

This issue has a focus on nurture and the important part it can play in meeting the mental health needs of children and young people at this time. David Colley's article overleaf looks forward to the soon to be published research offering practical guidance for setting up successful secondary school nurture groups.



Nurture as a framework for post lockdown support

The 6 principles of nurture 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

The following links provide 3 examples of using these principles as a framework for post lockdown support:

- [Supporting post-lockdown education using the 6 principles of Nurture](#): An EP recommends this as an approach to meeting the needs of CYP on return to school in contrast to an attainment driven approach based on 'catch up'.
- [Applying nurture as a whole school approach: Covid-19](#): A self-evaluation tool for schools developed by Inverclyde Educational Psychology Service .
- [Supporting children post lockdown using the six principles of nurture](#): Using the 6 principles of nurture to support children in the Early Years.

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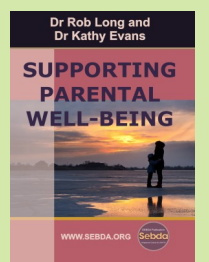
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Nurture Groups in Secondary Schools

Dr David Colley (Oxford Brookes University) and Dr Ruth Seymour (Mulberry Bush Organisation)

A nurture group is a form of educational provision that supports the social, emotional and mental health needs of pupils who do not yet have the skills to function constructively in the mainstream classroom environment. Developed by Marjorie Boxall in the 1970s (Boxall 2002), the nurture group philosophy understands that behaviours such as defiance, aggression, negativity or withdrawal are a communication of how the pupil perceives the world and their place in it. Rather than resort to punishment, suspension and exclusion, the nurture group provides a safe environment where trained staff prioritise the well-being and mental health of pupils above all else. In this way the nurture group allows students to catch up on essential social and emotional skills that are integral to achieving success in the secondary environment. The nurture group experience also enables pupils to build positive and safe relationships with adults in school that are internalised and carried through their secondary school experience.

The secondary school nurture group is typically located in a classroom on the mainstream school site and offers small groups of pupils a combination of socio-emotional and academic learning sessions at regular points in the week. The nurture group is staffed by two informed adults who have been trained in attachment theory, the principles of nurture and the Boxall Profile assessment instrument. Attachment theory and relationship building are at the heart of the nurture group approach and the formal, structured nurture sessions have a focus on early level interactions that are both positive and supportive.

Nurture groups have been central to a major initiative in Scotland since 2007 and Glasgow's 'Towards a Nurturing City' initiative has had a significant impact on both the outcomes for young people and the well-being of staff. For example, school exclusion has dropped a massive 74% since 2007 and staff attendance at work is up to 97% (Glasgow City Council 2018). In addition, research into secondary school nurture groups has been emanating from Scotland with extensive guidance on offer through Education Scotland (2017) and a number of research publications (Kourmoulaki 2014; Grantham and Primrose 2017) confirming the impact of nurture group support on socio-emotional functioning

The soon to be published research by Colley and Seymour (2021)* offers practical guidance to secondary schools wishing to set up a successful secondary school nurture group. The research paper reiterates the need for nurture groups to be located within schools that already have a whole school nurturing philosophy that is robustly led by the Head teacher and Senior Leadership Team. Where this is not the case, nurture groups will struggle to take root. A six month period of whole school preparation is recommended to allow mainstream staff to fully understand the purpose of the nurture group in the context of attachment theory, the six principles of nurture and assessment through the Boxall Profile. A range of operational features are articulated in the paper along with the challenges to anticipate and prepare for.

While the focus of the nurture group is on the development of socio-emotional functioning and cognitive development, it is also an important proactive intervention in the support of well-being and pupil mental health. In 2017, NHS England identified that 10.8% of children aged 5-16 years had a 'probable mental disorder' and this statistic has since risen to 16.0% (NHS digital 2021). As the pandemic continues to impact on provision across the country, now is the time for concerted investment in a range of mental health support structures that includes the evidence-based and dynamic support on offer from a successful secondary school nurture group.

*The research paper 'An evidence based guide to opening a successful secondary school nurture group' (Colley and Seymour) will be published in the International Journal for Nurture In Education Vol.7 in July 2021. This will be available for free download from <https://www.nurtureuk.org>

References

- Boxall, M. (2002). *Nurture Groups in School. Principles and Practice*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Education Scotland (2017). [Applying Nurture as a Whole School Approach](#)
- Glasgow City Council (2018) [Standards and Quality Report 2016-17](#) Glasgow. GCC.
- Grantham, R. & Primrose, F. (2017). Investigating the fidelity and effectiveness of Nurture Groups in the secondary school context. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 0(0), 1–18. .
- Kourmoulaki, A. (2013). Nurture Groups in a Scottish Secondary School: Purpose, Features, Value and Areas for Development. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 18(1), 60–76.
- NHS digital (2021) [Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2020: Wave 1 follow up to 2017 survey](#)