

# NURTURE PROVISION AT ST. WULSTAN'S

## Developing and Nurturing the Whole Child

As a Catholic School, living out the Gospel Values, at St. Wulstan's, we believe that it is our role and duty as educators to develop the whole child, academically and socially, to ensure that they have all the skills they need to reach their full potential.

We have many different groups for children to develop their social and emotional and behavioural skills which are led and run by a highly skilled Teaching Assistant.

Not all children are ready to meet the social and intellectual demands of school life. Children who arrive in the classroom from stressful or disrupted backgrounds are never going to flourish, unless they are given a safe place in school where they could develop and grow. Children's emotional well-being underpins their learning.

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, who famously said: "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."

## What do we mean by a Nurture Group?

A nurture group:

- is a small discrete class
- provides a safe and predictable structured environment
- gives children opportunities to revisit early missed 'nurturing' experiences

Staff model positive relationships and there is an emphasis on the development of language and communication skills and a focus on social, emotional and challenging behaviour. As well as developing curriculum-based skills, children are encouraged to celebrate their own progress with acquiring skills such as listening, sharing and turn-taking that will reduce or remove barriers to learning thus enabling success back in the mainstream classroom.

## The Principles of Nurture

Nurture groups are developed around six principles and must underpin daily practice:

### ***1)Children's learning is understood developmentally***

In nurture groups staff respond to children not in terms of arbitrary expectations about 'attainment levels' but in terms of the children's developmental progress assessed through SDQs, a structured framework for the observation of children's behavioural, social and cognitive engagement in classrooms. The response to the individual child is 'as they are', underpinned by a non-judgemental and accepting attitude.

### ***2)The classroom offers a safe base***

The nurture group room offers a balance of educational and domestic experiences aimed at supporting the development of the children's relationship with each other and with the

staff. Nurture groups are an educational provision making the important link between emotional containment and cognitive learning.

### ***3) Nurture is important for the development of self-esteem***

Nurture involves listening and responding. In a nurture group 'everything is verbalised' with an emphasis on the adults engaging with the children in reciprocal shared activities e.g. art and crafts/ playing games/ snack/talking about events and feelings. Children respond to being valued and thought about as individuals so in practice this involves noticing and praising small achievements; 'nothing is hurried in nurture groups'.

### ***4) Language is understood as a vital means of communication***

Language is more than a skill to be learnt, it is the way of putting feelings into words. Nurture group children often 'act out' their feelings as they lack the vocabulary to 'name' how they feel. In nurture groups, the informal opportunities for talking and sharing, e.g. welcoming the children into the group or having a drink and biscuit together are as important as the more formal lessons teaching language skills. Words are used instead of actions to express feelings and opportunities are created for extended conversations or encouraging imaginative play to understand the feelings of others.

### ***5) All behaviour is communication***

This principle underlies the adult response to the children's often challenging or difficult behaviour. 'Given what I know about this child and their development what is this child trying to tell me?' Understanding what a child is communicating through behaviour helps staff to respond in a firm but non-punitive way by not being provoked or discouraged. If the child can sense that their feelings are understood this can help to diffuse difficult situations. The adult makes the link between the external/internal worlds of the child.

### ***6) Transitions are significant in the lives of children***

The nurture group can help the child make the difficult transition from home to school. However, on a daily basis there are numerous transitions the child makes, e.g. between sessions and classes and between different adults. Changes in routine are invariably difficult for vulnerable children and need to be carefully managed with preparation and support.

Adapted from Nurture Group Network, online at  
[http://www.nurturegroups.org/pages/the\\_six\\_principles.html](http://www.nurturegroups.org/pages/the_six_principles.html)

## **Nurture Provision Experience**

The objectives of our nurture provision are:

- to achieve stability with behaviour and attitudes to learning
- to significantly reduce the impact of key learners' behaviour on others within the school and beyond (family life)
- 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

## **Running a Nurture Group**

## Resources – What do you need?

### 1. *Good, well trained staff.*

We are confident that our staff:

- have the respect of other staff members and parents
  - have the essential personality qualities of perseverance and humour
  - create effective learning environments
  - secure motivation and concentration
  - set realistic demands and state them explicitly
  - use positive behaviour management
  - teach pupils to value and respect the contributions of others
  - have the support from mainstream staff for the school for planning
2. **A room where there is equipment and materials** that help to provide learning opportunities for emotional and behavioural growth set in a curriculum working area:
- a work table
  - soft seating in an area of the room where informal activities can take place
  - food preparation and sharing area
  - play resources
  - a mirror
  - access to age and developmentally appropriate curriculum resources
3. **Systems in place to run the group effectively:**
- careful selection of the children
  - monitor progress
  - assessment, planning and IEPs

