving implementation science, academic and contextual knowledge. Elements of Action Research (Lewin, 1946), along with the Model for

Improvement (Langley et al., 2009) and quality improvement (QI) resources would be the tools used to direct and measure change. In terms of creating the culture and environment suitable for such a change, Kotter's (1995) eight steps to transformational change were considered. At the start of the information gathering process, educational psychologists (EPs) from Perth and Kinross Council contacted colleagues from the EP service in Renfrewshire Council to discuss their model for whole-school nurture. The programme team reviewed the needs and context in Perth and Kinross and designed a model to suit.

### Structure

The programme team's initial task was to create clear and achievable aims which could be linked to visible outcomes and evidenced with evaluation data (Table 2). The aims include developing practice for the whole-school community, this is written to highlight the importance of all parties

**Table 2. Aims, outcomes and evaluation measures for the nurturing relationships programme.**

Aim	Outcome	Measures
To improve wellbeing and promote resilience through an emphasis on quality relationships within the whole-school community.	Improved resilience and wellbeing for children and young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pupil focus groups.</li> <li>• Staff questionnaire.</li> <li>• Glasgow Motivation and Wellbeing tool.</li> </ul>
To promote individual and collective understanding and confidence in the importance of nurturing relationships.	Children and young people benefitting from confident and nurturing practitioners leading to improved relationships in class.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pupil focus groups.</li> <li>• Staff questionnaires at various time points.</li> </ul>
To enhance progressions in learning through applying nurture as a whole-school approach.	Progression in learning is enhanced for children and young people through effective application of the Six Principles of Nurture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff questionnaires.</li> <li>• Staff tracking information using Curriculum for Excellence. Experiences and Outcomes (CfE)</li> <li>• Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSA).</li> </ul>
To use implementation science to promote nurturing approaches, support developing practice and ensure sustainability.	Staff report greater confidence and understanding in the use of nurturing relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coaching sessions.</li> <li>• Achievement of school aims.</li> <li>• Feedback from school leads.</li> </ul>



Figure 4. Role structure within the nurturing relationships programme



involved around a school and includes staff, pupils, parents, carers, local businesses and third partner agencies. While Table 2 outlines the aims, outcomes and evaluation measures for the PKC nurturing relationships programme, schools involved are supported to create their own aims against which to measure individual school progress and successes.

The programme team used Kotter’s concept of the ‘guiding coalition’ to consider how best to link in with schools (Kotter, 1995). The school lead teams are made up of one member of senior management and one or two members of staff in the school (Figure 4). This could be teaching, administration staff or anyone who works within the school who

has a passion for nurture and ability to support and drive change (Warin, 2017; Coleman 2020).

### Implementation

The process of the programme for a school is outlined in Figure 5 and recruitment begins in October/November when schools are starting to consider their improvement plans for the next academic session. The application process opens in December, with applications discussed in January. From here, schools take part in a readiness discussion based on the readiness document within ‘Applying Nurture as a Whole-School Approach’ (ANWSA) (Education Scotland, 2016). From here they can either be accepted onto the phase

