

Introduction to nurtureuk

Nurture approaches are educational psychologist-designed and teacher-led methods and interventions designed to support a learner's social and emotional skills and wellbeing.

The Six Principles of Nurture[®], which underpin all our interventions and training are:

- Children's learning is understood developmentally
- The classroom offers a safe base
- The importance of nurture for the development of wellbeing
- Language is a vital means of communication
- All behaviour is communication
- The importance of transition in children's lives

Nurtureuk is the national charity supporting these approaches. We offer accredited training and consultancy services to support teachers alongside resources including the Boxall Profile Online[®], a tool to help teachers understand pupil's social and emotional needs.

As an organisation, we campaign for an inclusive education system and for teachers to be given the support they need to #AspireNotToExclude.

Exclusions in Wales

Although the rate of permanent exclusion in Wales remains low, it doubled from 2015/16 to 2016/17 from 0.2 to 0.4 per 1,000 pupils. Rates of fixed term exclusion increased in 2016/17 to 36.3 per 1,000 pupils, up from 31.6 in 2014/5 and 32.3 in 2015/16.

The rate of exclusion is three times higher for those entitled to free school meals (Welsh Government, October 2018, [Permanent and fixed-term exclusions from schools: September 2016 to August 2017](#)).

We believe exclusion from school compounds, rather than solves, the issues that lead to a pupil being excluded in the first place – issues such as undiagnosed and unmet underlying needs and adverse early experiences. We believe that early intervention can prevent such issues becoming embedded, reducing the number of exclusions and allowing all children to access an inclusive education.

Nurture in the UK

Nurture groups are the original nurture intervention, first developed in Hackney almost 50 years ago. Children identified by teachers as needing to access a nurture group have their social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs assessed using

the Boxall Profile to ensure appropriate support can be planned. A nurture group will comprise six to 12 children or young people supported by two trained adults. On average, they are provided five times a week for two to three hours per day per child and are the only intensive psychosocial intervention available full-time that allow students to remain a part of their mainstream class. Once in the group, a nurturing philosophy rooted in attachment theory is used to ensure that children are provided with the early nurturing experiences that are vital to prepare for learning. There is great emphasis on language development and communication. Nothing is taken for granted and everything is explained and supported by role modelling and demonstration. The relationship between the two staff, always nurturing and supportive, provides a role model that children observe and begin to copy. The average pupil will be able to return fully to their mainstream classes after two to four terms.

In a 2014 survey of 100 nurtureuk-accredited nurture groups, the majority of children were shown to 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 substance abuse exposure and maternal depression. 19% of students in primary school nurture groups and 42% in secondary school provisions have a diagnosed psychiatric disorder, most commonly ADHD. (Nurtureuk (2014) [Pilot Study Summary](https://www.nurtureuk.org/research-evidence/ngn-commissioned-research/pilot-study-summary): <https://www.nurtureuk.org/research-evidence/ngn-commissioned-research/pilot-study-summary>)

A growing policy and research literature notes the benefits of nurture programmes for learners, including improved academic attainment, behaviour and reduced exclusions.

A 2016 Queens University Belfast (QUB) evaluation of 30 Northern Ireland Department of Education-funded nurture groups: '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 (as measured by the SDQ total difficulties score), 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 found nurture groups to be cost effective and 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". The QUB research (Sloan et al, 2016, 'The Impact and Cost effectiveness of Nurture Groups in Primary Schools in Northern Ireland') also estimates the additional costs to families and educational and social services of children with antisocial behaviour as ranging from £5,960 to £15,282 per year and that "whilst it is important to treat these estimates with some caution, they do suggest that 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."

The [Timpson Review](#) into school exclusions in England found that nurture groups “can be an effective approach in reducing children’s social, emotional and behavioural difficulties while strengthening their academic performance” and recommended that “effective use of nurture groups and programmes” be supported by a new Practice Improvement Fund.

While nurture groups are the classic intervention, we also support whole-school approaches and the use of the **Boxall Profile Online®**, a unique tool which allows teachers to assess behaviour and social and emotional skills across multiple strands. This can then be used to inform, not only specific interventions for each child, but also the assessment of need across a whole class, which helps inform teaching and support strategies for all pupils.

We recommend a **whole-school nurture approach** that applies the Six Principles of Nurture, that have underpinned nurture groups for 50 years, across the school environment. Delivered alongside a graduated approach in a mainstream school, such as in the National Nurturing Schools Programme, and involving universal assessment of social, emotional and mental health needs, this approach ensures universal support for wellbeing as well as meaning that children with specific needs can then be identified and supported through more targeted interventions. Those with higher levels of need can then attend classic nurture groups and the most vulnerable can be supported with additional attachment-based interventions and therapies. In our experience, with the right commitment from school leadership, this is an approach that can dramatically reduce the number of pupils being excluded from school.