## Selecting the children

Children who benefit from nurture group intervention are unable to regulate their responses to stress and anxiety and get easily frustrated. They find it difficult to:

- trust adults and build relationships
- share resources and the attention of adults and other pupils
- ask for help
- have a feeling of self-worth
- explore the world around them
- attempt new things confidently without fearing failure

## Points to consider

- 1) Involving all staff so the whole school community knows how and why some pupils need additional support to cope with school
- 2) Sharing information whilst protecting confidentiality
- 3) Knowledge of the pupil and family/carer background

- 4) A portfolio of observations, checklists and assessments evidencing suitability for inclusion in the nurture group

The balance within the group is really important so think about:

- the number of girls and boys
- the age range
- the mix of pupils who are acting out and those who are withdrawn

### **Key Assessment Tool**

#### **Goodman's Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire**

Conduct problems, emotional symptoms, hyperactivity, peer problems and pro-social behaviour are assessed over the previous six months. Used as a pre entry assessment tool, as well as to monitor progress throughout the time in the nurture group.

#### **Promoting a whole school approach to nurture**

Research has shown that the effectiveness of nurture groups is linked to a whole school approach to nurture. This means that schools are likely to get the best out of nurture groups:

- when the school as a whole community is committed to maximising the social and educational engagement of all
- essential that the principles underpinning nurture work are accepted and its complex and demanding nature is understood by all the staff members and others concerned with the school
- when nurture groups are fully integrated into mainstream schools and local authority policies and structures
- creating meaningful actions to facilitate a more 'nurturing' environment throughout the school through teacher interaction and communication and exchange of good practice
- when nurture groups are positively contributing and affecting whole school culture and practices, facilitating a more 'nurturing' environment throughout the school

### **Evaluation**

- record the following: attendance levels; punctuality; number of exclusions; assessment information and value added results; changes in behaviour; attitude; function; attainment; and social skills of the pupils
- collect feedback from teachers
- record changes in behaviour; attitude; function; attainment; social skills of the pupils; attendance levels; exclusion rates; assessment information and value added results
- look for positive effects on the whole school
- record data on time spent in the nurture group

### **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:

- Improved learning skills, including language and literacy
- Improved behaviour and social skills
- Positive attachments to the school and staff
- Identification of issues that may require early intervention, for example by CAMHS or the educational psychologist
- Better self-esteem, confidence and self-worth
- Improved attendance
- Pupil progress demonstrated through curriculum planning and assessment, using SDQs and the national curriculum

### ***Further information***

<https://nurturegroups.org/>

<https://boxallprofile.org/>

## **What does provision at St. Wulstan's look like?**

Small groups of up to six children, offering short-term focused intervention which addresses barriers to learning caused by social or emotional difficulties. Children will remain part of their own class group and usually return to their own class full-time after a maximum of four terms.

There is a warm, structured environment where children are encouraged to build their confidence and learn good behaviour. Drinks and biscuits are provided as an afternoon snack. Children get plenty of chances to play, as well as clear rules, and coaching in basic social skills such as how to share and have a conversation. Praise and encouragement are constant.

### **Making Friends**

This weekly group focuses on developing positive relationship with peers, positive behaviours, good choices and positive outcomes.

### **Happy to be Me**

Happy to be Me is a weekly group that builds self-esteem. It develops children's communication, social and sharing skills, developing positive relationships and images of themselves.

### **There's no 'I' in Team**

Children work on skills that enable them to become good listeners listening to hear not to respond. They work together on tasks, talking about themselves in a positive manner, responding to each other, taking turns and sharing.

### **Lego Therapy**

Lego Therapy is a social skills group that we are running. It uses Lego and is run in groups of 3 to 4 children. In each group there is a 'builder', 'supplier' and 'engineer'. Children work together to build a Lego model, each taking an important role in its construction. Emphasis is placed on promoting positive social behaviour through interaction and collaboration.

*All these groups are flexible and run for short periods of time. Staff in class will identify children they believe would benefit from the groups and liaise with our SENDCo and*

*Teaching Assistant who runs the groups. There is discussion between staff throughout to ensure children are benefiting and skills learnt are developed in all aspects in school life. We have found that because of these groups, children are 'ready to learn' as they are able to manage feelings, emotions and behaviour. They really are a success of our school!*