

**The impact of a nurture group on an infant school:  
a longitudinal case study.**

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(PhD)**

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## **Abstract**

Nurture groups have been in existence since the late 1960s and interest in their therapeutic and educational approach has persisted to the present day. Citations of their effectiveness have appeared in government documentation since the Warnock Report of 1978 and they continue to be an area of interest to both researchers and practitioners in educational journals.

I had the opportunity to establish a full time nurture group in a school that had a turbulent history in an area of socio-economic deprivation. Despite its rural setting, the school had all the issues facing some of the toughest inner city environments.

This thesis is the culmination of an in-depth longitudinal case study looking at the nurture group and its impact on the evolution of the school. Whilst there is a gradual increase in publications in this field, a search at the time of writing this thesis indicated that no other studies replicate the nature of this one.

As part of the research process I was able to design a reintegration readiness scale and social development curriculum as well as guide the evolution to a nurturing school, publishing these and other articles in peer-reviewed journals, further adding to the current interest in the field.

Being immersed in the nurture group and school for a four year period provided me with a unique opportunity as a reflective practitioner, researcher and participant observer to document the impact of the nurture group, including its potential influence on the reduction of exclusion figures, the professional development of the staff team and support the identification of a broader range of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

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# **The impact of a nurture group on an infant school: a longitudinal case study.**

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction:**

#### **1.1 Aims of the Chapter:**

In this introductory chapter I aim to provide a brief summary of the research study and an introduction to nurture groups. I will provide some contextual information to provide a setting for the study and my reasons for becoming involved in this research. I will conclude by providing a brief outline of the remaining chapters.

#### **1.2 Background:**

Nurture groups have been in existence since the late 1960s and interest in their work has persisted up to the present day. Citations of their effectiveness have appeared in government documentation intermittently since the Warnock Report of 1978, and they continue to be an area of interest in educational journals. Their popularity with practitioners in schools fluctuates over time, often limited by financial resources. At the time of writing this thesis there are estimated to be 1500 nurture groups in the UK, with more in New Zealand, Canada, Malta and Australia. (Source: <http://www.nurturegroups.org/pages/frequently-asked-questions-about-nurture-groups.html>)

I had an opportunity in 2000 to establish a nurture group in a school which, although in a rural county, had many socio-economic issues more often found within inner city environments. The concept of a nurture group was new to the school and the

local authority and generated much interest from my teaching peers. I was appointed to work as the full time nurture group teacher.

As part of this work, I registered for a research degree, with a proposal of a longitudinal case study, aiming to look in-depth at the impact of the nurture group on the infant school that hosted it. Studies of this nature had not been identified in the literature at the start of the project. A subsequent search at the time of writing the thesis has identified an increasing body of knowledge and research evidence relating to nurture groups but none which replicate this study.

Being immersed in the nurture group and school for a four year period provided me with a unique opportunity both as a reflective practitioner, but also as a researcher. The work as the nurture group teacher was at times exhausting, always painstaking and both physically and emotionally demanding. My resultant thesis, presented here, aims to provide an additional contribution to the growing body of evidence into the impact of nurture groups and their role within the spectrum of inclusive provision for children experiencing social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

### **1.3     What is a nurture group?**

A nurture group is a school-based early intervention resource for children whose social, emotional and behavioural needs are not being met in a mainstream classroom. Nurture groups exist as a bridge between the demands of the mainstream classrooms and children who, for a wide variety of reasons, are demonstrating signs of emotional and behavioural difficulties. These children often present with difficulties accessing the curriculum due to unmet early learning needs which it is felt could be developed through social and nurturing experiences within a small group educational and therapeutic environment. These children are often without the basic essential early learning experiences that enable them to function socially and emotionally at an age appropriate level. The emphasis within a nurture group is on emotional growth, not pathological diagnosis, focusing on offering broad based experiences in an environment that promotes security, routines, clear boundaries and carefully planned, repetitive learning opportunities. (Boxall 2002; Bennathan and Boxall 2000;)

The role of a nurture group is to encourage the engagement of pupils in an appropriate academic curriculum, whilst recognising the individual child's need for positive experiences, increasing self-esteem and academic success. (Cooper and Lovey, 1999). By providing a therapeutic and educational supportive learning environment, nurture groups aim to ensure the emotional growth and development of the pupils within their care. Nurture groups model the interactive process between child and primary carers in a structure commensurate with the developmental level of the child, rather than within an environment focused on the chronological age of the child. Activities are individualised and designed for each child's developmental level, routines are predictable and consistent and there are many opportunities for the consolidation of each new skill. A classic nurture group operates with a teacher and teaching assistant who consistently model positive behaviour and social skills in a safe, predictable, nurturing environment at the appropriate developmental stage for each child. Through this process, the child is able to develop an attachment to the adult, receive approval and experience satisfactory outcomes. (Boxall 2002).

Cooper and Whitebread (2007 p176) state that "the practical day-to-day work of the nurture group is rooted in an understanding of the developmental needs of children, the interdependence of social, emotional and cognitive factors, and a commitment to the fostering of positive healthy development". Nurture groups offer a structure that is predictable and routine, enabling children to develop self-esteem and trust, feeling safe, asking questions and making sense of their world. According to Sanders (2007 p 46) the input from a nurture group leads to "...greater independence and the capacity to learn" compared to the child remaining within the mainstream environment.

According to the Nurture Group Network, a nurture group should:

- be located clearly within the policies and structures of an LEA or school continuum of special educational needs provision, either as an integral part of an individual school or as a resource for a cluster of schools.

- ensure that children attending the nurture group remain members of a mainstream class where they register daily and attend selected activities.
- have a pattern of attendance whereby children spend part of each day in the nurture group or attend for regular sessions during the week.
- be staffed by two adults working together modelling good adult relationships in a structured and predictable environment, where children can begin to trust adults and to learn.
- offer support for children's positive emotional and social growth and cognitive development at whatever level of need the children show by responding to them in a developmentally appropriate way.
- supply a setting and relationships for children in which missing or insufficiently internalised essential early learning experiences are provided.
- ensure that the National Curriculum is taught.
- be taken full account of in school policies, participate fully, and be fully considered in the development and review of policies.
- offer short or medium term placements, usually for between two and four terms, depending on the child's specific needs.
- ensure placement in the group is determined on the basis of systematic assessment in which appropriate diagnostic and evaluative instruments have been used, with the aim always being to return the child to full-time mainstream provision.
- place an emphasis on communication and language development through intensive interaction with an adult and with other children.
- provide opportunities for social learning through co-operation and play with others in a group with an appropriate mix of children.
- monitor and evaluate their effectiveness in promoting the positive social, emotional and educational development of each child.
- recognise the importance of quality play experiences in the development of children's learning.

(Source: National Nurture Group Network training)

Nurture Groups have an emphasis on the importance of the relationship between the child and the adult in developing a sense of self. They concentrate on social

development, focusing on the emotional aspects of interaction between the child and caregiver. They should be part of the school's provision for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and integral within the policies for inclusion and meeting special education needs. Nurture groups have been cited as examples of highly effective provision in a number of key documents including the report of the Warnock Committee (DES 1978), Excellence for All Children (DfEE 1997b), the Steer Report (2005) and in the Ofsted report Managing Challenging Behaviour (2005). They have also been cited positively in the Coram Family report "Intervening Early" (DfE 2002) and the Bernardo's commissioned review of research into effective alternatives to mainstream education for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) (Cooper 2001).

Throughout this study the term "classic nurture group" refers to the definitions of variants of nurture groups identified by Cooper et al (1999). Classic nurture groups operate under six guiding principles, reproduced below. These principles were devised and agreed during national training courses and as part of the first phase of a research project looking at the nature, number and spread of nurture groups in England and Wales. (Cooper et al 1999).

#### **The six principles of nurture:**

##### **•1. Children's learning is understood developmentally**

In nurture groups, staff responds to children not in terms of arbitrary expectations about 'attainment levels' but in terms of the children's developmental progress assessed through the Boxall Profile Handbook. The response to the individual child is 'as they are', underpinned by a non-judgemental and accepting attitude.

##### **•2. The classroom offers a safe base**

The organisation of the environment and the way the group is managed contains anxiety. The nurture group room offers a balance of educational and domestic experiences aimed at supporting the development of the children's relationship with each other and with the staff. The nurture group is organised around a structured day with predictable routines. Great attention is paid to detail; the adults are reliable and

consistent in their approach to the children. Nurture groups are an educational provision making the important link between emotional containment and cognitive learning.

**•3. Nurture is important for the development of self-esteem**

Nurture involves listening and responding. In a nurture group 'everything is verbalised' with an emphasis on the adults engaging with the children in reciprocal shared activities e.g. play / meals / reading /talking about events and feelings. Children respond to being valued and thought about as individuals, so in practice this involves noticing and praising small achievements; 'nothing is hurried in nurture groups'.

**•4. Language is understood as a vital means of communication**

Language is more than a skill to be learnt, it is the way of putting feelings into words. Nurture group children often 'act out' their feelings as they lack the vocabulary to 'name' how they feel. In nurture groups the informal opportunities for talking and sharing, e.g. welcoming the children into the group or having breakfast together are as important as the more formal lessons teaching language skills. Words are used instead of actions to express feelings and opportunities are created for extended conversations or encouraging imaginative play to understand the feelings of others.

**•5. All behaviour is communication**

This principle underlies the adult response to the children's often challenging or difficult behaviour. 'Given what I know about this child and their development what is this child trying to tell me?' Understanding what a child is communicating through behaviour helps staff to respond in a firm but non-punitive way by not being provoked or discouraged. If the child can sense that their feelings are understood this can help to diffuse difficult situations. The adult makes the link between the external / internal worlds of the child.

**•6. Transitions are significant in the lives of children**

The nurture group helps the child make the difficult transition from home to

school. However, on a daily basis there are numerous transitions the child makes, e.g. between sessions and classes and between different adults. Changes in routine are invariably difficult for vulnerable children and need to be carefully managed with preparation and support.

(Source: <http://www.nurturegroups.org/pages/what-are-nurture-groups.html>)

The case study nurture group adhered to the described variant 1, identified as a classic nurture group. This was defined by myself as the researcher and also during an independent evaluation of the nurture group undertaken by members of the national nurture group research project during the study period.

#### **1.4 The policy context at the beginning of the study – setting the scene:**

The Education Act of 1993 and subsequent Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs (1994) set out aims to educate children in mainstream schools wherever possible, identify the special educational needs of all those at risk of failure and to provide effective help. Following a change of government in 1997, a statement of aims for all state schools was published, “Excellence in Schools” (DfEE 1997a), which outlined plans for higher attainments for all children. The idea of the Literacy Hour and subsequent hour long daily numeracy lesson were introduced with prescriptive teaching methods and structures to be followed in all mainstream classrooms. Increasing emphasis was placed on the publication of school results based on targets for raising standards. In addition, Education Action Zones would be set up to provide targeted support to schools in deprived areas. Whilst the intention was to improve standards nationally in schools, this was parallel to the drive to increase inclusion for all children, ensuring that the majority, regardless of their individual educational needs or disability, including SEBD, would be taught in mainstream schools.

The green paper “Excellence for All Children: Meeting Special Educational Needs” (DfEE 1997b) subsequently outlined the government’s vision for all pupils with special educational needs, including a chapter on meeting the needs for pupils with

emotional and behavioural difficulties, citing that “... the number of children perceived as falling within this group is increasing” and describing them as “...one group which presents schools with special challenges ...” The paper stressed “We need to find ways of tackling their difficulties early, before they lead to under-achievement, disaffection and, in too many cases, exclusion from mainstream education”. (DfEE 1997b p 77). Within this policy paper, nurture groups are cited as an example of good practice. (p80).

The 1998 School Standards and Framework Act implemented the proposals and included empowering LEAs and the Secretary of State for Education to intervene in those schools judged by Ofsted as “failing”, giving two years to improve and having the threat of closure or the removal of the headteacher.

In the same year, the DfEE’s National Advisory Group on Special Educational Needs published “Meeting Special Educational Needs: A Programme for Action” (DfEE 1998). A requirement was made that all Local Education Authorities (LEAs) should have a statement of their arrangements for dealing with their pupils’ behavioural difficulties, including information on the advice and resources available for promoting good behaviour and discipline for pupils with behaviour problems. There was a plan for a national programme to help primary schools to intervene early to address SEBD issues and support for a research project investigating and promoting primary nurture groups at the University of Cambridge.

Alongside the drive to improve attainment standards and increase inclusion, with early identification and intervention of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, was the drive for social inclusion and the necessity for agencies to work together to support the reduction in children becoming socially excluded. This involved the DfEE, the Social Inclusion Unit, the Home Office and Department of Health collaborating to produce “Social Inclusion: Pupil Support” (DfES 1999). The focus was on reducing unauthorised absence, exclusions and poor attendance whilst increasing standards of appropriate behaviour. The acknowledgement of the risk of children with social, emotional and behavioural challenges being increasingly likely to become socially excluded drew attention to the need for effective early intervention, citing nurture groups as an appropriate intervention.

The decision to set up a nurture group in the school at this time was made in response to the demands for raising standards, publication of league tables, the need to increase attendance and the drive to reduce exclusions, all within the context of inclusion for all and better support for pupils with SEBD.

### **1.5 The background and rationale for nurture groups as an early intervention model:**

The first experimental nurture groups originated in Inner London in 1969. There was a gradual increase in numbers from 1970 onwards, particularly in the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) area until the abolition of ILEA in 1990, when centralised support ceased, and they became the domain of individual schools. (Bailey, 2007; Boxall, 2002). Nurture groups have been described as having “...something of a renaissance since the late 1990s...” (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005) and continue to be highlighted to the current day in various publications as examples of practice to be considered when meeting the needs of pupils with SEBD. (For example see Bernardos, 2001; The Coram Family Report, DfES, 2002; The Steer Report, DfES 2005; Ofsted, 2009;).

Nurture groups are generally described as a small group early intervention strategy in a school, whose purpose is to support a child to experience the “... missed nurturing experiences of the early years” (Bennathan, 2001, p31). In the preface to her book, Webster-Stratton (1999) discusses the importance of early intervention in preventing escalation of aggressive behaviour in early childhood, stating some 10-25% of preschool children meet criteria for oppositional defiant disorder or early onset conduct problems. (Webster-Stratton 1999 p xii). Early intervention is also highlighted by Stevenson and Goodman, (2001 p200) who conclude that the presence of specific behaviour problems in 3-year-old children indicates an increased risk of violent criminal conviction in adulthood. The behaviour problems considered as the most significant indicators of later violent criminal activity are the externalising behaviours such as temper tantrums, non-compliance and high activity levels. Many children offered nurture group placements exhibit a number of these characteristics and may be considered to be “... at risk of exclusion or special

educational placement". (Bennathan, 2001 p31). Holmes (1995 p155) identifies the preventative role nurture groups can play for individual child if they intervene early, stating that "The fact that an infant department with a nurture group rarely recommends that a child needs formal assessment demonstrates that this preventative approach – providing sensitive nurturing, so that learning can take place – is successful".

### **1.6 How I became involved in the nurture group and the study:**

Of specific relevance to this thesis was the setting up of Education Action Zones (EAZs) from September 1998. These were clusters of schools in deprived areas working together to improve standards sponsored through government grants and partnership from local businesses. EAZs were allowed to dispense with the teaching of the National Curriculum in favour of innovative approaches towards raising standards across their cluster of schools. The nurture group that is the focus for this study was in a school that was part of an EAZ which also funded the initiative as additional to the school's budget for all but normal curricular consumables.

Agreement for funding for a full time teacher and a full time teaching assistant, training costs, furniture and equipment costs were all secured for an initial period of four terms from the EAZ.<sup>1</sup> I was appointed to the position of the nurture group teacher and commenced my post in May 2000, having previously worked in inner London as a special educational needs co-ordinator in mainstream provision, with a particular interest in working with pupils with SEBD. Although having some interest in the area of nurture groups, I had not previously established any provision of this type. Whilst feeling this was an interesting opportunity, I found myself questioning how and why a nurture group would support the pupils in the school even before taking up my post, leading me to hypothesise what might make a difference in this particular small group intervention.

It was in discussion with both the headteacher of the school and the head of the EAZ that this hypothesising led me to feel that there was a further opportunity to engage

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<sup>1</sup> This was later extended to four years of funding due to a two year extension of the EAZ's operation

in a research project to look in more depth at the impact the nurture group might have on the wider school environment. The outcome of the case study is presented within this thesis.

### **1.7 The research questions:**

My main guiding research question for this study is “**What is the impact of a nurture group on an infant school?**” As this would be too broad a subject to form a single thesis, my supplementary questions supported the shaping of the research and guided the process. These supplementary questions are as follows:

- *Do nurture groups impact on inclusive practices?*
- *Is there an association between the introduction of a nurture group and staff professional development?*
- *Has the nurture group affected the ethos of the school?*
- *Is there an association between the instigation of the nurture group and the numbers of fixed-term and permanent exclusions issued?*
- *Has the nurture group supported an increase in the identification and understanding of a wider variety of needs of individual children?*

The questions were used to guide the literature review in chapter 2 and structure the findings in chapter 6. They were also used as a basis for unstructured interviews intermittently throughout the study to gain contemporaneous narrative from colleagues to inform the research findings. The impact of the nurture group on the infant school at the centre of the study and the supplementary questions are answered throughout the thesis using a combination of case reports, narrative stories and observed situations.

### **1.8 Chapter overview:**

Chapter 2 focuses on a review of the relevant literature pertaining to nurture groups and of the theoretical perspectives which informs nurture group practice. I also

outline the Boxall Profile, a key tool for assessment of social, emotional and behavioural needs alongside developmental levels within this chapter.

Chapter 3, focuses on the methodology I selected to use within this research study and the ethics employed in working within a situation where there were vulnerable children as an integral part of the research. I describe the challenges of obtaining consent from the study participants and the ethics involved in working with colleagues who, because of my dual role as practitioner and researcher, were also research subjects.

In Chapter 4, I outline in detail the specific nurture group that was the central focus of my research project. Using socio-economic data and Ofsted reports, the context of the school and nurture group are clarified. Specific operational information is provided to give the reader a better understanding of my work on a day-to-day basis.

Chapter 5, describes how the nurture group initiative grew and developed over time, leading to further development within the school and the impact this had. My design and development of a specific reintegration tool and a social development curriculum are discussed. Narrative accounts from colleagues adds a richness to the text and highlights their growing understanding of the needs of the children identified for inclusion within the nurture group, as well as the wider school environment.

In Chapter 6, I discuss the outcomes and impact of the nurture group in more detail. I discuss the impact the nurture group had on exclusion rates, using longitudinal data from both prior to and during the time the nurture group was operational. The narrative from colleagues provides insight into their perceptions of their professional development and understanding of meeting the needs of children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Comparison between the original Ofsted inspection that placed the school in special measures and the subsequent Ofsted inspection during the time of the research project provides useful evidence of improvements. An independent evaluation of the nurture group is also used as evidence of impact, together with narrative from colleagues, parents and visitors to the group. In this chapter I answer the research questions posed above.

Chapter 7 is the concluding chapter where I look at the placement outcomes for pupils, summarise the evolution of the school, look at whether a nurture group is a cost effective support strategy and identify future potential areas for research.

Throughout this thesis I have included the voice of the research participants in brief case reports and stories, their observations and anecdotes. These sometimes forthright observations provide contemporaneous evidence of the impact of the nurture group on the infant school over the four year study period.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Theoretical perspectives and a review of the literature.**

#### **2.1 Aims of the chapter:**

This chapter aims to consider critically the existing research pertaining to nurture groups and the theoretical perspectives which inform nurture group practice. I will discuss the Boxall Profile, a key tool for assessment of social, emotional and behavioural needs (SEBD), widely used in nurture groups and the teacher version of the Goodman's Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), an alternative screening tool used both in clinical practice and research.

#### **2.2 The theoretical perspectives that inform nurture group practice:**

##### **2.2.1. Attachment Theory:**

It is often stated that the theoretical basis for Nurture groups lies within attachment theory (Bowlby 1969; 1973; 1980;) which remains one of the guiding principles for those working within this intervention. (Seth-Smith et al, 2010; Reynolds et al, 2009; Cooper and Whitebread, 2007). Attachment theory relates to the relationship between people, particularly relevant to the family situation. It describes the significance of an infant developing a relationship with at least one primary caregiver who supports social and emotional development. This establishes secure attachment and enables other relationships to develop over time. Secure attachment enables the child to develop resilience to manage stressful situations, including separation and loss.

Attachment theory is an explanation for the bond that exists between a child and their primary caregiver, usually but not always, the mother. Although initially thought to be relevant to very early childhood, deemed the “sensitivity period” by Bowlby, from 6 months to 2-3 years of age, this theory is now considered to be relevant across the lifespan. (Waters et al 2000). There are three main component

behaviours which define how attachment is seen across the lifespan - proximity seeking, separation protest, and secure base. (Segrin and Flora 2005) These behaviours characterise typical patterns of development for an infant. Bowlby believed that the earliest bonds formed by children with their caregivers have an impact throughout life and a “lasting psychological connectedness between human beings.” (Bowlby, 1969 p194). Through earliest relationships, children develop their feelings of self-worth, their personal identity and a model of how others will respond to them. The theory suggests that the quality of these earliest relationships impact upon future behaviours, relationships and choices. (Sroufe 1983).

Ainsworth (1978) expanded upon Bowlby’s work through a study of the “Strange Situation” where children aged between 12 and 18 months were placed in an unfamiliar situation where they were briefly left by their care-giver with an unfamiliar person. Their behaviour was then observed when they were reunited with their mothers. This led to the defining of three types of attachment behaviour: secure attachment, ambivalent attachment and avoidant attachment. A fourth attachment behaviour, disorganised attachment, was added following further research by Main and Solomon (1990).

Ainsworth suggested that where a child has experienced love and security within an intimate and continuous relationship with a primary care-giver, an affectionate bond develops. Attachment develops within that affectionate bond, offering a sense of security and comfort for the child and providing a “safe base” from which to explore their world. Goldberg (2000) describes the operation of the attachment system as being in a “goal state” when there is adequate proximity of the child to the care-giver within a given environment. At these times, attachment behaviours would not be evident. However, if there are any perceived threats to safety then the attachment behaviours would be activated by the child, who would respond accordingly, depending on whether they had developed secure or insecure attachments. (Goldberg, 2000 p 9)

The idea of the care-giver as a safe base from which to explore their world is an area of attachment theory relevant to nurture group practice. As a child begins to explore their environment they will encounter unusual situations or objects which cause

feelings of uncertainty. The care-giver acknowledges that anxiety and uncertainty, supporting the child to resolve the problem either by removing the cause of the anxiety or encouraging the child to manage the situation for themselves to achieve a successful outcome. The child experiences success, excitement and gains in confidence within that new situation, learning that success produces positive feelings and feedback. This reinforces the drive to further explore from the safe base.

Within nurture group practice, the adults in the group become the safe-base for the pupils, providing the reassurance and encouragement necessary when they encounter unfamiliar or challenging situations. The nurture group adults provide the positive feedback to the child, increasing their confidence to tackle challenging aspects of their world, enabling the child to learn from the experiences and achieve success.

The attachment behaviours identified by Bowlby and Ainsworth are the externalised behaviours of the representational model of the care-giver and the child's own sense of self. This is defined as the internal working model (IWM), based on repeated patterns of interactive experience. If the child's IWM has developed a representation of the care-giver as being available and responsive, the child's sense of self is one worthy of love and of value. (Bowlby, 1969). However, if the care-giver has been unpredictable or neglectful, then insecure attachment results, where the child could develop an IWM that suggests the world is unresponsive, fearful and should be treated with caution, where the child's sense of self is of being unworthy of love and unvalued. Conversely, this produces an insecure attachment cycle.

Within a nurture group this insecure attachment cycle may offer insight into the root of some specific behaviour seen in the classroom. If a child has developed an IWM that suggests there will be inconsistent or absent reassurance in times of frustration, or that needs will not be met by the care-giver, they may become avoidant in an attempt to evade unpleasant and negative experiences. This will manifest itself as withdrawn or disengaged behaviour. Alternately, the child may express their frustration and uncertainty as aggressive, acting out, disruptive behaviour as a reaction to overwhelming feelings that remain unregulated by their care-giver.

Children who exhibit SEBD may display egocentric and emotionally immature behaviours not consistent with their chronological age. In a nurture group context this often manifests as a disregard for the feelings of others, emotional outbursts, tantrums and both active and passive aggressive actions. Nurture group theory suggests these children may not have developed the secure attachment that enables them to maintain sufficient internalised controls necessary for normal social functioning in a school setting that would be expected of their same age peers.

The behaviours associated with insecure attachment are often seen in nurture groups and are identified as descriptors for SEBD in the SEN Code of Practice (DfES 2001):

LEAs should also seek evidence of any other identifiable factors that could impact on learning outcomes including [...] evidence of significant emotional or behavioural difficulties, as indicated by clear recorded examples of

- withdrawn or disruptive behaviour;
- a marked and persistent inability to concentrate;
- signs that the child experiences considerable frustration or distress in relation to their learning difficulties;
- difficulties in establishing and maintaining balanced relationships with their fellow pupils or with adults;
- and any other evidence of a significant delay in the development of life and social skills.

(DfES 2001 para 7:43, p83)

According to Bennathan and Boxall (2000):

“The principle underlying the groups was that of responding to each child at whatever developmental age or stage he or she might be; whether needing comfort like a baby, control like a two-year-old in a tantrum, attention like a three-year-old who asks endless questions apparently for the sake of asking questions, or a four-year-old making grandiose claims not well based on

reality. As the children's needs were reliably met, not ignored or rebuffed as they would have had to be in a normal class if indeed they could have been expressed there, the children developed greater trust and self-confidence, became better organised and were ready for formal learning." (Bennathan and Boxall 2000 p 9)

This conceptual framework for nurture groups is based on the premise that insufficiently internalised early learning can be supported through the opportunity to re-experience early nurturing in an environment that promotes trust and consistency from adults. (Colwell and O'Connor 2003). Attachment theory described how early relationships impacted on later social, emotional and behaviour development; the relevance of this for nurture group theory is to accept that the child presenting with SEBD in the nurture group will need to be supported from a developmental position of "extreme egocentrism and a concomitant disregard for the needs and feelings of others" to a "level of social competence that is required in the standard infant classroom" (Cooper, 2006 p101) through applying a nurturing process.

Similarly, in her work with children with Special Educational Needs, Geddes (2003) states that many of the common features attributed to children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties can be understood and supported through the use of the attachment theory perspective.

Attachment theory is considered by some to be one of the major theoretical developments in the past fifty years, with wide ranging impact into its application. (Holmes, 1993) It continues to impact in the fields of social care (e.g. Howe 2005), the way children are cared for in hospitals, childcare policies (Rutter and O'Connor, 1999) and in the field of education, for example in support of pupils exhibiting SEBD in nurture groups. (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007).

Whilst not without its critics, attachment theory is now considered by some to be a dominant approach to understanding early social development. (Schaffer, 2007). However, Slater (2007) suggests that there is some criticism of the theory due to its deterministic nature, suggesting that a poor start in life will result in adverse life outcomes. There is some evidence to suggest that forming early attachments is

desirable, for example studies of children in Romanian orphanages and their later attachment behaviours (Chisholm et al, 1995). The field of neuroscience has also suggested that newborn infants are predisposed to make strong emotional bonds with a significant other and that attachment behaviours will emerge to promote contact and proximity. (Schore 2001). Where a child has felt unregulated and unsafe, high levels of cortisol can develop, affecting the development of the area of the brain responsible for reading social cues and adapting behaviour to social norms. (Gunnar and Donzella, 2002; Lyons et al, 2000)

There is also criticism of the tendency to blame the mother as the primary care-giver for this poor start in life. (Goldberg 2000). However although the importance of a consistent care-giver in early infancy was identified in attachment theory, this does not have to be the mother. Nurture group theory places emphasis on the development of attachments to the adults but due to the nature of the group size, with between ten and twelve pupils and two adults, Cooper (2006) suggests that inappropriate child-adult attachments that may challenge the parent-child relationship are avoided. Further, nurture groups “are intended to produce a form of educational attachment” wherein children develop trusting and caring relationships with adults. (Cooper, 2006 p103). Whilst nurture group theory focuses on a “no-blame” culture, it remains that the two key texts both use language that describes inadequacy of parenting as one probable cause for pupil SEBD. Bennathan and Boxall (2000) for instance describes children with significant difficulties thus:

“Such children often come from homes where there are serious social problems or parental inadequacy, perhaps violence between the parents, perhaps one parent has deserted the family, or where housing has been totally unsatisfactory; in short, from conditions where it has not been possible to meet the minimum developmental needs of the child”.

(Bennathan and Boxall, 2000 p 12-13)

Although this text is now somewhat dated, it remains a key text referred to in training for nurture group staff.

Initially attachment theory suggested that developmental changes focused in the first few years of life would set the pattern of attachment behaviour that could not

change. (Bee and Boyd 2007) If this was the case, the role of the nurture group would therefore be futile, as attachment patterns could not alter through support for the child to develop these behaviours once of statutory school age and therefore outside of the sensitivity period. There are however some studies that show attachment styles to be both continuous and discontinuous (Waters et al, 2000), demonstrating that for some, the attachment style may be changed over time, depending on experiences.

There is also the concern from critics of attachment theory that the child's temperament is not considered in the application of the theory, although Thompson (1998) does suggest that insecure attachment may be linked to some aspects of temperament associated with negative emotions.

### **2.2.2 Sociocultural Theory of Learning:**

Although not as frequently referred to as attachment theory when speaking to practitioners in nurture groups, the sociocultural theory of learning is central to the psychological understanding of and justification for nurture groups. (Cooper, 2006). Vygotsky (1987) suggested that learning involves internalisation of knowledge that is initially experienced through social interactions. Vygotsky believed that when learning a new concept, a child benefits from social interaction with an adult or peer who has already acquired the skill being learnt. This more knowledgeable other, be it child or adult, supports the learning using social clues and context, language and modelling the learning behaviour. This provides cognitive scaffolding, enabling the learner to acquire new skills and knowledge from the starting point of their existing understanding. As the child develops their autonomy and knowledge of a situation, these scaffolds are gradually withdrawn. This is a key element in the practice within a nurture group, where the scaffolding to support learning is provided socially, emotionally and academically.

Vygotsky believed that in order to provide appropriate scaffolding for the child, the adults need to engage in observation to determine where children are in their learning processes and where they are capable of moving on to as the next stages in their development. The observations should inform the adult of the distance

between the most difficult task a child can complete alone and the task a child could complete with assistance, defined as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky describes the ZPD as the “ distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky 1987 p 86).

Within nurture group theory, the ZPD is determined through careful observation leading to curriculum planning and classroom organisation, pairing children on tasks or in small groups to accelerate learning within the social context of the nurture group and school. Due to the small group environment with high adult to child ratio in a classic nurture group, the opportunity to observe and understand the individual child’s developmental level is enhanced compared to a larger class environment. In-depth observation is central to nurture group theory and forms part of the initial assessment for inclusion within the intervention as well as being an essential skill used in completing the Boxall Diagnostic and Developmental Profile tool (Bennathan and Boxall 1998) used for assessment and monitoring of progress in the nurture group.

