



# Nurture Policy

Ratified: September 2024

To be Reviewed: September 2026

## Background

Taughmonagh Primary School was identified in 2013 as one of 20 schools where nurture units should be established through the Delivering Social Change (DSC) Signature Project. In June 2013 the Department of Education issued guidelines to the 20 schools. The guidelines were developed by a Regional Steering Group comprising representatives from DE and the (then) Education and Library Boards, providing information and advice on setting up a new nurture unit and the planning and practice of nurture provision. All new nurture units were expected to follow the guidelines to ensure a consistent approach was adopted, which was of particular importance for the purposes of evaluation of the Nurture Project.

The guidelines were updated in May 2024 to reaffirm the principles of nurture and a nurturing school and to share recognised good practice. It is expected that all schools receiving funding from the Department of Education for a nurture group follow this guidance. The Department does however recognise that certain situations and individual circumstances may require the nurture teacher to adopt a flexible approach on a daily basis to meet the needs of individual children attending the nurture group who are presenting with complex needs or circumstances.

## Purpose of Nurture Group (Sunshine Room) Provision

At Taughmonagh Primary School the Nurture Room (Sunshine Room) offers a short term, focused, early intervention strategy, which addresses barriers to learning arising primarily from social, emotional, behavioural or wellbeing difficulties, in an inclusive and supportive manner. Central to the philosophy of nurture is the theory of attachment, and the need for a child to be able to form secure and happy relationships with others in the formative years of their lives. The nurture group provides an opportunity for a child to revisit early nurturing experiences.

The main purpose of nurture provision is:

- To provide a flexible and preventative resource that is responsive to the particular needs of each child.
- To provide ongoing assessment and support for children showing signs of emotional stress and behavioural difficulties with the aim of enabling the child to access the curriculum and return to full participation in their mainstream class.
- To provide a secure and predictable small class 'setting' where children can learn by re-experiencing pre-school nurture from two caring adults who actively work towards enabling their successful integration into their mainstream class.
- To help the children to learn to behave appropriately, use their curiosity constructively, improve their self-esteem and develop confidence, through forming close and trusting relationships with adults.
- To work in partnership with class teacher(s), parents, school staff and other Education Authority services to enable consistency of approach both at home and at school.

## **Conditions of Funding for a Nurture Group**

It is a mandatory requirement for funding that Taughmonagh Primary School will operate a nurture group on the following basis:

- ✓ The nurture room will be staffed with one full-time nurture teacher and a full-time nurture classroom assistant.
- ✓ Both staff should have completed training on the Theory and Practice of Nurture Groups and have received or be working towards the Nurture Group Network training accreditation.
- ✓ The nurture room will operate full time, offering short or medium term placement usually between one and four school terms depending on the assessed needs of each child.
- ✓

## Selection of Children

Nurture group support is appropriate for children who are experiencing significant social, emotional and behavioural and well being difficulties in school, arising from attachment difficulties in early childhood. Indicators of such difficulties may include:

- ✓ Children, who are very restless, cannot listen, behave impulsively or aggressively.
- ✓ Children who are withdrawn and unresponsive and who have difficulty forming friendships or relating to others.
- ✓ Children whose known early or recent history suggests that they may be at risk due to Adverse Childhood Experiences.

All children will be selected to attend the nurture group based on their scores following the completion of the Boxall Profile.

- ✓ Class teacher/SENCO express concerns about how a child is presenting in class
- ✓ Initial observations and/or assessments undertaken by the class teacher, SENCO and/or trained nurture group teacher.
- ✓ Use of the Goodman's Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) as an initial screening questionnaire to identify children who require more indepth assessment through the Boxall Profile.
- ✓ Nurture practitioner and class teacher complete Boxall Profile
- ✓ After the Boxall Profile has been completed, and when deciding which children would benefit most from the nurture group, the balance of the needs within the group should be carefully considered at all times, particularly:
  - the number of girls and boys;
  - the age range;
  - the mix of pupils who are “acting out” and those who are withdrawn,
  - the number of Looked After Children.
- ✓ The recommended number of children attending the nurture room full time should normally be between five to seven, from Years 1 to 4 year groups.
- ✓ Nurture support is normally appropriate for children who are at Stage 1 or 2 of the Special Educational Needs register.
- ✓ Assessment by an Educational Psychologist is not a pre-requisite for admission but it is recommended that consultation and discussion with the schools named Educational Psychologist should take place, where appropriate.