Figure 5. Implementation plan

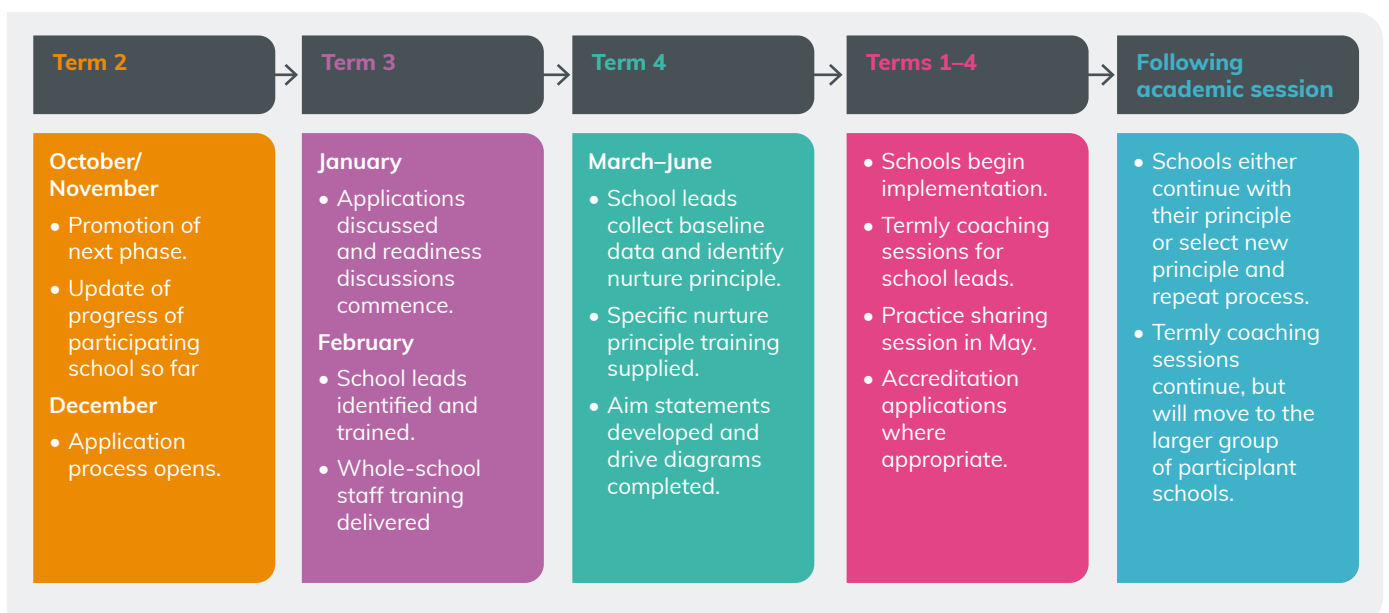
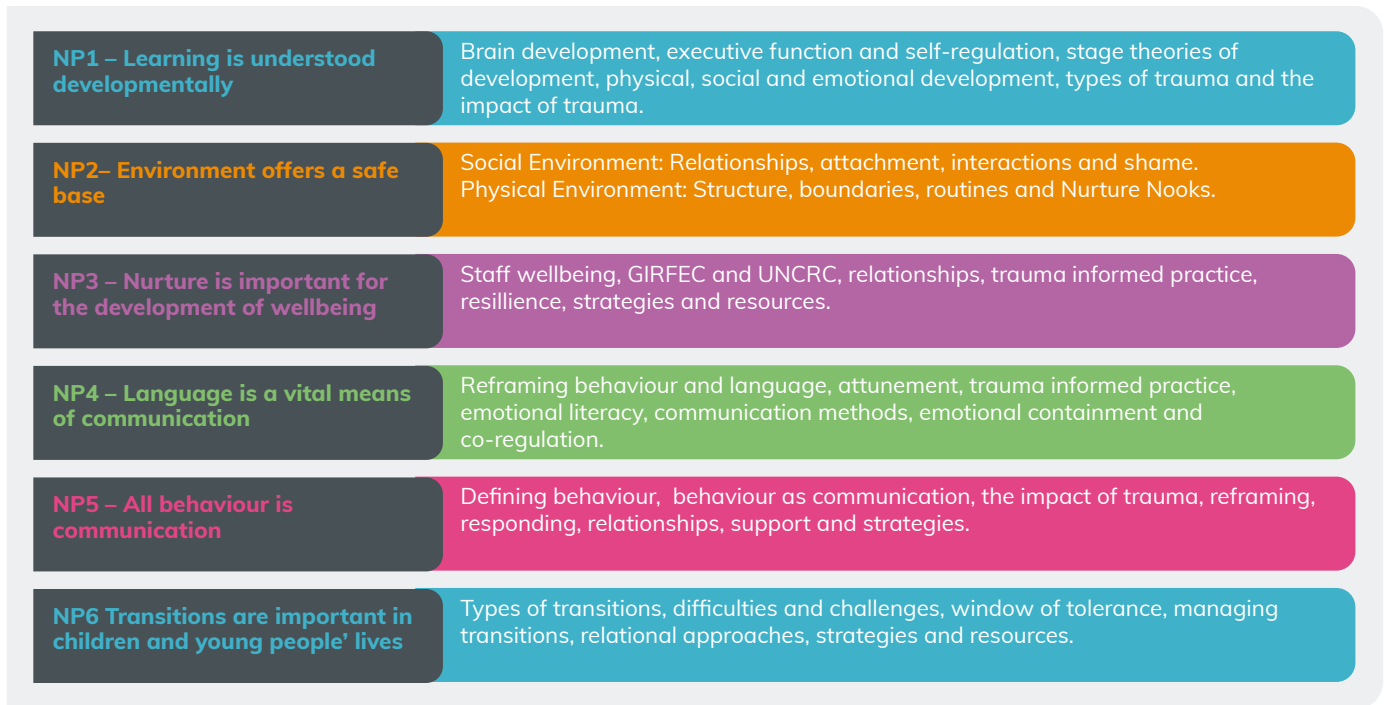


Figure 6. Nurture principles and core concepts from individualised principle training



for which they have applied or deferred to the following year. Deferral can be based on schools not meeting the minimum criteria of having nurture within their improvement plan or not having the baseline level of CIRCLE use within the school. If a school is deferred to the next year, it is supported during that gap year by its link EPs, to ensure readiness for the following phase. Schools who are accepted on the phase are tasked to identify their school leads team who undergo training in February.

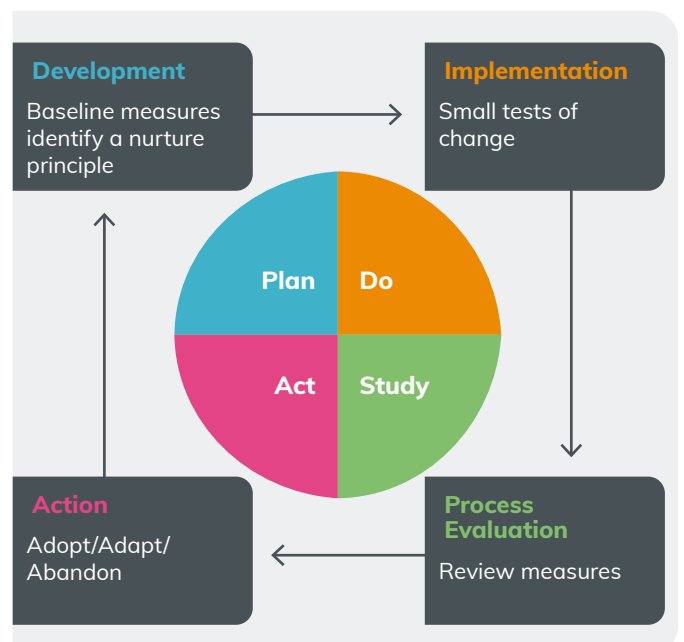
**School-based process**

The whole-school staff attend a core training session that takes place on the February in-service day. The core training covers the concepts of attachment, attunement, the pillars of nurture, the sensory system and trauma informed practice along with resilience. The idea being to create a universal understanding of the core concepts underpinning nurture for all. These concepts are organised through the Six Principles of Nurture:

The school leads collect baseline data to provide evidence of need within the school. Once complete, school leads use this information to decide which of the Six Principles to focus on. The school leads team are provided with pre-recorded training in relation to their chosen nurture principle (Figure 6). They are supported to use QI tools to write