Vygotsky’s Sociocultural theory holds central the belief that the child’s culture is a fundamental principle in the development of each individual, determining both the process and content of a child’s thinking. (Vygotsky 1978). This cultural context helps to support cognitive development, with social and cognitive development working together and building on each other. Whilst agreeing with the Piagetian theory that a child’s knowledge was constructed from personal experiences, Vygotsky’s developed this theory further by focusing on the impact of the social experiences of the child on their development, believing that personal and social experiences could not be separated. Vygotskian theory incorporates the belief that the world of the child was shaped by their families, communities, socioeconomic status, education and culture and that their understanding of this world would be influenced in part from the values and beliefs of the adults and children in their lives. The theory encourages adults to scaffold the cognitive development of the child by engaging them in social learning situations where their competence is stretched to support their development.

This concept informs nurture group practice, where the attention is on the processes by which a child can develop the skills necessary for functional inclusion within a mainstream environment. Progress is supported through the use of social interaction both with the adults and peers through developing skills individually, in paired working and in small group working. Understanding the cultural context for the child is a principle of nurture group practice, particularly relevant to working with families to support the child. The aim within the nurture group context is to develop learning and social skills both within the school environment and the home. Bennathan and Boxall (2000) describe the significance of the relationship between home and school and how by working with the family, the child is able to recognise the that “home and school visibly become one” (Bennathan and Boxall 2000 p34). Having a positive regard for parents/carers is a requirement of the quality mark award from the nurture group network requiring nurture groups to be “staffed by adults who have and promote a positive attitude towards parents/carers of all children and encourage their involvement in activities supportive of the nurture group programme” (Nurture Group Network Quality Mark Award Part II, 1d, 2006 – see appendix 1).

Language development is a further element of sociocultural theory which informs nurture group theory. Vygotsky believed that the social use of language supported the cognitive development across the ZPD. Observation of children’s language during learning informs the adult of the ZPD by helping to identify areas where the child is competent and those that could progress with appropriate scaffolding. The significance of language and communication is one of the core principles of nurture group theory. The belief is that children may lack the vocabulary to express their emotions so may instead “act out” their feelings. The social use of language is encouraged through play not just as a function for developing vocabulary, but also as a tool to develop empathy and understanding of the actions and reactions of others. The close observation of language during play can provide “intriguing insights into children’s development of thinking and learning” (Moyles 1989 p39) and supports the recognition of the ZPD for the individual child. Within assessment of quality of provision for a nurture group, the quality mark award emphasises the communication and language development between adults and children with

particular reference to developing emotional literacy, active listening, promoting engagement through conversation rather than behaviour and modelling of interactional language within the normal routines in the nurture group. (Nurture Group Network QMA award section 6b, 2006 – reproduced in appendix 1)

### **2.3 The importance of play in early development:**

According to Bennathan and Boxall (2000), through play with others, children are learning relationship skills, learning to organise themselves and building a repertoire of responses to different situations. (Bennathan and Boxall 2000 p81). Dunn (2004) describes how forming friendships is associated with the ability to play jointly with other children through imaginative ‘make-believe’ games. Play in a classic nurture group is an integral part of the social learning experience and curriculum. Through play, the children have the opportunity to develop cognitive and social skills as prerequisites for learning more complex concepts. Play activities are encouraged in classic nurture groups to encourage language, promote memory, self-regulation and social skills such as turn taking, sharing and collaboration. Through play, a child is learning to solve problems, express emotions and get along with others. Children use imaginative play to act out events that cause fear or anxiety which they may not otherwise verbalise.

The role of play is considered so significant that it is expressed in the UN convention on the rights of the child as an inalienable right “to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child” (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. 1989).

Good quality play is linked to positive learning outcomes in the cognitive, emotional, social and psycho-motor domains. (Wood 2009 p28). According to Ginsberg (2007), play should be an integral part of the academic environment in order to promote social and emotional development alongside cognitive development of the child. Play has been demonstrated to help children to adjust to the school situation and support a readiness for learning. (Ginsberg 2007 p183). Improved verbal communication, social and interaction skills, imaginative and

divergent thinking and problem-solving capabilities are all enhanced through play. (Wood and Attfield 2005).

Observation of solitary play can inform adults of a child's understanding, particularly in dramatic play as suggested by Wood (2005) where the child may "use self-speech or out-loud thinking to communicate the pretence (often in different voices) and provide a commentary on the action as they play in role" (Wood 2005 p43). This can provide a useful insight into the child's current understanding of a situation.

Engaging the child in joint play may have benefits over solitary play in a number of areas. It is suggested by Harris (2000) in a review of the empirical evidence into role play and belief understanding, that children who engage in joint play have been observed to perform better on theory of mind tasks when compared to their peers engaged in solitary play. Theory of mind is the ability to attribute mental states to oneself and others and to understand that others have beliefs, desires and interests that are different to one's own. It is the ability to understand another perspective or recognise what others may be thinking or feeling and to empathise with those feelings. This is a significant area within nurture group practice in order to support SEBD, develop social skills and support development of appropriate responses to challenge in the mainstream classroom to meet the expectations of the classroom. Children attending nurture groups often have significant difficulties in recognising the impact of their behaviour on others and are supported in the process of developing this recognition, often through dialogue and role play scenarios.

Dunn (2004) states that psychology has studied the importance of play in the development of language skills, wellbeing, conflict resolution and the understanding of others. Although it is difficult to provide evidence of how play in itself supports this development, common sense leads us to believe that children who have not had the opportunity to play with other children are deprived of a range of important experiences. (Dunn 2004 p30). Play is also important in developing the capacity to show affection, caring and develop mutually supportive friendships which are linked to understanding the feelings of others. (Dunn 2004 p32).

Nurture group theory uses play as a means, within a classic nurture group, of engaging children, developing social skills, supporting language and providing an insight into children's understanding of their world. Observation during play is a means by which the nurture group adults can inform their completion of the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall 1998) or support their curricular planning to encompass the next stages in the child's learning incorporating the ZPD. Moyles (1989) suggests that teachers should "constantly review by careful and objective observations their impressions of individuals and recognise when change has occurred" (Moyles 1989 p131-132) which is a principle used in nurture group practice, as is recognising the need for some children to role play situations that cause them concern until understanding and comfort are established.

## **2.4 The current literature relating to nurture groups:**

At the beginning of the research study outlined within this thesis, there was an interest in nurture groups but little in terms of peer reviewed literature available. Towards the end of 2000 a search revealed just seven peer-reviewed papers. However, during the course of the study period and writing this thesis, this position has changed and there is now a wider body of evidence from peer reviewed literature, and interest in the field continues to increase.

Literature has been sourced through a number of searches and the use of personal books. During May 2012 an electronic search was undertaken using the term "nurture groups". This included accessing the Educational Resource Index Abstracts (ERIC) and the British Education Index and Google Scholar. There were 22 reports relating to peer-reviewed articles identified as relevant to this thesis. Reference lists from these reports were used to identify other documents where relevant. In addition, a number of books, chapters and other documentation directly related to nurture groups (e.g. Ofsted 2011; HMIE Scotland 2008; Nurture Group Network 2006) have been consulted in order to inform the research.

The literature mainly falls into two areas: qualitative papers that look at an element of practice such as reintegration, a curricular area, or nurturing schools (e.g. Doyle 2003; Doyle 2001; Bishop and Swain 2000; Lucas 1999), or quantitative papers that focus on the evaluation of outcomes for individual pupils (e.g. Seth-Smith et al 2010; Reynolds et al 2009; Binnie and Allen 2008; Cooper and Whitebread 2007; Gerrard, 2005; Cooper, Arnold and Boyd, 2003; O'Connor and Colwell, 2002; Iszatt and Wasilewska, 1999) The majority of these studies assess pupil progress, using the Boxall Profile (1998) as a measure of attainment.

It is important to recognise that there are limitations to the research on nurture groups in relation to the nature of quantitative research design. The nurture groups are not viewed under controlled conditions but are observed in natural settings in real world situations. There has not been any research to date that encompasses randomised selection and allocation to controls groups. As such, nurture group quantitative research can be viewed as quasi-experimental wherein the study controls for some variables but is unable to isolate all potential for bias. Recognising this, some studies of a quantitative nature have used matched variables to increase validity e.g. Reynolds et al (2009), Cooper and Whitebread (2007), Saunders (2007) and Gerrard (2005). Whilst this can increase validity, forming generalisations remains problematic due to the challenge of controlling for all variables within matched groups and the difficulties in closely matching across school populations.

In this section I will critique the various literature available in relation to informing my research questions and look at some of the criticisms of nurture groups and the evidence for and against this approach, using my research questions to frame the review.

## **2.5 Do nurture groups impact on inclusive practices?**

Cooper and Whitebread (2007) assessed the progress of 546 children across 34 schools with an average age of 6 years 5 months. The study took place over a two year period and covered children from eleven different English local authorities. The schools were all reported to be in the lowest quartile of SATs league tables in their local authorities. Of these 546 children, 359 had nurture group placements.

The researchers included four control groups for outcome comparison; the first comprised 64 pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties who attended the mainstream schools where the nurture group was located but did not have a placement. These 64 pupils were matched by age, gender and academic ability to a sample of the 359 children who had nurture group placements. The second control group comprised 62 children attending the mainstream schools that had nurture groups but who were not deemed to have any social, emotional or behavioural difficulties. These children were again sample matched for gender, age and academic ability. Control group three comprised 31 pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in mainstream schools that did not have nurture groups. Control group 4 had 27 pupils who were assessed not to have any social, emotional or behavioural difficulties and attended mainstream schools where there was not a nurture group. Both control group three and four were selected in this study from local authorities where there were no nurture groups in existence.

In this study, rather than relying solely on Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall 1998) data, to determine the levels of SEBD, pupil behaviour was assessed using the Goodman Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman 1997, 1999). Mainstream class teachers undertook this assessment based on observed behaviour over five subscales; hyperactivity, conduct problems, emotional symptoms, peer problems and pro-social behaviour. In addition, Boxall Profiles were completed for the children who attended the nurture groups. The data was gathered over four consecutive terms for the children in the nurture group and for those in the two control groups where children attended a mainstream classroom in a school where a nurture group existed. In the other two control groups where no nurture groups existed in the school that these children attended, the data was collected at the start and end of a two term period.

The results demonstrated that overall there was a greater improvement in the SEBD functioning for children who had places in the nurture groups. Additionally, schools that had a nurture group achieved better outcomes for pupils in their mainstream classes who were deemed to have SEBD but did not receive a nurture group placement than children with SEBD in mainstream school that did not have a nurture group. The study draws the conclusion relating to this finding that “the

strong possibility that the presence of an effective [nurture group] adds value to the work that schools do with the wider population of children with SEBD" (Cooper and Whitebread 2007 p187). This is an area investigated as part of the case study in this thesis, alongside the development of the "nurturing school" (Doyle 2003, Lucas 1999).

Whilst this finding is certainly of interest to this research study, the difficulty in determining the factors which may have influenced this potential outcome are hard to ascertain. Davies (2011) suggests that there may be a "state of readiness" in schools that have nurture groups with affects the impact of the provision, that there is a "philosophical bias" towards this approach or that mainstream classroom practices were influenced indirectly by communication between the nurture group and mainstream staff. (Davies 2011 p60). This is a consideration in my research study, given that the school had been working towards supporting pupils with SEBD and had actively investigated the nurture group phenomenon prior to the start of the research study, as outlined in chapter 5. In terms of my research, part of my brief coming into post was to support the development of sustained practices within the mainstream classrooms and therefore communication between myself as the nurture group teacher and my mainstream colleagues was hoped to influence practice, which I describe in discussion of the nurturing school in chapter 5.

Cooper and Whitebread (2007) acknowledge the problem of the attrition rate in the collection of data. From the original 359 children in the study, data was only available for 120 at the end of term 4. Additional consideration should be given to the fact that the mainstream teacher completed the SDQ prior to inclusion in the nurture group and then post intervention. The pupil scores post-intervention have the potential to be inaccurate as they had spent significant periods of time away from the mainstream environment but it was their mainstream teachers who completed the SDQ. It is possible that inappropriate behaviour had therefore not been witnessed frequently in the mainstream environment in order to accurately score the SDQ. Similarly, the pupils with SEBD who remained in the mainstream environment and not in a nurture group could have received higher scores due to the potential for more opportunities to witness behaviours considered inappropriate by the teacher completing the SDQ.

In addition, but not limited to this study, both the Boxall Profile and the SDQ are subjective measures of behaviour, as is discussed later in this chapter, and this could be considered as a limitation to the findings in all studies using these as measurement tools of success.

Sanders (2007) reports on an evaluation of nurture groups in Hampshire. One question within her evaluation enquires whether nurture groups have an impact on the whole school, which is of relevance to this thesis. Her findings indicated that head teachers reported a decrease in staff absenteeism and turnover. Class teachers in this study also reported an improvement in their own behaviour management practices, adaptations to their teaching approaches that were more nurturing and feeling they were more able to gain support. This is again of interest to my own research. However, it was noted that staff in schools with nurture groups already had a high awareness of the factors that impact on SEBD. Cooper and Tiknaz (2007) also identify this potential suggesting that a more nurturing approach in the mainstream setting is fostered as a result of the communication between the nurture group staff and their colleagues. They conclude that nurture groups may enhance opportunities for a more nurturing environment rather than be the causal factor that creates this situation. (Cooper and Tiknaz 2007 p96)

The use of methodological triangulation in Saunders study is useful to supplement the findings of the Boxall Profile. This included the views of parents and mainstream staff, naturalistic observations and teacher data on social, emotional and academic progress. However as samples of the exit questionnaire or other collection tools are not provided, it is not possible to use these to inform understanding of the methodology involved. The sample size was small, using three schools within the same local authority, of which two had nurture groups and the third was a research control. The study took place over a relatively short two term period which could also be viewed as problematic; nurture group input is recommended to involve two to four terms of involvement. (e.g. Bennathan and Boxall, 2000; Boxall 2002; Cooper et al 1999). However, although Cooper and Whitehead (2007) found significant improvements were made between terms one and four, the greatest improvements in SEBD was in the first two terms, which may have implications for

nurture group practice. Boxall Profile data was collected in only one school, therefore it is not possible to compare all three settings to inform the research outcomes. Whilst recognising this as a pilot study, Colley (2012) states that the control group of nine pupils was “poorly matched and tended to have higher entry scores on the Boxall Profile, thereby limiting the usefulness of the comparison results”. (Colley 2012 p106) There is the potential for bias from the researcher as she is also involved in supporting the nurture groups. This is an element of my own research that needs to be considered as I am both the researcher and the nurture group teacher. I address this in chapter 3 when discussing methodology and ethics.

Interestingly, Cooper and Tiknaz (2007) found that some mainstream teachers did not feel the nurture group was successful in increasing academic performance, although progress was made in social and behavioural functioning. Saunders (2007) reported that teachers felt they knew the nurture group children less well than others in their class. This could be an indication of a negative impact of inclusive practices in schools that have nurture groups.

Cooper (2004) describes nurture group staff feeling that there was a need for clarity of purpose for the nurture group and its role in schools to ensure a whole school common understanding of nurture group principles. Similarly, Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) found that staff in the nurture group felt they needed to explain the necessity of having a small group of pupils with two members of staff to colleagues to prevent tensions within school relating to pressure to support pupils in mainstream environments with SEBD. In relation to my own research, this may be an indication that the wider staff in school do not feel included in the decision making and operation of the nurture group. Whilst my initial focus was on inclusive practices in classrooms, the importance of including all adults in the research and development of the nurture group provision is highlighted in these findings.

Howes et al (2002) state that “on a day-to-day basis … a nurture group is not an inclusive mode of provision. Children are withdrawn each day from their mainstream class over a long period of time, separated from peers whose potentially positive influence on them is thereby reduced.” (Howes et al 2002 p102) They continue to suggest that the pupils in the nurture group may have limited interaction

with peers and may become stigmatised and labelled as a group whose behaviour requires them to be isolated from the rest of the school. There is some identification of the potential for whole-school development for a school that includes a nurture group however, extending practice into curriculum planning, staff development in behaviour management and more positive attitudes towards families under stress. (Howes et al 2002 p109). This is an interesting perspective in my research when considering whether and how nurture groups may impact on inclusive practices. The authors conclude by suggesting nurture groups may exclude rather than include.

I would argue that there is a perception that nurture groups may exclude pupils. Hartley (2010) states clearly that “children can be excluded in any number of settings, It is not ‘place’ that matters, but the accommodations made for a child’s individual needs, and a continual, active focus on ensuring that children are constantly engaged in the best way possible”. (Hartley 2010 p50). It could be argued that a child in a mainstream classroom who is socially isolated from their peers due to fear of aggressive behaviour, or equally due to anxiety over making social approaches towards peers, is excluded in this environment. However, supporting those children to develop the skills to enable them to be able to access their peer group and mainstream environment through short term intervention in a nurture group accommodates those individual needs and engages them in a way that is appropriate at that time.

Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) answer the criticism that nurture groups are not inclusive by reinforcing that pupils are expected to attend on a temporary basis with a goal of returning to full time mainstream provision within the expected two to four terms of intervention. Binnie and Allen (2008) evaluate part time provision, where children attended for a maximum of four sessions. Part of the decision to offer part time rather than full time placement was due to their perceptions that this was a more inclusive approach. Their study sampled six schools in one local authority with a total of thirty six pupils. There was triangulation of data from parental completion of the SDQ for five of the schools. In addition, the study used the Boxall Profile and the Behavioural Indicators of Self-esteem Scale (Burnett 1998). Alongside the assessment of the progress made within this nurturing intervention for the pupils, the impact on the wider school was noted, with the authors commenting on improved

ethos, increased capacity to support children with SEDB and an increase in understanding of the needs of the children attending. This is an interesting finding in that the study looks at part time placements and the impact on the whole school. It makes an interesting contribution to the debate as to the frequency of input for individual pupils in a nurture group and warrants further investigation. Using Cooper and Whitebread's (2007) variant model, these nurture groups would seem to conform to variant 2 nurture groups. In their study, Cooper and Whitebread (2007) found some pupils attending part time nurture groups had outcomes that were at or above the mean level achieved by pupils in full time variant 1 nurture groups. This has implications for nurture group practice and the costs of intervention. Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) highlight the need to research this further.

## **2.6 Is there an association between the introduction of a nurture group and staff professional development?**

The literature relating to this research question is partially answered above, with a number of studies identifying potential impact on staff knowledge and understanding in schools where a nurture group is present. (e.g. Binnie and Allen 2008; Sanders 2007).

Cooper and Lovey (1999) report on a facilitated meeting of people working in or with nurture groups who, in response to the question ‘How do you think the school is affected by having a nurture group?’ clearly identify several responses that relate to this research question. Statements made include “it deepens the professional stance and approach of all concerned with the child...” and “teachers in the class take on nurturing strategies”. (Cooper and Lovey 1999 p129). Although this study is essentially a report of respondents at the meeting, it does draw the interesting conclusion that staff support one another to meet individual needs – a peer support mechanism which could provide professional development.

Cooper (2004) found that having a nurture group in a school did support an increase in staff professional development in understanding developmental issues and how SEBD impacts on learning. This finding links to that of others, e.g. Sanders (2007)

and Binnie and Allen (2008) and I can hypothesise that a similar outcome may be evident in my own research study.

## **2.7 Has the nurture group affected the ethos of the school?**

Cooper (2006) states that there is good evidence to suggest that successful nurture groups contribute to the development of the nurturing school, citing Lucas (2009) and my own study, Doyle (2003). (Cooper 2006 p110). These studies both focus on the ethos of the nurturing school as something that develops from hosting a nurture group. More detail of this development is contained within chapter 5 of this thesis. Cooper and Lovey (1999) suggest that the impact of a fully integrated nurture group as not only benefiting the most vulnerable pupils but also “provides for all an ethos of caring and nurturing”. (Cooper and Lovey 1999 p130). This study, as stated above, reported on specific responses from a group of practitioners attending a nurture group meeting. There were thirty five practitioners who were surveyed within the meeting, all of whom had an interest in nurture groups. Whilst an interesting observation from one of the practitioners, this one finding cannot be generalised from in the context of my own research, although it can be part of the overall evidence used to inform my study.

Binnie and Allen (2008) found that the majority of head teachers in their study reported that the nurture group had an overall positive impact on the whole school. It should be noted that this study engaged six head teachers within one local authority so the cohort was small from which to generalise.

Reynolds et al (2009) make a very interesting point concerning the complexity of drawing conclusions on the impact a nurture group may have. They identify the challenge in eliminating all differences between nurture groups and control groups in the study and acknowledge that some schools with nurture groups may be more open to new ideas or more inclusive than others. This would impact on determining whether the ethos of a school had been affected by the inclusion of a nurture group as part of its provision for pupils with SEBD.

These studies raise the potential question of whether a nurture group can affect the ethos of a school over time or does the existing ethos of the school support the success of a nurture group?

**2.8 Is there an association between the instigation of the nurture group and the numbers of fixed term and permanent exclusions issued?**

Whilst this question is specific to the school hosting the case study nurture group, there was little reference, other than anecdotally, to the potential impact a nurture group might have on exclusion data in the literature review. Sanders (2007) describes pupils attending nurture groups to be “usually perceived to be at risk of exclusion” (Sanders 2007 p45). A recent Ofsted report into nurture groups states that some pupils who were selected for the groups they visited had previously received fixed-term exclusions and some were in danger of permanent exclusion. (Ofsted ref 2011 p4). A report into the exclusion of infant age pupils from school identified where nurture groups were in place they were “highly effective in improving children’s behaviour and preventing exclusion” (Ofsted 2006 p5). Otherwise, reference specifically to reducing incidences of fixed term or permanent exclusion was not clearly identified in research studies. This is an area of investigation within this research study where new findings may be able to support the often implied but not yet evidenced potential of a nurture group to have an effect on the number of exclusions issued by a school.

**2.9 Has the nurture group supported an increase in the identification and understanding of a wider variety of needs of individual children?**

There is some evidence in the research that indicates there is the potential to develop the understanding for staff of a wider range of individual needs for the children in their school, e.g. Binnie and Allen (2008); Sanders (2007). However, the research literature discusses mainstream staff developing an understanding of behaviour strategies but there is an absence of information relating to the types of SEBD within the nurture groups evaluated. I was unable to ascertain whether there was an increase in recognition of different presentations of SEBD across the school population or whether the development of staff knowledge and understanding

related to the more extreme behavioural difficulties such as acting out behaviours where reference is made to this area.

Within my own study I will be looking at types of referral over time to see if there are any conclusions that can be drawn relating to the main presenting SEBD within the case study nurture group. This may indicate an increase in awareness and understanding of a wider range of needs.

## **2.10 Other research studies of note:**

In undertaking the literature review there were a number of studies which demonstrated interesting findings relating to nurture group research. Whilst their content did not directly provide evidence to consider in relation to my research questions, these do add to the overall informing of nurture group theory. A number support the belief that nurture groups impact on overall pupil outcomes, not discussed above. (E.g. Seth-Smith et al 2010; Gerrard 2005; O'Connor and Colwell 2002 and Iszatt and Wasilewska 1997). These studies add background and inform my own research by developing an understanding of potential outcomes for pupils within these interventions.

Iszatt and Wasilewska (1997) undertook a comparative study of the outcomes for 308 pupils placed in nurture groups and a control sample of 20 children who had been assessed for inclusion in a nurture group but not received a place. The control sample was not matched in terms of age, gender or socio-economic factors but all of the children were identified using the Boxall Profile to assess their appropriateness for inclusion within a nurture group. This study found that 87% of the original 308 children were able to return to mainstream classrooms after a nurture group place of less than one year's duration. The outcomes for the same children were reviewed again at a later date to monitor whether the mainstream placements had been sustained since leaving the nurture group. 83% of the original 308 children had successfully maintained a mainstream placement. 13% of the original cohort of children were further assessed and received a statement of special educational needs. 11% received special school provision.

The outcomes for the control sample of 20 children who were unable to obtain a nurture group placement but assessed as suitable to attend one found 35% were placed in special schools, with the remaining 55% maintaining a mainstream class placement when their progress was monitored in 1995 alongside that of the children who had received nurture group placements.

It should be noted that the matched control sample is considerably smaller than the original study group which will therefore affect the percentage scores in the findings. The study also took place in one local authority and there should therefore be some caution in interpreting these findings. However, they do suggest that progress for a large percentage of the original cohort was maintained after several years in mainstream provision.

O'Connor and Colwell (2002) examined outcomes for children placed in a nurture group, looking at 68 five year old children in three separate nurture groups. The duration of the placement was an average of 3.1 terms. The Boxall Profile data demonstrated improvements in the areas of cognitive engagement, emotional development, social engagement and behaviour indicative of secure attachment. The data from the children in the nurture group was contrasted with a sample of 12 children after two years. The findings from the original cohort showed that there was evidence of relapse in some areas of emotional and social functioning, however many maintained their improvements into the mainstream situation.

This study demonstrated that short-term improvements were not necessarily sustained over time which will be interesting to relate to my own research which is a longitudinal study over a four year period. It may be possible in some cases to monitor pupil progress for a longer period of time than this study although the nature of the infant school situation may mean this is prevented. The researchers noted a number of limitations in their study including the lack of examination of the home lives of the children which may have impacted on their progress in assessment measures, the low sample numbers and lack of control groups. They do identify the need for more longitudinal research studies into nurture groups, which is currently lacking in the research on nurture groups.

A larger evaluation of outcomes from 179 children between the ages of 5 and 7, attending nurture groups in Glasgow was undertaken by Reynolds et al (2009). This study contrasted the outcomes for children across 32 schools, 16 of whom had nurture groups and a further 16 schools without nurture groups. All the children assessed were felt to have social, emotional and behaviour difficulties. Reynolds et al (2009) found that the children who had nurture group placements demonstrated improvements in self-esteem, self-image, emotional maturity and attainment in literacy when compared to the children not attending a nurture group in the study cohort. This study attempted to address some of the limitations in the evidence base for nurture groups and did involve a selection process and number of assessment tools to measure pre and post intervention.

The Reynolds et al (2009) study identifies many of the methodological limitations of previous nurture group research studies and areas for further research. Included in this is an argument for studies with randomly controlled matched schools and children but this is alongside the recognition of the complexity of identifying and eliminating all the potential variables that could affect research outcomes.

Some research has looked at the use of nurture group principles and practices in different contexts to that studied in this thesis. For example, Scott and Lee, (2007) compare the outcomes for children in cross-age nurture groups in Scotland, concluding that the children who had received part time placements in these nurturing groups had made statistically significant gains in their development when assessed using the Boxall Profile, with the youngest pupils making the most significant progress. My research is based in an infant school so the findings may be relevant, although the study looked at part time placements whereas the case study nurture group operates on a full time basis so generalisations from this may be inappropriate.

Cooke et al (2008) looked at using nurture group principles in a KS3 group, concluding that this had a positive impact on social, emotional and behavioural development even with this older age group. There is a slowly increasing body of knowledge relating to nurture provision in high school environments and whilst this

is interesting in informing the wider knowledge base on nurture groups, the operation of these groups is not comparable to my infant school based nurture group.

## **2.11 The Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998):**

The Boxall Profile is a subjective tool used both in a nurture group and also by researchers studying the effectiveness of nurture group provision. (e.g. Reynolds et al 2009; Cooper and Whitebread 2007; Sanders 2007). The Boxall Profile is recommended as a tool for establishing a baseline of developmental stage alongside a diagnostic profile of social, emotional and behavioural needs. The profile “enables teachers to understand behaviour that had seemed incomprehensible and to see how it makes sense in terms of impairment at early levels of development” (Bennathan and Boxall 1998 p3).

The Boxall Profile has been standardised to reflect a measure of normative behaviour and development for a population aged between 3 years 4 months and 8 years. The representative sample for standardisation included 880 children of which 442 were from primary school nurture groups, 307 from primary mainstream classes and 101 from mainstream nursery classrooms all within the ILEA area. This standardisation took place in 1984 and has not been repeated, which raises some question over its current validity. In addition, as all previous pupils participating as part of the standardisation came from the ILEA area, the accuracy of the measures in other populations and potential cultural bias could be questioned. The majority of the standardisation sample were from nurture groups which potentially may also affect the validity of this tool in determining normative development.

The tool remains a widely used measure within nurture groups despite these considerations. Completion of the profile produces a histogram identifying the individual child’s diagnostic and developmental functioning to be compared with normative development. The aim of the profile is not to classify whether or not a child has emotional, social or behavioural issues in itself, but to be part of the overall observations of the individual child and in so doing, to recognise the child’s complex needs at the time of the assessment. It is described as a tool for “...

refining teachers' observations and deepening their understanding of children's difficulties ..." (Bennathan and Boxall 1998 p5).

The profile is separated into two main sections, a developmental and a diagnostic section. Within each section are a number of strands, further separated into sub-strands. Both sections contain 34 statements to be graded by the observer. The developmental section focuses on the factors that underpin the child's capacity to engage effectively in the learning process. This developmental section contains two strands - organisation of experience and internalisation of controls, with each of these having five sub-strands. Completing this section gives a developmental profile which indicates how the child is currently able to engage with peers and the wider world. The profile in this section indicates the child's levels of functioning from a development perspective, rather than a measure of expectations based on chronological age.

The diagnostic profile section looks at the behavioural characteristics that could be affecting the child's social and academic performance. This section is divided into three strands - self-limiting features, undeveloped behaviour and unsupported development. Each of these strands, as with the developmental section, contains a number of sub-strands. Completion of this section gives a diagnostic profile which indicates how the child is able to manage their own behaviour, their ability to internalise and their resilience at times of perceived challenge.

O'Connor and Colwell (2002) highlight the subjective nature of this tool and the potential for bias in completing it. They suggest this should be completed by someone neutral to reduce the potential for subjective completion. However, as the tool is designed to be completed by those who know the child well, this suggestion would not necessarily improve the validity of any rating.

The question of subjectivity in using the Boxall Profile is one I considered during the research process. To attempt throughout the study to reduce the potential for bias in completing Boxall Profiles for the pupils in the study nurture group, these were completed in collaboration with both the nurture group assistant and the class teacher. In this way, discussion and consensus of opinion could be obtained in order

to provide a more accurate depiction of the child each term. The Boxall Profiles were completed based on recent observations and not one specific occasion which aimed to reduce the potential for bias and to score artificially if affected by sudden recent behavioural shifts, either positive or negative.

In relation to the issue of validity, Couture et al (2011) have undertaken a comparative analysis of the Boxall Profile and the Goodmans Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), a widely used screening instrument used in the field of mental health, education and social care. (Couture et al 2011). During the study, 202 children and young people attending nurture groups aged between 3 and 14 years were screened using both the Boxall Profile and the SDQ. The pupils were selected from 25 schools across 8 local authorities. The study found a high degree of concordance between the two instruments, with both being able to identify similar behavioural characteristics in the same children. There was a high correlation between scores in the Boxall Profile strands and sub-scales of the SDQ. The researchers conclude that the Boxall Profile is a reliable tool for diagnostic and research purposes.

In line with other nurture groups nationally, the Boxall Profile was completed in the case study group initially on entry into the nurture group as part of the screening to determine suitability for this type of intervention. A new profile was completed each term during input in the nurture group and one term following reintegration to the mainstream classroom. The results of each profile fed into the on-going planning and provision for the individual child as well as serving as a monitoring tool. Sample pages from the questionnaire and histogram sections of the Boxall Profile are reproduced in appendix 2.

