

Nurture groups: A briefing from The Nurture Group Network

“Nurture Groups allow for pupils to make considerable progress from their starting points, both in the social, emotional and behavioural aspects and with their reading and writing skills. Pupils became more confident in their main classes and this increased their participation. Parents reported that the children were happier and their behaviour was more settled at home. Attendance also improved for those for whom it was an issue.” **Ofsted: The Pupil Premium: how schools are spending the funding successfully to maximise achievement (2013)**

What is a nurture group?

- An educational psychologist-designed, teacher-led intervention for disengaged and troubled children, which removes behavioural barriers to engagement and attainment in schools through re-creating missing or distorted early attachments. First developed in Hackney more than 40 years ago, there are now more than 2,000 nurture groups in nursery, primary and secondary schools across the UK.
- ‘Nurture children’ are carefully selected using the Boxall Profile, (a resource enabling teachers to develop a precise and accurate understanding of children’s emotional and behavioural difficulties; plan effective interventions and support activities; set goals and capture outcomes. The Boxall Profile is now online enabling schools and The Nurture Group Network to access this (anonymised) data on need and outcomes.
- Once in the group, a nurturing philosophy rooted in attachment theory is used to ensure that children with social, emotional or behavioural difficulties are provided with the early nurturing experiences that are vital to learning. Nurture groups turn children’s lives around, ensuring no child is left behind, and are also an excellent ‘sharp end’ intervention, allowing teachers dedicated time and a framework through which to work with individual children to identify whether their needs could be met in school or if another course of action is necessary, such as an assessment for SEN support.
- In a survey of 100 NGN-accredited nurture groups, the majority of children have experienced significant trauma such as separation from family, exposure to family conflict, abuse, divorce, a new home or school, illness and hospitalisation, death of a loved one, parental drug exposure and maternal depression – 19% of primary school students in primary school nurture groups and 42% in secondary school have a diagnosed psychiatric disorder, most commonly ADHD.¹

What are the outcomes for nurture groups?

Outcomes for children and other learners

Greater academic attainment: Children and young people attending nurture groups have been shown in quasi non-randomised trials to have significant gains in academic attainment as measured by their total scores on their baseline assessment.² This includes improvements in metacognition skills³ and language and literacy skills.⁴

¹ Scott Loinaz, E., (2014), ‘Pilot study summary’. Available at: <http://www.nurturegroups.org/what-we-do/research-and-evidence/pilot-study-summary>

² Reynolds, S., Kearney, M. and MacKay, T. (2009). Nurture Groups: a large – scale, controlled study of effect on development and academic attainment. *British Journal of Special Education*, 36 (4): 204 – 212; Seth-Smith, F., Netali L., Richard P., Fonagy p. and Jaffey, D. (2010). Do nurture groups improve the social, emotional and behavioural functioning of at risk children? *Educational and Child Psychology*, Volume 27, No 1.

³ Gerrard, Brendan (2005). City of Glasgow Nurture Group Pilot Scheme Evaluation. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, volume 10, n4, 245-253

⁴ Hosie, Claire (2013). An Evaluation of the Impact of Nurture Provision upon Young Children, Including their Language and their Literacy Skills (Unpublished PhD thesis). East London University, United Kingdom

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

- **Improved behaviour:** Nurture groups resulted in an improvement in pupils' behaviour and improved social skills at school⁵ and at home.⁶
- **Improved attendance and reduced exclusions:** Nurture groups have proven to significantly improve attendance⁷ (a finding mirrored in Ofsted⁸ and Estyn⁹ publications) and significantly reduce exclusions¹⁰.
- **Attachment to teachers, school and community:** Nurture groups help develop affective bonds between teachers and students,¹¹ result in an increased nurturing ethos at school¹² and result in positive attachments to schools and the community.¹³
- **Long-term mental health improvements and resiliency:** Controlled studies have concluded that students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties are significantly more likely to improve in social and emotional functioning by attending nurture group provision in school rather than remaining in their mainstream classroom, gains that were found to be maintained over time.¹⁴ One study found that children's 'Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire' (SDQ) scores in the abnormal or borderline category improved by 29% to normal levels after three terms of nurture group provision compared to only 10% in the control group.¹⁵ Nurture groups promote good mental health as they help children feel valued, build confidence and self-esteem, teach children how to make good relationships with adults and each other, develop communication skills, provide opportunities for social learning and facilitate learning through quality play experiences¹⁶.

"Attendance improves with nurture and since the nurture group was formed there have been no exclusions at all ... [this is because of] the impact nurture has on vulnerable children and families."

Infant and Nursery School Headteacher, Warwickshire.

How do nurture groups work?

