NURTURE GROUPS

For all educational settings

nurtureuk

WHAT IS A NURTURE GROUP?

Nurture groups are in-school, teacher-led psychosocial interventions focused on supporting the social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) of children and young people. They are founded on evidence-based practices and offer a short-term, inclusive, targeted intervention that works in the long term.

Nurture groups address the social, emotional and learning needs of individual pupils by providing the necessary help to remove the barriers to learning. There is great emphasis on emotional literacy, language development and communication. Pupils are immersed in an accepting and warm environment that helps replace missing/distorted early nurturing experiences and helps pupils develop positive relationships with both teachers and peers.

Nurture groups are classes of between six and 12 children or young people, run by two members of staff trained in nurture interventions. Nurture groups can be set up in early years, primary or secondary settings as well as in special needs schools.

Nurture groups are now in over 2,000 schools in the UK and offer the opportunity to experience the early nurturing experiences some children and young people lack, giving them the skills to do well at school, make friends and deal more confidently and calmly with the trials and tribulations of life, for life.

NURTURE GROUPS ARE DEVELOPED AROUND THE SIX PRINCIPLES OF NURTURE:

THE SIX PRINCIPLES OF NURTURE

- CHILDREN'S LEARNING IS UNDERSTOOD DEVELOPMENTALLY
- THE IMPORTANCE OF TRANSITIONS IN CHILDREN'S LIVES
- THE CLASSROOM OFFERS A SAFE BASE
- ALL BEHAVIOUR IS COMMUNICATION
- THE IMPORTANCE OF NURTURE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF WELLBEING
- LANGUAGE IS A VITAL MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

❝Overall, since the first year the nurture group began, we have reduced exclusions in our school by 84%. In 2017 we enrolled on the National Nurturing Schools Programme and as a result, from the start of this current academic year, we have achieved three out of four terms with no exclusions at all.❞

Kent Nurture Group

Nurture groups are a targeted intervention for children and young people with social emotional behavioural/mental health difficulties (SEBD/SEMH).

Nurture groups need:

- A school committed to a nurturing ethos
- Two caring and affectionate nurture practitioners
- A group of no more than 12 students

First and foremost, nurture groups focus on supporting students to form attachments to loving and caring adults at school. Unconditional positive regard is the most powerful mechanism for change.

THE DAILY ROUTINE IS EXPLICIT AND PREDICTABLE:

The pupils start their day in their mainstream class.

They are picked up by the staff and taken to the nurture group, a hybrid of home and school.

Activities in the nurture group include emotional literacy sessions, news sharing, nurture breakfast and regular curriculum activities.

Children return to their mainstream class for some provision every day.

The social and developmental targets for each student are devised using the **Boxall Profile**, a detailed assessment of social, emotional and behavioural functioning of children and young people. When the appropriate targets are met the student is reintegrated into their mainstream class. This takes between one and four terms.

WHAT ARE THEIR OUTCOMES?

To date more than 100 academic studies have demonstrated the positive impact of nurture groups. Although their primary goal is to improve children and young people's social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, nurture groups have positive outcomes across a wide range of areas, both for pupils themselves and also for teachers, the school community and beyond.

IMPROVED SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS

Children and young people develop **confidence** and **self-esteem** and learn to take pride in their work and in behaving positively (Kearney 2005).

They become better at **managing their emotions** (Cooper and Whitebread 2007) and at **empathising** with others (Sanders 2007), and as a result are able to form more **positive relationships** with peers and teachers.

IMPROVED ATTENDANCE

As pupils feel safe in the nurture group and in school, they are able to **enjoy school more** (Sloan et al. 2016) and their overall **attendance** increases (Estyn 2014; Sanders 2007).

IMPROVED ATTAINMENT

Studies have also found that children and young people's **academic performance** increases following nurture provision (Sanders 2007; Reynolds, MacKay, and Kearney 2009; Seth-Smith et al. 2010), including language and literacy skills (Hosie 2013).

IMPROVED BEHAVIOUR AND REDUCED EXCLUSIONS

Children and young people's **behaviour** significantly improves (Sloan et al. 2016). They feel more settled in their mainstream classroom and are better able to cope with the challenges of the school day, reducing the risk for anger outbursts and disruptive behaviour.