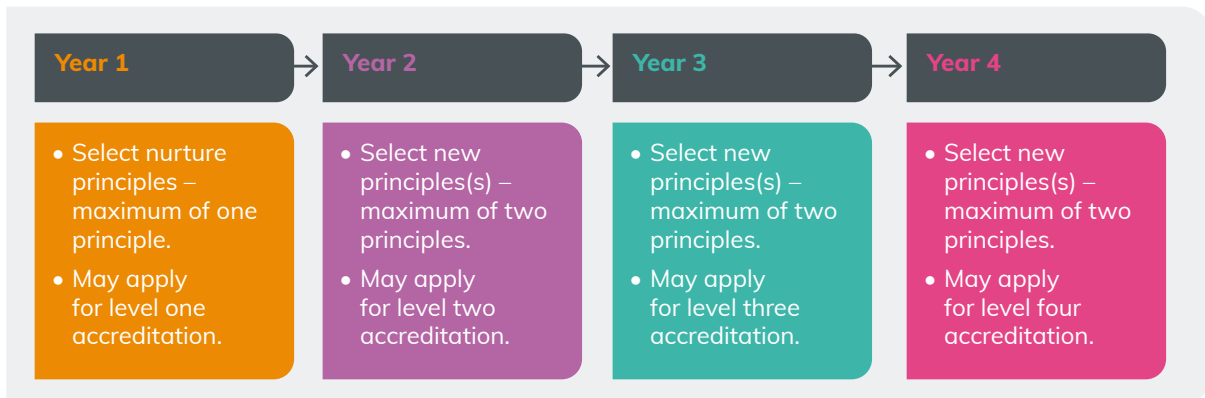
an aim statement, complete driver diagrams and identify potential change ideas to implement. In the first year of implementation, they are encouraged to focus on one principle. This is to allow them to become more accustomed to the model and encourage a deeper dive into the concepts introduced and how they can change practice through using the plan, do, study, act cycles (Langley et al., 2009) (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Adapted from Langley et al (2009)





**Figure 8. Timeline of participation in the PKC nurturing relationships programme**



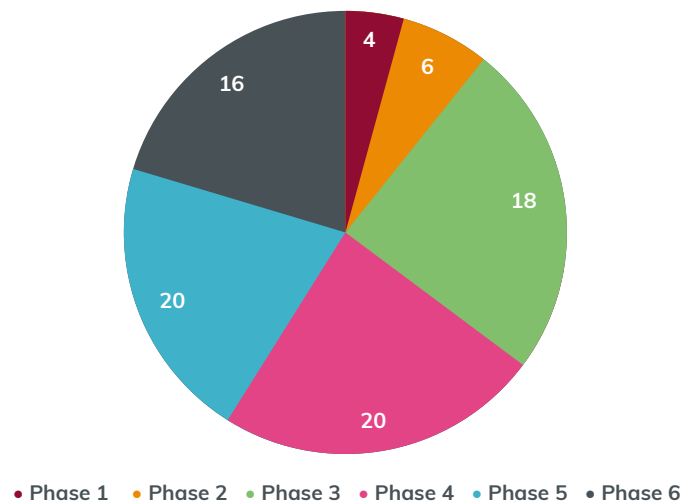
When ready, implementation begins and school leads are expected to attend termly virtual coaching sessions, joining with school leads from other participating schools. The coaching sessions follow the same model of reflecting on what is going well, what is not going so well and their next steps. This cyclical nature of reflection from Action Research and the plan, do, study, act (PDSA) process (Lewin, 1946; Langley, et al., 2009) helps the school leads to consider any adaptations needed to change their ideas and how they plan to overcome barriers to implementation. The coaching sessions create a peer network within which school leads can engage in problem solving conversations and is aimed at encouraging a strong network of support beyond the programme.

Depending on the context, schools will take a minimum of four years to complete the programme (Figure 8), some may take considerably longer. The programme allows schools to progress through the principles and model of accreditation at their own pace.

The pilot for the programme began with four schools in November 2021. They were joined by six schools in phase two, beginning in May 2022 and a further 18 schools in phase three of the programme in February 2023. As the overall aim for Perth and Kinross is to have 100% of schools having started their nurturing relationships journey by June 2026, there will be a total of six phases to the programme (Figure 9).

The PKC model is supported by an accreditation process (Figure 10) that builds on success and towards the incorporation of the whole-school community. The idea is to give participant schools a mechanism by which they can share

**Figure 9. Percentage of schools already engaged in the nurturing relationships programme**



practice with the wider community and have their efforts and work validated and accredited. The process itself requires schools to complete a self-evaluation form which is shared with a chosen peer reviewer. The peer reviewers are members of a quality improvement team or link EPs who have a connection with the school. This allows for reflective discussion with a peer who has knowledge of the context and keeps nurture central to any other support or planning around the school.

To widen the reach of the programme and develop a shared understanding within Education and Children’s Services (ECS), the programme team developed and delivered training to promote awareness and create a shared ECS vision. ECS colleagues can keep up to date via regular updates on social media or through a termly update on school’s progress. The termly update details which phase a school is on, their current nurture principle of focus and their aims. It is hoped that

Figure 10. Levels of accreditation

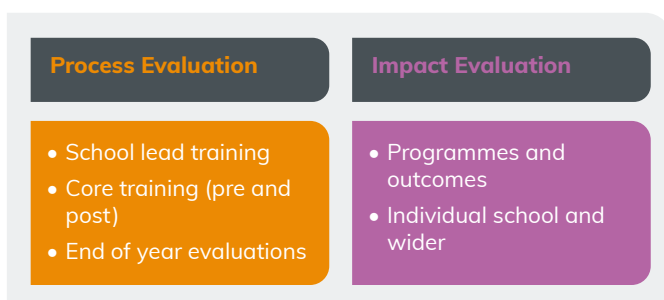


when a school applies for accreditation, the wider ECS team will already have the required level of awareness to support and strengthen their application.

### Evaluation

The programme team developed an evaluation strategy to measure the impact of the programme across two areas (Figure 11). The process evaluation looks at data around the development, implementation and delivery of the programme. This evaluation is mainly for quality assurance purposes. The impact evaluation of ‘Nurturing Relationships’ focuses on impact relating to staff practice, children and young people’s wellbeing and attainment, and is evaluated against the programme outcomes across the local authority (see Table 2). The data presented in this article will focus on the process evaluation, as data related to the impact evaluation is still being collated. However, a summary of impact evaluation to date is outlined having been generalised across phases 1 and 2. The programme team are in the early stages of collecting longer-term data for the impact evaluation methods include: SNSA information, CofE levels, incident monitoring forms, absence figures etc.