## **Nurture Practice**

The Nurture Group Network define the six principles of nurture as:

1. Children's learning is understood developmentally.
2. The classroom offers a safe base.
3. The importance of nurture for the development of self-esteem.
4. Language is a vital means of communication.
5. All behaviour is communication.
6. Transitions are significant in the lives of children.

(Ref: Lucas,S., Insley,K. and Buckland,G. (2006) Nurture Group Principles and Curriculum Guidelines Helping Children to Achieve, The Nurture Group Network).

All approaches and interventions with children should clearly reflect the nurture principles.

The routine of the nurture room should be structured and predictable with a regular pattern to the day. This should include eating together, formal work, story time, play etc with activities clearly planned to reflect each child's individual needs.

Children selected to attend the nurture group should continue to be on the register for their mainstream class and join with them for appropriate activities, to ensure that regular contact is maintained, and to avoid isolation from their peers. Common practice includes integration with the mainstream class first thing in the morning (for around 20-30 minutes) and the last period of the day, along with joining the mainstream class for group activities such as PE, assemblies, trips etc, as determined by both the class teacher and the nurture group teacher.

## **Monitoring and Review of Pupils Progress**

Arrangements should be in place for systematic monitoring of each pupil's progress in the nurture group, through the use of the Boxall Profile, on a termly basis and each child should be monitored for a period after reintegration with the mainstream class with appropriate records kept.

For further tracking and monitoring purposes a register should be maintained within the school of all children who have attended the nurture group including UPRN, age, length of time in the nurture group, Boxall entry and exit scores etc. Schools may also choose to continue to complete a Boxall Profile periodically as the child moves through the school for longer term analysis of the child's progress.

There should be appropriate involvement of Educational Psychologists and any other professional services as required

Formal review with parents should take place on a regular basis.

## **Inclusion and Reintegration Process**

### **Broad principles**

The main aim of nurture group support is for the child to move towards full reintegration and independent learning within the mainstream classroom, therefore from the outset all children in the nurture group are expected to experience a level of regular inclusion with their mainstream class, often at registration in the morning.

### **Integration Pathway**

During the initial period in the nurture group the focus will be on maximising engagement with the nurturing process and building relationships within the nurturing environment. While children will normally complete a minimum of one or two terms in the nurture group, planning for reintegration should not be unnecessarily delayed. Consideration should be given to formulating an inclusion and reintegration plan (IRP) while being mindful that the pace of inclusion and reintegration will be influenced by each child's progress in the nurture group as assessed by the Boxall Profile and their engagement with learning in the mainstream class.

### **Readiness Indicators for Inclusion and reintegration**

It is important to move with small steps and at the child's pace. Children's progress is monitored via the Boxall Profile therefore this should be the main indicator of the child's readiness for reintegration, although other factors will be considered by the nurture staff. For example, some nurture teachers have found the Reintegration Readiness Scale<sup>1</sup> an effective tool that can be used alongside the Boxall Profile to help provide a full and balanced picture of a child's individual progress towards reintegration as well as their overall developmental progress.

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Nurture Steering Group**

A Steering Group will oversee the delivery of the nurture group, and deal with strategic planning in relation to the policy of the nurture group including staffing and finance.

Members of the Steering Group should include:

Principal.

SENCO.

Nurture Group Teacher.