This in turn leads to a reduction in the number of **exclusions** (Ofsted 2009; March and Kearney 2017).

IMPROVED PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

Nurture groups also have a positive impact on the **parent-child relationship** (Pyle 2015), with children being more affectionate and communicative at home, and parents feeling more confident in being able to help their children (Ofsted 2011).

IMPACT ON THE WHOLE SCHOOL

Nurture groups help develop affective bonds between teachers and pupils and help create a **whole school nurturing ethos** (Binnie and Allen 2008; Cooper 2001).

"In Glasgow, nurture has been a substantial part of a success story in education in the city which can point to a clear reduction in pupil exclusions, an increase in attendance and a dramatic improvement in Glasgow establishments."

March and Kearney 2017

WHY ARE NURTURE GROUPS NEEDED?

Reduce the risk of being excluded:
Every day in England, 40 children and young people are being permanently excluded from school, and more than 2,000 pupils receive fixed period exclusions (Department for Education 2018). The most common reason pupils are being excluded remains persistent disruptive behaviour. Nurture groups and nurture principles can reduce the risk for children and young to be excluded.

> " Nurture groups [...] were highly effective in improving children's behaviour and preventing exclusion. "
>
> **Ofsted 2009**

Improve children and young people's mental health: 1 in 8 children and young people have a clinically diagnosable mental health problem (Sadler et al. 2018), and half of those with lifetime mental health problems first experience symptoms by the age of 14 (Kessler et al. 2005). Moreover, children who develop conduct problems early on are at a greater risk of experiencing delinquency, antisocial behaviours and substance abuse in adolescence and adulthood (Moffitt 2006). Nurture groups can help manage these detrimental cognitive, affective or behavioural styles by helping children and young people develop the social emotional skills, resilience and positive behaviours they need to do well in school and in life.

Increase educational attainment for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils: Children and young people with special educational needs, poor mental health or living in poverty are much more likely to get excluded and to have lower educational outcomes (Gill, Quilter-Pinner, and Swift 2017). By increasing the chances of having vulnerable and disadvantaged students remain in schools, nurture groups help break the cycle of intergenerational poverty by removing the barriers to learning and succeeding in schools.

Comply with new mental health and wellbeing policy for schools: Across the UK more and more emphasis is being put on schools to support the mental health and wellbeing of their pupils (Department of Health and Department for Education 2017). Nurture groups, alongside whole-school nurturing ethos, can have a real impact on all pupils' wellbeing, not only on children and young people with SEBD/SEMH needs but across the whole school population, by making everyone feel safe, heard and valued.

LEFT UNSUPPORTED, SEMH NEEDS ARE LIKELY TO PERSIST AND WORSEN

EXTERNALISING BEHAVIOURS

such as being aggressive, fighting and violating rules may lead to persistent difficulties, including conduct disorders, that can have negative consequences both in childhood and later in life (Moffitt 2006).

Children and young people experiencing persistent externalising behaviours are at risk of:

- Academic difficulties (low grades, truancy and exclusion)
- Social rejection
- Antisocial behaviour and substance abuse

INTERNALISING BEHAVIOURS

such as anxiety and depression can lead to:

- Difficulties forming and maintaining relationships
- Poor school performance
- Suicidal behaviours

Children and young people who have experienced depression are also more likely to have recurrent episodes later in adulthood (Rao 2006).

VULNERABLE AND DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

are at high risk of personal and school failure:

- Young people who are persistently disadvantaged are up to two years behind on their learning compared to their peers (Andrews, Robinson, and Hutchinson 2017).
- Poorer young people are four times more likely to be excluded than their wealthier peers (Gill, Quilter-Pinner, and Swift 2017).

HOW DO NURTURE GROUPS WORK?

