

The following article was published in
SEN Magazine
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Nurturing success

Sharon Jackson looks at how nurture groups have helped turn around the life chances of children in a Nottinghamshire primary school

I am the Headteacher of a larger than average primary school, which currently caters for 424 pupils. The school is set in the midst of an area recognised nationally for its significant deprivation. We also have a higher than average number of pupils with SEN. Last year alone saw our Year 6 cohort (ages ten to 11) include 50 per cent of pupils with additional educational needs. These included learning disabilities, autism, Prader Willi, Asperger's syndrome and physical disabilities including complex medical needs. We pride ourselves on their full inclusion in mainstream education, ensuring a true sense of belonging and achievement for all.

Having led and managed schools for those with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) for more than 11 years, I have drawn upon strategies and my experience to try to bring about a truly inclusive environment to support and meet the needs of all children at my current school, including those with BESD.

In the past, behaviour was a real cause for concern, with exclusions occurring frequently. So this was a really important area for us to focus on. In October 2009, when there were 124 children on the SEN register, 38 with BESD needs, we set up nurture groups. In these groups, teaching staff aim to help pupils with their social and emotional development, alongside their academic work, and provide a positive link between school and the home.

The case study below focuses on one child whose access to the nurture groups



Nurture group pupils enjoy an end of term trip.

has resulted in tangible evidence of his accelerated progress academically, socially and emotionally, and in terms of his improved behaviour. This has translated into better life chances for the individual concerned and may ensure less costly provision in the future.

When we opened the nurture groups, the entire school staff was accessing training in behaviour management to ensure that they all understood the principles of such groups and how they sit within the inclusive ethos of the whole school.

All children who attend the nurture groups register and complete wake up work with their mainstream class each morning. They are then collected by the nurture staff and taken into the classroom. Ready on their desks are their basic skills exercises. Each child has an individualised range of activities carefully planned as a result of assessment and tracking, identifying what children can do and specific areas

within numeracy and literacy that are yet to be achieved and are creating barriers to learning. Children complete their basic skills and are supported to reflect on and evaluate their progress before assessing whether they have achieved their targets for that session. Together, pupils then make breakfast for

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the group, with each child taking a role with responsibility. The aim is to work effectively together while respecting and understanding the importance of each team member. Over time and with support, children understand how this translates into everyday experiences.



Learning that it is not just faces that carry emotion.

After breakfast (tea and toast), children move into curriculum learning where the basic skills are practised across a range of different contexts, carefully planned so that when children return, with support (depending on need), to their mainstream classroom each afternoon, they stay very much in touch with the themes of learning of their peers. This encourages an authentic sense of belonging and worth. Behaviour targets, along with academic targets, are regularly visited, and the social and emotional aspects are discussed at every opportunity. Target cards are taken by the children back to their classrooms where their class teachers share and celebrate the achievements of the morning and complete the card with the child on how they do during the afternoon session. These target cards ensure close communication between the nurture staff and the teachers within the mainstream school.

Case study: Philip's story

In Year 4, Philip attended school for approximately one hour each day where he accessed one to one support in literacy. His behaviour caused such disruption that it was arranged for him to access home tuition for the rest of the day. During this time, Philip was diagnosed with dyslexia after his mother sought specialist advice. Indeed, it is interesting to correlate the data regarding children in special schools, particularly BESD schools, with those who are later diagnosed with dyslexia. What's more, research now suggests an equally strong relationship between literacy difficulties and young offenders serving time in prison.

48 serious incidents were recorded of Philip attempting to abscond from the classroom during the first term

Philip's dyslexia had not been picked up in school. After six months of home support, his placement at school ended, as Philip absconded on a daily basis, disrupting his own learning and that of others. An arrangement was made for Philip to be fully educated at home. This impacted negatively on his younger siblings who then communicated their desire to be educated at home.

Although Philip's mother did her best to ensure he accessed a balanced learning diet, the skills that he needed most (to socialise, make relationships and manage his emotions and feelings well) were somewhat missed, as opportunities to socialise and work with his peer group were limited by the situation.

When he joined the nurture group setting and started attending school full time, 48 serious incidents were recorded of Philip attempting to abscond from the classroom during the first term, potentially putting himself and others at risk. During the same period a year on, after a year with the group, only two incidents have been recorded. Boxall profiles are used to assess children's social, emotional and behavioural development and these clearly show excellent progress and development for Philip, which we can see translating into all areas of his life.

Philip's attendance is now 91.6 per cent. He says he loves school and wants to go on to university. At his most recent review, Philip expressed that he is happy at school, that he can manage his anger now and that staff understand him. Philip has also been chosen to be included in a trip to Paris, which is a reward for just 12 children at the school. It is our Golden Integrity Award for those children who have shown positive attitudes to learning and integrity in all they do.

When comparing baseline data to where this young man is now, the progress is clear. Specialist support, through the nurture group, has helped create a positive process, in which Philip has been a key participant and leader, which has opened up real opportunities for him. This has enabled Philip to believe, realise his own potential, surprise himself with his own achievements and, crucially, see himself as a successful life-long learner. **SEN**

Further information

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