- A nurture group is a small group of 6 to 12 children or young people supported by two trained adults. Nurture groups are, on average, provided 5 times a week for 2.5 hours a day per child and are the only intensive psychosocial intervention available full-time whilst allowing students to remain a part of their mainstream class, joining them for some activities. Placements in the nurture group can be either short or medium-term with the average pupil returning fully to their mainstream classes between two and four terms. Both part-time and full-time nurture groups have been found to work well and nurture groups are effective in both primary and secondary school settings.
- The children are carefully selected according to their individual holistic profile of needs, identified using the Boxall Profile (a resource that gives practitioners a precise and accurate understanding of children's

⁵ Cooper, P. and Tiknaz, Y. (2005). Progress and challenge in Nurture Groups: evidence from three case studies. *British Journal of Special Education*, Volume 32, Issue 4, pages 211–222

⁶ Binnie, L.M., and K. Allen (2008). Whole school support for vulnerable children: The evaluation of a part-time nurture group. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, volume 13, no. 3: 201–16.

⁷ Sanders, Tracy (2007). Helping Children Thrive at School: The Effectiveness of Nurture Groups. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, Volume. 23, Issue 1, 45-61.

⁸ Ofsted (2013) The Pupil Premium: How schools are spending the funding successfully to maximise achievement

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/413197/The_Pupil_Premium_-_How_schools_are_spending_the_funding.pdf

⁹ Estyn (2014) Attendance in secondary schools – September 2014 <http://www.estyn.gov.uk/english/docViewer/329401.8/attendance-in-secondary-schools-september-2014/?navmap=30%2C163>

¹⁰ Cooper et al (2001). The effectiveness of nurture groups: preliminary research findings. *British journal of Special Education*, 28 (4), 160-166

¹¹ Cooper, P. and Whitebread, D. (2007). The Effectiveness of Nurture Groups: Evidence from a National Research Study. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, volume 12, n3 p171-190.

¹² Binnie, L.M., and K. Allen (2008). Whole school support for vulnerable children: The evaluation of a part-time nurture group. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, volume 13, no. 3: 201–16.

¹³ Walker, L C (2010). *The impact of nurture group interventions: parental involvement and perceptions* (Unpublished PhD thesis). University of Sheffield, United Kingdom.

¹⁴ O'Connor, Tina and John Colwell (2002). The effectiveness and rationale of the 'nurture group' approach to helping children with emotional and behavioural difficulties remain within mainstream education. *British Journal of Special Education*, Volume 29, Issue 2,

¹⁵ Cooper, Arnold, R. and Boyd, E. (2001). The effectiveness of nurture groups: preliminary research findings. *British Journal of Special Education*, 28 (4), 160–166

¹⁶ Cole, T. (2015). University of Oxford: Mental Health Difficulties and Children at Risk of Exclusion from Schools in England. A review from an educational perspective of policy, practice and research, 1997 to 2015'. Available at: <http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/MENTAL-HEALTH-AND-EXCLUSION-FINAL-DIGITAL-13-06-15.pdf>

educational and behavioural difficulties), whilst also ensuring the establishment of a cohesive nurture group. Social and developmental targets for each student in a nurture group are devised on the basis of the Boxall Profile.

- Teaching staff trained in the theory and practice of nurture groups create an attractive, safe, structured environment, usually within the context of a mainstream educational setting, with a number of areas and resources designed to bridge the gap between home and school. Not only does sharing the nurture group environment with other students help the pupils practice social skills that are fundamental to their reintegration into mainstream classes, it also prevents any inappropriate attachment between themselves and nurture group staff; the goal of nurture group is not to usurp the parent-child relationship, but to create a positive attachment to the school. The nurture group staff engage intensely with each student, within a daily routine that is explicit, uniform and predictable; activities undertaken include emotional literacy sessions, news-sharing, group activities, curriculum tasks and nurture breakfast.

Nurture Groups in national policy

England:

The value of nurture groups has been recognised in national policy as an effective intervention for more than forty years, beginning with the *Warnock Report in 1978*¹⁷. More recently, the positive impact of nurture groups has been highlighted in:

- Green Paper *Excellence for All Children* (1997)¹⁸
- *Steer Report* (2005)¹⁹
- Ofsted's survey on *Supporting Children with Challenging Behaviour through a Nurture Group Approach* (2011)²⁰
- Ofsted's *The Pupil Premium: How schools are spending the funding successfully to maximise achievement* (2013)²¹
- The Department for Education's *Healthy Schools Toolkit*²² (2012)
- The Department for Education's *'Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools'* report (2016)²³

Northern Ireland:

- In Northern Ireland, the Department for Social Development has cited nurture groups as an important tool in challenging some of the barriers that result in low educational attainment and made additional funding available to establish new nurture units across the country.²⁴