ATTACHMENT THEORY

The fundamental theoretical model that underpins the effectiveness of nurture groups is John Bowlby's attachment theory which argues that children acquire age-appropriate behaviour through interactions with significant others (Bowlby 1969). If a child's early experiences were characterised by missing or distorted nurturing, it can lead to stunted social, emotional and cognitive development. Yet nurture is not a once-and-for-all event that must take place in a critical period, and missing or distorted early experiences can be overcome with the help of nurturing adults. Teachers, youth workers and significant adults in a child's life can provide important attachments for children.

❝ The roots of a child or young person's social-emotional wellbeing are found in their first attachment to their primary care-giver. The nature of that attachment determines not just their ability to form relationships but their capacity to learn. Educators must establish attachment-like relationships with their students, particularly with challenging and vulnerable children and young people, in order to improve their chances of learning and achieving. ❞

Attachment Aware Schools 2017

❝ Classroom learning cannot occur if the child is in either a persistent state of arousal or anxiety [...]. When in this state, the key parts of the cortex are not receptive to cognitive information that is not relevant to survival. The traumatized child's brain is essentially unavailable to process efficiently the complex cognitive information being conveyed by the teacher. ❞
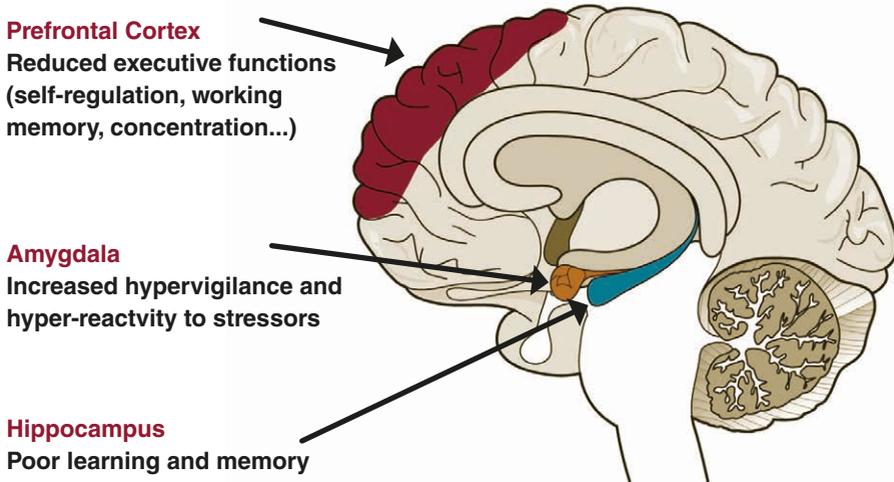
Perry 2002

THE NEUROSCIENCE BEHIND NURTURE GROUPS

Many children and young people in nurture groups have experienced significant trauma in their young lives, including bereavement, neglect and abuse, or witnessing parents experiencing mental health issues, incarceration, or substance abuse.

Though a few stressors can be manageable for young children, there is a point where prolonged stress becomes toxic and neurobiological factors are affected. If levels of glucocorticoids, particularly the stress hormone cortisol, remain high for prolonged periods of time, **stress can impact the developing brain** and alter the structure and function of key brain areas. As a consequence **children may become hypervigilant, highly irritable and may have a short temper**. They will have difficulties with attention, learning and emotional control. In turn these difficulties may translate into anger outbursts, aggression and challenging behaviours.

Effects of stress on the brain and behaviour of children and young people

Prefrontal Cortex
Reduced executive functions (self-regulation, working memory, concentration...)

Amygdala
Increased hypervigilance and hyper-reactvity to stressors

Hippocampus
Poor learning and memory

The good news is that with sufficient nurture and support from adults, children can develop the skills and resilience they need to cope with stressful experiences and return to manageable levels of stress, in turn allowing them to become ready to learn (Shonkoff et al. 2015).

Nurture groups help students return to healthy levels of stress by:

1) Providing a consistent, predictable pattern to the day;
2) Having nurturing, comforting and affectionate nurture practitioners trained in attachment theory;
3) Having expectations of behaviour clearly discussed with the child/young person;
4) By providing a safe space where the pupil feels protected, is given choices and some sense of control.

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Using the Boxall Profile, the social and emotional needs of individual children/young people are identified and targeted support is provided to encourage social emotional learning.

