



# Every child able to learn

Recommendations for  
the next Government



# A chance for change

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*"I truly believe that nurture has been instrumental in our success here at Norbury Manor Primary School. By creating a safe and welcoming environment for all of our students, we are able to foster a culture of learning and growth that will serve them well throughout their lives."*

**Headteacher Sonia Potter**

The next government has a golden opportunity to ensure children can truly flourish at school and in life.

Across the UK, nurture practice is ensuring thousands of children are ready and able to learn and achieve their potential. A new government has the power to give this chance to every child.

We know that happy children learn better. And we also know that children and young people are struggling with their mental health and wellbeing like never before.

If we want our young people to thrive, we must put support for children's social, emotional and mental health firmly at the top of the agenda – recognising its vital role in achieving academic success and developing essential life skills.

We must also create inclusive school environments where children and young people feel genuinely safe, supported and able to learn – and teachers need the right tools and support to achieve this.



# A different way

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The growing teacher recruitment and retention crisis is testament to the challenges currently faced by pupils and education professionals.

But **nurture** is already making a difference in thousands of schools across the UK, helping children and young people to flourish, and teachers to improve attendance, behaviour and attainment, and exclusions.

This relational approach to education builds up children's resilience, social and emotional skills, and self esteem.

It helps children build strong attachments to school, and makes the classroom a place they really want to be. It has also been shown to have a positive impact on staff wellbeing and retention.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent cost of living crisis have highlighted and exacerbated many of the challenges facing our education system. Nurture is a key part of the solution to some of these issues, but it is also a cost-effective approach that works in all circumstances, for all children.

The cost of exclusion is around £370,000 per young person in lifetime education, benefits, healthcare and criminal justice costs.<sup>1</sup> And the average cost of providing a place at a pupil referral unit (PRU) is more than three or four times the cost of a school place.<sup>2</sup> Effective nurture provision presents direct savings to the education system by ensuring children are settled in school and engaged in their learning.

*"Our attendance is where it's never been before and our exclusions are lower than they've ever been. I feel we're much richer and stronger as a school as a consequence of nurture. I've got numerous pupils who have not been excluded because nurture has changed how we meet their needs. They stay in mainstream, we are managing them and they are managing themselves."*

**Neil Hutchins, Assistant Headteacher at Heathcote School and Science College in London.**



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1 IPR [Making the Difference](#) (2017)

2 Children's Commissioner [Five things you need to know about exclusions](#) (2018)

# The Six Principles of Nurture



## Safety

The classroom offers a safe base



## Wellbeing

The importance of nurture for the development of wellbeing



## Language

Language is a vital means of communication



## Behaviour

All behaviour is communication



## Learning

Children's learning is understood developmentally



## Transitions

The importance of transitions in children's lives

# How we know nurture works

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## The evidence so far

A 2024 evaluation survey of schools on the three-year Nurturing Kent Programme, which is running across 300 mainstream primary and secondary schools across the county, found that:

- 100% of schools would recommend the nurturing approach to other schools.
- 86.4% of schools had noticed a positive change in student behaviour since implementing the nurturing approach.
- 85% of schools agreed that or strongly agreed that they have seen a positive impact on SEMH and wellbeing in their settings across the whole school as a result of the programme.
- 79% of schools agreed or strongly agreed that they had seen an improvement in the engagement and learning of children and young people with SEND needs in their setting.

Northern Ireland's Department of Education has facilitated the use of nurture groups across the country and currently funds 62 groups in primary schools."<sup>1</sup>

A report on these groups by Queen's University Belfast's Centre for Science and Innovation has found that teachers "felt that they could see clear improvements in the children in relation to punctuality, increased attendance and significant reductions in social, emotional and behavioural difficulties."<sup>2</sup>

Further, an [evaluation of Nurture Group provision in Northern Ireland](#), carried out in 2020, found there is clear and consistent evidence of improvements in social, emotional and behavioural outcomes for children attending nurture groups compared to those who don't.