## **2.12 The Goodmans Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman 1997, 1999):**

The SDQ is a widely used tool across the domains of education, social care and mental health as a screening measure. It has been the subject of validity testing (Muris et al 2004; Muris et al 2003; Goodman et al 2000; Goodman et al 1999; Goodman 1997) and compared to other more established behaviour rating scales,

such as the Child Behaviour Rating Scale (Rutter 1967), where a high correlation between total scores was established, demonstrating concurrent validity for the SDQ. (Goodman 1999) The test-retest stability of the SDQ has also been demonstrated to be satisfactory. (Muir et al 2004) As noted above, the SDQ and Boxall Profile demonstrate concurrent validity. (Couture et al 2011)

The SDQ comprises of a 25 item behaviour screening questionnaire relating to five strands; conduct problems, emotional symptoms, hyperactivity, peer relationships and pro-social behaviour. Each strand contains five items. The scores are completed subjectively by the rater. There are separate questionnaires for use in different contexts e.g. a teacher questionnaire. The questionnaires include an impact supplement which aims to discover the teacher, parent and child's perspectives on the level of distress and social impairment the difficulties cause. Scores are recorded as being normal, borderline or abnormal.

The SDQ is a shorter questionnaire than the Boxall Profile, with 25 responses required as opposed to the 68 responses required of the Boxall Profile. As a relatively quick to complete screening questionnaire, the SDQ has benefits for larger populations in schools to potentially identify pupils for more in-depth screening using the Boxall Profile prior to inclusion in the nurture group.

As O'Connor and Colwell (2002) identify with their concerns for potential bias in completing the Boxall Profile, the SDQ is also a subjective measure and therefore has the same potential for rater bias. These factors should be considered when interpreting results of assessment for both the SDQ and the Boxall Profile.

### **2.13 Conclusion:**

Throughout this chapter I have sought to identify the link between the theoretical perspectives informing nurture group practice, relevant research and how this can be used to inform this particular research study. It is important to consider the context in which the research has been carried out, i.e. within a western world framework, with the possibility that judgements made could be influenced by the values of the researcher. Therefore any generalisations made will relate to the cultural situation in which the research took place and there may be alternative perceptions on some of

the key theoretical underpinning of nurture groups depending on the values of the reader.

The research into nurture groups raises a number of areas for further investigation, including longitudinal follow up of pupils, the types of groups which bring the most success and further analysis of what factors can be attributed to the success of nurture group provision. Within this research study I aim to offer insight into one case study nurture group over a four year period with the objective of providing some insight into the factors that may have affected the wider school environment.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology and Ethics.**

#### **3.1 Aims of the Chapter:**

In this chapter I will provide a description of the methodology I used in this research study. I will also describe the ethical considerations involved in working where vulnerable children were research subjects. I will also outline some of the issues of informed consent I encountered due to my role both as a practitioner and as a researcher.

#### **3.2 Study design – methodology:**

In initially approaching my research project, I gave extensive consideration to deciding upon the most appropriate methodology in order to successfully conduct this study. In the context of this project, I decided upon a participant observation case study as the most relevant methodology in order to gather the data and analyse, triangulate and report it in a format that would provide sufficient scope and focus. A case study can be described as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.” (Yin 1994 p 13). Jorgensen (1989) states that for the researcher using participant observation “...it is possible to describe what goes on, who or what is involved, when and where things happen, how they occur, and why ...” (Jorgensen 1989 p12).

The case study methodology is an approach to research where observed evidence is collected regarding the intricacies of what is taking place within a specific, focused environment in its natural context. It can adopt multiple methods of data collection in order to produce a report that is the sum of the parts rather than isolated examples of individual studies. The characteristics of this methodology are defined by Robson (2002 p 179) as a concentration on a particular case, studied in its own right. Stake (1995 p16) describes how in order to gain a greater understanding of the unique case it is necessary to “...appreciate the uniqueness and complexity of [the

case], its embeddedness and interaction with its contexts.” Within this particular case study, I would be immersed in the day to day operation of the nurture group and wider school as a member of staff, and therefore felt I would be ideally placed to study the specific case and report on the detail from a participant observer perspective.

The case study methodology provides an opportunity to focus in detail on a specific phenomenon - in this case a particular initiative within a single school - in order to give an in-depth account of the processes occurring within a particular instance. It offers the prospect of focussing on the relationships between events, experiences and the combination of these which give a distinctive character to the initiative at the heart of the study. According to Denscombe, case study methodology’s defining characteristic is “its focus on just one instance of the thing that is to be investigated” (Denscombe 2007 p35). Combining Denscombe’s characteristics with a participant observation methodology provides the opportunity to look in depth at the processes, relationships and organisation of people and events in a sociocultural context over a period of time. (Jorgensen 1989 p 12).

The nurture group concept in itself is not new; successful nurture groups had been established in many schools over time, (see Boxall 2000; Bennathan and Boxall 1998; Cooper, Arnold and Boyd 1999) but an intervention of this nature had never been operational in this specific school under these particular set of circumstances. This phenomenon was therefore sufficiently “... unique to justify intensive investigation.” (Jorgensen 1989 p 19)

I selected the case study approach for its ability to provide a holistic view of the setting up of a specific initiative. I felt this methodology would give depth to the work by looking at the wider impact for the school, teachers, pupils and families, thereby setting the operation of the nurture group within the context of its environment as opposed to the more isolated view of focusing only on outcomes. For me, it offered an opportunity to conduct a concentrated study in this specific instance of an educational initiative as Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) state “... in order to reveal the ways in which events come together to create particular kinds of outcomes.” (p 214). Case studies are holistic in their approach to studying a

phenomenon, “...seeking to avoid the separation of components from the larger context to which these matters may be related.” (Jorgensen 1989 p19).

The inclusion of a participant observation methodology to enrich the case study was in part due to the necessity of me being integral to the working of the nurture group due to being a practitioner in the school for the duration of the research project. However, the conditions being studied were also particularly suitable to this approach. Jorgensen (1989 p 13) outlines how participant observation is most appropriate when the following minimal conditions are present (my highlights):

- The research problem is ***concerned with human meanings and interactions*** viewed from the insiders’ perspective;
- The phenomenon of investigation is ***observable within an everyday life situation or setting***;
- The researcher is able to gain ***access to an appropriate setting***;
- The phenomenon is ***sufficiently limited in size and location to be studied as a case***;
- ***Study questions are appropriate for case study***; and
- The research problem can be addressed by ***qualitative data gathered by direct observation and other means pertinent to the field setting***.

Source: Jorgensen 1989 p 13

In this instance, the setting was appropriate to this methodology as it was an integral part of the working of a mainstream school rather than a laboratory or artificially structured environment designed purely for the purposes of the research study. The focus therefore was on a “... real situation, with real people in an environment often familiar to the researcher.” (Opie 2004 p 74).

Being able to study the particular characteristics of the initiative and its inter-related impact on the wider school environment at a given point in time enabled me to engage in an in-depth study of the intricacies of the complex social and educational situation. Rather than looking at individual actions, outcomes or isolated events, the

study could look in depth at the reasons for these actions, the route taken to achieve this and the often complex series of related events which produce these outcomes. This involved me collecting and amassing of large amount of qualitative data from numerous sources, including narratives.

Gray (2004) notes that using qualitative data in the form of narratives can lead to more holistic data. He describes using narratives as "... an ideal way of capturing the lived experiences of participants ..." (p341). The analysis of the narrative accounts set relevant data into the context and social situation it had been created in. Lieblich et al (1998) describe the use of narrative methodology as resulting in "... unique and rich data that cannot be obtained from experiments, questionnaires or observations." (p 9). At Arendt states, "The chief characteristic of the specifically human life ... is that it is always full of events which ultimately can be told as a story ..." (Arendt 1958 p 72). By combining the strengths of participant observer case study with the use of narratives I created a research project that had richness and depth, whilst retaining the focus on the context of the study within the wider school and social environment.

### **3.3 Criticisms of case study methodology:**

My review of the literature relating to this methodological approach revealed a critical focus on three main concerns. Firstly that the data collected is subjective in nature, based on general observations, and therefore could provide a distorted viewpoint from the researcher. Secondly, critics suggest that it is not possible to determine a causal connection between that observed and outcomes due to a lack of appropriate control measures. Thirdly, the issue of the inability to generalise from one case study to a broader spectrum of cases in order to apply the data to replicate the findings is raised as a limitation in some of the critical literature.

Well-designed case study research addresses the issue of potential for distortion and researcher bias in reporting by incorporating triangulation of data as an integral part of the work. Tellis (1997) describes how the necessity for triangulation arises due to an ethical need for validity in endorsing the processes undertaken as part of the research study. He continues by stating that this can be done by using multiple

sources of data. Paton (2001 p247) also suggests using more than one kind of data source, or more than one methodology, to strengthen the validity of a research study through triangulation. Stake (1995 p134) states that "...we use triangulation, ... , to minimise misperception and the invalidity of our conclusions". My use of participant observation, analysis of multiple sources of data and incorporating narrative within the study all support the triangulation of the case study's observational records. Denzin (1978) describes how within participant observation case studies, although the focus is on the observation of human activity in social contexts, triangulation of the observation is generally undertaken using several sources or methods of data collection.

Within this case study, the use of narrative accounts provided me with the opportunity to obtain perspectives from all the key participants during the period of the study and set in context some of the research observations. Burgess (1984 pvi) highlights the benefit of using these narrative accounts in the preface to his edited book, stating that "... first person accounts that combine together discussions of the research process with research technique can help us to advance our knowledge of research practice". Stake (1995) talks of the use of narrative as a form of reflection in case study reports:

*"We use ordinary language and narratives to describe the case. We seek to portray the case comprehensively, using ample but non-technical description and narrative. The report may read something like a story. Our observations cannot help but be interpretive, and our descriptive report is laced with and followed by interpretations. We offer opportunity for readers to make their own interpretations of the case, but we offer ours too".*

(Stake 1995 p134)

Billington (2003) takes this further. He expresses the opinion that the stories told by researchers are not just about the parent, child or the research project but about our own stories as actively involved participants, and "... we lose sight of our own story at our peril" (Billington 2003). Freidus (2002) describes how the use of narrative can start from conversations that retell personal experiences that over time are added to by others to form a collective narrative that contextualises what is taking place

and support the understanding of why it is happening: "... the narrative experience led to a construction of shared meaning about what was and what had been". (Friedus 2002 p161).

Waddington (2004) raises a particular concern in relation to the act of participation and the interference of the participant in the observed setting or community. He also emphasises the influence of that community on the observer, suggesting that this could introduce bias or personal preference into what should be an objective account. He continues by stating that this type of research is time consuming, inherently subjective and that the researcher "...plays a role within unfolding events and is therefore not a passive recipient of information, but someone who contributes to the shape and content of the resultant data." (Waddington 2004)

Throughout the study period I was always mindful of the role I played both as a researcher and as a fully involved participant due to the nature of my employment position. Consideration had to be given at all times to the impact of being a participant within the study as well as the observer of the events, being aware of the inevitable part I played in shaping the intervention, the actions of those within it and the wider study. Case study literature indicates that traditionally those conducting the study are observers who can look in depth at the phenomena and the context in which it occurs (e.g. Miles and Huberman, 1994, Yin 1994, Stake 1995, Robson 2002). Specifically, Miles and Huberman (1994 p 27) suggest that unlike the way that a quantitative researcher might approach their study, a case will always occur in a specific setting, physically and socially, meaning the context has to be considered in this approach to research. My research took place in the nurture group and school and therefore my dual role as both practitioner and researcher had to be acknowledged throughout the study, attributing my participation to the findings appropriately.

In undertaking the research study, it was important to be aware of the issues raised above and to develop strategies to reduce the potential for bias and distortion without losing any of the richness of the study that being a participant observer would afford. Robson (2002) states that whilst it is important to be aware of the potential for bias in reporting on any research project, the objectivity in research can be improved through a greater awareness of the potential for subjectivity. This self-

awareness, i.e. knowing what distortions or bias we may introduce into our observations and research, will help to counteract them and is part of the process of being a reflective researcher and practitioner. Jorgenson (1987) states that within the participant observation case study, dependable and trustworthy results are a fundamental concern. Participant observation provides a number of strategies for checking for valid and reliable findings. Using a range of documents, interviews, observation and artefacts to triangulate the data provides multi-dimensional evidence which serves to reduce any tendency for distortion, whether conscious or unconscious.

Critics of the case study methodology state that the findings are not easily open to cross-checking and may therefore be selective or biased. To minimise the potential criticism in this specific study, I have used a wide range of source materials to support my observations, including public records such as Ofsted inspection reports and an independent evaluation of the nurture group initiative. Due to the uniqueness of the individual case study, not all findings can be supported by public records. Triangulation of the observations has therefore been sought in the form of responses from others who used the initiative, including children's anecdotes, teacher observations and responses, both specific and spontaneous, and from parents and carers of the children within the nurture group during the study period.

As a key factor with case study methodology is the study of the specific rather than the general, this evidence gathering was integral to the observations and to provide an in-depth narrative of the process I undertook in working within a school context. LaBoskey (2002 p39) describes the difficulty in avoiding bias in narrative accounts when reporting on issues that involve human interaction. She continues by stating that using narrative accounts as part of a teacher training programme she worked on demonstrated how being self-reflective and aware of the potential for bias reporting when using narrative to tell the story required conscious and explicit attention. Throughout this research project I have given this level of attention to the data I have collected and its context.

Whilst it can be argued that determining a causal connection between the intervention at the heart of this study and the outcomes for all the study participants

is not simple, Jorgensen (1987) states that this area can be addressed as long as the researcher details the study procedures sufficiently to enable them to become "... subject to debate and testing in the experience and judgements of everyone reading the final report". By detailing factors such as the physical, social, institutional and historical context of the selected school and nurture group, the study will provide detail which offers sufficient information on which another practitioner or researcher could make a judgement in relation to the relevance of this study to their own context.

Some critics stress the limitation of a case study methodology is that it is difficult to take one set of data from a specific case and to apply it to other situations in order to generalise the findings. My choice of methodology was not to enable generalisations to be made in relation to setting up and running a nurture group in a school, but to provide a thorough and in-depth study of all the factors relevant to this particular initiative. It is not the remit of this study to enable another school working under different social and educational circumstances to replicate the work in this project; it is the remit of this study to provide an informative and in-depth examination of the processes involved in developing an initiative of this type and the impact it had on the wider school community. As Flyvbjerg (2006) states:

“That knowledge cannot be formally generalized does not mean that it cannot enter into the collective process of knowledge accumulation in a given field or in a society. A purely descriptive, phenomenological case study without any attempt to generalize can certainly be of value in this process and has often helped cut a path toward scientific innovation”.

Flyvbjerg (2006)

### **3.4 Practical considerations within the study design:**

I had to take into account a number of considerations in addition to the positive benefit of using a case study methodology in order to ensure this study contained sufficient attention to detail and rigour. Because of the nature of case study

methodology in providing the opportunity to look at the reasons for observed details, it can be difficult to maintain a focus and determine which data is appropriate to include within the study and what should be excluded. The volume of data gathered when studying this type of initiative is vast; determining what is relevant and will provide depth and interest within the study from amongst the array of sources of data to maintain a focus is challenging. Many sources provide appealing additional information, but these can run the risk of detracting from the main focus of the case study and lead to tangents which, whilst interesting, do not provide any in-depth knowledge to the current study. The process employed in analysing the data is outlined below.

Working with such large volumes of data relating to a school, teachers and children raises the very significant ethical issue of confidentiality. I have taken all reasonable precautions to ensure that no child or adult is identifiable within the study, which I have detailed within the ethical considerations discussed below.

A further consideration which needed careful examination was the observer effect. As I was also a member of staff, I was aware that this would have an unavoidable effect on the participants in the study i.e. the children and teachers, on a daily basis. Within this case study situation, it was not possible to keep interaction with the children or staff to a minimum. This meant that as the observer I had to be a full participant within the research study and is therefore integral to the findings. Stake (1995 p41) discusses the need for qualitative research to recognise that “.... the people most responsible for interpretations [need] to be in the field, making observations, exercising subjective judgment, analysing and synthesizing, all the while realising their own consciousness” . In this study there was no option apart from the researcher responsible for the interpretation of the specific case study to be “in the field” as the research ran alongside my day-to-day employment role. Part of the role of a case study is to understand and interpret what is happening within a specific instance, and doing that in this research study involved being in the field, studying the specific instance in action. In doing so, the study provided a contextual illustration of a specific, unique, real situation with real participants rather than offering an abstract theoretical model.

However, I had to recognise that people may alter their behaviour if they know they are being observed and take this into consideration when talking to or formally observing colleagues within this study. Various strategies were put in place to try to alleviate the effect this may have, including the use of stakeholder checks, wherein my colleagues were able to comment on my observation notes to correct any errors, challenge my interpretations or provide relevant information that potentially could further inform the context of the observed situation. Additionally, the focus for any observation was made explicit to my colleagues and as this case study took place over a four year period with a mainly stable staff team, it became possible to minimise the observer effect by becoming an integral member of the staff. Observations became accepted as part of the natural process involved in the established nurture group's day-to-day operation. A case study, according to Cohen et al (2000 p 183) "...frequently follows the interpretive tradition of research – seeing the situation through the eyes of participants." As I was also a participant, this offered me a unique perspective on this interpretation.

Bailey (1978) has identified some advantages for participant observation including the ability of the observer to note behaviours as they occur, enabling the surrounding facts to be noted at the time they occur rather than retrospective or anecdotal accounts. There is also the benefit of the research being longitudinal, allowing a more detailed study to take place, with myself as a participant observer forming a relationship with those being studied, becoming seen as integral to the normal operation of the case study subject. The decision to adopt a participant observer strategy within a case study methodology can, according to Cohen et al (2000), be related to the type of setting the case study occurs in. Settings which have an artificial environment such as a laboratory or a purposely set up therapy room are more likely to involve non-participant observations. Naturally occurring environments such as classrooms or playgrounds are more likely to involve participant observation which can be reactive to unanticipated events and variables in a way that a more structured non-participant observation cannot do, thereby managing to "...catch the dynamics of unfolding situations..." (Cohen et al 2000 p189).

### **3.5 Data collection during the study:**

#### **3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews:**

Data in the form of semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions was gathered from both teaching and non-teaching staff at the beginning and end of the study period. Before discussing this in more detail, it is important to provide some contextual information regarding these study participants.

During the four year study period there were a total of twelve teaching staff in addition to myself employed at the school. Of these, two resigned their posts within a term of the nurture group being established. In addition, two staff had limited involvement in the nurture group research due to coming into post towards the end of the study period and one further member of staff worked exclusively in the part-time nursery class and did not have any pupils attending the nurture group at any stage during the four year study period as the intervention accepted pupils from reception to Y2 only. Of the remaining seven staff, six were consistently mainstream classroom based and most involved with the pupils in the nurture group due to their joint class responsibility with myself as the nurture group teacher. Two of these six were employed as NQTs during the study period, one was midpoint in her NQT year at the start of the study period and the remaining three were experienced teachers with a minimum of five years teaching experience each. The final member of teaching staff was the head teacher who did not have a class teaching responsibility.

In addition, during the four year period there were eleven teaching assistant staff employed in school, two directly employed as the nurture group assistants, one for a period of four terms and the second for eight terms. Of the remaining nine TA staff, one worked exclusively in the nursery class, one had a period of maternity leave during the study and subsequently resigned and another spent one year in a mainstream class before also working exclusively in the nursery during the study period. Eight of the TA staff had been employed for several years in the school prior to the instigation of the nurture group with the remaining one joining in the first year

of the study period. Both nurture group assistants had experience in schools in the local area as TAs prior to appointment in the case study school.

Nine members of staff participated in the initial semi-structured interviews, five teaching and four support staff. These all took place in the first four weeks of the research study period. The questioning was open-ended to allow time for each respondent to give as much detail as they felt was appropriate in answering. Whilst the conversation was guided at times by using supplementary questions, these were for clarification of points made. During each discussion, handwritten notes were taken. At the end of each discussion, I summarised the points I felt had been made and gave the respondent the opportunity to provide oral feedback to either confirm my summary or to correct any errors in my understanding of the conversation. All semi-structured interviews were carried out individually.

The questions covered in each of the initial semi-structured interviews were:

- What do you understand a nurture group to be?
- What effect do you think the nurture group might have in school?
- How do you think the nurture group will work in practice?
- Do you have any children in mind that might benefit from being in the nurture group?
- Why do you think they should be considered?
- What do you think the nurture group might do that is different to what you do in the classroom?
- What do you think the main impact for you personally might be from having the nurture group in school?
- Do you have any reservations about the nurture group?
- Why do you think this school should have a nurture group?

Initially these semi-structured interviews were undertaken as an information gathering exercise for myself to determine how much prior understanding staff had about the planned nurture group. I also wanted to build rapport with colleagues and felt I would be better placed to do this if I was more familiar with their existing knowledge of nurture groups. I wanted to gain a baseline of their existing

expectations for which pupils they felt would benefit from the intervention and to acknowledge any concerns my colleagues had.

Analysis of the data gathered from this exercise was used to inform the amount of support for individual staff I felt I needed to provide as part of my nurture group teacher role. In terms of the information this gave me for my research study, I was able to refer back to the original notes and compare this with the second semi-structured interviews when informing the research findings.

At the end of the study period, semi-structured interviews were again held with those staff still in post for the full duration of the study period. There were a total of seven staff, three teaching and four TAs. On this occasion each member of staff was asked the following questions:

- What do you understand a nurture group to be?
- What effect do you think the nurture group has had on the school?
- How did you feel the nurture group worked in practice compared to your expectations?
- In what ways do you think the children benefitted from being in the nurture group?
- Do you think the nurture group does anything different to what you do in the classroom?
- Was there any impact for you personally from having the nurture group in school?
- Do you have any reservations about the nurture group?
- Do you think this school should have had a nurture group?

The data from this second set of semi-structured interviews was used as a comparison with the earlier interview data. This helped to provide a measure over the study period to use as part of the data assessed to answer the research questions.

### **3.5.2 Operational discussions during the study period:**

During the period of the study there were regular operational discussions held between myself as the nurture group teacher and my mainstream teaching colleagues relating to individual pupils. These would either be with regard to pupils already in the nurture group or those who might be able to have a place in the future. These operational meetings were not formally scheduled and took place as part of the on-going practice in the nurture group within school. Whilst some note of these may have been included in my field notes, they were not formally recorded for the purposes of the research study.

### **3.5.3 Unstructured Interviews:**

During the study there were some unstructured interviews undertaken with staff in order to inform elements of my understanding of the school's decision to have a nurture group and other operational matters. A number of these were recorded on a hand held dictation machine and later transcribed for illustrative use within this thesis. Consent was not always forthcoming to record these unstructured interviews and at these times, brief handwritten notes were taken by me instead. In order to check the reliability of my notes, they were verbally summarised for the respondent at the end of the unstructured interview and the opportunity for verbal feedback was given. I have indicated whether semi-structured or unstructured respondent testimony has been used where these have been used to illustrate points within this thesis.

### **3.5.4 Observations:**

Formal observations were undertaken of every pupil prior to having a place in the nurture group during the four year study period. These took place in their mainstream classroom and some were supplemented in other school areas such as the playground or dining hall. The purpose of these formal observations were to inform the completion of the Boxall Profile from the nurture group teacher's perspective. The Boxall Profiles were completed in conjunction with the mainstream teacher and, where possible, with the teaching assistant who spent time

in the classroom to reduce the potential for subjective bias. However, in order to inform myself of typical behaviour in the mainstream situation, I undertook an initial observation to gather evidence to respond to the Boxall Profile questions. There were 55 pupils during the four year period that had placements in the nurture group, all of whom had an initial formal observation.

The Boxall Profile was subsequently completed each term during a nurture group placement. In order to reduce the potential for subjective bias, this would be undertaken in consultation with the mainstream teacher who could add insight into typical behaviours when the child was not in the nurture group room. There would not be a formal observation undertaken at these times as I could use my familiarity of the child in the nurture group context to inform the answers. The nurture group assistant would also be part of the process to provide an alternative perspective at these times.

A further formal observation took place of each child who had returned to their mainstream classroom one term after the end of their nurture group placement. There were a number of pupils for whom this was not possible due to leaving school prior to completion of a placement due to a family move or due to transition to junior school before reintegration could take place. In total, there were 46 pupils who were successfully reintegrated into the mainstream classrooms and of these, 38 had follow-up formal observations. The remaining eight were did not have formal observations due to the cessation of my post. The formal observations and completed Boxall Profiles were kept in the individual pupil files in school.

### **3.5.5 Research field notes:**

Throughout the four year study I kept handwritten field notes. These were used to record notes of conversations, impromptu discussions and to reflect on observations. They served as a method for me to record my thoughts relating to what was taking place in the nurture group and wider school. They were used reflectively to summarise staff meetings, as a reminder to myself to look at specific pupils and as a working document to guide my study. They were not formalised records but were very much working documents for myself.

These field notes were referred back to many times and annotated as I learnt more or observed other things I felt to be significant. The children in the nurture group often made simple comments which I recorded in my field notes to refer to at a later stage to reflect on.

These notes often contained names and information that could potentially identify both adults and children. Therefore any content from these field notes used within this thesis has undergone careful scrutiny to ensure I have altered names and removed any personal information to protect identities. During the study period, these field notes were kept in a locked filing cabinet overnight if left in school as the building was often used for community activities.

### **3.6 Data analysis:**

As stated above, there was a considerable amount of data amassed during the four year study period of varying types. This included informal observational data, notes I kept of discussions with colleagues, data from open ended questioning during semi-structured interviews, pupil's perspectives and some formal data collated from specific focused observation in the classroom. Analysing this amount of qualitative data involved a general inductive approach in order to condense the large volume of raw text data into summary data linked to the key research questions and the objectives of each section of my research study.

Thomas (2006) expresses three purposes to a general inductive approach as:

1. To condense extensive and varied raw text data into a brief, summary focus
2. To establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data and to ensure these links are both transparent (able to be demonstrated to others) and defensible (justifiable given the objectives of the research).
3. To develop a model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences or processes which are evident in the text (raw data).

The general inductive approach applies a systematic method to managing data involving multiple readings and interpretations of raw data, developing themes or coding of the categories of raw data based on the areas of importance to the researcher and refining the categories into summary data used to inform the research findings. The reliability of findings can be undertaken in a number of ways, including triangulation within the project, feedback from research participants or comparison with findings from other research.

This inductive approach was particularly useful for me within the research as I wanted to be able to engage my colleague within the study to maintain their interest and co-operation. Being able to summarise larger amounts of qualitative data had two benefits from my perspective; firstly it was a way to keep the volume of data manageable and relevant to the key research questions. Secondly, it was a method by which I was able to gain feedback from my colleagues who were part of the research. This latter benefit was, to me as a researcher, a method of validating what I felt I had seen or heard which increased the reliability of my own summaries. To my colleagues, it was a way for them to be involved in what was taking place rather than being passive participants and helped reduce the potential for misrepresentation due to inadvertent observer bias.

### **3.7 The procedures used in the research for inductive analysis:**

The majority of qualitative data collected during the research study including records of semi-structured interviews and observational records, was in the form of handwritten notes. To transcribe these into an electronic form was impractical due to the volume and nature of the data and therefore the use of software to support coding of key words was not appropriate in this instance. Part of the reason for keeping handwritten notes was to maintain the informality of working so closely with colleagues who were subjects of my observations and questioning. I was keen to avoid situations where guarded responses may be an issue, particularly during individual interviewing, and felt that recording of discussions too frequently in a more formal mode could reduce the openness. One colleague had stated at the beginning of the research when I was obtaining informed consent that she would be unprepared to have a taped interview as she felt that this could be used

inappropriately to paint her in a dim light. Whatever the reason for this suspicion, I wanted to create a culture during the research whereby colleagues felt they could be open about their feelings on the nurture group and its potential effect so her testimony has been manually recorded where relevant.

In addition, where children's accounts are used to inform the research, this took place in an informal context in the classroom or nurture group class and being able to hand write notes was important to me to ensure the children were not intimidated by more formal recording procedures. I was also aware when speaking to parents and carers of the potential for creating an intimidating situation and wanted to ensure that any discussions had an air of openness and informality. Notes were not taken covertly at any time. In a number of situations I was able to verbally summarise from my notes at the end of an observation or interview prior to engaging in more systematic inductive analysis which supported me as a researcher to ensure I was accurately recording my notes.

In the process of analysing raw data using inductive analysis, the text is read in detail by the researcher initially to gain understanding of the detail. Further readings of the text take place to create segments of information with the aim of defining categories. The coding can initially be undertaken with a view to identifying relevant features in the text according to pre-set criteria based on what the researcher expects to find, for example looking in a semi-structured interview notes for data on aggressive behaviour. As the text is reviewed, other criteria for coding may emerge which can be added to the pre-determined categories. Unlike quantitative data coding, qualitative data coding allows for text data to be applied to more than one category. In addition, there may be large amounts of text that is not coded as it is not relevant at that time to the specific research questions being examined. This was the case often with data coding from observation and discussion in my research study as I began to focus in on specifics of the study rather than more general information gathering.

Once the data has been analysed and categorised, further examination takes place in order to reduce the overall number of categories. This involves looking for categories where there are similarities that can be linked together or combining areas

into a superordinate category where an overall theme could form one category which includes linked concepts. This process reduces the number of categories without reducing the content. This process continues until the most significant categories have been identified with subcategories of the larger initial categories incorporated into them. Figure 1 demonstrates the stages undertaken in order to conduct an inductive analysis of the data.

Initial read through text data	Identify specific segments of information	Label the segments of information to create categories	Reduce overlap and redundancy among the categories	Create a model incorporating most important categories
Many pages of text	Many segments of text	30-40 categories	15-20 categories	3-8 categories

Figure 1: the coding process in inductive analysis (Thomas, 2006 adapted from Creswell 2002, figure 9.4 p266)

This process was useful throughout the analysis of data for me as a researcher to inform this study, but was of specific practical relevance to colleagues in the initial stages of developing the reintegration readiness scale (see Chapter 5) where criteria was selected from a number of different document as well as drawn from discussion in a group situation with colleagues and needed to be coded into a useable format.

### 3.8 Reliability of data analysis using a general inductive approach:

Analysis of large amounts of qualitative data will inevitably be subject to some level of researcher bias and subjectivity. It is the researcher who determines what is to be included in the findings and what can be omitted from observation notes or answers to open-ended questions as seemingly not relevant to the study objectives or key research questions at that time. However, it is possible to try to limit the potential for

subjectivity and researcher bias through adopting strategies specifically in relation to coding of data.

In incidences where a study is carried out by more than one researcher, each can separately code the data and compare the results to determine consistency. As I was the only researcher, this was not possible within the context of this study. Alternatively, coding consistency can be checked by asking an independent person to code a selection of the data using the research objectives or key questions. Their categories and the content of these can be compared with the original research coding. As my colleagues working in the case study school were also subjects of the research, they could not be considered independent in order to support coding consistency checks in this manner. I therefore engaged in stakeholder checking during the research project, mainly using informal opportunities, but also formally in a group situation where it was supportive of the data analysis.

Stakeholder checks (Thomas 2006) can improve the credibility of the coding process by giving opportunities to participants in the study to provide feedback on the categories or summaries the researcher has produced. In this study, I adopted this strategy through informal means such as summarising discussions and inviting oral feedback to ensure I had interpreted the respondent's words accurately. I was aware that note taking during discussions can be problematic and key elements may be inaccurately reflected due to engagement in the conversation, so felt it important to provide an opportunity on completion of a discussion to receive immediate feedback. In follow up discussion or during a subsequent interview I referred back to the earlier agreed summary. This was helpful in working with time constraints to ensure we did not re-cover ground already discussed but moved the discussion forward, as well as giving the opportunity to verify my interpretations.