The relationship between the two nurture practitioners, always nurturing and supportive, provides a role model that children observe and begin to copy. Pupils are given ample opportunities to understand and manage their emotions, reflect on their behaviours in a non-judgmental way, and develop positive friendships. Food is shared at 'breakfast' or 'snack time' with much opportunity for social learning, helping pupils to attend to the needs of others, with time to listen and be listened to.

As the children learn academically and socially they develop confidence, become responsive to others, learn self-respect and take pride in behaving well and in achieving.

NURTURE GROUP PROVISION SHARES MANY EVIDENCE-BASED COMPONENTS WITH OTHER EFFECTIVE PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERVENTIONS:

Building affective bonds:
Forming positive, trusting relationships with pupils and being responsive to their individual needs.

Cognitive restructuring:
Perspective taking; recognising triggers of anger; distinguishing between helpful and unhelpful thoughts.

Modelling:
Role modelling of appropriate behaviour/ social skills between two adults participating in constructive interaction.

Consensual goal setting:
Setting achievable targets from the Boxall Profile.

Emotional literacy:
Understanding, identifying and labelling emotions; recognising physical and environmental cues of emotions; providing opportunities for pupils to verbalise their emotional experiences.

Relaxation techniques:
Mindfulness; controlled breathing techniques.

SECONDARY NURTURE GROUPS

Children and young people have the same basic needs – to be loved, accepted and encouraged – whether they are four or 14. Secondary nurture groups support all of these needs and minimise the chances of young people becoming non-attendees or excluded further through the school system.

There are currently more than 200 nurture groups running in secondary settings, demonstrating that nurture group practice can be successfully adapted to support young people.

Secondary nurture groups have been recommended by various government papers (Estyn 2014; Ofsted 2008) and their outcomes investigated in several academic studies (e.g. Chiappella, 2015; Colley, 2012; Grantham & Primrose, 2017).

Just like in primary school, the six principles of nurture underpin the nurture practice in secondary schools. Social and developmental targets for each student are devised using the Boxall Profile for Young People (Bennathan, Boxall, and Colley 2011) – a detailed assessment of social, emotional and behavioural functioning.

" Along with other provisions within the school, the nurture group has helped reduce the number of fixed term exclusions in [our school]. Many pupils have exceeded expectations at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. The nurture group is now a key factor in parents choosing [us] as their first choice secondary school. **"**

Secondary school with nurture groups in Year 7, 8 and 9, Wales

HOW TO START YOUR OWN NURTURE GROUP

1.

Most nurture groups are initiated by enthusiastic members of staff. As a first step, it will be crucial to gain the approval and support of senior management to ensure whole school understanding and secure funding. The school will need to decide on a budget, a suitable room and two permanent staff to act as nurture practitioners. The cost of starting a nurture group varies from setting to setting, and the majority are funded annually by the Pupil Premium.

2.

Visit our website **nurtureuk.org** and look at the courses available near you. We recommend that at least one member of staff in the nurture group completes the three-day SCQF accredited training course *Theory and Practice of Nurture Groups*, to learn about the principles and practice of nurture, along with the theoretical models underpinning the effectiveness and impact of the intervention.

3.

Arrange to visit a local nurture group that has been accredited a Marjorie Boxall Quality Mark Award. The MBQMA ensures that the nurture group has been assessed and recognised by nurture**uk** as following good practice set against national standards. The practitioners will be able to share their learnings and insights before you embark on your nurture journey.

" Fantastic course, I feel equipped to take forward the nurture approach. "
Delegate, Scotland

4.

Complete observations and assess children/young people using the Boxall Profile to choose the pupils who will make up the first nurture group. Consider the pupils' strengths and difficulties and how children might learn from each other.

5.

Make positive contact with parents to discuss their child's place in the nurture group. Part of the success of the nurture group is the regular involvement of parents, who are given ample opportunities to provide feedback, and staff in turn provide support to parents and give them ideas/equipment for home activities.

6.

Update relevant school policy to reference the nurture group in behaviour, inclusion, special needs and staff support policies. It is fundamental that a whole school nurturing policy be established for the success of the nurture group. It is also recommended to create a separate nurture group policy.