Figure 11. Nurturing relationships evaluation strategy



### Data collection and ethical considerations

A mixed-method approach was used to gather data, including scaling surveys, qualitative questionnaires, school visits and coaching sessions (primarily collected anonymously through Mentimeter and Microsoft Forms to protect the confidentiality of participants). This has been collated across each phase of the programme and summarised for the present article to ensure there are no identifying factors for participants or participant schools. At times, it was necessary to gather identifiable information in order to provide additional tailored support on the programme. However, this was then anonymised when processing in relation to the evaluation of the programme. In terms of ethical considerations, consent to collect data has been granted by the schools and individuals involved. They were made aware of this interim report and that their information would be included, but also that there would be no identifying features of the individual schools involved in the programme. All data were gathered and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018).

Whole-school data are gathered at two time points (pre-core training and end of academic session) and data from school lead teams are gathered on an ongoing basis during coaching sessions, school visits, observations and training sessions.

### Process evaluation

#### School leads training

Following school lead training, participants are asked to scale their ‘readiness’ to undertake their role as school leads (Appendix A). Across phases 1-3, participants reported an overall ‘felt’ readiness of 3.8 out of 5. Themes emerged of staff

experiencing the training as ‘clear,’ ‘informative’ and ‘structured.’ While overall responses appeared relatively high, analysis revealed fluctuations in confidence according to role, with senior leaders reporting the highest confidence averaging 4 out of 5.

*‘Very informative and our role was made very clear...’*

*‘...Very clear with the steps that we as a school need to take.’*

*‘Clearly explained the process of becoming a nurturing school.’*

**Source: Comments from school leads who hold a senior leadership role.**

Similarly high confidence was reported from school leads who were teaching or support staff (average 3.5 out of 5).

*‘The training itself was easy to follow... with (the project team) taking us through the aims and process clearly and succinctly. It appears to be a very structured and manageable programme with a lot of support in place if required...’*

**Source: Comment from school leads who hold a teaching or support staff role.**

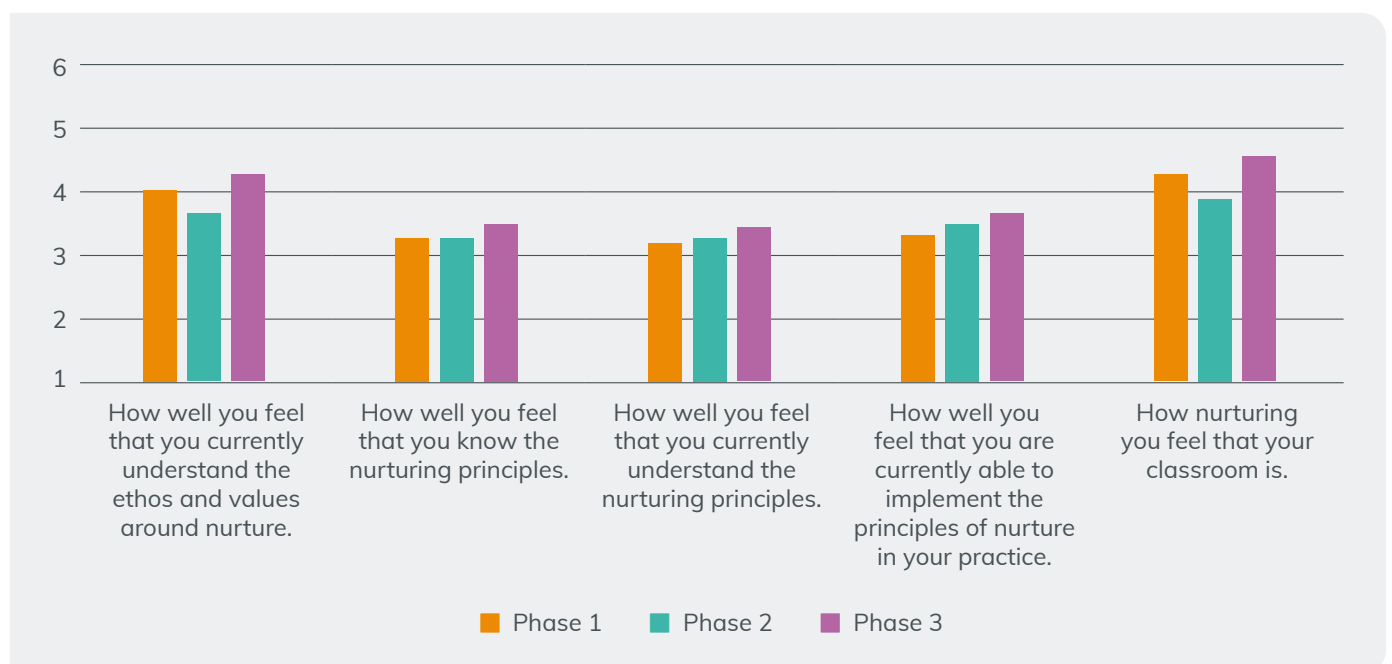
While overall ‘felt’ readiness is sufficiently high, teachers and support staff did appear to feel less equipped to carry out their roles as school leads in comparison to those in management roles. Qualitative feedback received during the pilot year suggests the disparity in readiness amongst training attendees may be related to the concepts of action research and implementation science. Some participants reported they were unfamiliar with the language associated with these approaches. This indicated a need for the programme team to develop guidance, resources and planning documents and offer additional coaching input around these concepts for those in teaching and support staff roles.

### Core training – pre-intervention evaluation

Prior to any input from the programme team, core training participants took part in ‘readiness for nurture’ activities (Appendix B).

This consisted of a scaling activity (Figure 12) and a simple three-question questionnaire (Figure 13) which aimed to capture ‘felt’ pre-existing knowledge and practice across each phase of the programme. Both activities were presented and recorded using Mentimeter within the introduction of the Core Training.