More formally, when devising categories for the reintegration readiness scale (see chapter 5) the use of stakeholder checks provided valuable feedback to me when determining the five overall categories contained in the scale. This was completed as a consultative group exercise alongside investigation of relevant existing documentation. The data generated needed a systematic reduction and analysis. There was the potential for researcher bias in the coding; I had asked colleagues

what they would realistically like a pupil to be able to achieve following nurture group input and this generated many expectations, not all of which I felt were realistic. I was aware that my own bias could affect the coding of the data in that I could potentially exclude some of my colleagues expectations based on my own opinion of what should be expected of the pupils. I therefore actively sought feedback from my data coding as a group exercise during a timetabled staff meeting. The stakeholder feedback informed the coding categories, particularly in identifying linked themes that could be combined into a superordinate category. A reintegration readiness scale can be seen in appendix 4.

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations:**

*Ethical issues raised by [qualitative longitudinal research] include concerns around consent, confidentiality, anonymity, the potential impact of the research on both researched and researchers. Other problems arising from prolonged contact between researcher and researched are intrusion, dependency, distortion of life experience through repeated intervention, emotional involvement and problems of closure. Escaping the field is one of the most difficult things to do after a long engagement with participants.*

Source: transcript from a workshop run by Janet Holland, entitled “Issues in Qualitative Longitudinal Research” as part of the conference on Qualitative Longitudinal Research: Exploring ways of researching lives through time. London South Bank University 2007

In undertaking any research with children or in schools, a significant number of ethical and moral considerations need to be taken into account. Hill (2005 p 66) includes an adapted table outlining key ethical issues specifically in relation to research with children which I used as a focus for my study, reproduced below. Although generalised across research paradigms and not specific to a case study methodology, the questions it raises were useful for me to consider and provided a helpful framework when I was analysing and reporting on the vast array of data amassed during the active fieldwork period. It was useful for me to consider the

questions in the context of the case study as prompts to ensure that the interests of myself as a researcher did not cause any unintentional adverse effect for the child due to having been a part of the study.

This table was used as a framework to clarify the designing of the specific case study from an ethical perspective and was regularly referred to during the study period.

Topic		Responses to questions specific to this study
1	Research purpose	The research will provide information in relation to what impact the nurture group intervention has on children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. It will provide training and skill development for mainstream staff to continue the support in wider school areas.
2	Costs and benefits	The exclusion rates from the school, both fixed term and permanent, are running at a very high level. There is inconsistency in the approaches to supporting behavioural needs in the school with some teaching staff who favour an authoritarian approach and other adults who are reluctant to challenge unacceptable behaviour due to concerns of escalation of the problems if they do. The children are not being prepared for future independent learning as they move through school. Behaviour challenges are hindering progress due to a lack of access to the curriculum. Disruptive behaviour from a minority of children is affecting the learning of the wider group. Continuation of disruptive behaviour is not supporting the children to learn how to act in a socially more appropriate manner. There is no evidence that the nurture group initiative will be successful within this school although the approach has been demonstrated to be successful in other schools. The research will be able to monitor the impact on individual children but also on the wider school and support professional development of the staff. Not carrying out the research will not affect the setting up of the nurture group

		as a stand-alone initiative. However, there will be a lack of evaluation evidence without the research project in order to decide whether to continue with the approach or not.
3	Privacy and confidentiality	All children selected for inclusion in the nurture group will have been assessed using appropriate developmental tools (e.g. Boxall Profile) and after informative discussion with their parent/carers. The children are too young to give informed consent regarding attending the group but this will be sought from their parent/carer. Children will all be asked if any information they provide can be included in the research at an appropriately developmental level. Every child, and adult, will be protected from identification through anonymising information and documentation provided as part of the study. Any disclosures from children within the nurture group will be treated according to appropriate safeguarding procedures which include not providing confidentiality in disclosures which indicate a risk of harm to the child. Adults who do not want to be part of the study will be provided with further information to enable them to come to an informed decision regarding their role in the study. If they still do not want to be involved then their data will not be included in the study. If there is a request to withdraw during the study this will be treated in the same way. If any parent/carer withdraws consent the same procedure will apply. If these issues arise, this will be identified within the final thesis as a discussion point within the overall findings.
4	Inclusion and exclusion	All children who are included within the nurture group will only be there following assessment using appropriate tools (e.g. Boxall Profile). Children identified as meeting the criteria for inclusion in the group but who may not receive a place, e.g. if there is no parental consent, will be included in the subsequent discussion in the thesis findings. It is

		<p>planned to offer some mainstream support via the class teacher for any children this applies to which will be identified on the relevant Individual Education Plan.</p> <p>There is no distinction between groups of children within this study. Criteria for referral applies to any child who exhibits difficulties in social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. There is no distinction relating to age or gender with all children attending the nurture group being selected from those on the roll of the school.</p> <p>Where there are more applications than available places, a discussion with the relevant staff will take place and consideration of the children already in the group and their needs will form part of the decision making. If a place is not offered, alternative strategies and support will be recommended as part of the mainstream provision until a place is available, when reconsideration will be given if still appropriate.</p>
5	Funding	<p>The funding for the setting up and staffing of the nurture group is from the Education Action Zone. There is a requirement attached to the funds to disseminate practice within the EAZ schools. The EAZ requires a report on the progress of the group to be delivered once per term. There is no operational input into the nurture group from the EAZ and the day-to-day running and organisation is from the school and not the EAZ. The information on the expenditure related to the nurture group is required to be itemised and submitted to the EAZ as part of their audit procedures. These accounts are submitted to the DFES. The funds provided cover the cost of staffing and some initial equipment and furniture. All other items will be provided through the resources available to the mainstream school. There is no payment to the children or families for inclusion in the group and no additional costs incurred for</p>

		the families or children as they are all already on roll in the school.
6.	Involvement and accountability	<p>The research aim was not contributed to by the children and carers. However, the input of the children and carers in terms of narrative, observation and engagement is integral to the case study. These observations and narratives will enable the research design to evolve as part of the process of forming a full picture of the unique case, for example in looking at the nurture group classroom initially, then moving to looking at the wider school from the perspective of continuing the support for the children once integrating into mainstream classrooms.</p> <p>The researcher is accountable to a variety of stakeholders in the school and will need to ensure that there remains consent to continue the work from the school leaders, governing body and the EAZ who fund the staffing costs of the nurture group. This will be undertaken through regular feedback to each group. Termly reports of progress are required to maintain staff funding to the EAZ. Regular updates to the staff and school leadership are given during staff meetings and training days. Normal school communication processes regarding individual children are given to their parent/carers e.g. parent consultation evenings twice per year, school reports and ad hoc meetings and discussions. The children will take home a target sheet each week which indicates their progress during the previous five days in a child friendly format.</p>
7.	Information	An information booklet has been produced to outline the work in the nurture group for parents/carers whose children are offered a place. This can be translated via the EAZ services into other languages as required. An individual parent/carer consultation is undertaken for every child who is offered a place in the nurture group which explains the

		<p>research aims and implications. The children are only admitted to the group with parental consent after this discussion. Consent is also obtained at this time to include anonymous information about the child within the research. Explanations about how this might take place and in what format are given. Parents and children are shown photographs, copies of work and other documentation that may be included in the research. Assessments undertaken are discussed with the parents and data will be included within the research, but this will also be anonymous.</p> <p>Children will be given explanations regularly at a developmentally appropriate level regarding the reasons for collating data.</p>
8	Consent	<p>Due to the young age of the children within the study, consent for inclusion is obtained from their parent/carers. If consent is refused, further explanations will be given and the researcher will try to ascertain the reason for refusal without coercion. If the reason given outlines concerns that cannot be rectified satisfactorily for the parent/carer, the child will still be offered a place in the nurture group but data collection will be restricted. This will be identified in the final thesis.</p> <p>Consent to include individual pieces of work will be requested for each item from the child with copies taken of originals. If consent to include an original or copy of an original piece of work is refused, narrative may be included within the research as an alternative, appropriately anonymised. Explanations for the reason for requesting copies of work will be given to the child at an appropriate developmental level.</p> <p>If parent/carer co-operation is refused during the study, a consultation will take place to give further information for clarity, or to ascertain the reason for withdrawal of co-</p>

		<p>operation to see if there is an alternative approach that can be used to still include the relevant data. If not, then this decision will be respected and this withdrawal of co-operation will be referred to in the final thesis wherever relevant to the data. The researcher will make the decision whether narrative can be included within the research without compromising the stance of the parent/carer as an alternative approach to documenting relevant aspects of the study. This may include a cost/benefit analysis of including anonymous data in a format that does not compromise the stance of the parent/carer. This will be identified in the final thesis.</p> <p>Where doubt remains about the inclusion of data, the researcher will err on the side of caution and not include anything where there has been specific objections raised. If necessary, this will be identified in the final thesis.</p> <p>The inclusion of data relating to staff will be treated no less favourably in this context than that of the child or parent/carer. The same cautions will be applied and adhered to.</p>
9.	Dissemination	<p>Part of the funding for staff costs includes a proviso that the findings should be disseminated to a wider audience of staff within the EAZ area. This will include a termly progress report to the EAZ steering committee and participation at a one day training session for wider staff to be held during the fourth term of operation. There are no other expectations relating to dissemination from the funding body or from the school and governing body.</p> <p>As the research progresses, the researcher may produce academic papers which will be submitted to relevant journals for peer review and publication.</p> <p>Staff within the case study school will be given regular input regarding the research in the form of summaries at</p>

		staff meetings or training days. Engagement with the process to disseminate the practice within the group will be undertaken through training sessions on staff INSET days. Child participants will be encouraged to comment on the areas that are relevant to them at a developmental appropriate level, including a self-evaluation of their own progress in the group and their mainstream classroom as a regular and integral part of the process within the nurture group. Parent/carer involvement will also be sought each term or more frequently if relevant, to determine their perceptions of the progress being made by their child.
10	Impact on children	<p>During the progress of the research it is anticipated that there will be impact on thinking, policy and practice within the mainstream environments in the school. This will impact on the children both within the mainstream environment and those who have nurture group placements. The impact of the focus of the case study will be addressed in the final thesis.</p> <p>Children within the nurture group will regularly be engaging in a self-evaluation at a level commensurate with their developmental level. As part of this process, it will be possible for the researcher to identify areas from the child's perspective which may be able to form part of the changes to thinking, policy and practice. These areas will be highlighted to the wider staff team during dissemination of the findings and progress of the research.</p>

This study took place in an infant school with children in the age range of 4 to 7 years. As these children were so young, there needed to be specific recognition of their lack of social power and understanding in order to give consent to participate in the research study. In order to ensure participants are able to give appropriately informed consent to be part of a research study, they must be made explicitly aware of what is involved. In the case of young children, this can be problematic for a

researcher and consent may instead be sought from their appropriate representative i.e. their parent or carer. Additionally consent may be requested from other appropriate people who are *in loco parentis*, such as the head teacher or governing body of a school participating in the research.

In this case study, I obtained consent from all parents and carers of the individual children, from each member of staff and the governing body. However, as France et al (2000) discuss, informed consent cannot be considered a once only event, but should be an on-going process throughout all phases of the research, including data analysis and final reporting.

During the course of the study, age appropriate requests were made to individual children asking if I could include their comments and examples of work in my thesis. This was obtained by keeping a research notebook in the classroom and referring to it when including written comments, along with photographic images and photocopies of work. Fine and Sandstrom (1988) discuss obtaining informed consent from young children and the right to be given as much detail as developmentally appropriate in order to agree to participation in a research study: “Our feeling is that children should be told as much as possible, even if some of them cannot understand the full explanation. Their age should not diminish their rights, although their level of understanding must be taken into account in the explanations that are shared with them.” (Fine and Sandstrom 1988 p46).

From the outset I maintained a culture within the nurture group of openness about the research and the recording of events and actions, with explanations given regularly in an age appropriate way, differentiated developmentally, using adapted language. Hill (2005 p53) highlights the implications of obtaining informed consent, including the need to adapt the language between adults and children to the level of linguistic understanding of the child, and to include repetition of the requests and to check for understanding.

Coates (2004 p25) describes how she sought permission from each child to retain drawings completed as part of her research study during conversation with them when they were describing their pictures. Consent to share the pictures with others

was also sought in this way. In the nurture group, I made individual requests to each child when their work was photocopied and gave the originals back after copying unless the child voluntarily offered the pictures to me. Even if work was voluntarily given, the discussion always included a request for permission to share this with other people. Photographs of the children were openly taken as a routine part of the assessment procedures in school so were a familiar part of the normal day. Specific images taken as part of the research work were, once taken, discussed with the children and prints were offered to them to take home, with a request for consent to share these images with others in the same way as for their drawings and work.

In addition, all of these materials were shown to parents and carers and not included if there was any objection to the content, after reassurance that all inclusions in the thesis would not identify individual children. When occasional parental concerns were raised regarding the inclusion of some annotated children's drawings, these were not maintained as part of the research artefacts, but the narrative surrounding the discussion may have been recorded. During the period of the study, this occurred on three occasions, two of which eventually involved external services for family support as part of the parent discussions. On a third occasion, following discussion with Emma, a reception age child about a drawing of her family, consent for inclusion was refused by the parent. However, after this period of family support, initiated due to the contents of the picture, the parent spontaneously talked to me about the drawing and what the subsequent support had provided for the family. At this point, with an improvement in the relationship between the parent and myself, she asked for her story to be included in my research to illustrate the work that had resulted from the nurture group involvement with her child. Emma's story is contained in appendix 5.

For the children attending on a daily basis, the seeking of consent and normality of seeing me recording information in research notebooks became an accepted part of the normal routine in the classroom. The children began to personally request inclusion in the notebook when they felt they had something they wanted others to see in relation to the support work in the classroom.



*“Miss! Quick, look! I did a model. Look, its brilliant. There’s two of us doing it. Take a picture and put it in your homework ‘cos we did that working together, like you said”.*

Two YR boys working together to build a tall marble run structure in the classroom.

Both the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Children Act (2004) in the UK emphasise the importance of enabling children to express their opinions on matters and decisions affecting themselves. Barker and Weller (2003) outline the increasing acknowledgement that children are competent to speak about their experiences and perspectives of their world in which they operate, with researchers negotiating research with children and not imposing research upon them. In so doing, children become the subjects of the research, with their voices heard and perspectives incorporated, rather than passive objects of research, written about but not involved in the reports.

Researchers need to be ethical at all points of the study from data collection, through analysis and the dissemination of findings, respecting the rights and dignity of the participants. Denscombe (2007) identifies three core principles for ethical research drawn from the codes of conduct across social science disciplines code of research ethics.

- 1. The interest of the participants should be protected;**
- 2. Researchers should avoid deception or misrepresentation;**
- 3. Participants should give informed consent.**

Denscombe (2007) p143-147

In any research project it is essential to ensure that the ethical considerations are an integral part not just of the early stages in research planning, but are revisited and considered when collecting and analysing data, and equally when writing up the research. There is a need to provide an unbiased analysis of findings, avoiding any misrepresentation of the participants. Critics of the case study methodology have suggested that the findings may be open to bias due to the challenge of not easily cross referencing the report findings with other sources of information, as outlined in the methodology section above. This was an ethical consideration within this particular study due to my own concerns about the role of the participant observer creating potential bias.

To address this concern, my research relied not only on the close observation involved in the fieldwork in the classroom environment, but also drew on a number of other source materials including unstructured teacher interviews, parental comments, external evaluations and public records e.g. Ofsted reports prior and during the research period. I have taken care throughout this report to include direct comments and quotes from participants in the research where these serve to illustrate findings. This has supported my triangulation of data and been particularly useful to set my observation into context as seen through the eyes of the other participants, who may have had a different perspective on the reasons for actions.

A key ethical consideration for me within this study was the need to ensure confidentiality and anonymity for the children. As nurture groups work with socially, emotionally and behaviourally challenging children, there was a significant risk of these children becoming labelled in their infant schooling which would remain with them throughout their school careers if anonymity was not guaranteed. It could also potentially be problematic for the children outside of school in their local community.

Hill (2005) discusses the main concerns from children and young people with regard to their privacy and confidentiality, summarising these into three areas:

1. Public confidentiality – not identifying research participants in research reports, presentations and so forth;
2. Social network confidentiality – not passing on information to family members, friends and others known to the child;
3. Third-party breach of privacy – where a group or household member reveals something personal about another.

Source: Hill 2005

With regard to the public confidentiality issue, although names and identities have been anonymised throughout the study, as is common place. I have also scrutinised other documents both during the process of the study and especially during the writing of the thesis to ensure that there are no identifiable details. As Hill (2005 p 75) states, "...it is tempting to include vivid examples, which may reveal too much about an individual, even though referred to anonymously. Wherever there is doubt, it may be necessary to omit or disguise certain details of a situation so that the persons involved are not identifiable."

### **3.10 Ethical issues in using public records:**

To set the context for this case study, relevant information has been included in this report such as a socio-economic description of the locality of the school and some geographical information, although it has not been specifically named. I undertook a risk/benefit analysis of including this data, looking at the potential value of inclusion of material that might identify the area against the benefit of providing information about the social context of the school. The data used in this thesis covers a wider area than the catchment of the school. Further investigation showed it was not the only area with high multiple indices of deprivation within the East of England. Therefore I was able to make the decision to include this socio-economic data for the value it provided to the overall thesis, judging the risk of identification of the school and any individuals within it was low.

I have used some source materials including Ofsted reports with due caution not to actually name the school or the exact dates when the inspections took place. However, it is potentially possible to identify the school using a combination of these public records and some investigation. The ethical need for anonymity was considered against the benefit of including this contextual data as part of the triangulation of evidence. However, Ofsted reports do not name individual children or staff members within their reports, and the content of the reports included within the research were valuable in terms of measuring impact. I therefore made the decision to include reference to these reports for the value they add to the overall research project. This was part of the risk/benefit analysis undertaken at an early stage of the research, and all reasonable steps are taken throughout this study to ensure individual identities are not revealed. It should be noted that since the project has completed, the school has undergone significant reorganisation and now has a different structure, age range, different building and name, although these developments were unknown throughout the research period.

### **3.11 Ethical dilemmas during the course of the study:**

Early in the study period an ethical dilemma arose that needed considerable discussion amongst the staff team. I had expressed the opinion that maintaining a label of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties for those children who had spent time in the nurture group but who then successfully integrated into their mainstream classrooms without substantial need for further intervention was negative and may not be appropriate to be passed to receiving schools. The staff team were divided on this issue and it was discussed many times throughout the study period. Some staff felt that the receiving schools should be made aware that there had been sufficient concern earlier in a child's school career to warrant intervention. Some felt that even if issues were not occurring now, they could be dormant and had the potential to resurface in the future, so receiving schools needed to be aware of this. Other staff felt that it was unfair to label a child who had successfully had input and was now an integral part of their mainstream class, particularly those who had been in mainstream classrooms for over a year without recurrent issues. It was an area of personal bias for me within the research. As

honesty in research and recording was held in high esteem by the participants, this was raised by me as an issue of personal moral and ethical dilemma.

The staff team openly gave opinions which were recorded and transcribed from the discussion below:

- *“Thing is, if you don’t tell the next school that he spent time in the nurture group, then you are not really sharing all the relevant information with them. What if there is a time when he starts to do the same things? How will they know what works for him? You have a moral duty to tell the school in my opinion”.*
- *“If you tell the next school, even if you say it was two years ago and only for two terms, they are going to assume she still has behaviour problems. It is a stigma – however you dress it up, putting a child in a nurture group is seen as a behavioural intervention and with that comes stigma”.*
- *“Why do you have to say they had involvement in the nurture group? You don’t necessarily say in every case “so-and-so had time in a phonics group in reception but he’s fine now” do you? Once the initial problems are sorted out, then you talk about the here and now, not the past”.*
- *“It depends. If he has been in my class all year without any problems that can’t be sorted out in the usual ways, why do I need to draw attention to what things were like, especially if I have never experienced it? But, if the input is still going on when we are looking at transition, or if it has only ended recently, then you have to tell the next teachers and schools or you could be setting that child up for failure if they regress to earlier problems”.*
- *“I would want to know. It might not be a problem again, but I can’t be sure of that. Yes, I would want to know”.*

- “*You run the risk that any labelling could become a self-fulfilling prophecy for the child, particularly those with lower self-esteem, who could feel that if the expectation is that they behave in a specific way, then they will fulfil that expectation. There is safety in maintaining an expectation rather than bucking the trend, especially if your self-esteem is low and you are being put in a larger, unfamiliar environment*”.
- “*You want to protect the children too much – it is your research and you want to make sure it works. But not giving the information to the next school isn't protecting them, it is putting the child at risk because if it goes wrong, they won't know what to do. You have to be careful to make sure you are doing this for the right reasons – and making your research look good is not the right reason. It is about the children ultimately. You can't protect them once they leave here – you have to let go and give the responsibility to make the decision about how to handle the behaviour to the next school.*”
- “*I am not sure. The children who have the really big behaviour problems – the next school needs to know, even if they have been ok for a while. But those children who were just quiet, well I don't think we need to draw attention to them in the same way*”.
- “*We can share relevant information without labelling – we do this anyway at transition meetings. If a child is in my class and has a particular way that works best for him or her, I share that. I don't see this as any different – if something in particular works, then I will give that information to the new teacher. Whether or not the child has been in the nurture group. I think that is the important part – it is not whether they have had input previously, it is what works. I think we need to share what works. The nurture group involvement in the past is not the important part of this, it is making sure that the new school knows that she needs to have regular breaks away from the classroom for a few minutes, or he likes to be in control and so you have to manage that – not that a year ago they both had full time nurture group*

*places. It is not about that, it is about making sure everyone knows that this works or that works in your classroom”.*

Recorded debate at staff meeting – June 2001

Consensus was eventually reached after discussion with the main receiving school and senior management team. The decision was taken to let the receiving school know that a previous placement had taken place in the nurture group but that this was no longer current. The outcome was that these children were all noted on the transition papers to have SEBD needs and this was transferred to individual records of special educational needs for all the children who entered the local receiving school in September 2001.

This personal ethical issue arose again earlier the following summer term when transition was being planned for the children moving on to their receiving schools in July 2002. There had been a change in the composition of the senior management team, with the head teacher moving to another school and I had become the deputy head teacher and nurture group teacher. It was agreed to review the processes for transition for all the children, including those who had had nurture group placements at any time in their school history.

The debate was re-opened at a staff meeting, taking a different approach towards transition. This involved me introducing the idea of a positive transition document to share with the receiving schools, focusing on what worked well to support individual children as a “pupil passport”. Included within this were details of successful strategies for support. The pupil passport was approached as a document belonging to the child, put together by the child with adult support and would give relevant information on likes and dislikes, key issues for the child and what worked when they needed help. The pupil passport was felt to be a child friendly document which contained enough useful information to enable the receiving schools to see easily what should be put in place to enable inclusion for all the children.

As previously stated, this area was one of personal bias from me as the researcher and it could be argued that by reopening the debate on transitions and the contentious issue of potentially labelling children with SEBD, I had manipulated the situation. The concept of pupil passports is now one that is well used in many schools for children as part of transition planning good practice. Although I had initially introduced the idea of using these for this cohort of children, the whole staff engaged with the discussion on their use and whether this was a more appropriate approach. There was agreement that transition meetings focused on discussion between adults but neglected the voice of the child. The use of the pupil passports allowed the children to have a voice and ownership of their support and provision. This shaped the transition discussions and as every child transferring completed one, not just those who had been in the nurture group, this was deemed by the staff team in the case study school to be a strategy to offer support rather than researcher manipulation.

Throughout the study period it was necessary to develop a positive rapport with all the participants to build a trusting culture where there was confidence that the findings of the study would reflect what was occurring in the school, but would not be detrimental to the individual participants in any way. As the study took place over a four year period with daily contact, this was possibly easier for me to establish than for a researcher who had less frequent periods of contact. This was a positive aspect of being a participant observer; being the teacher in the nurture group and having daily access to the children, staff and parents during school term times for an extended period of time enabled a considerable amount of data to be gathered and observations to be undertaken of both regular routines and unique occurrences.

However, I had to use caution when encountering casual conversations or happenings in the school where familiarity between myself and colleagues may have resulted in a perceived abuse of the researcher/participant relationship. On several occasions during the study period I had encountered informal incidences, interactions and conversations which were valuable insights into the wider case study. These needed to be given ethical consideration: was it right to include them when they potentially would not be considered by the participants to have been obtained consensually? In these circumstances, individual decisions had to be made

based on the benefit of inclusion within the study versus the cost to the participant. If necessary, this included a repeat discussion between the participant and I in relation to consent to include this specific data where reasonable doubt remained.

One of the most significant ethical issues within this study related to working directly with children. As a teacher in a classroom there is an imbalance of power between the adult and the children. Concerns that I would be able to gain consent from individual children to include their anecdotes, work or observations because they felt at the time that this was what was expected of them was considered. I also had concerns that consent might be forthcoming if the language used to elicit this agreement was not at an appropriate level, either insufficiently informative or overly complex. Either could result in a child consenting without understanding what they were agreeing to without appropriate developmental explanations, as quoted earlier in this chapter from Fine and Sandstrom, (1988 p 46)

I took great care to minimise these issues throughout the study period. Continuing agreement was sought regularly from each child and not assumed to be given just because this had previously been the case. The language I used reflected the child's developmental understanding. Children were told that I wanted to include a photograph, picture or to write down what they had said for my own work because it might help me to understand how to help other children. Whilst this was a very simplistic explanation, due to the nature of the operation of the nurture group the children were aware that they would spend some time there but that their place was not permanent. They knew that other children would take their place once they were working in their mainstream classrooms again, which was the usual procedure. Therefore this simplistic initial request was used to demonstrate how what I was learning within the nurture group would be used to help other children in the school. This was an integral part of much of the social development work within the group, where peers were encouraged to identify what had helped them to learn which could be shared with others to help them also. Any child who asked me further questions was answered on an individual basis as appropriate.

This process relates to individual pieces of work or anecdotes as opposed to the observations and record keeping that were part of the daily operation of the nurture

group. Consent to include information from observations and assessments was obtained by me from parents/carers on entry into the nurture group. Observations and study of the wider school environment was also integrated into the case study to provide a more in-depth analysis, and it was not possible or practical to obtain individual informed consent from every child and family within the school. Again, a risk/benefit analysis was undertaken relating to the inclusion of this type of data. As observations in this context would not identify individual children at any stage, consent to include this information generally within the study was obtained from the head teacher, governing body and individual staff members. Parents and carers were notified that part of the development of the work within the nurture group involved study by me in the wider school context. This was included on a school newsletter each academic year and formed part of the new parent meetings for children about to start in the reception class. There was always confirmation that parents and carers could discuss this with me at any stage and that children would not be identified personally to maintain their confidentiality.

In summary, within the decisions to include observations, work, photographs and pictures, ethical judgements had to be made to ensure that confidentiality was maintained. With some data, this was relatively easy as names and obvious identifying features could be changed to anonymise them. With other artefacts, individual decisions had to be made on whether to include them or not using a cost/benefit analysis – would the benefit of including the material have a negative impact on the study participant? If so, and alterations were inappropriate, then the item was omitted either in part or full.

During the study period, both the children and my colleagues in the school developed a trusting relationship with me that could blur the boundaries between researcher and participant. There were many opportunities to include data in the final thesis which potentially could identify the participants. Where possible, it has been included but with details that may be identifiable being altered or omitted. Each inclusion has been examined individually and treated separately to ensure that it retains the confidentiality expected by the participants who originally consented to its inclusion.

There are a considerable number of ethical considerations necessary in engaging in this specific research study. Some are generalised ethical considerations, but many relate specifically to working with young children who could be perceived as vulnerable in terms of their understanding of the implications of participating in any study. Case study research amasses considerable amounts of data from multiple sources. In analysing the data and reporting on the findings, all reasonable ethical considerations have been taken into account and measures taken to ensure the confidentiality of all sensitive data and privacy of those who participated.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The nurture group specific to the case study**

#### **4.1 Aims of the chapter:**

This chapter aims to provide specific information relating to the nurture group as the focus for the case study. It will provide the context in which the school was situated and provides some operational information to enable the reader to have a clearer understanding of the day-to-day work of the nurture group.

#### **4.2 The socio-economic context of the area:**

The focus school in this case study was an infant school in a rural East Anglian market town. The school was situated in an area of social deprivation, with a significant number of single parent families, some complex step-family households and high unemployment rates. The total percentage of priority need for adult social service clients within the area, based on Acorn data, was 45.01%. (source: [www.norfolkinsight.org.uk](http://www.norfolkinsight.org.uk))

The catchment area of the school covers a large housing estate of 978 houses, mainly terraced properties built as a series of cul-de-sacs along one side of a busy road between the railway station and the river, on the outskirts of the town. On the other side of the road are rows of purpose built flats. The housing estate was constructed originally as part of the town expansion scheme following an agreement under the Town Development Act 1952 to attract employment and increase commercial activity through transferring industry and population from more congested areas of the country. The houses were erected between 1967 and 1972 to accommodate some of the increasing “London overspill”. Much of the housing estate is social housing, although a percentage of the population have instigated their local authority ‘right to buy’ options and therefore own their property within the estate.<sup>2</sup>

The town has experienced a period of rapid growth since the development of the school's catchment housing estate, with an increase in the population from 5398 in 1961 to 13706 in 1971, and has continued its rapid growth, reaching 21,805 by 2001, (Source: National Census) and approximately 30,000 in 2012 (Source: Norfolk Constabulary). It has growth point status and is set for further significant expansion with an expectation of 5000 new homes being built over the next ten years.

Acorn data indicates that a significant percentage of the local population, 45.49%, meet the category 5 criteria of "hard pressed".<sup>3</sup> (source: [www.norfolkinsight.org.uk](http://www.norfolkinsight.org.uk)). Within the ward boundary, the percentage of long term unemployed, in excess of two years, was 19.71%. Of 16-24 year olds, 38.83% were unemployed. The percentage of the 16-74 year olds in the area with no qualifications was 40.77%, compared to 28.85% of the national population. Only 6.95% of the local population achieve a level 4/5 qualification, compared to the national figure of 19.90%.

Lone parent households with dependent children were 11.11%. The majority of lone parents, 52.99%, were females not in employment. The living arrangements within the area show 24.75% of the local population to be separated, divorced or widowed compared to 18.55% over the East of England. 56% of the pupils were eligible for free school meals.

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<sup>2</sup> Within the larger ward boundary, 48.53% are owner occupiers, including those in shared ownership and 40.58% are in social housing, with an additional 10.89% living in private rented accommodation. (Source: National Census 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Category 5 contains the poorest areas of the UK. Unemployment is well above the national average. Levels of qualifications are low. Those in work are likely to be employed in unskilled occupations. Household incomes are low and there are high levels of long-term illness in some areas. Housing is a mix of low-rise estates, with terraced or semi-detached houses, and purpose built flats, including high-rise blocks. Over 50% of the housing is rented from the local council or a housing association. There are a large number of single adult households, including single pensioners and lone parents. These people are experiencing the most difficult social and economic conditions in the whole country, and appear to have limited opportunity to improve their circumstances. (Source: [www.Norfolkinsight.org](http://www.Norfolkinsight.org))

Indicators of household deprivation applied to a total of 2100 households within the ward, showed 38.43% having one indicator and an additional 27.17% having two indicators. The indicators cover employment, education, health and disability and housing. (source: national census 2001) The Index of Multiple Deprivation shows the area to have a Lower Super Output Area<sup>4</sup> within the lowest ten per cent most deprived category. The Super Output Area which included the school catchment is ranked 299 out of 32,482 SOAs in England, with 1 being the most deprived. However, within the education, skills and training domain the school catchment area ranks even higher up the scales at number 170 out of 32,482 other areas in England. Data from the 2011 census is not available at the time of writing this thesis.

