

Nurturing for accelerated progress and high outcomes

With this case study Jo Corrigan, head of primary networks at SSAT, considers what makes nurture group provision successful and the impact it has on children and their families



Not all children are ready to meet the social and intellectual demands of school life. Research shows that a child is able to learn best when they have strong self-esteem, a sense of belonging and resilience. Nurture groups offer a short term focused intervention which addresses barriers to learning arising from social or emotional difficulties.

Nurture groups were originally developed in 1969 by educational psychologist Marjorie Boxall. They are small, structured teaching groups for children showing signs of behavioural, social or emotional difficulties, particularly those

who are experiencing disruption or distress outside school. There are now over 1500 schools with nurture provision in the UK, offering opportunities to experience the early nurturing experiences some children have not had.

Nurture groups are developed around six principles:

- Learning is understood developmentally
- The classroom offers a safe base
- Nurture is important for the development of wellbeing
- Language is a vital means of communication
- All behaviour is communication

- The importance of transition in the lives of children and young people.

Good practice in a primary school

Offering children opportunities to revisit early learning skills to support their social and emotional development and move forwards successfully as lifelong learners is the overall aim of Saplings Nurture Provision at South Rise Primary School, Greenwich.

South Rise is a large, three form entry, primary school with 689 pupils. It serves a diverse community, with three quarters of the children coming from minority

ethnic backgrounds. The proportions of children with SEND, eligible for pupil premium and those with English as a second language are higher than average. Pupil mobility is also high.

The school vision statement shows a strong commitment to the education of the whole child: “South Rise Primary School aims to be an outstanding, values-based school at the heart of our culturally diverse community. Through innovative practice we strive for excellence, enabling our children to achieve their highest potential. We aspire to develop great thinkers who demonstrate curiosity, resilience and embrace challenge. We aim to develop confident, independent individuals who are fully prepared for life in modern Britain.”

About 18 months ago, staff and children had reached crisis point, following a range of concerns in relation to behaviour, attitudes to learning and low self-esteem in year 2. Prompt action was taken to research and establish the school’s nurture provision, which included:

- Establishing a steering group to conduct research into nurture provision and plan the way forward
- Completing visits to other schools to observe best practice
- Writing a rationale for the provision which was shared with all staff.
- Appointing suitably qualified staff to key roles, who attended training provided by Nurture Group Network. This enabled the staff to



- write key policies for the provision.
- Setting up the nurture provision – within two days – as a result of the urgent need.
- Ensuring that the six principles underpinned daily practice.
- Providing detailed information about the provision on the school website, as a means of communicating with the school community.
- Enabling children to form positive attachments with the group staff.
- Involving parents in the provision, through regular invitations to events and occasions.

- Purchasing the Boxall profile for measuring social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, which can also be used for early identification of children who would benefit from the nurture group and designing reintegration checklists.
- Organising observations of the provision by governors and the school improvement partner.

Nurture provision experience

The objectives of the provision were clear from the outset:

- To achieve stability with behaviour and attitudes to learning in the year 2 cohort.
- To significantly reduce the impact of key learners’ behaviour on others within the school and beyond (family life).
- To significantly reduce the number of significant incidents, internal isolations and exclusions.

“If the child is unable to adjust to the needs of the school, then the school must adjust to meet the needs of the child”

Marjorie Boxall

- To improve attendance.
- To address children's lack of progress academically, emotionally and socially.
- To increase children's confidence, self-esteem, attainment, and love for learning and school.

A day in the life of Saplings nurture provision

Saplings is a small group of up to six children, staffed by two supportive adults. It offers a short term focused intervention which addresses barriers to learning caused by social or emotional difficulties. Children remain part of their own class group and usually return to their own class full time after a maximum of four terms.

Children learn in an environment where the furniture is a mixture of home and school, so the space is safe, consistent and predictable for the children. A kitchen area provides them with breakfast, supporting a calm start to the day. They are taught English, maths

and phonics by a qualified teacher. The rest of the day is structured to provide opportunities to address specific skills needed to become successful learners upon return to a mainstream class.

Parental involvement is encouraged and has a positive impact of time spent in the group. Parents are invited in on Wednesday and Friday afternoons to meet staff and to share children's achievements and successes.

Evidence of success

The overall impact of the nurture provision is evidenced through the successful reintegration of the children into their main class. Other impact measures include:

- Impact on pupils Improved learning skills, including language and literacy
- Improved behaviour and social skills
- Positive change to social and emotional functioning at home
- Positive attachments to the school and staff

- Breaking down social and emotional barriers to learning
- Identification of issues that may require early intervention, e.g. CAMHS, Educational Psychologist
- Helps to build self-esteem, confidence and self-worth
- Improved attendance – Saplings children's attendance was 100% throughout their stay (previously some children's attendance was below 95%)
- Aids the provision of individualised intervention
- Pupil progress demonstrated through curriculum planning and assessment, using the Boxall Profile and National Curriculum.
- Setting achievable targets from the Boxall Profile (consensual goal setting).
- Positive feedback from parents through questionnaires and comments.
- Positive impact of links with the 'base' class throughout the nurture intervention.
- Use of reintegration checklists to ensure a smooth transition.
- High quality CPD through staff attendance at the Nurture Group Network summer schools.
- Certification in nurture (Renee Wheeler, July 2016).

Impact on school

- Reduced exclusion rates – no exclusions or periods of 'internal isolation' away from setting
- Reduced daily incidents by a staggering 95%
- 100% of Saplings children made above expected progress across the year
- Improves classroom functioning
- Frees teacher time to focus on the rest of the class
- Improved pupil/teacher relationship upon reintegration
- 100% were reintegrated during the course of the year – one child returned to main stream class in



- January, others by summer term
- One child has subsequently attended a specialist provision outside of school
- Nurturing environment for pupils/staff
- Ability to build good relationships with parents who can be difficult to reach

Executive headteacher Sophie Powell and Nurture Provision Leader Renee Wheeler offer the following tips for the creation of a successful nurture provision:

- Support from the school's leadership is essential: strategic direction in the early stages and a monitoring role once the provision is established.
- Positive relationship with parents must be established to support their child in the provision (eg invitations to special occasions, weekly 'stay and play' sessions)
- Survey parents at the end of each cohort to find out about their experiences of their child's time in the nurture provision. This can be used to ensure that the provision is of the highest quality.
- Ensure clear communication with everyone about the provision.
- A dedicated space where the children feel safe is essential.



- Ensure regular contact with the 'base' class/peer group during intervention.
- Investment in the Boxall profile for target setting, assessment and reintegration checklists.
- Time with a qualified teacher and access to the national curriculum subjects is important, as is specialist teaching in nurture, PE and music.
- Provide high quality training for key staff within and beyond the provision to ensure the principles are understood by everyone.

- It is important for children to form firm attachments with the staff in the provision – changes to personnel could cause disruption.

The school is looking forward to submitting their application for the Marjorie Boxall quality mark award in the near future, joining over 100 schools, to receive recognition for the hard work of the children and the dedication of the staff in the provision. They are also happy to support other schools that are just embarking on their 'nurture group' journey.