7.

Introduce the nurture group to other staff and to the senior leadership team. Although they may have heard of nurture groups before, they may not be aware of how they work or what their outcomes can be.

ARE NURTURE GROUPS EFFECTIVE?

Queens University Belfast carried out an evaluation of 30 Northern Ireland Department of Education-funded nurture groups in 2016. The report 'The Impact and Cost effectiveness of Nurture Groups in Primary Schools in Northern Ireland', found that:

" 77.7% of children who entered nurture groups as part of the trial were exhibiting difficult behaviour […] and this reduced to just 20.6% at post-intervention test over one academic year. "

"For those children in the control schools, 62.8% of children exhibited difficult behaviour at the start of the year and this remained largely unchanged at post-test (61.9%)."

The report also concluded that nurture groups are cost effective and hailed the project to be "highly successful in its primary aim of achieving improvements in the social, emotional and behavioural skills of children from deprived areas exhibiting significant difficulties". Investment in...

" Nurture Group provision is likely to pay for itself after just two years for each child whose problem behaviour is reduced to the normal range. "

However, nurture groups are not an 'off the shelf' or stand-alone intervention. To be most effective, nurture groups require the following elements (Fraser-smith & Henry, 2016; Warin & Hibbin, 2016):

- Adequate training provided to nurture group practitioners to ensure a high-quality provision
- Ongoing commitment from the senior management
- Awareness and understanding of nurture principles and values from the whole school community (including children, parents and mainstream staff)
- Strong communication and integration between the nurture group and mainstream class
- Positive engagement with parents
- Systems in place to monitor and evaluate the nurture group

FUNDRAISING FOR YOUR NURTURE GROUP

With school budgets becoming increasingly tight, it may be difficult for schools to find the funds available to open and maintain their nurture groups. Despite evidence showing how cost-effective they are, nurture groups can often be one of the first initiatives to be cut in times of limited funding for schools. This does not need to be the case. Your school can fundraise for its nurture group and help it to be the best it can be for your pupils.

FUNDRAISING EVENT

Fundraising events are great as you can do whatever works best for your school. You may hold a school fete, have an own clothes day, host a school tuck shop or even a fashion show. You can find materials to help you plan a successful fundraising event for your school on our website, including a fundraising guide full of tips and inspiration. Make sure you refer to the 'Keeping your fundraising efforts legal' if you are going to hold an event.

TRUST FUNDRAISING

Many schools do not consider grant-making bodies, such as trusts and foundations, as a potential source of income. However, fundraising from trusts and foundations for your nurture provision can be a valuable and useful source of funds. Our guide to writing a case for support will help you to understand the basics of applying to a trust or foundation and help you decide whether applying to a grant-making body for funding is something your school should consider.

MAKING THE MOST OF EVERY DAY

If you would like to cut costs or make the most of the spending in your school, there are lots of places you can easily ask for donations or raise small funds that can amount to much more over time. You can raise funds and resources for your school or nurture group in a number of different ways. Many of them are quick and do not require a lot of effort. On our website, you can find a small glossary of companies and initiatives that help you to make the most of or cut the cost of your everyday spending.

Access our free Fundraising Toolkit online at: **nurtureuk.org/get-involved/ fundraising-your-school**

THE MARJORIE BOXALL QUALITY MARK AWARD

To recognise the outstanding work of nurture groups to support vulnerable children and young people, nurture**uk** runs an accreditation scheme for excellence in nurture: **The Marjorie Boxall Quality Mark Award** (MBQMA).

Schools who have been running a nurture group for more than two years can apply to the MBQMA. The process of achieving the MBQMA ensures that there is an evidential base of good practice set against national standards, which is not only useful for inspections, but also planning, reviewing and reflecting on effective practices and the impact and outcomes of your nurture group.

The MBQMA involves assessing the work of a nurture group against a set of quality standards. These standards are derived from the six principles of nurture and their clearly defined operational characteristics, which have been instilled and refined over 40 years through ongoing research and evaluations. The principles and characteristics are those contained in what has become known as the 'classic Boxall' model, or Boxall Nurture Group®.