Social mobility was high throughout the period of the case study, with approximately 20% movement in and out of school per year. I was able to note several reasons for this during the study. A number of children moved within the town to alternative social housing as their family size increased, most also changing schools at this time. In addition, a number of families moved to other towns within the Norfolk area following family break ups, which was a feature evident throughout the study period.

#### **4.3 The school background:**

The school had a standard number of 45 pupils per year group and a 52-place part time nursery, operating over two sessions per day. Prior to September 2000 the school operated as a first school, admitting pupils from 3 to 8 years (nursery to Year 3). However, as a result of educational reorganisation within the county, it became an infant school in the academic year 2000/01, thereby losing the year 3 pupils and reducing the overall pupil numbers on roll by 45 pupils.

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<sup>4</sup> A Super Output Area (SOA) is a geographical area designed for the collection and publication of small area statistics. It is used on the Neighbourhood Statistics site, and has a wider application throughout national statistics. SOAs give an improved basis for comparison throughout the country because the units are more similar in size of population than, for example, electoral wards.

In May 1997 the school was placed in special measures following an Ofsted inspection. The report drew attention in particular to the following areas:

- a lack of special educational needs provision,
- inconsistent and frequently poor quality teaching and learning opportunities
- inadequate and inconsistent management of behaviour issues.
- an outdoor playground which was deemed a safety hazard

Immediately prior to the Ofsted inspection, the school had been without a permanent head teacher for several months and had experienced a very high staff turnover for a number of years, adding to the instability. The following two quotes provide a picture of how challenging the general ethos was felt to be at that time:

*“On my first day, and I had been in a few tough schools before, I went out into the playground at the end of lunchtime to ring the bell to get the children in to the classrooms. I will never forget what happened next. I lifted the bell, rang it twice and watched with open mouth at the response, before I even finished ringing. Half the playground ran to the low and collapsing fences, climbed over and ran off into the housing estate and most of the others either climbed up into the trees or just ran off across the playing field. Not one single child responded as though they were ready to come into the classroom. There was nothing I could do – there were all these children running home at 6 and 7 years old, and I could not stop them. They had just decided that they wanted to go home – school held no interest for them and they did not seem to care how much trouble they might get into for doing this. We had to install seven foot high fences to keep them in. I thought, at least if we can keep them on the premises we can start to get them to want to be at school. If they are running around the estate, we just have no way of changing anything.”*

*SLT member*

*Transcribed section of an unstructured interview 2001*

*"It was like coming into a bear pit. You felt physically sick in the morning having to take assembly. How can such small children have so little respect for their school? But it was not their fault – even the teachers hated the school and most left. If we got a supply teacher to cover, most never lasted the day. A couple of the classroom assistants were more or less running the school because they were the only consistent people for these children. These children had been completely let down by the school and had no interest in what they were doing, because they saw adults who had no interest in them. It was horrific when I first came here."*

Y2 teacher

Transcribed section of unstructured interview 2001

The Ofsted report noted a new head teacher had recently been appointed and had begun to implement positive changes, but that there had been a sustained period of instability in staffing and due to the significant concerns, the school would be placed in special measures. A number of significant key issues for action were identified:

### **Key issues for action**

In order to improve overall standards of attainment and quality of education, the governors, head teacher and staff should:

Continue to improve standards of behaviour by:

- Defining clear boundaries for acceptable behaviour
- Applying a consistent approach to rewards and sanctions throughout the school
- Monitoring the effectiveness of behaviour management
- Developing social skills
- Considering ways in which pupils might take increased responsibility for their own learning and demonstrate initiative

Improve curriculum planning and assessment by:

- Developing the leadership role of the subject co-ordinator
- Producing schemes of work in all subjects, with priority given to English, mathematics and science to ensure coverage of the national curriculum
- Implementing effective systems for assessing pupils' attainment in all subjects so that the match between teaching and learning needs of all pupils may be closer.

Improve overall standards of teaching in Key Stages 1 and 2 by:

- Ensuring that there is appropriate provision for teachers to broaden their subject knowledge
- Improving the quality of lesson planning so that learning objectives are clearly defined
- Using assessment regularly and rigorously to ensure a close match between tasks set and learning needs of all pupils

Address, in consultation with the local education authority, identified deficiencies in the accommodation, namely the unsafe nature of the playground and surrounding area.

As a matter of urgency assess and make provision for all pupils who have special educational needs.

HMI Ofsted inspection report 1997

After much work by the staff team, and termly inspection monitoring visits, the school was removed from special measures two years later in May 1999, and became a member school of an Education Action Zone (EAZ).

EAZ's were devised to develop local partnerships between education and businesses, working with the local authority, parents and community representatives. The aim was to raise standards in disadvantaged areas, working within a cluster including high schools, primaries and special schools. The brief was to be creative in the approach towards raising standards, with funding of up to £750,000 per year from the Department for Education and Science and an additional £250,000 from private sector funding.

The EAZ was closely monitored, having to provide an annual action plan outlining targets for every participating school as well as for EAZ wide initiatives. This action plan was submitted to the Secretary of State annually by the management body, the Education Action Forum, which was made up of representatives from the main partners in the EAZ, e.g. the local authority, business representatives and schools.

Funding for an EAZ was initially provided for a three year period, with a further extension of two years, providing clear results were shown towards the targets for schools and on the overall action plan.

This EAZ had four main areas to work towards:

- improving the quality of teaching and learning
- social inclusion
- initiatives for family and pupil support
- increasing partnership working with business and other organisations.

A key aspect which was relevant to the case study school was the ability individual schools had to make a business case for financial support to fund an initiative directly from the EAZ. This enabled the school to request the financial support to set up a nurture group, including funding the staffing costs, with clear, measurable targets to report on each term to enable close monitoring of the initiative.

#### **4.4 Establishing a need for a nurture group:**

The decision to establish a nurture group was made just after the school was removed from special measures in May 1999. Academic results were improving, but there were still a significant number of children whose perceived needs were not being met in the mainstream classrooms. Some of these children faced exclusion due to their extreme behaviour and disaffection, others exhibited poor social skills, had difficulty interacting with their peers or trusting adult intentions. These children were identified by the existing staff as being failed by the education system in place, were underachieving, unhappy and demonstrating behaviours that were not being adequately supported with any of the strategies available in mainstream classrooms.

The children were not thriving in the classroom and whilst many were described by the adults as “streetwise”, their behaviour when challenged was more akin to that of a much younger child. Temper tantrums were not unusual. Many would run out of the classroom, some deliberately destroying work, equipment and displays as they ran through corridors, others would run and hide elsewhere in the building when

challenged. Some threw objects around the classroom, including furniture, endangering themselves and those around them. The disruption was considerable and the time taken away from other children's right to be taught was significant and caused resentment with staff, pupils and increasingly with parents as they became more aware of what was happening in school on a daily basis.

After much discussion amongst the staff, with the county educational psychology service, the behaviour support service and research into various behavioural groups and strategies, the concept of a nurture group was discovered. There was consensus that the children who were still not responding to the existing strategies to support their emotional and behavioural difficulties needed something different to the other children in the school. After further discussion, it was agreed that these children needed the opportunity to develop social and emotional competence away from the expectations of a mainstream class, which was overwhelming them. Further discussion and a visit to an established nurture group by the head and SENCo encouraged them to both feel this particular initiative had the potential to support this group of children.

The school itself was not financially able to fund what they wanted – a full time nurture group, staffed by a qualified teacher and a teaching assistant. As part of the EAZ, the school was in the fortunate position of being able to construct a bid for funding of the initiative. Part of this funding agreement would include an assurance that whatever was put in place would have some sustainability in the longer term and would make a difference to behaviour and learning. Agreement was also put in place that the work in this initiative would be disseminated to the partner schools in the EAZ.

A bid was put to the EAZ to employ two full time staff, training, initial equipment, furniture to include in the room and for the on-going staffing costs of running the nurture group for a four-term period from May 2000 until December 2001, when the first three years of EAZ funding would come to an end. This bid was successful and the process of recruitment, training and purchasing equipment began, with staff in place by May 2000.

#### **4.5 Setting up the nurture group classroom:**

The identified classroom was a small room that had initially been the staff room. It had windows running along both sides of the room and opened into the main corridor between the two reception classrooms. It was in a central position within the school, with safe and easy access to the mainstream classrooms, playground and communal areas such as the assembly and dining hall.

In line with recommendations from the National Nurture Group Network, I designed the room to have a homely feel compared to normal classrooms. I carefully zoned it for the children who would enter the group, with specific designated areas for food preparation, academic work, role play, a quiet area, construction and messy play areas. There were curtains at the windows and carpet over the floor areas. The room was bright and well lit. The windows on one side looked out onto a small unused courtyard area which I incorporated into the activities within the classroom to provide an outdoor safe area to learn.

Bright storage for toys and equipment was in place, which was clean, clearly labelled and organised into zones for easy recall of where things should be kept. The quiet area had comfortable chairs, cushions, some screening and a book case with plenty of storybooks, puppets and soft toys. The role-play area had a range of adaptable furniture, enabling the area to become all manner of scenarios dependent on the interests of the children in the group.

The clearly defined work areas encompassed an internet accessible computer, clearly labelled individual work boxes for each child, stationary and equipment storage. There were additional display boards and specific equipment and toys to facilitate developmental progress. A non-breakable mirror was available at all times, dressing up outfits, functional play equipment and many other items generally observed in early years foundation stage classrooms. All the equipment was newly purchased for the nurture group at the start of the initiative as part of the initial funding bid agreement, apart from general school consumables such as paper and pencils.

#### **4.6 Initial identification of the children for inclusion in the nurture group:**

Once the room was ready for occupation by the children, and both my nurture group assistant and I had completed the accredited training course in the principles and practices involved in running a nurture group, the identification of the initial cohort of children for inclusion in the nurture group began.

The criteria for inclusion within the group was initially set at a school SEN support team meeting comprising of the head teacher, SENCo and the school educational psychologist before I took up my post. Agreement initially was to include children who exhibited antisocial behaviour including swearing, fighting and spitting, persistent aggression towards peers including verbally aggressive behaviour, persistent refusal to comply with school and class rules and children who were often observed to sulk or withdraw their cooperation from group sessions. These were the behaviours identified most frequently by the class teachers as the most disruptive and challenging to manage in a mainstream class room at the beginning of this initiative.

There were also two children recommended for inclusion within the group who were described by the class teacher as unable to access the curriculum in the reception class, who appeared to be of very low ability, but who were not aggressive or hostile. These two children were included to obtain an assessment of whether there was an emotional component to their difficulty with curricular access, or whether this was instead a learning difficulty which needed alternative support strategies.

Each child identified was then observed by me in their mainstream classroom and a Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall 1998) was completed with the class teacher and wherever possible with the teaching assistant most familiar with the child. The profile is described in more detail in Chapter 2. I then used the completed profiles as the basis for devising an individualised intervention programme for each child who joined the nurture group in the first term of operation. Careful analysis of the Boxall Profiles made it possible to plan focused interventions to narrow the gap between the child's personal stage of development on assessment and the standardised normal pattern of development.

#### **4.7 Key Characteristics of the Group:**

I had taken the decision from the instigation of the nurture group that it would follow the key characteristics of a classic nurture group and not one of the alternative variants as identified by Cooper et al (2001). In line with this, the group in this case study adhered to the basic operational principles of a variant 1 provision.

Taking each of these principles individually, the nurture group within the case study complied in the following ways:

***“A nurture group should be located clearly within the policies and structures of an LEA or school continuum of special educational needs provision, either as an integral part of an individual school or as a resource for a cluster of schools”***

The nurture group in this study was part of the school's provision for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Children were only accepted from within the host school and had to be on roll for a minimum of half a term in order to have had the opportunity to settle into the routines of the mainstream environment before a referral to the group was made. As part of the EAZ action plan to support individual pupils, the nurture group was clearly located and monitored within that framework. The local authority was a partner of the EAZ and therefore also maintained an overview.

***“A nurture group should ensure that children attending the nurture group remain members of a mainstream class where they register daily and attend selected activities.”***

Each child entered school into the mainstream classroom with their peers and spent the initial registration period with their class until either I or my nurture group assistant came to collect them. Each child also spent a limited amount of

time in the mainstream environment, the amount and frequency was dependent on their individual capacity to achieve success in so doing. Assembly, break and lunchtimes were spent with peers, with additional support if necessary. Each child spent one half day per week in the mainstream environment, supported as necessary by either myself or my nurture group assistant. The child was considered to be the joint responsibility of the nurture group teacher and the class teacher for the duration of the placement, with close liaison between the teaching staff to support this dual role.

All children were initially accepted on a full time basis into the group; over time, the time spent in the group lessened with a corresponding increase in the time spent in the mainstream classroom. This was formally agreed between myself and the mainstream teacher as part of an individualised reintegration package.

***“A nurture group should have a pattern of attendance whereby children spend part of each day in the nurture group or attend for regular sessions during the week.”***

The nurture group operated for nine sessions each week, with the tenth session involving the children spending time in their mainstream classrooms. This session was important to maintain the links with the mainstream class.

***“A nurture group should be staffed by two adults working together modelling good adult relationships in a structured and predictable environment, where children can begin to trust adults and to learn.”***

Two adults staffed the case study nurture group. I was employed as the full time teacher and I had a full time teaching assistant in the classroom with me at all times.

The routine and structure within the classroom followed the same pattern each day, allowing for predictability and familiarity. Both I and my nurture group assistant modelled normal social behaviour and interactions in the nurture group.

Any room layout changes were discussed with the children in advance to prepare them for change.

***“A nurture group should offer support for children’s positive emotional and social growth and cognitive development at whatever level of need the children show by responding to them in a developmentally appropriate way.”***

The children within the nurture group had differentiated access to the academic curriculum at an appropriate developmental stage, but alongside and inbuilt within that academic curriculum was a perpetual focus on emotional and social development.

Each child had an assessment of their baseline academic skills at the beginning of the nurture group placement, which were monitored throughout the placement and on return to the mainstream classroom. These assessments had to be undertaken over time and in consultation with mainstream colleagues. For many of the children entering the nurture group, academic success had been inconsistent and difficult to assess previously as the behavioural, social and emotional challenges experienced by these children had hindered access to the full curriculum for some time.

***“A nurture group should supply a setting and relationships for children in which missing or insufficiently internalised essential early learning experiences are provided.”***

The nurture group was set up to be a deliberately home-like environment. Maintaining the principle of having two adults modelling appropriate behaviour and normal relationships in a non-threatening, comfortable and homely setting helped to promote the safety and security found in most home environments. Building relationships with individual children and nurturing their developmental needs provided the security to allow each to begin to internalise the essential early learning experiences they needed to sustain their time in school.

The nurture group and the two adults in it provided a “safe base” (Bowlby 1978) for each child. From this safe base, each child was able to explore developmentally and take risks in their learning, whilst having the security to be able to return to an earlier stage of development if this was needed. Children were not prevented from acting out earlier social learning experiences in this environment and were provided with enough nurturing to enable them to feel secure to do so, even if they were aware others may not view this as appropriate behaviour.

***“A nurture group should ensure that the National Curriculum is taught.”***

I worked on planning of the curriculum jointly with the mainstream class teachers each week, which I then adapted and differentiated to take into consideration the individual developmental stages of each child. This resulted in the children within the nurture group covering broadly similar learning objectives as their mainstream peers, but with those objectives being individually developmentally adjusted. Planning was completed using a play-based curriculum. This enabled the children to develop their social development skills alongside academic learning.

***“A nurture group should be taken full account of in school policies, participate fully and be fully considered in the development and review of policies.”***

The nurture group was a central part of the school’s provision for children and although it had its own operational policy, it was also an integral part of other policy documents. As policy documents were reviewed as part of the normal cycle before presentation to the governing body for approval, I was able to make suggestions for increasing the nurturing content of each. Of particular note was the school behaviour policy which had been focused on a strict policy of sanctions and rewards that was too challenging for many of the children in the nurture group. Considerable re-writing of this policy was undertaken to fully reflect nurturing principles. A school marking policy was similarly scrutinised to increase the nurturing principles within it, whilst still retaining the positive focus it had.

Over time, a number of curriculum area policies were also reviewed with an aim to increase the nurturing focus. For example, the speaking and listening section of the literacy policy contained more references to allowing time to think and process information, having alternative communication strategies and allowing the opportunity not to speak when part of a group if alternative communication strategies could be used.

***“A nurture group should offer short or medium term placements, usually for between two and four terms, depending on the child’s specific needs.”***

During the period of the case study, a total of fifty-five children received input from the nurture group. Of these children, nine did not complete a full period of input mainly due to transferring from the school. However, of the remaining forty-six children who achieved successful reintegration for the remainder of their time in the infant school, the average length of stay was 2.3 terms of input.

***“A nurture group should ensure placement in the group is determined on the basis of systematic assessment in which appropriate diagnostic and evaluative instruments have been used, with the aim always being to return the child to full-time mainstream provision.”***

Assessment for inclusion in the nurture group followed a systematic process, as did the on-going monitoring and eventual reintegration. Once per half term a staff meeting was devoted to the discussion of current children in the nurture group and their progress. Children who were ready to begin a reintegration programme were highlighted as it was recognised that this stage of the child’s support put additional stress on both the child and the receiving class teacher. Any vacancies in the group were identified and names suggested for inclusion.

For any newly identified child, I undertook observations in the mainstream environment, including in communal areas of the school such as the dining hall where appropriate. A Boxall profile was completed with the class teacher and, if

the child was appropriate for placement in the group and with parental consent, a plan for inclusion was undertaken.

During a placement, alongside academic monitoring and assessment where appropriate, a Boxall profile would be completed each term. In addition, a reintegration readiness scale (Doyle 2001 – see chapter 5) would be completed and regular discussion took place with the mainstream teacher to monitor progress and establish whether skills were being transferred between the two environments.

At an appropriate point the child would begin to spend more time in the mainstream environment. The reintegration plan would culminate in the child being congratulated and their nurture group peers formally saying goodbye during an appropriate social activity.

***“A nurture group should place an emphasis on communication and language development through intensive interaction with an adult and with other children.”***

Many of the children who had placements in the nurture group also used immature language both in terms of pronunciation and grammatical structure. Many had limited listening skills and concerns regarding receptive language. I undertook a baseline assessment of receptive language on entry for each child and specific activities and games were targeted to support this area. Language was modelled by the adults during play, with immature comments reflected back with the correct grammar and pronunciation.

Due to the high adult to child ratio available in the nurture group, opportunities were available throughout the sessions to develop spoken language skills, comprehension and specifically listening skills at a developmentally appropriate level.

Other forms of communication were encouraged, including the use of symbols and visual clues as part of the usual structure during the day to augment communication. The children were actively taught to recognise the use of body language and gesture and to understand its significance in everyday communication. Work on recognising facial expressions and their meanings was undertaken as an important part of the non-verbal communication the children would be exposed to on a daily basis. All of this was encouraged through play-based activities and developmentally appropriate targeting according to the needs of the individuals.

The adults modelled appropriate strategies and conventions of social communication, including looking at the person speaking to show interest, taking turns in the conversation, waiting until someone had finished talking before speaking to someone else and sharing things of interest. This was integral to every activity.

***“A nurture group should monitor and evaluate their effectiveness in promoting the positive social, emotional and educational development of each child.”***

The main tool used to monitor effectiveness in promoting the positive social and emotional development each term was the Boxall profile. Alongside this was the use of the reintegration readiness scale (Doyle 2001) which was completed each half term to measure an individual child's progress towards being able to spend more time in their mainstream classroom. Each child also had an Individual Education Plan (IEP) which detailed specific targets for the adults to work on alongside the mainstream teachers, drawn from the areas identified as needing support after completing the reintegration readiness scale and Boxall profile. The IEP was reviewed each half term with the mainstream class teacher so that the joint responsibility for carrying out the specific targets could be discussed.

Prior to admission into the nurture group, each class teacher was asked to complete a brief pen portrait of the child in the mainstream setting, noting any issues they found particularly challenging to manage in their classroom, what

strategies they had used and how successful they felt they had been. This information was revisited with the class teachers as a child began to show readiness to return to the mainstream classroom. The comparison of this earlier report and the progress made by the child in their social and emotional development proved to be a useful starting point for the dialogue relating to reintegration planning.

***“A nurture group should recognise the importance of quality play experiences in the development of children’s learning.”***

The focus of all academic learning within the nurture group was on a developmentally play based approach, which gradually moved to a more formal structure for individual children if this was appropriate for them over time. There was a clear balance between adult led, adult supported and child led activities at all times in the nurture group, depending on the needs of each child.

A key feature for the work within the nurture group was teaching the skills needed to enable children to play with each other collaboratively. Developmentally, many of the children entered the group at a stage where they could play in isolation or alongside another child, but had not yet reached the stage of appropriate interaction with peers. Others were aggressive, dominated activities, needed to be supported and taught to play co-operatively and eventually to collaborate with peers in an activity. Imaginative play was not evident for many of the children; some acted out aggressive play based on comic or television characters but many were at the stage of functional play rather than symbolic play. A number of the children always selected “safe” options and appeared repetitive in their choices, due to wariness to try new things, often fearing failure.

The planning for the nurture group retained the focus on the current learning objectives in the mainstream classroom, but these were taught through a differentiated play-based curriculum. This enabled the children to maintain an

awareness of the learning from the mainstream class but made it accessible for the individual child in the nurture group.

#### **4.8 Practices within the group:**

The structure for the day followed the same familiar pattern and in so doing, provided consistency, familiarity and security for each child. The daily timetable followed the same basic structure each day and was displayed using words, pictures, clock faces and numbers for each child to refer to. This was also outlined each morning at breakfast time for the children to provide reassurance and prepare them for the day's activities.

The importance of routine, structure and consistency was paramount in the working of the nurture group. One particular feature of working in a nurture group is the sharing of food in a social setting. As this group operated on a full-time basis, breakfast was an integral part of the day for the children. All children and adults sat together at the breakfast table and shared food in a family atmosphere.

After clearing up breakfast, the familiar routine was for the children to sit with me, using a story basket or introducing a book. This linked to the mainstream curricular planning, but was approached as part of an integrated day with developmentally appropriate activities to meet individual learning requirements within the nurture group, rather than stand-alone subject teaching in the mainstream environment.

Throughout the nurture group day, there was an awareness of the need to be flexible in the time allowed to complete a task, and to be able to respond to the individual children. Sessions had to be adapted to utilise the children's own learning and understanding and to maintain motivation for those who have low self-esteem and give up when faced with challenges. I and my nurture group assistant play with the children, encouraging learning, language development and consolidation of skills alongside social development support. We encouraged the children to recall information they had learnt from more formal taught sessions within their play. We extended play sequences and supported the consolidation of these through

modelling, sharing and the use of appropriate vocabulary. A multi-sensory approach was used within the classroom to enhance learning and to form associations to help recall, such as taste, texture and smell.

I planned a balance between adult led and independent tasks, with role-play, sensory activities and opportunities to explore new materials on offer. The children selected from their own choice, although some required the support of a choice board, either to limit or extend opportunities, dependent on the needs of the individual child.

For many of the children accessing the nurture group, the free choice of a wide range of activities in the mainstream classrooms is over stimulating and they flit from one to the other without true engagement. Within the nurture group, a curricular-based range of activities is set out each day and the children are encouraged to select from these, although they can find other materials to play with if they request them. They do not have full choice from all activities and equipment in the classroom at all times however, as a strategy to avoid them becoming overwhelmed. Whilst this may appear restrictive to some practitioners in a mainstream environment, it is appropriate for the children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties to support them in learning how to manage their own behaviours, make appropriate choices and become active learners.

Built into the normal routine of the nurture group are the school-wide activities such as assembly, where the children sit with their peers in class groups. Some of the children preferred to stay close to either me or my nurture group assistant in these larger environments as the number of other children could be overwhelming. If this was the case, I would sit on the floor or on a low chair in close proximity to the child, but ensured that the child still sat alongside their mainstream class peers. In this way, the child retains contact with their peers but with the security of one of the nurture group staff remaining in close proximity.

#### **4.9 Examples of individualised work within the overall nurture group structure:**

Whilst the daily structure and routine within the nurture group remained a constant, during the regular activities in the classroom, individualised working was undertaken across the day with each child to meet support specific needs. I present four illustrative accounts below of work undertaken with individuals who experienced different support needs in the nurture group to provide some context to the work.

##### **4.9.1 Peter – Year 1:**

The first step towards encouraging peer relationships was to build their confidence that Peter would not hurt them and would play according to the accepted rules of any game. This involved an adult playing alongside the children in a variety of situations, modelling play behaviour and social skills. Peter was selective in the activities he would engage in, only accepting an invitation to join in if I was involved. He attempted to gain very close proximity to me by force, literally pushing others aside so he could be next to me. Great care had to be taken to ensure Peter could not always be the closest to me, with activities being set up at tables and me sitting behind the table with no chairs available next to me. Peter would attempt to move the chair to the same side of the table, but would not be allowed to join in the task if he moved the chair. This was always verbally reinforced and consistently applied to all the children engaged in the activity so Peter was not singled out. Initially, Peter would then erupt into rage and refuse to comply with my request to maintain his place at the table, but I would not stop the activity. I ensured others would continue to be engaged in it and Peter would always receive a personal invitation to join in once he had calmed down.

After every angry outburst, Peter would be invited to join in with a small group activity; every session was treated as a fresh start for him; every playtime was followed by a tantrum and the reassurance that I would help to find a buddy for him to play with for the next playtime; every brief session in a mainstream classroom

needed support to ensure the class teacher was able to cope with the inevitable throwing of equipment and disruption; and every small step forward was celebrated.

Peter remained in the nurture group for a total of four terms before successfully reintegrating to his mainstream class, where he was able to remain without additional support. More detail of the work with Peter is available in Doyle (2005).

However, not all children were aggressive and individualised programmes of support needed to be put in place for all the children. This example demonstrates the engagement of more able peers from a sociocultural perspective in the support programme for one pupil.

#### **4.9.2 Cherry – Year 1**

When Cherry first came into the nurture group she spent the initial morning tipping out the toy boxes and examining the contents briefly before moving to another box. She flitted between activities and would not remain focused on anything for more than a few moments, even when actively encouraged to do so by me. I observed her picking up objects, briefly scanning them and then casting them without obvious awareness of the proximity of others. She did approach the other children and spoke to them, but often walked away before they had responded. She made no attempt to return any item she had looked at to its original position.

At breakfast time Cherry had snatched at the toast and pushed it into her mouth in one piece, with no attempt to bite. This had made her gag on the toast and she had spat it onto the table, which caused several other children to complain. She had listened to me explaining that she was new to the group and did not yet know how we liked to bite a piece off our toast and chew it to make it easier to swallow. She then snatched another piece of toast before I could clean up the spat-out toast from the table, and attempted to bite at it, using her teeth to grip as she tore the toast with her fingers. One other child had said “That’s better Cherry, now you won’t cough it up” and Cherry made brief eye contact and smiled, but then pushed him defensively.

Just before lunchtime when the children had been asked to help to tidy up, Cherry had a tantrum and ran out of the room to the nearby cloakroom area. The other children had completed tidying up but one had remarked “Cherry should do it. The mess is her fault”. A discussion was again held about it being Cherry’s first day in the group and she did not yet know that we tidy up when we have finished with a toy or game so that another person can use it. One child offered to show Cherry where to put the toys when she had finished during the afternoon session, which I praised as a kind gesture.

As Cherry had attempted to make several approaches to children in the morning session, it was decided to use this as a starting point for her to begin to understand the routines in the classroom. By using peer modelling, Cherry would be encouraged slowly to learn appropriate social skills using the sociocultural principle of learning from the more knowledgeable others. (Vygotsky 1987)

For other children, play activities can be used to engage their interest and support participation in the wider curriculum, as illustrated below.

#### **4.9.3 Oliver – Year 1**

Oliver was in a year 1 class who appeared very disengaged in the mainstream environment and often distressed and tearful. He sat in a “W” position and had an immature pencil grasp. He was referred to the group by his class teacher, who was becoming increasingly exasperated with his level of skills demonstrated in class. He was monosyllabic in speech and did not appear to be listening when on the carpet, although he was generally looking at the teacher at these times. Oliver was not disruptive in class, nor has he demonstrated any signs of aggressive or rough play in the playground. He played happily with cars, bricks or construction toys, and became absorbed in his play. He generally played alone, rarely engaging with other children, although he watched them whilst playing alongside.

Oliver did not appear to recognise his name in a written form, and had not demonstrated any recognition of number. He was observed to frequently select a large picture dictionary that had photographic images to illustrate the words. He

spent considerable time looking at this, although he randomly opens the book and remains at the same page without turning over to look at other pages. He resisted activities involving early writing or colouring, using delay tactics such as asking for the toilet, not clearing up other activities or complaining of feeling unwell. He had not demonstrated any spontaneous use the computer, but would stand behind other children and watch the screen. He did not appear to have an awareness of the cause and effect of using the keyboard or mouse to make changes in what is happening on the screen.

Oliver made eye contact when his name was used and nodded, but rarely spoke spontaneously. When an adult models simple sentences to develop his monosyllabic answers, Oliver can repeat them accurately, but did not use them spontaneously. Oliver was observed to like music, tapping his feet and swaying from foot to foot. He was often seen to touch the puppets in the classroom, stroking them, picking them up and looking at them, but does not put them on his hands, even when this is modelled for him. When he was observed playing in the water tray, Oliver was scooping up handfuls of water and throwing them in the air above his head, becoming soaked in the process, but showing obvious enjoyment on his face.

My work with Oliver involved initially looking at the play items he selected to engage with, albeit repetitively and at an early developmental stage. Taking that as a starting point, I was able to put quality play experiences in place that would engage him, using toys and activities that Oliver would select for himself, but building in the next developmental stage. I modelled the play initially, and another child would be invited to participate so that Oliver could see his peers engaging appropriately with the activity. I provided a simplistic running commentary as the activity progressed.

Some activities were undertaken using Oliver's enjoyment of music and rhythm, adapting musical party games for instance to encourage participation and fun within the play.

I made use of play activities outside involving watering cans fitted with rose water sprayers pouring onto different materials to allow Oliver to enjoy the sensation of

the water, but giving him the opportunity for new experiences. This progressed to standing under umbrellas covered in different materials and pouring water on them to talk about the sounds made. Games that encouraged anticipation and verbalisation such as including “ready, steady ....” for Oliver to add the final “go!” became popular and I used these to engage him with his peers, such as racing toy cars down slopes.

Although these play activities were aimed at Oliver’s developmental level, they were also related to the curriculum planning in his mainstream class where the science planning centred on materials and their properties. Oliver was able to make simple observations regarding different materials, such as indicating which made the most noise when water was poured on it or which kept his hands dry when I wrapped them up in different materials and trickled water over them. Using quality play experiences for Oliver developed his academic and social skills at a level he was able to successfully access.