**Figure 12. Baseline scaling activity across Phases 1-3 at core training (pre-measure) – rating scale out of six**



### Core training – post-intervention evaluation

Following the core training, participants were asked to provide feedback via Microsoft forms (Appendix C), around the theoretical knowledge shared during the training and were asked to rate on a one to five scale (one being not enough and five being about right), whether the training had provided enough information around the core concepts of attachment, attunement, trauma and resilience, as well as rating the overall training on the same scale.

### End of year evaluation

At the end of each academic session, the baseline scaling activity from the core training was repeated (Appendix D) (Figure 14). Data collated so far relates to Phase 1, as Phases 2 and 3 have not yet reached the end of their first year of implementation at the time of writing.

Within Phase 1, there has been an improvement across the board in terms of participant understanding of nurture, the values, ethos and

Figure 13. Key themes across Phases 1-3 at core training (pre-measure)

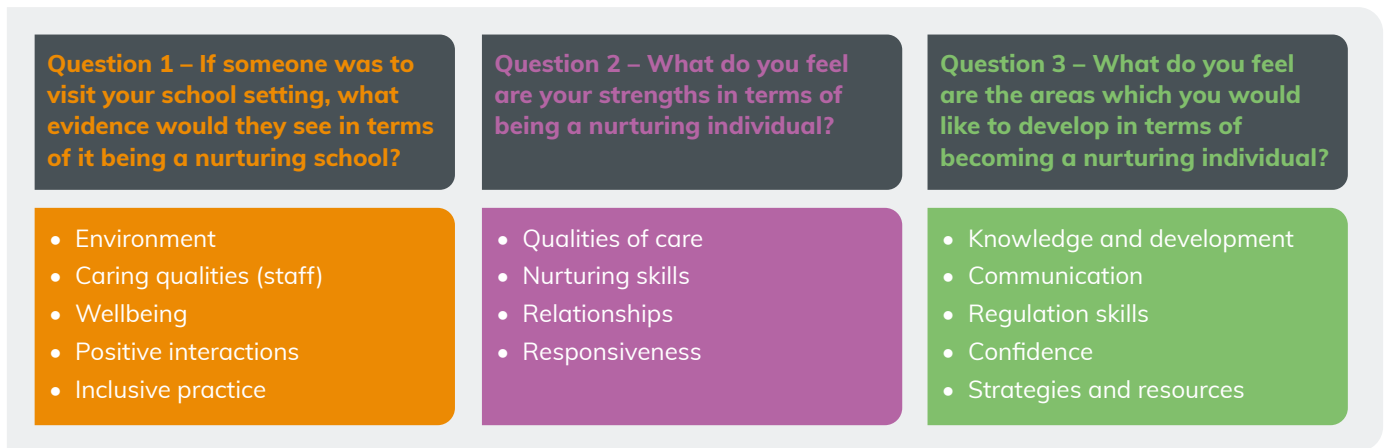


Figure 14. Post core training ratings across Phases 1-3 relating to understanding of theoretical concepts and overall training – rating scale out of five

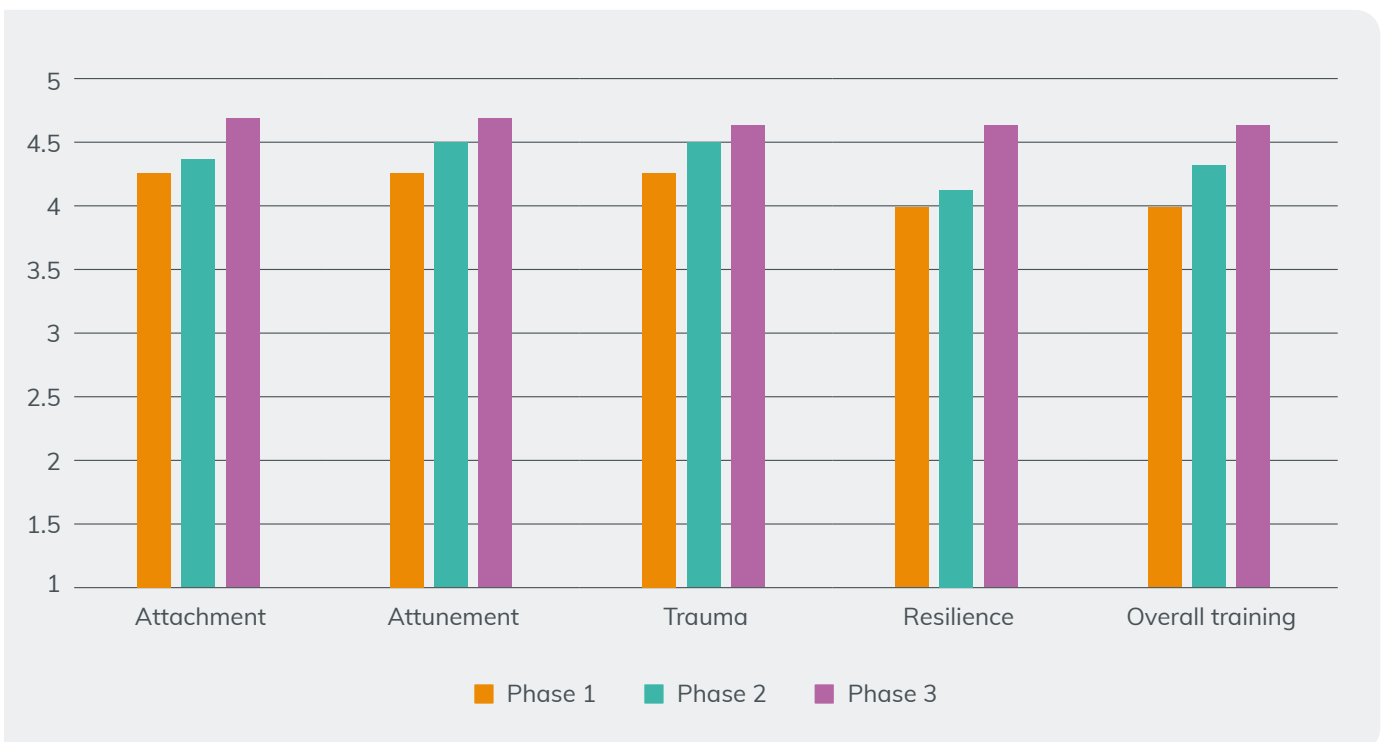
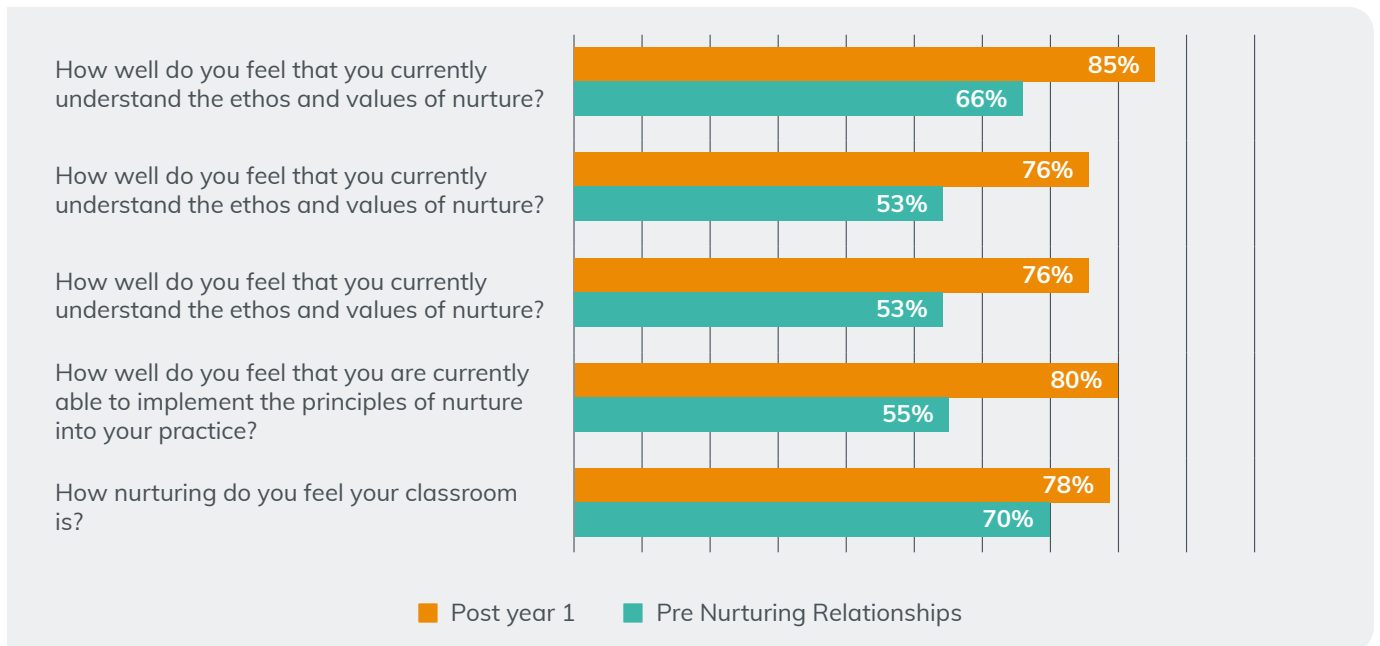