Groups that meet these standards and are successfully assessed by nurture**uk**, can carry the **Boxall Nurture Group® Quality Mark**.

Find out more online at: **nurtureuk.org/ what-we-do/marjorie-boxall-quality- mark-award**

" We were nervous, you made us feel at ease, and by the end of the day, we felt uplifted and proud of our achievements, our children, staff and school. THANK YOU! "

MBQMA School

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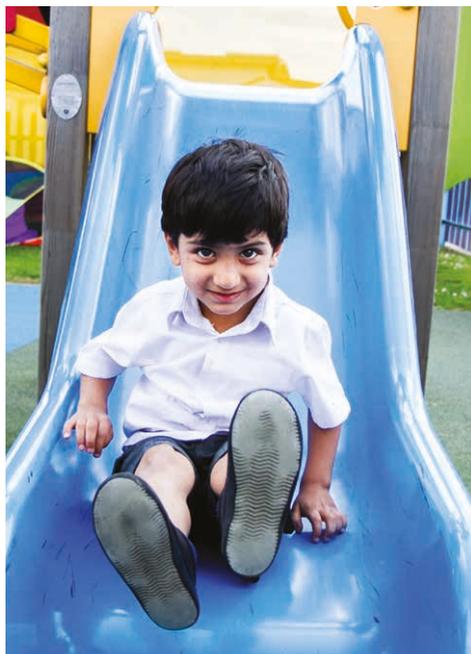
NURTURE GROUPS IN NATIONAL POLICY

Nurture groups have been endorsed by the different UK governments in numerous reports and policy papers since the 1970s (Warnock Committee 1978; Steer 2005; Department for Education 2012; 2016) and more recently in 2018 (Education Scotland 2018; Brown 2018).

In England, Ofsted recommended the Department for Education and local authorities to *"take into account the substantial value of well-led and well-taught nurture groups when considering policies and guidance on early intervention and targeted support for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social needs"* and concluded that:

> **[Nurture groups] significantly modified pupils' behaviour, improved pupils' social, emotional and behavioural skills, accelerated academic progress [...] and influenced the rest of the school's practice.**

Ofsted 2011

In Scotland, the government has put a strong emphasis on improving the wellbeing of children and young people through the 'Getting it right for every child' national approach. A report released in 2018 highlights how nurturing approaches are aligned with the national policy agenda (Education Scotland 2018) and additional reports highlight that nurture is considered a key approach to supporting wellbeing and achievement in Scottish schools (Scottish Government 2011; 2013).

In Wales, the Welsh Government has published a handbook for schools outlining how to set up and run a nurture group (Welsh Assembly Government 2010). In 2016, it also released guidance on inclusive education and cited nurture groups as one of the interventions schools could use to help pupils who need extra support to help manage their behaviour and attendance (Welsh Government 2016). Estyn also recommended nurture groups to help reduce exclusions and as a way to improve attendance in secondary schools (Estyn 2007; 2014).

In Northern Ireland, as part of the Delivering Social Change Signature Projects, funding has been available since 2012 for 30+ nurture groups, thanks to the support from the Department of Education and the Department for Social Development. The Department for Education (2017) released guidance for schools running a nurture group and commissioned in 2015 an evaluation of nurture groups, carried out by Queen's University Belfast which found that:

> **Nurture group provision has a significant and large effect in improving social emotional and behavioural outcomes.**

Sloan et al. 2016

THE GRADUATED APPROACH

The Graduated Nurture Approach is the model nurture**uk** uses to map out the tiers of support we can provide to improve children and young people's social emotional wellbeing, ensuring that every child or young person gets the support they require to meet their needs.

Nurture groups sit near the top of the pyramid and provide targeted support for children and young people with significant SEBD/SEMH needs. They work best when embedded in a whole-school nurturing ethos, where all staff understand the role of the nurture group, and where pupils graduating from the nurture group return in a nurturing and supportive classroom environment.