For some children in the nurture group working on building a positive self-image at an individual level is the most significant part of the work. In the brief case summary below, Katherine is able to access a differentiated academic curriculum in the classroom but is felt to underachieve in her mainstream class, is very compliant but socially isolated and does not appear to have a recognisable friendship group.

#### **4.8.4 Katherine - Reception:**

Katherine is a compliant child and will follow adult directions without question. She is very quiet and socially withdrawn and tends to play alone, away from other children. She has a full time placement in the nurture group. Each day, Katherine comes in with her peers in the morning and self-registers as every child does. She takes a small detour on her way to find her place at the breakfast table, pausing in front of the small mirror in the home area, looking at her image briefly before quietly closing both sides across the front of the mirror so she can no longer see her reflection. Katherine then sits at the table and joins the group for breakfast.

After breakfast, when Katherine is engaged in other activities, the nurture group assistant opens the sides of the mirror again without making any reference to it. Katherine continues with her activity until she notices the mirror is again placed to reflect images. She stands up and walks back to the mirror. She makes no attempt to look at her own image, just closes the sides once more and returns to her task. This pattern of behaviour continues several times over each day.

After three weeks of this behaviour, my nurture group assistant and I discuss it in more detail. I decide to move the position of the mirror to see if the issue is connected to the reflection of light from the window which may be disturbing Katherine, rather than an issue with looking at her own image. The mirror is moved and placed in an alternative position, open to reflect images.

Katherine returns to the classroom on the first afternoon after the mirror's position has been altered. She hesitates on entry to the room and looks towards the original position of the mirror. Not seeing it, she becomes slightly agitated; rubbing her hands together, but resists any attempts by the nurture group assistant to talk about what is upsetting her. She sits in the quiet area, looking around the room. After a few moments, Katherine sees the mirror and stands up. She walks towards it and stands in front of it looking at her own image for a few moments before once again closing the sides. We decide not to open the mirror again that session.

The following day, I planned an activity relating to self-portraits to take place as an adult-led activity in the afternoon, to enable me to prepare Katherine and her peers for this task during the morning session. Several times during the morning this idea was relayed to the children in an upbeat way.

At the start of the afternoon session I placed the small mirror on the table, along with resources to enable the children to draw their own images. The children were encouraged to study their own faces in the mirror before drawing. I drew attention to their eye, skin and hair colour and the corresponding pencils available. They were encouraged to look at the placement of eyes, lip shape and size and finer detail such as eyelashes and freckles. Katherine was looking on from a distance but made no attempt to spontaneously approach the activity.

Towards the end of the activity, I made a personal and specific request to Katherine to come and join the activity. As expected, she approached the table and sat next to me. I talked calmly to Katherine, asking her about hair colour, showing her the portraits other children had completed and indicating the skin tone pencils available. Katherine responds verbally or by pointing. As the work begins to take shape, I gestured towards the mirror and asked if it will help to see the position of her features in the mirror. Katherine looks uncertain. I talked about how the other children found that helpful, how they could look at the colour of their own eyes and skin tone and match it to the pencils better by looking in the mirror. I suggest Katherine tries it too.

Katherine looks in the mirror without speaking. She stares at her reflected image for a long time, motionless. I continued to talk in a calm voice, pointing on the mirror to features and talking about them, leaving long pauses in between speech to try to elicit a verbal response from Katherine. Eventually, Katherine looks away and begins to select from the pencils available. I encourage her to look back in the mirror to check the colour of her eyes, stating “They are a really lovely colour. Which of these two pencils are nearest to your eye colour do you think?” trying to engage Katherine with her reflected image again. Katherine selects a green pencil and uses it to colour in the eyes. “Now what about your hair colour? Can you see which pencil is closest in colour to your hair when you look in the mirror?” I held three pencils up next to the reflected image so that Katherine looks between the colours and her own reflection. Katherine has freckles. I ask what colour she might need to colour these in on her portrait. Katherine hesitates before looking away from the mirror. I indicate my own face and freckles and say “When I was little, my daddy told me they were where the sunshine had kissed my nose!” Katherine looked directly at me and smiled. “My daddy says they are fairy spots” she says quietly. “Who has the most freckles do you think, me or you?” I ask. Katherine looks into the mirror and studies her image carefully. After a while, she turns to me and says “You. My freckles are smaller numbers”. She completes her portrait and leaves the activity. The mirror remained open as she left the table.

Although Katherine continued to close the mirror sides intermittently from that point on, this was not so consistent. It was observed that as her self-esteem and confidence grew, she paid less attention to the mirror and eventually stopped closing it altogether.

#### **4.10 Using common processes in play to develop social learning:**

Whilst the academic curriculum can be suitably adapted to operate as play-based tasks, these same classroom activities can successfully include social development skills. By being aware of the social processes involved in undertaking these curricular activities, I was able to address the need for social development without the challenge of trying to incorporate discrete additional tasks. This involved thinking creatively about the curriculum and having the confidence to approach even familiar teaching activities in new ways to ensure that each child could achieve success at their own level.

As part of the continuous curricular provision in the nurture group, typical activities were used simultaneously for academic, developmental and social learning. Many of these activities, which are widely found in mainstream classrooms as well as in nurture groups with this age range, have common processes involved that support a range of developmental needs.

For example:

*Sorting and classifying activities*:- talking and communicating, explaining, reasoning, questioning, investigating, organising, collaborating, sharing, making choices, taking risks, exploring, decision making;

*Construction toys*:- planning, organising, sorting, sharing, manipulating, investigating, hypothesising, making choices, decision making, collaborating, talking, questioning, developing ideas;

*Cooking activities*:- observing, measuring, estimating, predicting, precision, making choices, organising, explaining, questioning, investigating,

manipulating, following directions, waiting, turn taking, planning;

*Board games*:- turn taking, problem solving, talking, explaining, making choices, collaborating, sharing, observing, predicting, waiting;

*Jigsaw puzzles*:- scanning, trial and error, manipulating, problem solving, exploring, making choices, predicting, investigating, observing, sorting, organising;

*Drawing, colouring and mark making*:- recording, interpreting, exploring, observing, organising, making choices, talking and communicating, manipulating, developing ideas;

*Water play*:- exploring, investigating, questioning, explaining, testing, predicting, hypothesising, problem solving, making choices, observing, measuring, estimating, risk taking, precision;

As with all activities in the nurture group, the social development skills were reinforced alongside the academic and developmental learning according to individual needs. With two adults modelling and engaging proactively with each child, combined with careful targeting of an appropriate nurture curriculum, progress towards reaching an age appropriate Boxall profile can be achieved within the two to four terms recommended for nurture group input.

## **Chapter 5**

### **The influence of the nurture group on the whole school: reintegration, the nurturing school and the social development curriculum**

#### **5.1 Aims of the chapter:**

In this chapter I will outline how the nurture group initiative developed over time, leading to further developments across the school. I will outline the process involved in designing the reintegration readiness scale and the subsequent social development curriculum.

#### **5.2 Designing the Reintegration Readiness Scale as a tool to support pupils within the group to achieve success:**

For each child, screening for suitability for inclusion in the nurture group was undertaken, as outlined in the previous chapter, using the Boxall Profile. This was completed each term and again one term after reintegration into mainstream classes for monitoring and assessment purposes. However, as the first term of operation of the nurture group progressed, it became evident that some of these pupils would need longer-term input, whereas others were showing signs of building a positive self-image much faster than I had anticipated. These latter pupils were showing significant improvements in their self-esteem and desire to reintegrate with their peers in the mainstream classrooms. However each had presented with a Boxall profile that had identified a number of areas of concern, and as these children had been attending the nurture group for such a short space of time, this caused a dilemma for me. My desire to reintegrate needed to be carefully balanced with a detailed analysis of the pupil's level of skills and an appropriate assessment of their approach to learning.

Nurture groups have an expectation that children will attend for a concentrated period of between two to four terms (Boxall, 2002; Bennathan and Boxall 2000; Cooper et al 1999) One child, James, began to show signs of being able to work in his mainstream classroom within a shorter period of time than expected. He appeared to be reaching a plateau in his social development within the nurture group, complying with instructions, engaging well with his peers and responding equally well to collective school times such as playtimes, lunchtimes and assembly. Considering that a number of children struggled with these periods in school, either responding negatively to the unstructured nature of them or finding the experience of being in a large gathering of children with a specific expectation somewhat overwhelming, James was managing his time remarkably well. He had initially presented as a moody, sulky boy who withdrew from any challenge and was reluctant to try new activities. However, the behaviours being observed after just half a term in the nurture group no longer supported these earlier observations. This was unexpected after such a short period of time and I had not expected to reach this point with James so quickly. He was not the only child who showed progress quicker than initially anticipated when the nurture group first began operating, but he did show the most significant change and triggered my desire to be able to assess readiness for reintegration.

The Boxall profile had been useful in identifying the broader areas of developmental and diagnostic needs of individuals in the nurture group. However, when I was faced with a number of children who had responded so positively to the provision in such a short space of time, I needed to look in detail at the next steps towards achieving reintegration. Using the Boxall profile each term offered a clear overall view of the pattern of development, but was not frequent enough to help with the reintegration of some pupils after a term of input. My attempts to complete the Boxall profile more frequently were unsuccessful in showing significant enough changes to give confidence to decide on readiness to reintegrate.

It became clear that a specific assessment tool to help analyse behaviour, measure readiness to reintegrate and highlight specific areas that needed further development would be extremely useful. For practicality, it needed to be quick to complete, supportive towards the reintegration process and not to merely mirror the categories

contained within the Boxall Profile. I decided to try to identify a tool that would support the transition into mainstream classrooms in very small steps, which offered targets which could be actively incorporated into IEPs both in the nurture group and mainstream classrooms.

Following some investigation, there did not seem to be any universally established method to measure suitability for reintegration from a nurture group, although the Boxall profile continued to be used to indicate overall progress each term. The criteria within the Boxall profile were useful for longer-term target setting, but were too broad to use to set the detailed, specific, small-step targets necessary to support reintegration. There was also a need to find something that could be used to provide a detailed analysis of the way forward for a number of children who were being screened for reintegration. I identified a range of documents which offered some support in this area, but none that exactly met my requirements. The IEPs were reviewed each half term and I felt there was a need for a tool which could highlight specific steps to help a child to achieve short term goals and help me to devise positively phrased targets to meet individual needs but without increasing the workload significantly. I was unsurprised that it was not possible to identify a single document which would meet these exacting needs to analyse behaviour, plan a programme of individual action for each child, provide suitable short-term targets for IEPs, highlight small areas where significant progress had been made and also to indicate readiness for reintegration and planning movement into and out of the nurture group on a frequent basis e.g. half termly.

I decided I would need to develop a tool to meet these criteria as part of my on-going work within the nurture group. This involved customising elements from other documents and collating these into an accessible format. Documents investigated included the Boxall profile, Portage Early Education Programme (White and Cameron, 1987), a reintegration programme used in an EBD high school (McSherry 1999), baseline assessment materials and the Early Learning Goals (QCA 2000). There was considerable consultation with mainstream colleagues regarding what they would realistically like a pupil to be able to do following input from the nurture group, combining that with what I felt a child would need to be able to achieve in order to function at an appropriate level within a mainstream

classroom. It was a difficult balance between having realistic expectations, and continuing to provide challenges for the children, but still supporting them to continue to achieve in a positive, nurturing environment throughout the school.

Using a range of different existing material generated a lot of text data. I also took the opportunity of working in a group situation during a scheduled staff meeting to consult with my teaching colleagues and brainstorm ideas of what they felt a pupil reintegrating from the nurture group should be expected to be able to achieve, given their starting point. These expectations were added to the data already amassed.

There was a need to systematically reduce the raw data and employ a coding system to begin to classify the materials. As specified in the discussion on methodology in Chapter 3, I adopted a general inductive approach to interrogating the data. I reduced the overall data to six initial categories before seeking stakeholder feedback from my colleagues again. This was an important part of the process for two reasons; firstly to reduce the potential for researcher bias as I had been concerned that some of my colleagues expectations collected from the group situation were not realistic given the pupil's individual starting points. I wanted to guard against allowing my own bias to exclude these suggestions from the final data based on this premise. Therefore the feedback gave me an opportunity to discuss these particular expectations further to gain more insight before either including or excluding them from the final product. Secondly, it provided me with the opportunity to look at the six categories and their contained data and to identify through the feedback where there still remained some areas that could be further condensed and combined. As a result, the raw data was able to be reduced to five overall categories by combining two areas into a superordinate category (self-control and management of behaviour were initially two separate categories) and I was confident that researcher bias had not excluded any areas without further discussion taking place to inform the decision.

The coded data was then compiled in a more appropriate format and the resulting document became known as the Nurture Group Reintegration Readiness Scale. (See appendix 4) This broke down the main areas of concern into five headings:

- self-control and management of behaviour
- social skills
- self-awareness and confidence
- skills for learning
- approach to learning

Each of these headings was then subdivided into a series of statements, with 78 in total across the scale. The reintegration readiness scale was then completed for individual pupils. Each statement was considered and allocated a simple numerical score of between one and four in relation to each of these criteria:

1. rarely fulfils this criterion
2. can occasionally fulfil this criterion
3. frequently fulfils this criterion
4. almost always fulfils this criterion

On completion of each set of criteria, the numerical score was totalled and plotted on a table with a maximum possible score of 312. After considerable discussion between myself and my colleagues, an overall score of 218 (70%) or above was chosen to indicate readiness for that pupil to begin a programme of reintegration into their mainstream class. This figure was selected as it would indicate a pupil who was achieving scores of 3 or 4 in a significant number of statements, i.e. frequently or almost always able to fulfil the relevant criteria, but with recognition that some areas may continue to require further input. The individual criteria were carefully selected to be usable as small step targets for joint nurture group and mainstream IEPs. I felt many to be achievable in a short timescale with suitable input, so the child and families could see progress as clearly and measurably as could be seen in school. I designed the reintegration readiness scale to be used alongside the Boxall profile to give a full and balanced picture of the individual child's progress towards reintegration, as well as their overall developmental progress.

I wanted to undertake some checks to see if the 70% figure was appropriate for the expectations of the general cohort of children within the mainstream classrooms in the case study school. I engaged in a pilot study to standardise the scores on the

reintegration readiness scale. This involved completing a scale for a sample of children across the age ranges in consultation with the mainstream class teachers. I decided that in order to obtain a reasonable sample size that was relevant to the current school intake, every third child would be scored across the five classes from reception to year 2. The school had two reception year groups and three vertically grouped mixed ability year 1 and 2 classes at this point in the study. There were a total of 150 pupils on roll at the time of the sampling. A total of 20 pupils from the two reception classes and 30 children in the year 1 and 2 classes were scored, averaging ten per class. I analysed the overall scores and then, as a staff group, we agreed that the expectation within a mainstream classroom across the sampled children would be that a score of 70% or above indicated a level of social developmental and behavioural functioning that would be manageable within the mainstream environment in that school at that particular time without additional resources or interventions.

Although this sampling represented a third of all the pupils in the mainstream environment, it is not without its limitations in making any generalisations outside of the case study school environment due to the small sample size and selection of the sample being only from one school. However, within the case study school this produced an acceptable result in order to inform the reliability in this context of the reintegration readiness scale.

A reintegration readiness scale was completed for the pupil that had originally sparked my concern regarding how to determine whether a point of “reintegration readiness” had been reached or not. It demonstrated particularly low scores under the heading “skills for learning”. In particular, James was scoring lowest in statements such as “can work alone without constant attention for brief periods”, “can organise the materials needed for a task and clear them away appropriately” and most significantly “has developed some self-help strategies (at own level) e.g. using reference materials such as word banks”. It was evident that James was relying too heavily upon the almost instant personal support he had become used to receiving in the nurture group and I needed to work on helping him to deal with the delay in receiving help in a larger classroom environment. The assessment led to

me recognising that we were over-compensating for James's needs, not allowing him to develop his independent working skills sufficiently.

A carefully planned programme was put into place to reduce the instant support James received in the nurture group with corresponding support strategies in his mainstream class where he was spending 50% of his time in school as part of his on-going reintegration programme.

Small step targets taken directly from the reintegration readiness scale, an increasing awareness on the part of the adults of the principles of nurture in the classroom and promoting peer support enabled James to make the transition between the nurture group and the mainstream classroom successfully. A fuller description of the support in place for James can be seen in Doyle (2001).

### **5.3 The concept of a Nurturing School:**

Beginning to reintegrate pupils into their mainstream classrooms after a period of time within the nurture group highlighted a significant need for a collective approach to managing behaviour and changing physical environments alongside attitudes towards nurturing within mainstream situations. It was evident very early on in the study that whilst acknowledging nurture groups as a distinct early intervention provision, the principles of nurture are equally important in the wider school environment and can be effectively applied to learning in many areas of school. (Doyle 2003, Holmes 2000, Lucas 1999). With this in mind, the nurture group staff actively promoted the work they undertook in the belief that if all the pupils from the nurture group were to maintain their success once they are reintegrated into mainstream classrooms, it was essential that the whole school understood the principles and practices involved and were willing to adopt a nurturing approach towards meeting the diverse needs of these children. Bennathan and Boxall (2000) emphasise that for the successful development of the nurturing school, there should be a commitment to the principles of nurture, which need to become part of the normal mainstream practices.

The successful practices within the nurture group and the achievements of the pupils increasingly led to the desire from mainstream colleagues for support in developing nurturing classrooms and a more nurturing school. As a consequence of this interest, I undertook an audit of current practices and approaches prior to developing and expanding them by adding nurturing initiatives. This led to the development of a social development curriculum, a nurturing school resource pack and the promotion of a number of positive approaches to tackling social and emotional development across all areas of the mainstream school.

#### **5.4 The development of the nurturing school:**

The impact of the nurture group and its practices could be witnessed throughout the school as classrooms and communal areas embraced many of its practices and principles as the school continued to evolve into a nurturing school. Some of the changes in the classrooms had to be physical, involving looking at the available space and determining how to make it a more nurturing environment. The school was on one level and designed with large open classrooms, most of which had their own attached group support rooms. Whilst this had advantages in terms of ease of movement around the building, lots of work spaces and plenty of storage, it had some disadvantages in terms of nurturing classrooms as there was a lack of areas which could be used as a sanctuary by those children needing some time away from the main activity areas due to the open plan environment.

##### **5.4.1 *Nooks:***

I was specifically concerned that these open spaces may make some of the nurture group pupils feel vulnerable and intimidated on occasions in the larger, less intimate mainstream classrooms. The solution was to suggest to colleagues the creation of “nooks” for the children to retreat to, containing attractive seating, books, pictures, soft toys and cushions. These nooks were screened with voile fabric hung from the ceiling to create a tented effect to enclose them for emotional security. The choice of fabric was deliberately translucent, allowing the children to continue to observe the activities in the classroom from a safe distance but still providing a sense of containment. They enhanced the feelings of security and familiarity, continuing to

nurture the child's emotional development in a mainstream setting. It was emphasised that there should not be any pressure on the child using the nook if they felt they need some sanctuary.

Initially some mainstream colleagues viewed the establishment of nooks within the classrooms with doubt, voicing concerns that they could be misused as an opportunity to avoid participating in the academic curriculum. Despite these reservations, with agreement to review this idea after a term of use, the nooks were implemented in each classroom. After some initial excitement at this new initiative by the children in each classroom, their use settled and the initial concerns of some staff were proven unfounded, as illustrated below:

*I had real doubts about the nooks. I thought, this is going to mean half the class walking off in the middle of every lesson and having an excuse not to work. I also thought they would be pulled down when one of them was angry or something. It was a leap of faith on my part to go along with it – I really was convinced it would cause more problems than it was worth. I introduced it on the Monday and by lunchtime I think just about every child in my class had been in there, and I thought, "I knew this would not work". But in the afternoon we had art and they were all busy enjoying themselves and I realised no one was using the nook.*

*The next day I talked to the class about it. I said they had all now had a chance to use it to see what it felt like, and from now on, it was to be used only when they felt like they really needed a bit of space for a few minutes. Over the next few days, although there was still a lot of use, the children got used to it. By the end of the week, I think it had become just another thing that happened in the classroom and not such a novelty. It was well used though and I began to suggest that a child might like to sit in there when I could see they were getting angry or upset. They went straight away. The teddy bears and soft toys were a great hit in there too – forget about their "street-cred", no matter which child went in there, I always saw them holding a soft toy!*

Year 1/2 class teacher

Transcribed section of an unstructured interview 2002

Each child was allowed to decide when they needed to withdraw into the nook, and, as they are able to see the activities in the main classroom, they were encouraged, but not pressurised, to make the decision to leave the nook and join in. There was always a range of children using the nooks for varying amounts of time, not just those who had a placement in the nurture group. Some of the children needed time out as they were angry, some of them were upset, some of them were overwhelmed during the day and needed sanctuary. The nooks gave children the opportunity for respite, enabling them to come to terms with some aspects of classroom life with less pressure to conform at that time. Once the child began to spend more time in the mainstream areas, the adults specifically targeted support to help them to settle into class life, and in so doing, to develop a sense of security and to build up a trusting relationship. The nooks made an impact in meeting the need for a safe base (Bowlby 1978) for many of the more vulnerable pupils and not just those with a nurture group placement.

#### **5.4.2 *Re-experiencing early play:***

All the mainstream teachers were positively encouraged to ensure there was access to a range of sensory and tactile experiences throughout the day. This involved some in-service training and negotiating with colleagues initially. Each class had both sand and water trays and a designated role-play area, themed to co-ordinate with the current class curriculum to allow exploration and increasing drama activities. There was a range of playdough and tools, puppets and theatres and lots of small role-play equipment freely available in each class. These items were actively planned for as part of the curriculum delivery. With demands of the academic curriculum being ever present, this was an area that needed a high level of co-operation from colleagues in developing ideas for how to incorporate play in an already full curriculum.

Initially I led the planning for this and promoted the creativity to think differently about how to address the curriculum. My role however quickly became a supporting one as mainstream colleagues embraced the ideas and became increasingly confident to use these as an integral part of their lesson delivery and not

as an “add-on” to the curriculum. Adult support was offered to the children, aimed at developing their vocabulary and constructive play activities associated with this equipment. Two colleagues discussed the inclusion of play activities in unstructured interviews with me, reported below:

*It was silly really, having to agree to have quality play equipment in the classroom when the children are so young. My class were all just 5 and 6 years old and I found myself thinking how am I going to get all the curriculum taught if they are playing? You forget, actually they are small children and have an absolute right to be “playing”. It was really useful to be able to sit down as a group though and look at the teaching objectives and curricular planning together to see where to fit in these times without having to feel that you needed to find extra time somehow. It is about being creative with how you address the curriculum, not about making yet another worksheet to prove the children understood what you wanted them to know in each lesson. And it felt almost like I had been given permission to let the children learn through play even in key stage 1 rather than in reception - that was really liberating for me as a teacher. I enjoyed it so much more than the first term in this classroom. It was more relaxed and I was always surprised how much the children could recall from what they had just experienced rather than from what I had wanted them to write. Finding new ways of recording the children’s learning and understanding was really liberating for me too. I actually enjoyed doing it even though I felt daunted at the idea at first. It is something I will definitely continue with too.*

Year 1 teacher

Transcribed section from an unstructured interview. 2001

*At first I thought I couldn’t do it – year 2 kids have enough to be getting on with to get them through SATS and there is just so much pressure all the time from the head, the LEA and parents too. Trouble was, everyone else said they would give it a go and I really worried about it at first. Then I sat back and watched Mikey at the sand the other day. He was totally absorbed, measuring out sand into different sized containers and looking at the amounts each held. He was making notes about it, writing the size and kept at it over and over until he turned around and beamed at me – he made the link between the size of the container and the capacity. He was*

*predicting, estimating, testing hypotheses – it was what I knew he could do but it was totally spontaneous and he was able to start to explain it to the other children. That gave him such a boost to his confidence. Now I am going to build that into the planning in the future to get others to do the same - it made it real for him. You just can't get that sort of thing from books and worksheets. You have to do it for yourself. I can't bear to think of going back to previous ways of doing things – this is something I will keep on doing as it just makes so much more sense. I will have to build it into the timetable somehow, SATS or no SATS!*

Year 2 class teacher.

Transcribed section of an unstructured interview 2001

#### ***5.4.3 A nurturing approach to behaviour management:***

A major review of the school behaviour policy was undertaken to make it a far more nurturing policy. There remained clear and realistic school-wide expectations of behaviour and full awareness of the sanctions that would be imposed if those expectations were not met. The list of rules was substantially reduced and discussed as a staff to make them relevant and manageable for the children. The children's view were actively sought and incorporated into the policy, and a copy was sent home to every family.

Including nurturing principles in the classrooms was initially a matter of gradually altering mainstream thought processes whilst recognising existing good practice, as opposed to a totally new way of addressing classroom behaviour management. A resource pack of materials drawing on the practices in the nurture group was given to each class teacher alongside whole staff in-service training. The pack included the social development curriculum and also some other resources to support the development of more nurturing classroom. One of these was a simple version of an ABC of behaviour to monitor the antecedent of any behaviour, the behaviour itself and the consequences. This proved to be a useful tool in identifying situations where it is possible to pre-empt negative behaviour, intercept or alter situations where difficulties are likely to arise, and as a consequence, to have calmer

classrooms at key points during the day. It also offered an easy to maintain record of disruptions or withdrawn behaviours, enabling specific targeting when there was an identifiable pattern to behaviour, positively encouraging mainstream colleagues to be proactive as opposed to reactive in their support.

As an integral part of the personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum, all classrooms were encouraged to use circle time as a constructive aid to building relationships where everyone felt valued and respected. The emphasis was on quality circle time (Mosley 1996) with no naming and shaming, where the children were supported to solve problems and difficulties constructively and cooperatively as a group, with plenty of adult support. During discussion, it was generally felt that using several short circle times during the week, rather than one timetabled weekly session as Mosley suggests, would be the most beneficial at that time in the school's development. This offered many opportunities for adults to adopt the nurture group practices of modelling positive behaviour and body language and to demonstrate to the children that their responses were respected and valued. The good practices in quality circle time such as listening to others, turn taking, looking at the person speaking and the "no blame" rule all helped to address social and emotional development and raise self-esteem in the mainstream classrooms.

#### ***5.4.4 Increasing concentration and reducing stress:***

Another important alteration in classroom management led by the nurture group staff was the instigation of "brain breaks" (Smith and Call 1999) and separating lessons into manageable chunks to make it easier for the children to remain focussed on tasks. Looking at the way teaching was approached and accepting a realistic limit to the concentration spans of the pupils made this a logical step. Brain breaks involved stopping the activity the children are working on at a suitable juncture and involving the children in some form of brief physical movement unrelated to the task such as air writing or limb stretches. The teacher then refocuses the children on the learning objective and activity. To support this, each literacy and numeracy lesson objective was written in child friendly language to highlight what the children were learning and focus them on their achievements before being displayed in the

class. These provided a useful resource for plenary sessions and to revisit the achievements of the class over a period of time.

## **5.5 Nurturing in the wider school environment:**

I had spent some time in the school undertaking an audit of the practices that had the potential to be part of the development of the nurturing school. I had identified a number of existing activities that could be used to support the school's evolution to a more nurturing environment.

### ***5.5.1 Sanctuary lunchtime club:***

The adoption of a sanctuary lunchtime club for pupils who felt overwhelmed and intimidated by the large, unstructured environment of the playground demonstrated a number of nurturing principles. This lunchtime provision was instigated when the school was in special measures, with the aim of supporting pupils who found the playground too rough and intimidating to be in. The sanctuary remained for pupils who benefited from a smaller, more nurturing environment to play in, supported by a familiar adult. Each member of the teaching staff voluntarily spent one lunchtime session per week supporting a small number of pupils in quiet play activities in one of the classrooms. This was never used as a punishment and attendance was voluntary. Some pupils were positively encouraged to attend the sanctuary club when it was felt a break from the routines in the playground would be beneficial, at which point they were encouraged to choose a friend to stay with them. This was viewed by the children as a privilege and not as a punishment.

As part of my drive to expand the nurturing principles and support those pupils with SEBD I developed and supported a number of other initiatives:

### ***5.5.2 Playtime routines:***

Playground issues continued to be flashpoints for some of the children and needed to be positively addressed. Following whole school staff in-service training there was an increased amount of play equipment provided and the appointment of some play

leaders which had a very positive effect on the quality of playtimes. I encouraged the staff to use the same structured games in the playground as warm-up games prior to PE lessons to create the link between good behaviour in lessons and the playground. There were regular meetings between the senior management team, including myself, and the midday supervisory team to ensure everyone was using the same approaches and to pre-empt any difficult situations.

I spent time supporting the concept of zoning the playground to provide some structure for the children and adults. There were zones for quieter play, including mats and boxes of books which were placed in shady areas. There were clearly marked zones for larger games which had a play leader allocated to support the children to learn the rules of co-operative games. There was a zone for independent team games such as football and a further zone for use with a range of toys and equipment. A new system to provide play equipment for pupils and giving them responsibility for its safekeeping was introduced. Each child had a named toy library borrowing card to use to obtain play equipment. The child was given the responsibility for the toy's safe return, and only received their borrowing card back in exchange for the same undamaged item of play equipment. The children paid a small voluntary contribution each term to have a card issued, which helped with the cost of replacing equipment.

In addition, a buddy stop was a prominent feature at every playtime. The principle was that if a child was on their own they stood at the buddy stop, which was placed, like a bus stop, in a prominent spot in the playground. This acted as a signal to other children, who collected the waiting child and involved them in their game or talk. Initially we needed to monitor the buddy stop, noting when a child was there and encouraging others to go and offer to play, but it soon became self-sufficient, with children monitoring it themselves and rarely needing adult intervention.

### ***5.5.3 Lunchtime rituals:***

The lunchtime experiences evolved from nurture group regular routines at breakfast time. I secured agreement from my colleagues for the children to sit in mixed class groups with named place cards. The older children were supported to take turns to

set the table with cutlery and to pour the water. Brightly coloured tablecloths were introduced. The children collected their lunch one table at a time and waited until everyone from their table had returned before beginning to eat. The same courtesy was shown when collecting and eating the second course, waiting until everyone had finished their lunch before clearing the plates. Additionally, the midday supervisory assistant staff used a reward token system with the children in five mixed-aged teams. Children were rewarded with group tokens for displaying good manners and helping others, as well as clearing the tables, for example. The team with the most tokens at the end of the week was praised publicly at a weekly celebration assembly.

#### ***5.4.4 Celebration assembly:***

Every Friday, the school held a celebration assembly. Every teacher nominated two children who could be publicly praised for their good work, acts of kindness, thoughtfulness or good manners. Each child nominated had their name and the reason for their nomination entered in the Golden Book, which was left on display in the hall for all visitors, pupils and staff to see. The lunchtime token system was given greater status and a special mention during these assemblies, with the successful group's name also included in the book.

When the personal, social and health education policy was revised and developed, in order to give this area of the curriculum greater significance, it was decided to nominate a whole school theme per week. The theme was decided during staff meetings and strongly reflected problem areas spotted by staff during unstructured periods of the day, and was introduced in weekly PSHE lessons. It is also linked to the assembly theme of the week. A child who was seen to pay significant attention to using this weekly theme received public acknowledgement at the weekly celebration assembly.