Nurture Group Assistant

NASS Locality Officer

Advisory Officer from  
Child Looked After  
Team (where  
appropriate)

Designated Child Protection teacher

Educational Psychologist (if available)

The Steering Group meet three times a year ideally for selection, review and integration meetings. They should review progress and contribute to forward planning. For the steering groups to be most effective, the members should where possible remain constant and attend each meeting in order to fully support the work of the nurture group

- ✓ The Department of Education requirements for funding are satisfied, and remain so.
- ✓ A nurturing ethos is embraced throughout the whole school through promoting the benefits of a nurturing school, including the nurture group, for the whole school community.
- ✓ The nurture group staff are fully supported in their role to deliver nurture group provision
- ✓ The roles and responsibilities of the mainstream class teachers of children attending the nurture group are clearly understood.
- ✓ The role of the nurture group staff within the school's child protection policy is clearly understood, with clear communication pathways established with the school's designated child protection team.
- ✓ Nurture group provision is reflected in the school development plan.
- ✓ The Staff and Board of Governors understand the purpose of the nurture group and agree to support it.
- ✓ Capacity Development is supported for all staff across the school focussing on the nurturing principles and approaches, with a shared understanding of a nurturing school environment.
- ✓ There is an increased emphasis on shared responsibility and working together to foster the social and emotional development of all children in the school, acknowledging and facilitating contributions made by all relevant professionals, including the nurture staff.
- ✓ The Principal will be responsible for dealing with any complaints that may arise from parents concerning the nurture group, within the normal school complaints policy

## Nurture Group teacher

The nurture group teacher is responsible for the day-to-day management of the class, ensuring that the nurture principles are maintained through consistent practice and approach. The teacher's responsibilities include:

- ✓ Ensuring that the nurture group operates within the Regional Nurture Group Guidelines, and all other school policies including the Child Protection/Safeguarding Policy.
- ✓ To work closely with the nurture group classroom assistant to plan the curriculum and personal/social development programmes for the children.
- ✓ To organise and plan the activities of the classroom, ensuring that activities and approaches reflect the individual needs of each child.
- ✓ To keep regular records of observations for each child, recording his/her progress and intended programmes of work.
- ✓ To monitor and evaluate each child's progress.
- ✓ To actively work in partnership with parents to support the development of their children.
- ✓ To liaise closely with the child's class teacher, and ensure there is careful joint planning. This will help the nurture child to automatically feel included on his/her return to the mainstream class, as the class and the nurture child will cover the same themes/topics but at their individual level. This approach will also facilitate effective reintegration of the nurture child when the time is right. To help ensure there is a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the nurture staff and the main class teacher, a "contract" can be agreed which provides clarity of their respective roles.
- ✓ To observe children in less structured sessions for example, the mainstream classroom, playground and at lunchtimes, and assist with successful inclusion.
- ✓ To participate in INSET and joint planning with the class teacher and school SENCO in relation to Education Plans.
- ✓ To prepare information on individual children in order to inform any meetings with other professionals involved.
- ✓ To ensure provision and maintenance of suitable resources/materials in the nurture room.  
To provide progress reports to the school Steering Group.  
To provide progress reports to their local EA Nurture Advisor

Non-contact time should be available (a minimum of half a day per week) for the nurture group teacher to:

- Meet with parents.
- Attend case conferences, where appropriate.
- Keep detailed assessment records.
- Carry out in-class observations.
- Meet with appropriate EA officers and external agencies as required.
- Liaise with the school's SENCO and other staff - including supporting the school capacity building and sharing nurture principles.
- Continue their own professional development through attendance at relevant courses and keeping up to date with relevant research.
- Participate in regular monitoring/review meetings with the Nurture Steering Group.
- Participate in training or cluster support sessions facilitated by the Education Authority.

## **Nurture Group Classroom Assistant**

The nurture group classroom assistant should be employed in the nurture group full-time working closely under the direction of the nurture group teacher, with both modelling good adult relationships and interactions. The role includes:

- ✓ Assist in delivering nurture provision in line with the Regional Nurture Group Guidelines, and all other school policies including the Child Protection/Safeguarding Policy;
- ✓ Assist and support the planning of the Curriculum and personal/social development programmes for the children;
- ✓ Contribute to child observation and record keeping;
- ✓ Observe children in less structured sessions eg the mainstream classroom, playground and at lunchtimes, and assist with successful inclusion
- ✓ Support the nurture teacher to establish relationships and work with parents;  
Attend nurture cluster support meetings;
- ✓ Attend Nurture Steering Group meetings
- ✓ Participate in INSET as required
- ✓ Continue their own professional development through attendance at relevant courses and keeping up to date with relevant research.

