

Appendix B Background information on Nurture Rooms

This evidence is taken from the resource pack that accompanies the film.

What is a nurture group?

A nurture group is a small group of six to twelve children, whose origins started in mainstream primary school settings but are now located within a broad range of educational establishments and alternative settings. The children/young people spend part of each week in the group but remain on the register of their mainstream class and join in with planned activities. It is absolutely essential that all school staff understand the nurture group and how it works, in order to provide each child with the consistent and holistic support that they need, whilst also ensuring that nurture is part of a whole school approach. Full access to the curriculum is the ultimate aim where the barriers to learning can be eliminated or considerably reduced in order to maximise potential.

The Nurture Area

Nurture rooms are set up to be a bridge between home and school or nursery, where missed learning opportunities are addressed according to the individual profile of needs. Nurture rooms are warm and welcoming places, with time to play within a highly structured and planned learning environment. The room is divided up into different areas to facilitate varying purposes with time to sit down to eat which is core to the whole approach. Nurture rooms don't need to cost the earth to furnish, but it is important that the room is appropriately comforting and welcoming in order to provide a consistent, predictable and safe place for the children and young people.

Nurture Staff

Nurture staff work in twos, usually a teacher and teaching assistant. The importance of the relationship of these two staff cannot be understated. They model for the nurture children and young people a happy, healthy, adult relationship, and the interaction between teacher and teaching assistant, staff and children is invaluable in showing the children and young people what constitutes appropriate behaviours. Relationships and consistency of approach are core to the whole nurture group approach.

Nurture staff are extremely supportive and patient, working as a team to make the children feel accepted and valued. Great emphasis is put on getting the students to engage with class life, encouraging students to relate to each other, and on fostering good relationships between peers and adults. As the children become more self-confident, they begin to respond to teaching and learning which is both aimed at their level and hits target levels within the national curriculum.

Effective communication is vital for academic progress and social acceptance. Many nurture group students have difficulty with receptive and expressive language often just through the lack of appropriate experiences. They are often anxious about talking when they enter a nurture group, which further inhibits their ability to make personal progress on a social, emotional, behavioural or intellectual level. Using a range of strategies, including games and songs, staff engage students' attention and encourage them to want to listen and talk.

The approach has proved to be very successful, enabling one 6 year old girl who'd been electively mute to take the starring role as the Virgin Mary in her school nativity play, after just 3 months in the nurture group. A core principle of nurture groups is that all behaviour is communication and this aspect is fully addressed within the approach. Staff also listen carefully to students, and repeat and rephrase their articulations in order to broaden the vocabulary of the student as well as to enhance their understanding of their own emotions. If there are arguments within the group, staff encourages the students to use the opportunity for growth by discussing alternative coping strategies for similar situations in the future. The students grow in self-control and self-respect as they improve their ability to talk clearly and confidently be able to express their needs.

Food

The group share breakfast every morning with a formal routine, which provides a wealth of learning opportunities for children (letting others go first, turn taking, empathy, learning acceptable ways of behaving, expressing likes and dislikes, having everyday conversations, setting the table, serving each other and encouraging good manners as well as experiences of healthy foods, food preparation, language of Maths, foods from other countries etc).

Development & Outcomes

The evaluation evidence on the outcomes for children and young people is amazing across all age groups. Parents also often benefit from their child's participation in a nurture group. Although it can be very difficult to engage parents in school for a number of reasons, the nurturing and supportive attitude of the staff make them very approachable and non-threatening to parents. A no blame approach is always taken. Further, the huge leaps and bounds their children make in terms of progress mean that a lot of parents are excited about their child's education and, perhaps for the first time ever, feel empowered to assist in it.

What nurture groups achieve

Support vulnerable children and young people at risk of :

- Social exclusion
- Educational failure
- Antisocial and criminal behaviour
- Poor mental and physical health

Nurture Groups:

- Offer a short term, focussed intervention
- Benefit the whole school community
- Empower staff, pupils and parents
- Address legislative requirements
- Are non judgemental
- Intervene early, preventing later problems
- Raise attainment, attendance and self confidence
- Demonstrate through evaluations, clear benefits for the child, family and school