#### ***5.5.5 Carousel:***

Whilst the school was in special measures, ways of providing a range of activities to support developmental growth were discussed. It had been decided to vertically group the entire school into five teacher-led groups for one session a week,

combining some art or design and technology objectives with the addition of supported and unstructured play activities. The aim was to give the older children the opportunity to lead and support the youngest children, whilst at the same time giving the younger ones the chance to relax in different classrooms and be more confident about moving around the school building. This became an integral part of PSHE, addressing the themed focus prior to the session and continuing the thread through the quality play activities.

As the nurture group ran for nine sessions per week, I arranged for the remaining session where the children were supported in mainstream classrooms to take place to correspond with the carousel activity. The nurture group children found this less stressful than attending other curricular led sessions and were able to experience a number of similar activities to those in the nurture group, thereby receiving support for their development in the wider school environment. I and my nurture group assistant were always available to support individual children within the mainstream classrooms at these times.

## **5.6 The development of the Social Development Curriculum:**

Greenhalgh (1994 p230) states that for the curriculum to work effectively to benefit all children, regardless of their barrier to learning, it needs to be consistent across the school as part of the whole school policy. For the concept of the nurturing school to have sufficient impact it had to become agreed whole school policy and be embraced by all staff.

Sharp (2001 p45) discusses the importance of the “hidden curriculum” and its role within the emotionally literate school, where emotions are recognised, understood and appropriately expressed by adults and children. Webster-Stratton (1999 p30) describes how teachers who strive to build positive relationships with the children in their care can make a significant difference to a child’s future. Both of these viewpoints supported the school’s development, whereby active work was being undertaken to improve emotional literacy and build positive relationships with children to make a difference to those with social and emotional needs within the nurturing school ethos.

The school had been supported both by the instigation of a nurture group and then subsequently in its development as a nurturing school with a positive whole-school ethos and considerable investment in staff in-service training. From its initial conception, the funding for the nurture group was time-limited with a significant requirement to encourage sustainability of the nurturing process even if it was not possible to continue with specific interventional funding for a discrete group. One very specific aim was to encourage the autonomous application of tasks within the curriculum which would be supportive of social development. With this in mind and recognising that the nurture group principles and practices could be applied to mainstream classrooms, the reintegration readiness scale (Doyle 2001) became the focus for further development into a social development curriculum resource document.

I had begun to receive an increasing number of requests from class teachers for simple but effective ideas to help them support pupils who were exhibiting SEBD in mainstream classrooms. Initially individual responses were given, but gradually there was a recognition that similar issues were arising across the mainstream classrooms. It became apparent that it would be useful to collate this information into a document that could be used as an informative resource for mainstream colleagues to meet the needs of all their children, not just those with a nurture group placement, to refer to.

A practical consideration was that any document produced needed to be useful and inspirational, without imposing additional burdens in terms of workload. It needed to be easy to incorporate into existing planning frameworks in use within the case study school, with a focus on pupils exhibiting social, emotional and behavioural needs. However, to use it successfully alongside and as part of the existing curricular planning it should not exclude those pupils who were not showing any specific social, emotional or behavioural barriers to learning. The result was the Social Development Curriculum (Doyle 2004) reproduced in appendix 6.

The social development curriculum was written as a natural progression towards the development of a nurturing school in terms of providing guidance and support for

mainstream colleagues. It became increasingly evident that to optimise the success of individual children, the whole school needed to undertake a pastoral support role. This emphasis on whole school responsibility was consistent with the then current DfES guidance on inclusive schooling (DfES 2001a), and also with the revised Code of Practice, which recognises that all teachers are teachers of special educational needs (DfES 2001b).

To enable mainstream staff to achieve the aim of actively promoting social development within an already full curriculum, the social development curriculum document was carefully produced using the familiar criteria from the reintegration readiness scale that staff had already been extensively consulted on. I undertook a data handling activity using the 78 statements contained in the reintegration readiness scale. These were initially analysed to identify those that could be objectives and those that were outcome based. Once the objectives were clearly identified, the remaining statements were classified as potential outcomes for each objective.

These statements had already been through a stakeholder feedback process when originally identifying them in designing the reintegration readiness scale. However, once they were allocated as either objectives or outcomes, I subjected the draft to further stakeholder feedback through three colleagues, two teachers and the nurture group assistant for comment. As there was agreement with my classification of the statements, I was able to proceed with the next stages of devising the activities and suggestions.

The social development curriculum was not designed to be used to plan separate lessons. Instead, it is a resource and strategy document to provide inspiration and starting points to assist mainstream teachers in meeting some of the SEBD needs of the pupils, focusing on a nurturing approach.

The social development curriculum covered the following four areas of development from the reintegration readiness scale:

- social skills
- self-awareness and confidence
- skills for learning
- self-control and management of behaviour

Each of these categories has a number of objectives and outcomes attributed to them, as stated above, reproduced in a clear table format. Suggested teaching activities to be used flexibly either during whole class activities, or by groups or individuals, with or without additional support are identified within the tables. Unlike many commercial games and activities marketed to meet social development needs, there is no specific financial outlay necessary to apply the social development curriculum activities. Where specific items of equipment are suggested they are usually games or adaptations of those frequently found in classrooms. This was a significant factor in designing the social development curriculum.

The document promoted the individualisation of the mainstream curriculum to meet the needs of the child. Chazan et al (1998) recommend that teachers find opportunities to teach strategies for self-esteem and social development as part of the whole curriculum rather than having to find and separate specific time for teaching personal and social development. The social development curriculum was designed to support this teaching as an integral part of the classroom activities. However, it was not designed to replace the valuable role of lessons in personal, social and health education, but to compliment these lessons throughout the week.

Using the social development curriculum alongside existing planning documentation aims to support the notion of “incorporative classrooms” (Pollard and Tann, 1987), ensuring all children are able to participate fully in class activities, and to feel valued and respected, with the corollary of raised self-esteem. The social development curriculum also actively promotes the ethos of the nurturing school. Teachers using these suggestions should be, as Lucas (1999) suggests, able to adapt their practice

and use their intuition while continuing to provide an appropriately challenging curriculum to meet the needs of all pupils. Two examples of the use of the social development curriculum can be seen in Doyle (2003).

### **5.7 The impact of the social development curriculum:**

Mainstream teaching staff reported an increase in awareness of the need to consider social development in their curricular planning after I introduced the social development curriculum. A number of staff said they actively looked for opportunities to encourage collaborative learning of these skills within their planning. Three staff specifically discussed this area during unstructured interviews, transcribed below:

*I used to focus on individual work a lot more really. I would group the children into ability groups, and I still do, but then I would set them on task and focus on what each individual produced. I don't do it in quite the same way now; I still group the children so that when I am planning I can differentiate for them, but now I think more about not just what each individual will produce at the end of the session, but on how I want them to produce it and what they can gain from the experience – not just academically but also socially. It is not different in terms of the academic outcome, but the social outcome can also be part of the process now. For instance, today I had a group using maths apparatus and instead of using it on their own and recording, they were using it in pairs, taking turns to record and manipulate the apparatus. I was worried first about being able to see who did what in terms of getting the right answers, and that does take a bit of confidence to convince yourself that you are still going to be able to do that, but actually, it's not that bad. And getting the pair to feedback to the other children in their group is a good idea too – that way you can assess their understanding by getting them to explain things to others and listening to their responses. It means I assess and record differently and am not just relying on what is put in their books. I photograph what is happening in the classroom and annotate that and stick it in their books too. I have to record carefully what I have heard them say or seen them do, but actually that gets easier with time – you get to know what you need to include in their books. It was a bit*

*noisy in here first as they got used to the idea and I had to ask a lot of open ended questions to get them to explain the processes to their group, and to me, but they are also getting the hang of this and seem to enjoy it more. And of course the best bit is they are learning the social skills in maths, say, but they start to use the same skills in their play and I spend less time on the low level disputes and more working with the children.*

Year 2 teacher

Transcribed section of unstructured interview 2003

*We do a lot of PSHE type work in this class anyway as part of the foundation stage curriculum so I think I got used to the idea of making my planning explicit in this area rather than implicit. I feel I have achieved more though by doing that – it is a great feeling at the end of a week to be looking at what I wanted to achieve and being able to evaluate it to say that I added so much to their social development! I think that is the only real change in this – I am being more explicit in what I am putting. That helps when I am trying to assess their progress – it is there clearly and I can see what I need to do next. It is helpful to plan with the other teacher on this though – it gives me more confidence as I know what I want to do, but we talk through what else we can get from it – in terms of we know the academic next step, but by talking it through from a nurture perspective, we get to see the social next steps too.*

Year R teacher

Transcribed section of an unstructured interview 2003

*I'll be honest, I am never sure when you come out with all this stuff. I always think "oh not nurture groups again!" I admit to thinking that. I just feel that there are so many different things we need to be doing all the time – it is totally initiative overdrive with all the government things, school assessments and the EAZ bringing in one thing after another. I feel like I have to sign up to it all though because everyone else is. This time though I thought you had a point – it is so important to*

*get it right from an early age with these kids – if we don't do it, then by the time they transfer to Junior school, the attitudes are so entrenched – well, it breaks my heart sometimes. I admit to struggling with the planning for this initially, but being able to do this with colleagues helps – they probably came out with all the ideas first off, but now I contribute more. I know it is confidence and probably a bit of mid-year tiredness too, but I am getting there. I don't mean this to be negative, but so many times there are things that you are expected to do – I'm just being realistic – and this was yet another. I do think it is working though, I have seen a difference with some of the low level kids who always have that sort of behaviour that you just know is bubbling away but not enough to really kick off. I guess in another school they would be considered a problem, but they are pretty low level here! I can find ways to provide things for them that help not only the learning side, but the social side too. I don't think it was something totally new, I just think that maybe I had got so into the routine of having to be quite strict with them to manage the behaviour that I was missing something. I still don't think this would have worked a couple of years ago though. I just don't think we could afford to take our eye off the ball with the behaviour as it was then. Still, it seems to be working better now. I guess time will tell with this all. You know I don't like too many changes anyway so I might be the slowest to agree with you - ask me again in a year!*

Year 1/2 teacher

Transcribed section of an unstructured interview. 2003

When the nurture group was instigated it was in a school that was trying an initiative to meet the needs of a small but challenging group of children who had not responded positively to other behavioural initiatives. During the study period, the school moved from a position of hosting a group to looking at ways to include all children with SEBD issues in the mainstream classrooms wherever possible. This was an interesting observation which has been raised by other researchers in various ways, e.g. Cooper and Whitebread (2007), Davies (2011), Reynolds et al (2009) as identified in chapter 2. The question of whether the nurture group supports the development of a nurturing school or the school with a nurturing ethos is more likely to host a nurture groups has not been answered by this observation; there are simply too many variables which may impact on this situation, as Reynolds et al (2009) identified.

## **Chapter 6**

### **So what was the impact of having a nurture group on this infant school?**

#### **6.1 Aims of this chapter:**

This chapter discusses the findings relating to the impact of the nurture group on the infant school that hosted it. I am able to refer to longitudinal data to inform the discussion on exclusion rates as well as draw on narrative accounts from colleagues throughout. A comparison between the two Ofsted inspection reports add some useful triangulation to the narratives and my own observations.

#### **6.2 Background:**

At the beginning of this study, the impact that a nurture group might have on this particular infant school was unknown. The initiative was new to the school, the town and the local authority. The staff had experienced a period of HMI visits during the previous two years while the school was in special measures and continued to receive regular monitoring visits from local authority school improvement personnel. They had additional accountability to the EAZ who were funding the nurture group.

During the period of the study I amassed a significant quantity of data from a variety of sources, as previously detailed. In writing this final chapter, it was fascinating to refer back to early data, observations and narratives to contrast with contemporaneous sources collated towards the end of the study period. It highlighted to me just how far the staff, school and I had come from the initial investigation and setting up of the nurture group to the point of exit from the group and study. I found many examples of long forgotten narrative from the early weeks and months when I had just set up the nurture group which I was able to use in semi-structured interviews with colleagues to collect data to answer the supplementary research questions.

In this chapter I will provide findings in response to each of the research questions

introduced in Chapter 1 to respond to the overall question “*What was the impact of having a nurture group on an infant school?*” I will draw on a range of data to discuss my perceptions of the impact the nurture group had on the case study school and those working within it.

The original research questions, as outlined in the introduction to this thesis which guided the case study were:

Main question:

**What is the impact of a nurture group on an infant school?**

Supplementary questions:

- *Do nurture groups impact on inclusive practices?*
- *Is there an association between the introduction of a nurture group and staff professional development?*
- *Has the nurture group affected the ethos of the school?*
- *Is there an association between the instigation of the nurture group and the numbers of fixed-term and permanent exclusions issued?*
- *Has the nurture group supported an increase in the identification and understanding of a wider variety of needs of individual children?*

To focus this chapter, I will use each of the supplementary questions as subheadings to structure the answering of the main research question.

### **6.3 Do nurture groups impact on inclusive practices?**

Even at the end of the study period this was a difficult question to answer - not because I felt that there no impact, but because of the difficulty in identifying the impact and proving that the nurture group was the causal factor in this. I am not isolated in suggesting this difficulty. Reynolds et al (2009) have called for further research into the possible contributory factors that impact on the effectiveness of nurture groups, but equally acknowledge the difficulty in reducing all variables. An

interesting unpublished research thesis from Davies (2011) has attempted to address the question of what factors affect the work of a nurture group, looking at staff knowledge, context of the school and other possible factors, including the readiness of the school to embrace the intervention at the time of hosting the provision. Cooper and Tiknaz (2007) speculated that the communication between nurture group staff and mainstream colleagues enhances opportunities for promoting a more nurturing approach in schools rather than a nurture group being a causal factor in the development of the school. (Cooper and Tiknaz 2007 p96)

In order to answer my research question, I used a combination of unstructured and semi-structured interviews with colleagues who had worked alongside me throughout the study period, and a comparison between the Ofsted inspection reports from prior to setting up the nurture group and the subsequent report which took place during the study period in order to provide some triangulation of the data from a source independent of the nurture group and school. In terms of proving causality, my feeling is that whilst associations can be made between practices within the nurture group, its relationship with the wider school environment and good inclusive practices, it is impossible to conclude that these links are causal. However, I equally feel that the inclusive practice within the wider school environment improved and was acknowledged as a strength of the school during the time the nurture group was in operation, which is corroborated within the Ofsted report of the time. The testimony from one of my colleagues during a semi-structured interview presented below provides a contemporaneous perspective in answer to this question.

*"I started work here when the school went into special measures. I felt like I spent my days not so much teaching as containing children – literally sometimes by standing in front of the classroom door to keep them in the classroom. It was really hard sometimes. It took me a long time to win the trust of the kids in my class that first term, and I am not saying I got it right all the time. I remember sitting in my car one night in the car park in tears and thinking it was not worth it – I was really tired, it had been a hellish day and I had lost my temper after lunch and just felt like it was too much. I was only on a secondment for two terms. That was the only reason I took this on, because I knew that I could go back to my previous school and*

*did not have to do this long term. It was that tough that I used to count the days till I could go back to my other school. That is not the attitude I used to have and it is not why I came into teaching. I used to see clock-watchers occasionally in schools and wonder why they bothered doing the job and not move out to do something else. Then I realised I was doing the same thing. It was the lowest point for me. It was certainly not my idea of inclusion to stand in a doorway to stop them running out.*

*But it settled a bit and I began not to feel the same about it. It was hard still, but it was in my second term that the school had appointed you as a new teacher, the nurture group funding was there and although I did not know a lot about what was involved, it did seem to be a “cure-all” solution for me particularly – I think I had the brunt of the really tough boys in my class at that time. I thought that if I was not going to have to manage these boys that were causing me such a problem, then I might get to the end of term unscathed. It was not the right attitude, I know that, but you had to be living through it to know how we all felt. It’s really easy to be disproving but unless you were in my shoes at the time..... In our optimistic moments we were able to see that things were improving slowly, but there were bleak days where things had not gone well and you just looked and thought that if the nurture group did not work, there was nothing much else to do for these children apart from exclusion – and that just felt like a failure on my part.*

*Do I think the nurture group had an impact on what I did? Yes, but so did being able to have someone else to take some of the flack – sorry, but it is true! It really helped to have someone else coming into the staff room and looking shattered at the end of the day – I don’t mean that to sound bad, but if you see it from my point of view, at least initially, I was having a huge crisis of confidence about my own teaching ability and felt like I could not manage these children and what I really would not have been able to take would be a new person coming in and fixing it all instantly. That would have made me really feel that I was a failure. I was not in a very good place personally and if you had waltzed in, sorted out these boys – well, I would have gone back to my previous school but I would have really taken a knock.*

*It was good that you also found it so hard and admitted it. We spent many evenings*

*sitting in the staffroom with a cup of tea trying to find the way forward with those boys didn't we? Thinking back, it was those cups of tea and chats that convinced me that I should take the job on permanently in the end, although I really agonised about it at the time. It was seeing that there was progress, and that there were things that were changing slowly that gave me a little more confidence initially. Over time it has had a bigger impact I think. I thought the way to do things at first was to be really strict and to not give an inch – I am more relaxed about it now, I still have really firm boundaries in my classroom, that's just my style, but that is about giving it structure and clarity. I think I maybe mixed up being a strict disciplinarian with gaining authority status, whereas now I think I get respect from the children without having to come across as hard-faced all the time. I certainly am more willing to take risks with what I do and don't do in the classroom. It is a lot more pleasant coming into school and thinking "it's sunny, let's work outside" – there is no way I would have dared when I had a class full of escape-artists!*

*Of everything I have taken on from the work as a nurturing classroom it is probably the part about looking beneath the surface of what is happening – the actual actions – and looking at why it happened, what I can change in the environment or the teaching or grouping and then noting what worked well and using that. Working with you on this has been eye-opening. It has not always worked but I can say I have given it a good go. I will take some of this with me to my next job. The nurturing classroom side has been really useful – the work of the nurture group is not isolated to your room, it can be done in any classroom. There is a place for both. The school has a good feel when you come in – it is welcoming. We are a good team here and all work well together. For me it is time to move on now – I have given this four years and I want to do something else, but I will take what I have learnt with me to the next job. I never thought I would want to work as a SENCo but it is now something I really enjoy doing – encouraging others and having that extra knowledge about what makes children tick, what might be happening under the surface and using the nurturing principles. I am much keener to show that things can change in the classroom than I was before. The difference it has made, to me, is that if the children feel that you are listening to them, that you will try to find a way to help, that they can do what the others can do, maybe in a different way, but that*

*that is just as valid, well, the relationship between the teacher and the children is better overall. I am more confident to have any child in my classroom now. I don't think "not another behaviour problem" I think "what is the reason for this, what can I do about it, how do I get them to see themselves as successful learners?" It is a shift in thought processes really. Actually, I could have summed up this whole interview by saying that and saved you time transcribing! That is exactly what it is; the biggest impact of having the nurture group was that it shifted the way I thought about things."*

Y2 teacher

Transcribed unstructured interview December 2003

The Ofsted inspection that placed the school in special measures in 1997, as outlined in Chapter 4, made particular mention of the urgent need to assess and make provision for all pupils who have special educational needs. Behavioural challenges were noted in the same Ofsted report to be a significant area for improvement, with recommendations to prioritise the defining of clear boundaries for acceptable behaviour, applying a consistent approach to rewards and sanctions throughout the school, monitoring the effectiveness of behaviour management and developing social skills. These issues were key factors in the school being placed in special measures.

By contrast, the subsequent Ofsted inspection during the period the nurture group was operational identified meeting the needs of pupils with SEN as a strength, stating that "the school is supportive of all pupils, but is very effective in helping pupils with special educational needs to develop their self-esteem and make a positive contribution to the school". The same inspection noted that behaviour was generally good throughout the school, with very good provision for pupils in the nurture group.

An independent evaluation of the effectiveness of nurturing practices within the EAZ that funded the case study nurture group undertaken in 2003 noted "...the head teacher and staff were generally very positive about the useful contributions made by the nurture group ... They believe the nurture group enhances inclusion and

promotes social adjustment and academic progress among pupils" (Independent evaluation, University of Cambridge 2003). The same evaluation report noted that the work I had developed in designing the reintegration readiness scale (Doyle 2001) in the course of the research study was having an impact on the inclusive practices in the wider school environment. "... the nurture group teacher has developed and published a reintegration schedule. This is making a significant contribution to developing effective strategies throughout the school for the support of vulnerable pupils. The reintegration schedule has been very helpful in ensuring the establishment of targets, shared between pupils, nurture group staff and mainstream staff, at this critical point." (Independent evaluation, University of Cambridge 2003).

The evaluation report noted that a factor in supporting effective reintegration from nurture groups to mainstream classrooms was the "...width of the gap between the attitudes and environment of the mainstream class and the nurture group. The closer these settings are in ethos, atmosphere and style, the more likely the children are to transfer effectively". In the case study school, as identified in chapter 5, a significant amount of work had been undertaken in developing the concept of a nurturing school. The emphasis on developing the ethos of the nurture group in all mainstream areas to promote inclusion was noted as a strength in the independent evaluation. Particular note was made of how the classrooms had engaged with the setting up of "... areas for withdrawal and play which provided a marked visual similarity to provision in the nurture group".

During an unstructured interview, one colleague expressed her feelings on the role of nurture within the classroom and the impact this had on her practice:

*"I think it's exciting – having the nurture group. I always thought I was pretty good at including all children in my class, you know? But I thought along different lines and it was all about the curriculum – to me, including all children was about differentiating the academic curriculum and grouping the children that way. But having the nurture group and working on that side of things, it has made me think more about differentiating according not just to academic ability, but to social abilities too – mixing my groupings up a bit more, encouraging the quieter children*

*to work with the more bouncy ones so you get them learning socially from each other alongside learning academically. I love the whole idea of putting in much more of the play-based curriculum too.*

*Do I think it has had an impact on my practice? Yes, I can honestly say it has. I think more about the way I will be grouping the children, like I say, but also on what else I am doing around school. Playtimes are so much better too now. It used to be a free-for-all out there and there was always this group wandering around on the periphery of everything and looking bewildered while another group ran like wild things around the middle of the playground yelling and screaming. I spent half the time sorting out fights and the other half trying to get them out of the trees and bushes! Now we actually play games – silly as that sounds, it means I can be out there with the whole school and there is a much better atmosphere. I can have a group playing a big game together, a mixed group and it not only encourages the quieter ones but helps to give the more challenging children a focus. It has really cut back on the behaviour issues out there.*

*In the classroom it has a difference too. I am better at noticing the passive children and encouraging them to join in new things. It was not a huge problem before or anything, but you tend to be so acutely aware of those that have a tendency to kick-off all the time that you unintentionally neglect the quieter ones – they are not causing a problem so you don't notice them so much. Actually, I notice them more now. We make a point when we plan of identifying those quieter children who are making slow but steady progress and work on activities that will engage them more with what they can shine at to boost their confidence. I probably would not have done that even two years ago, which is embarrassing to say.*

*I use nurture in everything now. I went to a meeting with other subject co-ordinators and we were talking about it and I felt like I could really add value to the discussion by talking about the nurturing approach, which was a bonus. It helps enormously when you are talking about reintegration too – knowing what to expect, making sure I plan work that will cover the nurturing concepts. It is just second nature to me now and I don't really have to think about it. Will I keep using this?*

*Yes, I will. It has a real legacy in what we do here as a school. I feel its embedded in my practice now".*

YR teacher

Transcribed semi-structured interview – April 2004

From my own observations, there was an impact on the inclusive practices in the mainstream environment. In May 2000 when I was initially employed in the school I observed a number of classroom situations where children who were identified as having SEBD were placed next to a teaching assistant at all times to support the management of their behaviour. These children were constantly in close proximity to a member of support staff who would remind them of expectations of behaviour or prevent disruption by removing them from the situation. Both of these strategies prevented the child from being able to develop their own self-management of behaviour and, in my opinion, hindered the opportunities for the child to be included in tasks. The close proximity of a member of staff may have prevented higher levels of disruption for the class teacher and other pupils, but could be counterproductive in terms of self-regulatory development for that child.

Within the nurture group, although it was a small environment with high adult to pupil ratios when compared to a mainstream classroom, the children were actively encouraged to develop skills to self-regulate their behaviour, to have increasing autonomy as they matured in their development and to recognise that their actions had consequences that they needed to have responsibility for. These were key elements in supporting the children in the nurture group to enable them to reintegrate successfully into mainstream life that had previously proven to be challenging for them.

One part of the development of the concept of the nurturing school with its emphasis on inclusion was for me to encourage this same ethos in the mainstream classrooms. It was initially met with some resistance, as I noted in semi-structured interviews with staff where I recorded handwritten field notes with those staff unwilling at that time to consent to recording these. Initially nurturing practices were witnessed by

mainstream staff on visits to the nurture group, which were then tried in their own mainstream classrooms. Gradually there was a shift in the normal practice in the mainstream classrooms with individualised targeting of pupils with behavioural needs which aligned to the practice in the nurture group. However, this did not happen without active planning and engagement of the wider staff in the activities of the nurture group through a programme of peer observation and mentoring.

#### **6.4 Is there an association between the introduction of a nurture group and staff professional development?**

At the beginning of the study period the school was staffed mainly by experienced teachers with one newly qualified teacher who worked in parallel with a more experienced member of staff. The leadership team had a wealth of professional experience, having all held positions of responsibility within other schools before being employed in the case study school. The school itself had experienced a very turbulent staffing history in recent years but now had a stable staffing structure. The teaching assistants had all been in post for several years, as had the mid-day supervisors.

The nurture group concept was welcomed by the staff as an initiative that would support pupils who were challenging to manage in the mainstream environment. However, I reflected several times in the first term in my personal notes that there was a general expectation that it would be the nurture group staff's responsibility to sort out the behaviour problems and that the issues in the classroom would diminish automatically as a result. As discussed in the chapter 3, I undertook a number of semi-structured interviews with staff during the first term I was in post. During those discussions I made notes that the nurture group was generally described as a support intervention for the most aggressive and challenging pupils and that some members of staff stated it would provide respite for the pupils and staff. Bishop and Swain (2000) also noted that respite for the teachers was perceived as a primary aim by one head teacher with reintegration secondary. (Bishop and Swain 2000 p22). Reflecting on this perception that respite was seen as an aim for these nurture groups, I note both my notes of the time and the publication date of the study were

in the same year. The climate at the time, as noted in chapter 1, was one of league tables, naming and shaming schools and considerable demands on ensuring there was a reduction in exclusions and increase in inclusion for all. It is possible that the nurture groups were seen as the solution to these competing demands within this context at the time.

I had to challenge these perceptions early on and expressed my feelings that if this initiative was to work effectively, then it needed to be an integral part of the school and not a “sin-bin” where children were sent and remained. I needed to reinforce the idea that the children who attended the nurture group would remain the responsibility of the class teacher with input from me but would not be my sole responsibility as that disassociation with the child would lead to difficulties in reintegration. This idea of shared responsibility was not recognised by all the staff prior to the start of the nurture group intervention as highlighted by my colleague below:

*“When this all started, I thought you would just take these kids out of the classroom, do whatever it is you do, then when they came back it would just be sorted out. I didn’t honestly expect to have them back in my classroom at all – I figured it would take so long to fix the problems with some of them – you felt it was all so entrenched, you know, their behaviour – that they would be in a different year group and not my problem any more. It was a shock to the system when you set out the timetable and I realised it was still very much my problem. And that is exactly how I saw it, a problem.”*

Y1 teacher

Section from a transcribed initial semi-structured interview May 2004

Whilst I empathised with my colleagues who had been under strain to manage some very challenging scenarios in their classrooms, I felt my role as the nurture group teacher was to work with them in partnership and not to take full responsibility for referred pupils. My aim was to achieve positive outcomes for both the child in terms of achieving an improvement in their behavioural challenges, but also to improve the perception and understanding of the child’s difficulties in the mainstream

environment. It meant I needed to set ground rules early on with my colleagues and maintain these.

My notes from the first term the nurture group was operational refer many times to the difficulty in establishing a positive perception of the nurture group. At one point I noted that I was described as “the naughty kids teacher” when a member of staff could not recall my name during the first few weeks I worked in the school.

The nurture group had come into being in response to the school’s desire to support a group of children who, despite other SEN support strategies being in place, continued to exhibit behavioural difficulties. These difficulties were preventing them from gaining full access to the curriculum, and preventing the learning of other children due to disruption of the lessons. The original perception in school was that removing these children to another class would be inclusive provision because they would be in a small group learning situation and therefore still included in the school and year group appropriate lessons. In this smaller environment their behaviour needs could simultaneously be addressed which would promote their social inclusion over time. Removal of the children was not seen as excluding them from the mainstream activities, but as including them in a more suitable environment. I challenged this perception by talking of the potential to internally exclude a child unintentionally from their peers. This was reflected on at the end of the study period by one of my teaching colleagues:

*“I remember you talking about the danger of exclusion within the school. I thought you meant literally excluding the children. It took me a while to get my head around what you were actually saying. It was a different way of thinking about what we were doing when we were sending children out of the classrooms to all these groups and things. I never really thought about it before – it was just something that happened. When you look at all the different groups though, you know, one for phonics, one for reading, maybe a group for social skills – it all adds up to time missing from the classroom. And then you wonder why they find it hard to follow what is going on in the lesson – they miss half an hour of it to do reading or something, come back in and have to try to catch up and probably in a lesson that*

*they are already struggling with! Sometimes I just get to the point where I think they are about to grasp something and they have to go out for a session somewhere else. It is so frustrating. I never thought about it from their point of view – I thought the children would be pleased to get out of the classroom where they were struggling a bit and have that extra bit of individual attention, but it can't have been easy for them either to come back in and we were half way through something else and they had not got a clue what we had been doing.*

*I never saw the nurture group as having the potential to exclude children though – it never occurred to me. I thought that by sending them there it was including them in something they could achieve at. I did not think initially about what they were going to miss out on in my classroom. I thought they don't access the learning in my classroom but you can teach them in yours. That to me was including them in the curriculum. I never considered the social aspect of it though, which is what we are talking about really. They could meet the curricular requirements through differentiated activities and higher staffing in your room, but they missed the peer learning side of things, the social opportunities and being one of a social group. If you had just taken them out from nine to three it might have made my day easier in the classroom, but it would not have helped them with that regular social contact. The others would have gelled and got into their social groups, and those children would have remained on the outside of it. I can see that now, but it was initially disappointing – sounds terrible but working with these children in the classroom could be emotionally draining and the thought that I would be still doing that when I had first hoped that the problem would be yours, not mine any longer, was actually quite hard.”*

Year 1 teacher

Transcribed section from a semi-structured interview April 2004

Whilst anecdotally there was a consensus from staff in the mainstream environment that having the nurture group in situ had had an impact on professional development, there had to be a planned approach to disseminating the practice in the nurture group to the wider staff team. There was national interest in the work of the nurture group following publication of peer-reviewed articles by me which resulted in many

requests to visit the group and observe it in operation. I accommodated all visitors and made a point of taking them around the wider school environment to highlight the nurturing approaches across the school that were in place to support the reintegration of the children, but also the social and emotional needs of the wider school community.