In Glasgow, four nurture groups were opened in 2001, and provision then expanded rapidly. Between 2006 and 2017, there was a 71% reduction in exclusion, and "many other improvements, such as the staying on at school rate, higher attendance, teacher absence, attainment overall, and specifically for looked after young people."

A 2017 Glasgow psychology services report, on [Glasgow's nurturing city](#), found that "nurture has been a substantial part of a success story in education in the city which can point to a clear reduction in pupil exclusions, an increase in attendance and a dramatic improvement in Glasgow establishments' capacity to hold on to the most vulnerable young people."<sup>3</sup>

The 2019 Department for Education-commissioned *Timpson Review of School Exclusion* found that "done well, as I have seen during this review, [nurture groups] can be an effective approach in reducing children's social, emotional and behavioural difficulties while strengthening their academic performance."

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1 Education Authority, '[Nurture Advisory & Support Service \(Nass\)](#)' (27/06/22)

2 Sloan, S., Winter, K., Lynn, F., Gildea, A. & Connolly, P. (2016), '[The impact and cost effectiveness of Nurture Groups in Primary Schools in Northern Ireland](#). Belfast: Centre for Evidence and Social Innovation,' Queen's University Belfast.

3 Kearney, M., March, S., '[A psychological service contribution to nurture: Glasgow's nurturing city](#)' (2017).

# Our plan for change

When nurture is done well, the effect is transformative. We want the next government to commit to making nurture the norm in school in order to set our children, and our society, up for success. We look forward to working with them to achieve our four-step plan.

## Assess

1

It's vital that each child's specific wellbeing and behaviour needs are understood. When teachers are empowered with this knowledge, real change can be delivered in the classroom, and learners with more complex needs requiring additional support can be identified.

- All schools should be required, and properly supported, to regularly assess all children's SEMH needs in order to track progress and better tailor support. (eg via use of the Boxall Profile® Online - the most popular tool being used in schools).
- As part of school inspections, Government should require that settings be assessed on the extent to which they have an accurate understanding of their pupils' SEMH needs and the efforts they make to meet them.

## Explain

2

Teacher training must include evidence on the link between improved pupil wellbeing and better educational outcomes, and the need to identify and address unmet SEMH needs at an early stage. It is also important for the government to facilitate the continued understanding of the importance of whole school cultures that prioritise wellbeing.

- Government attendance guidance should:
  - be clear about the vital role played by whole school cultures that prioritise wellbeing,
  - specify that adults supporting pupils with poor attendance must refer to a child's personal SEMH assessment to understand barriers and identify appropriate and child-centred strategies to help improve their attendance.
- Training on the link between improved pupil wellbeing and better educational outcomes, and the need for early identification of unmet SEMH needs, should be mandatory during initial teacher training and integrated into the Early Career Framework, National Professional Qualifications and any future training entitlement.



# Our plan for change

## Support

3

The academic evidence, and feedback from teachers, parents and pupils tells us that using nurture principles and practice in schools leads to a step change in wellbeing and behaviour, removing barriers to learning and enabling children to flourish in school.

- All schools should use nurture practice (defined by adhering to The Six Principles of Nurture) to support pupils' wellbeing and behaviour in schools.
- All wraparound care provided by schools (eg breakfast and after school clubs) should be nurturing provision - children's SEMH needs must be considered both inside and outside of the classroom.

## Research

4

Research to date on nurture interventions shows very positive results and teachers from across the country have used nurture to bring about vital improvements in pupils' wellbeing, behaviour, attendance and attainment.

Additional, wider-scale research on the difference nurture makes will help to ensure evidence-based policy making.

- Further research and evaluation should be commissioned to expand and deepen our knowledge of the impact nurture makes on pupil wellbeing, behaviour, attendance and reduced exclusions.





We exist to improve children and young people's social, emotional and mental health and wellbeing.

We believe every child should be able to learn.



For more information

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