

Nurture Groups

What is it?

Nurture groups have an evidence-base in practice and offer a short-term, inclusive, focused intervention that works in the long term. Nurture groups are classes of between six and 12 children or young people in early years, primary or secondary settings supported by the whole staff group and parents. Each group is run by two members of staff. Children attend nurture groups but remain an active part of their main class group, they spend appropriate times within the nurture group according to their need and typically return full time to their own class within two to four terms. Nurture groups assess learning and social and emotional needs and give whatever help is needed to remove the barriers to learning. There is great emphasis on language development and communication. Nothing is taken for granted and everything is explained, supported by role modelling, demonstration and the use of gesture as appropriate. The relationship between the two staff, always nurturing and supportive, provides a role model that children observe and begin to copy. Food is shared at 'breakfast' or 'snack time' with much opportunity for social learning, helping children to attend to the needs of others, with time to listen and be listened to.

As the children learn academically and socially they develop confidence, become responsive to others, learn self-respect and take pride in behaving well and in achieving. Nurture groups have been working successfully for more than 40 years in the UK and now in other countries including Canada, New Zealand and Romania, and have been praised, supported and recommended by organisations such as Ofsted, Estyn and HMIE.

Why would we use it?

Nurture group classrooms are set up to bridge between home and school, where the missed learning opportunities are addressed according to the individual profile of needs. Nurture rooms are warm and welcoming places, with time to play within the highly structured and planned learning environment. 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.

How does it work?

Using a range of strategies including games and songs, staff engage students' attention and encourage them to listen and talk. A core principle of nurture groups is that all behaviour is communication and this aspect is fully addressed within this 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 encourage 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 are able to express their needs.

How can we find out more?

In Kent, there are local hubs of Primary Schools' New Ways of Working. Nurture group approach has been used in several hubs. Read more about New Ways of Working ([hyperlink to the document](#)).