Figure 15. End of year evaluation data from Phase 1



principles, as well as the felt knowledge of how nurturing their classrooms were (Figure 15). The same measures will be repeated at the end of each academic session.

### Impact evaluation

#### Programme aims and outcomes.

Figure 16 shows the measures and tools used to gather evaluative data in relation to the aims and outcomes of the programme. Early indications suggest that progress is being made across the four outcomes. Staff are reporting confidence in their ability to build positive relationships

with pupils and valuing the importance of these relationships within education.

*“Relationships are key. The more time you invest in relationships in the classroom the better all aspects of daily life will be...”*

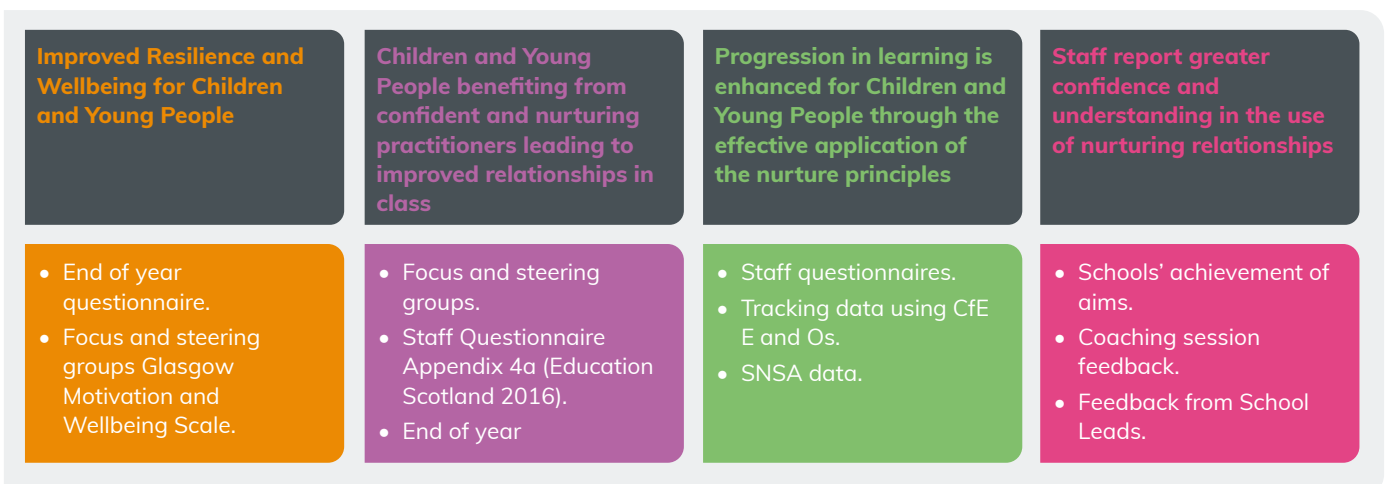
*“...positive relationships – the most important part of teaching.”*

Source: Whole-school end-of-year evaluation.

