

Nurturing Schools

Issue

Nurturing Schools, where the principles of Nurture are embedded in every educational establishment in Scotland, must be part of a strategic national plan to Get it Right for Every Child.

Headline position

AHDS believes there should be a sufficiently resourced national plan to ensure equity in meeting the social and emotional needs of Scotland's children.

Full position

The following extract from the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 makes clear what GIRFEC seeks to deliver:

“Section 1.1.3 - GIRFEC

- puts the best interests of the child or young person at the heart of decision making;
- takes a holistic approach to the wellbeing of a child;
- builds on strengths and capacities of children, young people and their families to improve wellbeing;
- advocates preventative work and early intervention to support children, young people and their families, and, wherever possible to reduce the need for statutory interventions; and
- builds on developing strong universal services with additional services brought in where required to meet the needs of children, young people and families”

Many Local Authorities have developed their approaches to removing barriers to learning within Nurture groups and rooms.

The AHDS believes that Nurturing principles should be embedded in all establishments across sectors in order that

- early intervention strategies ensure all children have positive outcomes.
- Establishments continue to build strong productive relationships with families and other agencies
- planning around individual children should address the child's wellbeing needs.

In ensuring Nurturing approaches across all establishments local Authorities must effectively resource establishments to provide

- Career Long Professional Learning
- Effective staffing
- Nurturing Environments

Furthermore to ensure equity targets interventions in Nurture Groups/rooms are essential.

More information on the function of Nurture Groups can be found in the AHDS good practice guide (attached as an Annex).

Nurture Groups – A Good Practice Guide

Nurture Groups were first set up in Hackney in London by Sylvia Lucas in the late 1960s.

In their classic form, nurture groups are classes of between 6 and 12 pupils which are set up in a mainstream school in a designated nurture classroom.

The nurture class approach has become an important early intervention strategy which is fully in keeping with all legislative requirements.

The target group for inclusion in the nurture classes are vulnerable children who risk failure at school if their barriers to learning remain unchallenged.

The nurture class should consist of a fulltime teacher and a full time support assistant, both of whom should be trained in the Nurture philosophy and assessment tools like BIOS, strengths and difficulties analysis and Boxhall profiles. Appropriate accommodation should also be provided.

An emphasis should be placed on valuing each child and responding to them at the emotionally developmental stage each has reached.

Originally the nurture classes were introduced into the early stages of the primary school although more recently the nurture class model has been adopted in secondary schools by some authorities.

Nurture class pupils maintain a strong link with their 'base' class and teacher and generally register there first thing mornings and afternoons and return for curricular areas like expressive arts.

The repeated and consistent routines of the nurture class provide a safe base for its pupils and Nurture class staff work hard to develop the self-esteem and interaction of the children there. The small pupil to teacher ratio generally ensures that progress in both language and number is speedier than the peers of the pupils in the base class.

Since their introduction nurture classes have provided a proven and effective learning environment for pupils who experience social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and although the Nurture class approach is a short term, focused intervention strategy results of relevant research show its effects are long term and lasting.

The length of time for a pupil in the Nurture class varies although the maximum amount should be around six terms or eighteen months.

Glasgow City Council has firmly embraced the Nurture class philosophy and has fully funded the establishment of 58 Nurture classes across the city in its 29 Learning Communities.

Findings from Glasgow totally endorse the Nurture class approach as an extremely effective strategy to identify and address special educational needs in pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

In Glasgow significant improvements were found in Nurture pupils in:

- improved behaviour
- improvements in social and emotional wellbeing
- improved attendance and punctuality
- improved academic attainment, particularly in basic literacy skills

In addition, not only do pupils in the Nurture class improve but considerable improvements are found in the academic gains of the classes where the children were removed for part of the day.

Parents of the Nurture class pupils gave more positive responses of their children who had spent some time in the Nurture class.

School staff are very excited and impressed by the positive addition to the ethos of the school and has helped to foster and promote the notion of the nurturing school.

The Nurture class philosophy leads naturally to the impact of a Curriculum for Excellence and its outcomes for early years. This provides an ideal opportunity for investigation into whether making Primary 1 curriculum less formal and forging more of a bridge between pre 5 and early primary has a positive impact on children.

In addition, consideration should be given to piloting Nurture class principles and practice to support transition from primary to secondary, ensuring our most vulnerable young people are included and supported at this stage.

For more information on nurture groups you can contact – www.nurturegroups.org