## **School SENCO**

The role of the school SENCO in relation to nurture group provision is:

- ✓ To be involved with the class teacher and the nurture group teacher in the identification and assessment of children for the nurture group.
- ✓ To liaise with the nurture group teacher and class teacher - this will include supporting the development and implementation of IEPs.
- ✓ To be involved in reviews in line with the Special Needs Code of Practice.
- ✓ To be a member of the school's nurture Steering Group

## **Involving Parents and Carers**

Working in partnership with parents and carers is an important element of nurture provision. At the outset, parental consent is required for a child to attend a nurture group. Early discussion with parents by the mainstream teacher can help explain the purpose of nurture and how it may help to support the child. Once consent has been given and the child attends the nurture room, parents and carers are informed and involved with the group. They are invited to join in nurture group activities and their feedback gathered, but with the proviso that care needs to be taken to maintain a stable and predictable environment for the nurture group children, therefore parental invitations and activities are carefully managed. Where joint parent and child days are organised, thought is given to the impact of an absent parent or carer on a nurture group child.

Parents/carers have opportunities to gain awareness and understanding of how they can help to support their child and reinforce their social and emotional development and learning at home. Flexibility and sensitivity is required for some parents or carers depending on their own individual circumstances or family needs.

Examples of good practice include:

- ✓ Inviting parents to join an activity with the nurture group, such as a birthday breakfast, stay and play sessions, a nurture group outing, picnics, creative arts, storytelling, reading etc.
- ✓ Providing materials for parents to read about nurture group activities and their child's progress.
- ✓ Providing parents with follow-up home activities that reflect what has been delivered within the nurture group setting.
- ✓ Communication of photos, progress updates via seesaw with parents/carers
- ✓ Where a child is a Looked After Child, the nurture teacher will need to liaise with the Designated Teacher for Child Protection and child's social worker for approval to involve a parent and/or foster carer where this is considered appropriate.

## **Dealing with nurture staff absence**

As the success of the nurture group will depend on the stability and routine it provides for the children, the nurture group teacher and classroom assistant should not be expected to cover for other absent staff within the school. Likewise the school principal will need to be mindful of the need for continuity when appointing the nurture group staff.

In the event of the short term absence of one of the nurture group staff, the group may not be able to function, however in this case children should be supported in their mainstream class where possible.

There is at least one teacher trained to act as a “back up” nurture group teacher in the event of a longer term absence.

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

Nurture Groups are a whole school early intervention strategy for preventing under achievement therefore for the successful development of a nurturing school, there is a whole school commitment to the nurturing principles being part of the normal mainstream practice. All school staff have received awareness training of the principles and practice underpinning a nurturing approach in school. This will help ensure that the nurturing ethos is embedded within the school and that all staff offer consistent expectations and behaviours across all school areas, including the playground and canteen.

As a part of whole school training and development, nurture group teachers have participated in INSET days through the delivery of training on the nurture group approach, with nurture group strategies shared throughout the school. Staff have received training in the whole class /group interventions Nurture in 5, Connect and Nurture and Theraplay based activities. Opportunities for other teachers to attend the nurture room for short sessions can be facilitated to gain first-hand experience of the routine of the nurture room and the strategies adopted to support the children's development.

Opportunities are taken to utilise the nurture room for the benefit of other pupils, for example by use of the nurture room in the afternoons for activities or programmes. Arrangements can also be made to invite peers from the mainstream classes to join with the nurture group children for playtime/snack thus reinforcing inclusivity and connections with other pupils.

Interruptions to the nurture group should be kept to a minimum to prevent disruption to the children and their routine. While visitors to the nurture classroom will be welcomed (and can aid the children's social development) this should be by prior arrangement with the nurture staff to ensure that the children are informed and prepared for any visits taking place.

## **Monitoring and Review of Provision**

In line with the Regional Guidelines, the School Steering Group will monitor and review the nurture group as part of its ongoing monitoring responsibility. It will ensure that the Guidelines are followed and that the agreed criteria are met.

There is regular liaison between the nurture group teacher, the school Principal, the EA Support Officer and other professionals as appropriate.

Monitoring reports are provided by the nurture group teacher to the Education Authority as and when required.