#### Individual school and wider authority evaluation data

Impact evaluation in terms of the individual school

Figure 16. Project outcomes and evaluation tools



and wider authority levels is currently in the initial stages, as only Phase 1 has completed their first year of implementation and Phase 2 are nearing the end of their first year. In the main, schools have chosen to focus on the environment (NP2) and have been gathering views from children and young people and creating targeted focus groups to support wellbeing, creating spaces within the school to support feelings of safety and focusing on staff development in the theory around positive relationships.

Using the coach-consult model during sessions with school leads has allowed the programme team to support the development of appropriate evaluation methods to gather impact data. The cyclical nature of the PDSA process used during these sessions has led to greater reflection and understanding of context and direction of the work they are doing. As the programme matures and develops, more data will be gathered to look at the wider authority and whole-school community implementation. In preparation for this, tools to gather the required data have been identified and will be collated as they become available.

## Discussion

The evaluation strategy has provided some encouraging evidence for the PKC nurturing relationships programme as a method of implementing nurture as a whole-school community approach. Following the school leads training, those who held a senior management role within the school felt more ready to take on their role of leads (rating of 4 out of 5). This links with the research around creating a guiding coalition from those within the school who have the passion and motivation to carry out the role (Kotter, 1995; Warin, 2017). The commitment and readiness of senior school management members within the school leads team has been shown as a critical factor in the development of whole-school nurture (Coleman, 2020).

In terms of the three questions asked prior to the core training, when viewing the free text provided by participants, qualities of care emerged as a strong theme from responses. These qualities align with nurture 'as a way of being' and provide a solid foundation for practice to be developed. Absent from most responses were phrases or words that would indicate an understanding of the theoretical

knowledge which underpins the approach. A possible explanation for this being the concept of nurture may be misunderstood or oversimplified, as other responses from participants suggested nurture was related to welcomes and soft furnishings.

The content of the training has varied slightly across the delivery of the core training to Phases 1, 2 and 3. Variations have been around the structure of the sessions, with the content being relatively constant. Pre-core training measures were gathered to provide a baseline from which to compare end of year results. While at the time of writing Phases 2 and 3 had not yet completed their first year of implementation, feedback gathered at their core training sessions suggested the content and level of training was pitched appropriately. Comparisons of core training baseline and end of year training with Phase 1 suggested significant increases in participant understanding of the concept, ethos, values and implementation of nurture. This increase in confidence is critical to the adaptation of nurture as part of normal practice and to be fed into every aspect of school life (Boxall and Lucas 2012; Kearney and Nowek, 2019).

From school leads' feedback, it would seem the Six Principles of Nurture on the surface appear simple, but when applied to real-life contexts, they are more complex, which supports the above-mentioned misunderstanding of the concept of nurture. This reflection came from school leads engaging with the plan, do, study, act cycles and has prompted and supported them to gain a deeper level of understanding in their contexts (Langley et al., 2009). As such, some Phase 1 schools have opted to remain on their initial principle beyond the first year of implementation, to incorporate more of their change ideas into practice and have a greater sense of completion before moving on to the next principle. While the programme allows for this level of flexibility, this is a consideration for future practice in terms of the sustainability of the coaching offer for participant schools.

In addition, practitioners are reporting confidence in their ability to build positive relationships with pupils and valuing the importance of these relationships within education, which links with existing research (Colwell and O'Connor 2003;



Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007; Binnie and Allen., 2008; Gillibrand, Lam and O'Donnell, 2016; Kearney and Nowek, 2019; Nolan, 2020).

The impact evaluation of the programme is measured against the programme aims and outcomes. Individual school evaluations from coaching sessions and accreditation applications will begin to provide a greater depth and quality of evidence for the PKC model. In relation to the wider authority data, this will be an ongoing process with evidence to be collated over the coming years.

## Implications for future practice and next steps

Regarding future implications of developing a large scale, whole-school nurture programme there are several considerations which have emerged from the evaluation to date. From the outset, establishing a clear vision of nurture requires all staff members in school to develop consistent knowledge around the concept of nurture. As mentioned by Kearney and Nowek (2019) and Coleman (2020), adopting a professional development model that incorporates action research, coaching and consultation provides a collaborative method of embedding both individual and collective understanding and is critical to successful implementation. However, substantial central resources are required to facilitate this on a large scale, thus requiring significant investment from local authorities. While providing this support builds the capacity for schools to engage in the development of nurture, there is recognition that this remains a significant undertaking for schools. Readiness for implementation should be reflected in schools' key priorities to establish capacity for effective implementation through committed leadership teams (Warin, 2017; Coleman, 2020). Finally, consideration must be given to how local authorities prioritise support for developing nurturing practice alongside ensuring practice is sustained beyond a school's involvement in the programme. It remains to be explored whether a self-sustaining model which incorporates nurture into regular school improvement visits would support this.

## Implications for research

As discussed in the introduction to this article, currently there are few examples of how nurture

can be applied as a whole-school approach and fewer that provide longitudinal evidence (Kearney and Nowek, 2019; Nolan, 2020). As this programme builds, participant schools will collate data in terms of case studies of individual pupils to provide further evidence on the long-term impact of nurture as they progress through their education. As the programme matures, the volume of quantitative and qualitative data will increase and this could be drawn upon to fill the gaps.

The development of a sustainable, large-scale whole-school nurture programme has required comprehensive, evidence-based planning. This has encompassed continual review and adjustment, and an action research model has been adopted to review the effectiveness of the programme's development and delivery. The cyclical nature of this is likely to uncover new areas to consider as the programme develops.

## Conclusion

Nationally there has been an increased awareness of the importance of relationships to promote the wellbeing and growth of children and young people. This is reflected in Education Scotland (2016) endorsing nurture as a key universal approach to meeting the wellbeing needs of students and closing the poverty related attainment gap. In recent years, the benefits of this new paradigm of nurture have been evidenced within a limited number of studies (Warin, 2017; Kearney and Nowek, 2019; Coleman, 2020; Nolan, 2020). It is anticipated that the evaluative information outlined in this interim report alongside future longitudinal studies will further contribute to the steadily increasing body of research around whole-school nurturing approaches.