Estyn case studies note the benefits of nurture provision in this regard and recent case studies note an outcome effective nurture provision as being a reduction or even an absence of exclusions over a number of years at [Ysgol Maesincla](#), Caernarfon, [Somerton Primary School](#), Newport and [Ysgol Llwyn Yr Eos](#), Aberystwyth.

While nurture is often seen as a methodology for primary age pupils, nurture is an effective provision for secondary school pupils too. One Welsh high school nurture teacher told us in 2018 that: *“Nurture provision has had a massive impact on pupils at our school. Pupils who have attended the nurture groups have managed to significantly improve their social and emotional skills which has removed barriers to learning. The skills and experiences gained in nurture has enabled pupils to reach their potential and in many cases exceed previous expectations. In many cases pupils who were at risk of permanent exclusion or becoming school refusers have remained in school throughout Key Stage 4 and in some cases Key Stage 5.”*

Nurture and Alternative Provision

Nurtureuk believes that, where possible, children should be supported to access mainstream education with their peers. We note that Wales has a lower rate of exclusion than England but a higher rate of temporary exclusion than Scotland which has a rate of 26.8 per 1,000 pupils. and with nurture approaches and provisions such

as nurture groups having been shown to improve behaviour and reduce exclusions, more children and young people can remain part of their peer group, learning in school.

However, where there is a need for alternative provisions such as Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), we believe they should be run along nurture principles, and there are already some examples in Wales working to support their pupils through the National Nurturing School Programme.

We have broadly welcomed the new Welsh curriculum for noting the importance of wellbeing and its note of the importance of child-centred teaching practice. However, we share the concerns of the Children, Young People and Education Committee that the additional emphasis on social and emotional wellbeing is not yet matched by additional funding for schools. Ultimately, high-quality provision for social and emotional needs and wellbeing, particularly more intensive earlier interventions such as nurture groups, will require more funding.

The Boxall Profile Online® helps teachers in both mainstream and alternative settings to understand the social, emotional and mental health needs of pupils. The understanding this provides allows teachers to select appropriate interventions, whether at a targeted level or for a whole class in the event similar needs are present within large groups of pupils.

A graduated approach such as this reduces exclusions and facilitates early intervention while also allowing children to access support outside the classroom, including nurture groups or counselling or, when required, to access alternative provision off-site.

Outside of mainstream settings, there are many examples of alternative provision, including PRUs, that have adopted a whole-school nurturing approach in the UK. Traditionally, alternative provisions and pupil referral units have been intended to be tailored around the individual needs of each child far more than mainstream education. Given the tailored nature of education in these non-mainstream settings is supposed to take, tools like the Boxall Profile Online® are particularly useful in alternative provision and allow tracking of incremental progress and the effectiveness of teaching strategies.

We believe that the use of the Boxall Profile Online® in mainstream education and alternative provision is therefore mutually supportive, helping support continuity and transition between the two. In Wales, local authorities have an important role to play in supporting this continuity and in sharing best practice between schools.

While in-school nurture groups are the best evidenced nurture provision we recognise the value of nurture provided off-site, whether on a part-time basis or for a temporary period while a pupil remains formally on their mainstream school's roll. We are currently piloting a Nurture Hub project in Norfolk, which will provide classic nurture group provision alongside other interventions for children with social, emotional and mental health needs while they remain enrolled in their own school.

Conclusion

Nurture approaches have been proven to support children with social, emotional and mental health needs. Where these needs are complex, nurture approaches and tools like the Boxall Profile Online® help complement other interventions and can help gauge their effectiveness in supporting social and emotional wellbeing and development.

We believe that establishing continuity between alternative provision, (including PRUs) and mainstream schools is key to removing barriers to learning for children with SEMH, reducing the number of exclusions among children and young people in this group, and supports the potential to return to mainstream provision for these pupils. Common adoption of, and support for, the Six Principles of Nurture would support this. The new curriculum for Wales supports many of the principles behind nurtureuk's whole-school approach and we believe proper support for teachers to implement the new curriculum effectively will reduce the number of exclusions and also better support those children who are excluded.

The experience and research into nurture groups demonstrates that they are an effective form of early intervention to reduce exclusions. We believe nurture programmes are effective for pupils being educated outside mainstream settings after exclusions and that an excluded pupil, needs more, not less social and emotional support.