The Boxall Profile allows schools to assess the SEBD/SEMH needs of children and young people and therefore underpins all the different nurture approaches. At the foundation of the graduated approach sits the universal screening of all children and young people using the Boxall Profile, to ensure that the needs of every pupil are identified and supported.

nurture**uk** GRADUATED NURTURE APPROACH

NG+
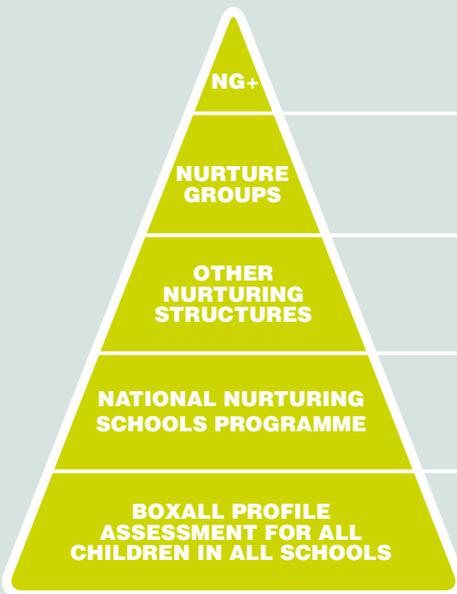
NURTURE GROUPS +
For the most damaged/vulnerable children and young people
Attachment interventions and therapies

NURTURE GROUPS

NURTURE GROUPS
For children and young people with significant social, emotional, behavioural and/or mental health needs
Boxall Nurture Group® (classic)

OTHER NURTURING STRUCTURES

OTHER NURTURING STRUCTURES
Where nurture groups are not feasible or needs are sub-threshold **Nurture ABC™, Mindfulness, After-school clubs, non-classic nurture groups**

NATIONAL NURTURING SCHOOLS PROGRAMME

NATIONAL NURTURING SCHOOLS PROGRAMME Nurturing approaches for all children and young people **Boxall Profile**™
assessment for all children, six principles embedded

BOXALL PROFILE ASSESSMENT FOR ALL CHILDREN IN ALL SCHOOLS

BOXALL PROFILE ASSESSMENT FOR ALL CHILDREN IN ALL SCHOOLS
Early identification of potential social, emotional, behavioural and/or mental health issues **School, Local Authority, Government prioritisation based on need**

A MESSAGE FROM KEVIN KIBBLE, CEO OF NURTUREUK

Sometimes children need extra support to help them with their learning, making friends and growing into confident and successful individuals. Nurture groups can help provide that support for children and parents to give them the skills they need to do well at school, and deal more confidently and calmly with the trials and tribulations of everyday life.

Most children start school with confidence and enthusiasm but not all. Some do not respond to teachers or teaching methods, leaving them disengaged from their surroundings. This can evidence itself in a child being withdrawn and inward-looking, or 'acting out', behaving aggressively to teachers, fellow pupils or others around them. These behaviour traits limit the child's ability to learn and may even reach the stage of exclusion from school, a damaging and emotionally charged experience for both child and parents.

The behaviour of these children also impacts adversely on others in the class, disrupting lessons and taking up a disproportionate share of the teacher's time and attention. Class morale suffers, learning is inhibited and standards and levels of attainment can fall.

In many cases this can be prevented. For more than 40 years nurture groups have demonstrated that, with the right help, support and resources applied, these children can be taught successfully, cost-effectively, and reintroduced to mainstream classrooms to continue their education with their peers. Nurture groups led by trained practitioners offer an effective intervention both in primary and secondary education (indicating that it is never too late). The nurture group solution has been shown to be effective in enabling emotionally vulnerable children to develop their skills and resilience to engage in, and benefit from, mainstream education.

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ABOUT NURTUREUK

Nurture**uk** is a registered charity working tirelessly to promote access to education for all. With increasing numbers of children and young people affected by social, emotional and behavioural difficulties inhibiting their progress and limiting their life chances, nurture**uk** has developed a range of interventions and support to give disadvantaged children and young people the opportunity to be the best they can be.

Whether it is delivering certified training, supporting whole school or authority-wide nurturing school approaches or promoting evidence-based research, nurture**uk** is providing quality support and resources to make nurturing provision a reality for pupils across the UK and beyond.

Visit our website for more information about nurture**uk**

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