This interim report offered insight into the process of developing a comprehensive whole-school nurture programme using improvement methodology within a local authority with a varied demographic. The authors aimed to contribute to the national sharing of practice which benefited the programme team during the early development stage of the PKC approach. Initially, the model drew on national examples of good practice (Kearney and Nowek, 2019; Nolan, 2020) and has since been adapted considerably to the contextual needs of schools within the area. In relation to the research question, early indications show an improvement

in staff confidence in their delivery of nurturing relationships.

The nurturing relationships programme is being evaluated across two areas that have been referred to throughout the article as the 'process' and 'impact' evaluation. A significant amount of evidence has been collated relating to the process evaluation, which indicates that the programme offers a comprehensive professional learning process. This is further reflected in evidence from Phase 1 schools; participants are collectively reporting an increase in their conceptual knowledge of nurture and confidence of implementation into practice. Continuous review has ensured the quality of the programme continues to be enhanced and the article outlines that committed leadership provides optimal conditions for nurturing approaches to be developed. In addition, action research has been associated with the flexible nature of the programme. This approach is supporting schools

to develop a sustainable nurturing approach that is relevant to the needs of their individual contexts. It is recognised that as a long-term approach the programme is currently in its infancy, so longitudinal evidence required to evaluate the impact of the approach is limited. Nonetheless, there are promising signs that progress is being made across the programme's four outcomes.

Since the programme was piloted in 2021 it has grown significantly, with a third of PKC schools currently enrolled over three phases. It is anticipated that a further 56 schools will start their nurturing relationships journey over the next three academic years. Through a coach-consult model the programme team provides extensive support to schools during the early stages of implementation. To assist schools to maintain momentum during the later stages of their journey, it is envisaged that they will require a self-sustaining coaching network, in conjunction with incorporating nurturing relationships into pre-existing support.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A – School leads post training questionnaire.

School Leads Questionnaire	
Q1	What did you like about the school leads training?
Linkert Scale	Having attended the session, please rate how equipped you feel you are to carry out your role as school lead? (1=Not equipped at all 5=Fully equipped)
Q2	Following on from the previous question, is there any further information that you feel you would need to be able to move forward with your role as a school lead?
Q3	Do you know who you can approach for support with your work on the nurturing relationships project?
Q4	Any other comments?

### Appendix B – Whole-school staff baseline activity.

Mentimeter Baseline Activity	
Q1	Please rate how well you feel that you currently understand the ethos and values around nurture?
Q2	Please rate how well you feel that you know the nurturing principles?
Q3	Please rate how well you feel that you currently understand the nurturing principles?
Q4	Please rate how well you feel that you are currently able to implement the principles of nurture in your practice?
Q5	Please rate how nurturing you feel that your classroom is?
Linkert Scale (1-6)	If someone was to visit your school setting, what evidence would they see in terms of it being a nurturing school?
Linkert Scale (1-6)	What do you feel are your strengths in terms of being a nurturing individual?
Linkert Scale (1-6)	What do you feel are the areas which you would like to develop in terms of becoming a nurturing individual?
Adapted from: Applying Nurture as a Whole-School Approach (Education Scotland 2016)	

## Appendix C – Whole-school staff post training questionnaire.

Overall training	
Linkert Scale (1-6)	Do you feel the training provided enough information around PKC vision and approach?
Linkert Scale (1-6)	Do you feel the training provided enough information around the PKC Nurturing Relationships project?
Linkert Scale (1-6)	Do you feel the training provided enough information on attachment?
Linkert Scale (1-6)	Do you feel the training provided enough information on attunement
Linkert Scale (1-6)	Do you feel the training provided enough information on the impact of trauma?
Linkert Scale (1-6)	Do you feel the training provided enough information around resilience?
Linkert Scale (1-6)	Do you feel there was an appropriate balance of taught input and activity/discussion opportunities?
Linkert Scale (1-6)	Do you feel the session was paced appropriately?
Q1	Having completed the core training, is there any further information or training you feel that you would need to be able to move forward with the PKC nurturing relationships project?
Q2	Any other comments?



## Appendix D – Whole-school staff end of year evaluation.

Mentimeter Baseline Activity																			
Q1	Please rate how well you feel that you currently understand the ethos and values around nurture?																		
Q2	Please rate how well you feel that you know the nurturing principles?																		
Q3	Please rate how well you feel that you currently understand the nurturing principles?																		
Q4	Please rate how well you feel that you are currently able to implement the Six Principles of Nurture in your practice?																		
Q5	Please rate how nurturing you feel that your classroom is?																		
Q6	What did you particularly appreciate about the overall training?																		
Q7	What would you like to see changed about the training?																		
Q8	Is there anything that you would like to find out more about?																		
Q9	Is there any further support you need?																		
Linkert Scale (1-6)	If someone was to visit your school setting, what evidence would they see in terms of it being a nurturing school?																		
Linkert Scale (1-6)	What do you feel are your strengths in terms of being a nurturing individual?																		
Linkert Scale (1-6)	What do you feel are the areas which you would like to develop in terms of becoming a nurturing individual?																		
Selection	Please select all those that apply to your experience of this training																		
	<table border="0"> <tbody> <tr> <td>Inspiring</td> <td>Helpful</td> <td>Frustrating</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Boring</td> <td>Difficult</td> <td>Relaxed</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Motivational</td> <td>Challenging</td> <td>Informal</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Confusing</td> <td>Fantastic</td> <td>Well delivered</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Interesting</td> <td>Depressing</td> <td>Overwhelming</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fun</td> <td>Thought provoking</td> <td>Daunting</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Inspiring	Helpful	Frustrating	Boring	Difficult	Relaxed	Motivational	Challenging	Informal	Confusing	Fantastic	Well delivered	Interesting	Depressing	Overwhelming	Fun	Thought provoking	Daunting
Inspiring	Helpful	Frustrating																	
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