¹⁷ Warnock, M., (1978), 'Special Educational Needs: Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People', London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office

¹⁸ Department for Education and Employment, (1997), 'Excellence for all children: Meeting Special Educational Needs'. Available at: https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/45_1.pdf

¹⁹ Department for Education and Skills (2005), 'Learning behaviour: The report of the practitioners group on school behaviour and discipline'. Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/1950-2005PDF-EN-02.pdf>

²⁰ Ofsted (2011), 'Supporting children with challenging behaviour through a nurture group approach'. Available at: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/supporting-children-challenging-behaviour-through-nurture-group-approach>

²¹ Ofsted (2013) 'The Pupil Premium: How schools are spending the funding successfully to maximize achievement'. Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20141124154759/http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/surveys-and-good-practice/t/The%20Pupil%20Premium%20-%20How%20schools%20are%20spending%20the%20funding.pdf>

²² Department for Education, (2012), 'Healthy Schools Toolkit'. Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130903123545/http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/pastoralcare/a0075278/healthy-schools>

²³ Department for Education (2016), 'Mental health and behaviour in schools: Departmental Advice for school staff'. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/508847/Mental_Health_and_Behaviour_-_advice_for_Schools_160316.pdf

²⁴ Northern Ireland Executive, 'Twenty schools selected for new nurture units'. Available at: <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news-de-210613-twenty-schools-selected>

- The Northern Ireland Executive has established 20 new nurture groups and funded the continued running of 10 others since 2013, as part of its 'Delivering Social Change' signature programmes aimed at tackling poverty and social exclusion and improving children's wellbeing.
- Recent evaluation of the nurture groups carried out by the Education and Training Inspectorate of Northern Ireland found improvements in attendance, wellbeing and behaviour in the children attending the nurture groups.²⁵

Scotland:

- Nurture groups are recognised by Education Scotland as being one approach to developing positive relationships and behaviour.²⁶
- The use of nurture groups to promote positive behaviours has been recognised in a Scottish Government paper on 'What Works to Reduce Crime?: A summary of the Evidence (2014).

Wales:

- The Welsh Government published '*Nurture Groups: A handbook for schools*' (2010)²⁷, which outlines how to set up and run a nurture group, as well as providing an overview of how they operate.
- The Department for Education and Skills' '*Inclusion and Pupil Support Guidance*' (2006)²⁸ highlighted the use of nurture groups as an effective strategy in aiding pupils who are experiencing behaviour issues.
- Estyn's report on '*Attendance in Secondary Schools*' (2014) recommends nurture groups as an intervention,²⁹ explain that nurture groups "are used to good effect and have enabled more pupils to attend school more often"
- Estyn has also highlighted nurture groups within *Guidance for using the Pupil Deprivation Grant: What really works?* (2014).

Costs and funding

Most nurture groups cost less than £10,000 for schools to establish. As shown by a recent survey of nurture groups in schools, the most popular option in terms of funding for nurture group provision is annually via the Pupil Premium, followed by Local Education Authority funding (LEAs) and then by individual school funding streams, Government funding or a combination of these different sources.

About the Nurture Group Network

The Nurture Group Network is a charity that aims to break cycles of low achievement and tackle social exclusion by ensuring that an unequal start in life does not mean an unequal chance to engage with learning. The Nurture Group Network works to ensure that every disadvantaged or disengaged child has access to a nurturing intervention to equip them with the skills and resilience they need to make the most of learning and school. We do this by supporting the development of nurturing interventions in schools through training, resources and support; making the case for nurture in schools with policymakers and politicians; and we have an on-going research and evaluation programme to monitor evidence of outcomes. For further information please visit: <http://www.nurturegroups.org>

²⁵ Education and Training Inspectorate, 'An Evaluation of the Nurture Unit Signature Project Pilot'. Available at: https://www.etini.gov.uk/sites/etini.gov.uk/files/publications/an-evaluation-of-the-nurture-unit-signature-project-pilot_0.PDF

²⁶ Education Scotland, 'Nurture groups'. Available at: <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/supportinglearners/positivelearningenvironments/positivebehaviour/approaches/nurture/index.asp>

²⁷ Welsh Assembly Government, (November 2010), 'Nurture Groups: A handbook for schools'. Available at: <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/101124nurturehandbooken.pdf>

²⁸ Welsh Government Department for Education and Skills, (2006), 'Inclusion and Pupil Support Guidance'. Available at:

<http://wales.gov.uk/dcells/publications/publications/circularsindex/2006/inclusionandpupilsupport/inclusionpupilsupport-e.pdf?lang=en>

²⁹ Estyn (September 2014), 'Attendance in Secondary Schools', <http://www.estyn.gov.uk/english/docViewer/329401.8/attendance-in-secondary-schools-september-2014/?navmap=30,163>