It was following one set of visitors that I raised the issue in a staff meeting that although we were hosting many professionals who had an interest in nurture groups and wanted to learn more to use in their own contexts, it occurred to me that the adults working within the case study school knew about the work of the nurture group but had not had the opportunity to spend time actually in there with us while it was working to gain insight into the practicalities of this work. I suggested arranging a programme of peer-observation sessions for all staff to enable them to see the group in operation, with a focus during each observation session on a particular aspect of the work that they felt they would like to develop further in their mainstream classrooms. This was agreed and a programme of regular visits to the group by the staff was put into place as part of the identified professional development for individuals. This was viewed positively, as the following demonstrates:

*"It was really useful, seeing the actual practice. I could read the books and hear it all from you, but actually being able to see the theory put into practice is worth a thousand words. Watching a child that I had thought only did things in a certain way and was rigid in their learning approach, well, it was eye-opening to see them take risks, try things out, even to be motivated to do something. I watched one little girl in the role play area chatting, bouncing about and engaging so well with the others – she never did that in my classroom. And to see them finding things independently, and clearing equipment away and putting this in order after they have been working – I felt like I did not recognise them from the same children that seem to be dependent on me telling them how to do things all the time.*

*There is no way I am going to keep putting in so much support for them now – I mean, I will give them support but I am going to use prompt cards like you do to get*

*them to find the equipment they need for instance. It just proves they can do it without being dependent on me all the time. I never realised they had made so much progress – it is different in a bigger class of course, but there are still things I can take into my classroom to use straight away from this.”*

YR teacher

Transcribed section from unstructured interview February 2002

In the transcribed text above, the class teacher describes how she felt that she was less familiar with what the children had the potential to achieve in the classroom. Sanders (2007) reported some teachers in her study felt they knew the nurture group children less well than others in their class. Through peer observation I feel this potential was reduced in the case study school, although clearly not eradicated as seen in the transcription.

Having the opportunity to invite colleagues in to see the practice in the nurture group was useful in promoting the dialogue between us to move the concept of the nurturing school forward. The communication between the nurture group staff and mainstream colleagues has been suggested by other researchers to be influential in encouraging a more nurturing approach in the mainstream environment. (Cooper and Tiknaz 2007).

However, it was not always an easy process and there were a number of situations that I wanted to encourage development in that met with higher resistance, possibly because they challenged the status quo within an individual's preferred style of classroom management. For example, I broached the subject of having support staff always seemingly to be working with the same children in order to maintain standards of behaviour in the classroom. I had challenged the practice and suggested that it was more appropriate in the longer term to allow the children to develop self-regulatory skills for managing their own behaviour. One teacher was particularly strong in her opinion on this.

*“You have no real idea of what it was like in the classroom. It is easy for you to be sat in your nurture group with ten children and two of you and think that we were not coping in the real world of the 30-child classroom. The reality is when you are trying to teach that number of children and one is constantly shouting out, rolling about on the carpet, flicking pencils about – well it changes the whole room. The only way of keeping it so you can teach is to have my TA sitting with him. At least the others get to learn. You need to be realistic about what it is like in these rooms or it could be seen as a criticism of the rest of us”*

Y3 class teacher

Transcribed section of a partially recorded staff meeting July 2000

The above statement was transcribed from a partially recorded staff meeting. My handwritten notes following this meeting describe it as taking place at the end of a term, with the staff room feeling particularly hot and tempers as frayed at the time. I had been asked to comment on the progress of the children in the group and my observations around school. I had raised the issue of needing to work on the tendency to keep TA staff so close to pupils with SEBD all the time. I had suggested that children could continue to be supported but should also be able to develop their own skills for managing their behaviour appropriately. As is evident from the extract above, some staff felt this was unrealistic in their classrooms if they were to meet the demands of the curriculum and expectations of behaviour. The school had only recently been removed from special measures and was still receiving regular visits from the LA inspectorate team so remained under close scrutiny. As a new recruit to the school, I had not been part of the intensive inspection and monitoring visits over the previous two years. Whilst I felt that the practice needed to change, I acknowledged this would require negotiation, collaboration and tact to enable staff to see the benefit of developing sustainable change for the child, rather than the short-term benefit to themselves in the classroom.

I had taken time to discuss this with the senior management team to gauge an opinion on the best way to move this situation forwards. I felt at the time that I had

to justify my conviction that the practice in classrooms of using TAs to manage behaviour was not in the best long-term interests of the child, or indeed of the adult. I noted at the time that even the senior management team felt that changing this wide-spread practice would risk a deterioration in standards across the school as behaviour would revert to earlier levels and teacher time would be taken up managing this rather than on curricular issues. With the exception of the head teacher, all other staff had full time teaching commitments.

After considerable discussion, and an acknowledgement by me that there was a risk involved in altering established practices, it was agreed to trial my suggested approaches in the SENCo's KS1 classroom initially and then feed this back to the other staff to identify the successes or weaknesses of the approach in a mainstream classroom.

I spent time with the SENCo analysing the behaviour patterns in the classroom, identifying triggers within the structure of the day and looking at the classroom environment. I undertook some whole class observations and my SENCo colleague also observed some groups of pupils in the classroom and individual children over the period of a week. We compared what we had both seen and looked at ways to enhance the environment the children were working in that would support the development of self-help skills, monitoring of their own behaviour and promote consistently high standards of behaviour.

We moved some of the furniture around in the open-plan classroom to create areas of clearly defined curricular storage, exploration and resourcing. This provided sectioned areas of the classroom that we felt would prove an obstacle to the children who tended to wander or run around in a more open-plan environment. I looked at the planning for the first week and identified areas where a more play-based and experiential learning that could have a self-regulatory element to it would be appropriate. We identified key areas for the TA to support, talking through the suggestions and defining her role clearly. We were explicit in our desire for her to remain supportive of the children by encouraging them to think about what they needed to do next, or how they needed to behave, but without constantly directing them. The TA spent a day in the nurture group with this interaction being modelled

for her and had time to relate this to her classroom role with the nurture group assistant for peer support.

Mirroring the nurture group, a number of visual support strategies were put in place in the classroom. This included a visual noise level indicator based on a traffic light system – red indicated playground level noise, amber was used to indicate voices during play activities in the classroom and green was an indication of using quiet working voices. A large arrow was used to indicate the expectation in the classroom at the time. A choice board was made for the children to refer to when they had completed their set task, with a selection of activities they could then decide to use, rather than be expected to select from an overwhelming number of options. It was agreed that there would be a maximum of six suggestions in the mainstream environment for the children to select from.

Storage areas were clearly indicated for each type of equipment with a sign above each area containing words and photographs. All boxes and storage trays were re-labelled with photographs as well as words.

Each table had a laminated card with self-help strategies on it in pictures and words. We included new cards which gave a visual reminder of what was needed to begin a task in a short list such as a pencil, book and equipment. We added a reverse to this card that showed what needed to be done before a piece of work was completed such as checking spelling in a dictionary, making sure there was a date on the work and other simple self-checking strategies for each child. These things had previously been undertaken by the TA. We put these on every work area and did not restrict them to the children with identified behavioural difficulties.

In central areas, such as the carpet, we obtained a number of carpet samples from a local store which were of discontinued stock. We named these as “magic mats” and suggested to the children that they could sit on one and it did not matter how much they wriggled or fidgeted on these as long as the magic kept them in place on the mat and they did not touch anyone else’s mat.

Individual place mats to use on the tables were produced with correct letter formation, key sight vocabulary and incorporated some self-checking strategies. These were named and the borders decorated by the children to give them ownership, laminated and used for each child at work at their tables. They could also be used to manage groupings by the teacher who could set the mats out on a table prior to the children being in the classroom, and as a strategy for preventing two antagonists sitting next to each other as a behaviour management technique.

We agreed to a trial of this approach for half a term and would then review the situation with the whole school team. The following two transcriptions were made at the review interview:

*"I was a firm believer in the nurture group approach and was enthusiastic about it from day one. To put it into some sort of context though, we were a school that had been working so hard on getting standards up and that included the behaviour standards. You had to be here to see what it was like before – I know it can be really challenging still but it really is so much better than when I first came. I used to feel physically sick at the thought of assembly because it was just impossible to manage the behaviour in there without every member of staff standing there like some military presence. I felt that we had made a lot of progress as a school and to me, the nurture group was a logical step to continue to make that progress.*

*We had got into the routine of having to have a TA with us at all times to help with control in the classroom. It was working. I was a little surprised when you pointed out that actually it was containing the children but was excluding some of them. I felt at the time that they were managing to stay in my classroom and produce some work so how was this excluding them? To me, that was including them. But it is more about getting the most out of their educational experience isn't it? To really include them, they have to be able to do things more for themselves, and to get things wrong. It is not getting it wrong that is the problem, it is knowing how to deal with the consequences that is the difficulty for them. As I saw it at the time, having the TA there to deal with the consequences worked from my point of view because I could teach, the children could learn and my class was not disrupted all the time.*

*But now I can see it from the other side, and having the TA there did help me, but it was not teaching the children to take any responsibility for their behaviour. I know they are really young, but they know right from wrong. They knew they were doing something we did not approve of because they were being told this in one way or the other, but they never had to really learn to deal with things for themselves and to see that what they did had an impact on others – they just said sorry and did it all over again!*

*I feel with everything about the nurture group and nurturing school that there has to be a huge element of faith in the process – you keep saying there is no “quick-fix” solution to this and that can be frustrating when you want, as a teacher, to make it all work instantly. You have to maintain the faith that this will work, but it will take time, consistency and determination. That can take a little getting used to.*

*You really start to feel differently though. The best piece of advice I think you ever gave me was to write down an observation of the situation at the start, putting the reality of it down, you know – a worst case scenario of the day to day reality of working, then put it away in a file and don’t look at it again. When you have tried something out for a time and are getting to the part where you are not sure it is working and you feel that you have come to a plateau, get the observation out again and read it through. That is really effective – you see just how far you have come in a situation when you do that. Sometimes it is hard to see the wood for the trees. Looking back at a detailed and usually emotive observation like that ensures you can see the progress you have made. Good advice. I use that a lot now.*

*I think it worked really well; we both enjoy watching the children learning how to control their behaviour. I will say it takes a lot of effort and you need to be really on the ball with some of them and it was not quick. It took maybe the first three or four weeks for them to stop pushing the boundaries to see if we would go back to having the TA with a group all the time, but we stuck with it and I am glad we did. I think it will become second nature eventually in the classroom. It would be easier if we had started this at the very beginning of term rather than trying to change things mid-term like this, but that’s fine and part of the learning process. I can see a*

*difference. I think there is much more to do, but there is a difference already.*

SENCo/KS1 Class teacher

Transcribed section from unstructured review interview Autumn term 2001

*"As a TA you don't always get asked what you think should happen in the classroom, you just do what you are asked. It's the teacher's responsibility. This was something new for me and some of the other TAs said straight away it would not work. They thought it would just lead to the children running riot around the classroom and that we would go back to normal after a week of chaos! I had my doubts too, but after coming into the nurture group and seeing the same child who I feel like I am practically sewn onto in my class behaving in a different way with you two, it made me feel like I was doing something wrong actually. I first thought that if you could get him to do that, why couldn't I? But I know it is not like that. Your class is different and much smaller. There is less space to run to and there is always something ready to do next. I think that is something we can all learn from actually. Often the problems are at those times when one thing has finished but the next hasn't quite started, or when some have completed work and others haven't. That's when you see the behaviour problems starting up in the classroom. In your room there is always something else to do next. We have been talking about how to duplicate that in our classroom, so that is something new I have learnt as well through this!"*

*I find the whole thing about understanding the reasons for behaviour difficult sometimes. It doesn't help that I live on the estate that most of these children come from. You hear and see things outside of school and think 'well no wonder they play up in here' but you have to put that behind you when you are in the classroom.*

*I much prefer being more active in the classroom. I felt like I was always sitting there and stopping them doing things. Mind you, I still do a lot of that but now I am standing up and in different areas of the classroom! I do remember to ask them what they think they should be doing next, rather than giving them the instruction though. That is one of the biggest changes but it is so easy to do – it only takes a*

*minute or two and the result is that they tell you, actually show you what they should be doing, and then they do it. That makes it sound easy and it's not. It is actually emotionally draining to work with these children but I really enjoy it and wouldn't want to do anything else. I go home shattered at the end of the day, but it is better to go home tired and know that you have made a difference than to go home tired because you have been sorting out behaviour all day and know that tomorrow there will be more of the same. I am going to demonstrate to the other TAs what we have been doing in the classroom too, which is a bit of status for me. As one of the newer TAs, that has been a good thing for me to get involved in as it was quite hard at first to feel accepted as part of the group. This gives me a little bit of a positive light in their eyes, which is helping me too. I think it is working well, hard work, but good".*

TA from Y1 Classroom

Transcribed section from an unstructured interview after the trial period. December 2001

During the course of the study period there was increasing interest from the existing staff in wanting to develop their skills in the classroom to incorporate the practices in the nurture group. This need was met through a combination of staff in-service training on school closure days, opportunities to visit and observe in the nurture group and the on-going communication between myself and my colleagues. There was an association between the establishing of the nurture group and professional development in terms of an increase in understanding of the theory and practice involved in working in a nurture group and in the relevance of this to working in a mainstream classroom. The impact of this professional development and increased understanding was evidenced in the Ofsted inspection that took place during the study period. Whereas previous Ofsted inspections had identified the behaviour of some of the pupils to be poorly managed and the SEN needs of all children to be a priority area for improvement, this subsequent report noted that "Pupils with special educational needs have a very positive attitude to school and to learning. The majority behave well, although there is some disruption from those with identified behaviour difficulties. They are given very good support to help them control themselves and other pupils often assist them in a mature and sympathetic way". During a semi-structured interview at the end of the study period, one member of staff expressed her opinion clearly in this area:

*“Do I think there was an association between the nurture group and professional development? Absolutely. I have seen the school improve over the last few years almost unimaginably from that first damning Ofsted when we went into special measures. I knew that [special measures] was likely to happen when I took on the job and was determined to see it through. But the biggest change has got to be in the last few years – we did the hard work of getting the children to see themselves as learners, but the nurture group, and you, helped with the hard work of getting us to see ourselves as nurturers and not just as teachers and behaviour managers”*

Member of Senior Management Team

Transcribed section from a semi-structured interview - May 2004

## **6.5 Has the nurture group affected the ethos of the school?**

At the start of the research project, as noted previously, the school had come through a very challenging period of intensive inspection and monitoring. This had placed considerable strain on the staff at the time. All the teaching staff were recruited to the school within the two years prior to 2000, knowing it was a school in special measures and that it would continue to be closely monitored. When the nurture group was initially set up, the classrooms tended to operate in a similar way regardless of the age range of the children. The school timetable was rigid and although all staff were welcoming of the initiative, there was a sense of needing to maintain things as they were in many aspects of the school as without that rigid structure, the previous problems would recur as highlighted below:

*“I was actually scared to change anything in case I rocked the boat too much and suddenly we went back to the problems we had a couple of years ago. I felt that as things were much more settled now, there was just no way I would want to change anything in case it all went wrong. It was a real fear for all of us. Last thing I wanted was to go back to having constant scrutiny from the LEA and Ofsted. It puts such a strain on you all the time. For the first time, I felt I could breathe for myself*

*and there was no way I wanted to revert to my first few months here where I was constantly being watched”.*

YR teacher

Transcribed section of unstructured interview 2002

There was a rigid approach to the curriculum in the reception year group and although there was a play based curriculum, it was rigid in its management as part of the class teacher's management style. The children were achieving well academically, but socially there were limited opportunities for exploratory play and social interactions. They were responding well to the structure and formality of the classroom in many ways and had a clear understanding of the routine of the day, but their behaviour in unstructured times such as playtimes was particularly challenging.

In the key stage 1 classrooms the approach was similar, with a rigid structure and formal approach to learning. Again, the children were clearly familiar with the routines in the classroom and responded generally positively to the adults. Those children with clearly identified behaviour difficulties continued to provide challenge to the adults, but the majority of children complied with the routines and structure. During the first term of the study there was also a key stage 2 classroom as the school was initially a first school with year three pupils. This had an particularly rigid structure and a very formal physical environment.

The overall ethos was one of routine and structure, with children who were largely able to move around the school without disruption. Behaviour challenges were dealt with promptly by the staff but there was a tendency to escalate to serious sanctions very rapidly, such as requesting the head teacher came to the classroom for anything other than the most minor misdemeanours, rather than using this as a last resort as part of a graduated response.

The physical environment was well maintained and the majority of children demonstrated respect for their equipment. The communal areas had bright displays and were overall pleasant to come in to. The physical environments of the classrooms were clean and well maintained, as were the resource storage areas. It

gave the impression of a school that was well respected by adults and pupils. The atmosphere as I initially orientated myself with the classrooms was one of active work but with strict behavioural management routines and policies.

The playground atmosphere was totally different. My observations there demonstrated children at lunchtimes that seemed to have difficulty in calming themselves down when over-excited. There were groups of children who appeared incredibly unhappy, alone at the sides of the playground and those who showed dominance in their play and defiance in their behaviour. The dining hall was very noisy and appeared to be purely functional; the children got their lunch, ate it and left with no real social interaction between them or the adults. There was a table to the side of the others, set apart from the other children that the midday supervisory assistants described as “the naughty table” and used as a punishment for any child they felt was not complying with their strict practices. There were occasions initially when I noted up to eight children placed at that table.

The general ethos of the school was a positive one, with the probable exception of the lunchtime period, but one that had an underlying element of fear from the adults of not wanting to change practices in case this caused a recurrence of the difficulties that had placed the school into special measures.

Whether it can be claimed that the nurture group was the catalyst that changed the overall ethos of the school or not is impossible to answer without speculation, as other researchers have indicated. (Cooper and Tiknaz 2007, Davies 2011). Within this research study there were a number of other factors to consider that may have had an impact on the ethos of the school. An acknowledgement of the challenges of coming out of special measures has already been made. This was a significant factor in my early observations of the ethos of the school. One member of the teaching staff felt that class teachers who had been under close scrutiny for a long period of time, should not be subject to criticism for lacking the confidence to make changes to their classroom management and structure. Although she had spoken to me at length about this issue she had not consented to including any quotes in the thesis on this issue. She had been clear that she felt that the leadership of the school had the best interests of the children at the forefront of their practice and had wanted the

nurture group as an additional resource to support on-going behaviour concerns. However, she had also voiced her concerns that with the additional pressure now from the EAZ to increase academic standards, she would be reluctant to relax the rigid approach to behaviour, seeing this as a backward step in the development of the school.

Some very pro-active work was undertaken by me to alter practices at lunchtimes, including the removal of the “naughty table” and the increase in toys and equipment in the playground as outlined in chapter 4, to facilitate rapid change. However, the change in ethos across the school happened over a longer period of time as the nurture group became well established. I can hypothesise that this change took place as staff became more confident in the nurturing approach and children underwent the process of nurturing intervention and returned to their mainstream class. Being able to see a difference in the behaviour of children after input may have influenced the ethos change as belief in the impact the nurture group could have increased. Cooper and Whitebread (2007) reported that the nurture groups in their controlled study who were deemed to be most successful were those which had been in operation for two years or longer. This could link to my feeling that the ethos changed over the study period as the influence on practice took time to embed into the mainstream environment. Whilst I agree with Davies (2011) that there may have been a philosophical bias towards nurture prior to the group being set up, it took some time to establish the practices from the theory across the school. I had been aware from feedback from visitors to the nurture group that over time we changed from being described by the wider staff as a school with a nurture group to a nurturing school; at those times it appeared that the ethos in school and the staff perceptions had changed from the commencement of the study. This is summed up in the following quote from a semi-structured interview at the end of the study period:

*“It’s like a chicken and egg scenario – which came first? The nurture group that led to the nurturing school, or the nurturing school that wanted a nurture group? Not sure I can answer that one. We wanted a nurture group but we must have been nurturing in our thought processes to decide that first in my opinion. Mind you, the*

*nurture group has made us all think, eat, sleep, breath and act “nurture” around the school”.*

Member of Senior Leadership Team

Transcribed section from a semi-structured interview June 2004

Towards the end of the research study, the ethos of the school was less rigid than it had felt in the earlier stages. The confidence of the staff to be more flexible in their approach was evident in the classrooms on observation, and the knowledge and understanding of the principles of nurture were part of the processes in each classroom. Cooper and Whitebread (2007) also found that where schools hosted a nurture group, there was a change in practice for all pupils with difficulties, not just those with nurture group placements, which tallies with my observation in this case study school.

There was a change in senior leadership at the mid-point of the study which may have also altered the ethos of the school. Whilst observations and discussion does highlight the change in ethos over the four year study period, and my feeling is that the nurture group had a significant impact on the development of that positive nurturing ethos, other factors will also have contributed to this as outlined. Reynolds et al (2009) undertook a study involving 16 nurture groups and discussed the complexity of finding the key variants that made a difference to the pupils in the nurture groups, including looking at the environment of the school. My study here identifies that there are indeed many possible reasons that could contribute to the change in ethos of the school, although both my colleagues and my own observations in situ felt the impact of the nurture group affected the ethos of the school over time. One teaching colleague related this to her own feeling of being nurtured within school at the end of the study period, reproduced below:

*“The whole school feels nurturing. I think the best way to put it is to say that the staff feel nurtured and that means they are able to nurture others. Visitors to school comment on the nurturing feel as soon as they come in. It is still hard working here, some of the issues are still the same, the children are the same and the families have*

*just as many problems as before, but the feeling in here is different. It is not so much looking at the problems and feeling overwhelmed now. It is more about thinking 'what can I do to compensate for this situation for the child'. If I did not feel supported – and nurtured – myself, then I don't think I would have the emotional reserves I need to do this job and nurture the children in my class."*

KS1 teacher

Transcribed section from semi-structured interview May 2004

## **6.6 Is there an association between the instigation of the nurture group and the numbers of fixed-term and permanent exclusions issued?**

Having spent time working with the National Nurture Group Network during the period of this study and subsequently, it is clear that there is a general speculative feeling from those working within the field that they do reduce exclusions. However, evidence remains anecdotal due to the complex nature of proving the effect inclusion within a nurture group has on reducing exclusions. I spent some time analysing data relating to the school and the nurture group in this case study, and found evidence that the overall numbers of exclusions did reduce during the group's operation. However, raw data does not paint the full picture and further discussion of the results provides a fuller understanding of the overall data.

Reducing exclusions from schools continues to be high in the national agenda. One study highlights an increase of up to 400% in permanent exclusions during the 1990s. (Castle and Parsons 1998), with the greatest increase in permanent exclusions being in the primary phase. The government circular, "Social Inclusion: Pupil Support" (DfES 1999) identifies those groups of students most likely to be at risk of exclusion from education, including those with special educational needs and those from families under stress. These children are those commonly allocated placements in nurture groups.

Recent data from the DfE (July 2010) relating to exclusions showed:

There was an estimated 6,550 permanent exclusions from primary, secondary and all special schools in 2008/09.

In 2008/09 there were 307,840 fixed period exclusions from state funded secondary schools, 39,510 fixed period exclusions from primary schools and 15,930 fixed period exclusions from special schools.

The average length of a fixed period exclusion in state funded secondary schools was 2.6 days, for primary schools the average length of a fixed period exclusion was 2.2 days.

The permanent exclusion rate for boys was approximately 3.5 times higher than that for girls. The fixed period exclusion rate for boys was almost 3 times higher than that for girls.

Pupils with SEN (both with and without statements) are over 8 times more likely to be permanently excluded than those pupils with no SEN.

Children who are eligible for free school meals are around 3 times more likely to receive either a permanent or fixed period exclusion than children who are not eligible for free school meals.

(Sodha and Margo 2010 p137-138)

Children attending the nurture group in my case study frequently fitted the above criteria for risk of exclusion, with a predominance of boys referred for the more aggressive behaviours, the majority of referrals having previously identified SEN and a significant number eligible for free school meals. Several children attending the nurture group with the most significant anti-social behavioural difficulties were considered at risk of exclusion immediately before receiving nurture group placements. A minority of those children had already had at least one fixed-term exclusion (FTE) prior to entry into the nurture group.

During the period of the study I was able to analyse longitudinal data relating to exclusion rates in the case study school both before the nurture group was operational and once it was in place, which provided me with some interesting data from which to draw conclusions in this chapter. I was able to analyse data that was held in the school for a nine year period from the academic year 1995/6 to the end of the academic year 2003/4. This gave me data for a five year period prior to the nurture group to contrast with the data over the four year period during which the nurture group was in situ.

#### ***6.6.1 Pupil data relating to exclusion:***

When I examined the data relating to pupil exclusions it was evident that the two criteria for which children were most likely to receive a FTE were frequent and extreme anti-social behaviour with violence towards others and frequent extremely non-compliant behaviour. Permanent exclusions (PEX) over the nine year period applied to five children, all of whom had experienced a number of FTEs of increasing length up to the issuing of a PEX notification. Again, the causes for these were stated as extreme anti-social behaviour and frequent non-compliance.

The following table shows the number of sessions lost to FTE from September 1995 to April 2000, prior to the existence of the nurture group.

<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>Total number of fixed-term exclusions (sessions)</b>	<b>Total number of pupils receiving fixed-term exclusions</b>
1995/96	11	3
1996/97	134	13
1997/98	113	8
1998/99	196	6
1999/00	16	4

*Figure 2: sessions lost to FTE and number of pupils affected by academic year prior to nurture group*

Also during the same period a total of 5 pupils were permanently excluded from the school, all following several fixed term exclusions.

From May 2000 to July 2004, whilst the nurture group was operational, there was a total of 126 sessions lost to FTEs. Of these, 6 sessions were issued to pupils who had placements in the nurture group at the time of the exclusion; the remaining 120 sessions were for two pupils not in the nurture group.

		Number of FTE exclusions (sessions)		
Academic Year	Pupils with NG placement	Pupils without NG placement	Total number of sessions	Number of pupils
1999/2000	0	0	0	0
2000/01	1	0	1	1
2001/02	1	8	9	1
2002/03	4	112	116	2
2003/04	0	0	0	0

*Figure 3: FTE by academic year once nurture group opened*

Overall, during the nine year period analysed, the total number of school sessions lost to exclusions amounted to 596 out of a possible full time attendance of 3420 sessions. These exclusions were experienced by a total of thirty different pupils, affecting all the national curriculum year groups in school.

Following the instigation of the nurture group and during its four years of operation there was a significant decrease in the number of sessions lost to FTEs. There were no PEX during this same period. Whilst I cannot categorically say that the decrease in FTE and PEX numbers is due to me setting up the nurture group, I do think there is a correlation between the two and certainly an interesting trend between the number of exclusions issued and the time the nurture group was in place. In discussion, my colleague concurred with my theory.

*"I guess you can't say it is definitely the nurture group that made the difference, but I have no doubt it did. It is not just the group though; it is what we all do now that makes a difference – my own tolerance is probably better than it was for the kids with behaviour problems. I think that it makes a difference just knowing there is a nurture group in some ways – I know I should probably not think it, but sometimes you are more tolerant because you know you could get some respite when the children are in the nurture group. I am sure it is respite for the children too; they get to spend time away from the pressure of the mainstream classroom where it is harder for them to maintain acceptable behaviour levels, and they get that all important individual attention in the nurture group that is not always possible in mainstream busy classrooms. You can't ever totally say it is one thing or another that makes the difference, but I don't doubt having the nurture group has saved some of these children from exclusions."*

SLT member

Transcribed section from unstructured interview - 2003

#### ***6.6.2 Analysis of context and the potential effect on the exclusion rate:***

External factors such as the catchment area of the school, pupil mobility and the alteration in the numbers of pupils on roll due to the county reorganisation from first to infant schools have all be examined as part of the analysis of the exclusion data.

The catchment area of the school remained consistent over the nine years of the study. In addition, the levels of pupil mobility and indicators of social deprivation have remained at similar levels, as have the number of pupils on the schools roll identified as having special educational needs. Caution needs to be used when attributing exclusions to indicators of economic impoverishment within a school catchment area however. Rutter (1979) found that even within an area of social disadvantage, the structure and organisation of the school can make a significant difference to student behaviour. The same study also highlighted the importance of

the school relating to their local community and classroom management as factors that would support the improvement of student behaviour.

### ***6.6.3 The effect of county reorganisation:***

One factor I had to consider when analysing this data was the school reorganisation from a first school with pupils from YR to Y3 to an infant school with pupils from YR to Y2 in the term following the opening of the nurture group. I initially had hypothesised that the older Y3 pupils might have had a large impact on the rates of exclusions, with the tolerance level towards persistent disruptive behaviour diminishing as the children continued through their school careers. I therefore looked at the effect of county reorganisation closely to establish whether the majority of exclusions were from the Y3 classes, and therefore following reorganisation, this group would no longer be on roll and unable to impact on the data.

I discovered a total of 17 pupils in Y3 during the five years prior to the nurture group had received FTEs, four eventually receiving PEXs. The total number of sessions lost for this group to FTEs over the five years was 269, accounting for 57% of all pupils given FTEs. During the same five year period from 95/96 to 99/2000 the total number of sessions lost to FTEs for pupils in YR to Y2 amounted to 201, accounting for the remaining 43%. Additionally, within this latter group there was one PEX.

Following the establishing of a nurture group during the 1999/00 academic year, the overall exclusion numbers for pupils in YR to Y2 decreased from 201 sessions prior to the nurture group to 126 sessions post nurture group, a reduction of sessions. If the year 3 pupils are removed from the overall picture, this represents a reduction of 75 sessions lost to FTE following the opening of the nurture group. These figures demonstrate a significant reduction in FTEs. However, raw data does not give a full story and there was an unusually high number of FTEs issued to one individual pupil from a mainstream class during the academic year 2002/03. The context which may have influenced these decisions are discussed below.

#### ***6.6.4 Possible contributory factors to the increase in FTE during 2002/03 academic year:***

There were three main contextual factors affecting the nurture group and school operation during the 2002/3 academic year. Firstly, I had a period of maternity leave from my post of nurture group teacher from January to July 2003. During this six month period, the nurture group had been run with a variable attendance pattern, including a large number of sessions when the group was not operational. It had been staffed temporarily by a teacher who had not been a previous member of staff within the school, and had not received the benefit of any nurture group principles and practices training.

Secondly, during the summer term of 2003 the existing well known nurture group assistant was unfortunately absent for an extended period of time due to sustaining a physical injury which had added to the inconsistency. A TA from within the school was placed in the nurture group to cover this extended absence.

Thirdly, there were some significant changes in the school leadership at this time. A new head teacher had been appointed, a permanent deputy had not been appointed and two long-established senior teaching staff had also resigned during the year. All of these factors may have contributed to the difference in approach.

During my maternity leave, 112 FTE were issued over several episodes to one child in a Y1 mainstream class who was unable to benefit from a nurture group placement. He was originally identified on transfer into the school from another county as being a child who may need additional support. At the point where he may have been considered for a nurture group placement, I was about to start my maternity leave and did not expect to return to the school until the following academic year. It was felt that it would be inappropriate for this child to form a relationship with me as I would then be absent from school for several months. The alternative leadership decision was to support him through operating a reduced timetable of half day attendance at school, and to provide an additional adult in the classroom for sessions he was in attendance. Unfortunately, the outcome for this child was not positive, and following a large number of FTEs over two terms it was

agreed to instigate a “managed move” to an alternative school following a further extended FTE of 90 sessions. Originally this child had been issued with a PEX notice, but following negotiation with the LEA, it was agreed that a managed move would be more supportive, and the PEX was rescinded.

It is impossible to say in this instance whether a nurture group placement would have made a difference to the outcome. It could be speculated that children with similar presenting difficulties had been successfully supported in the past through placement in the nurture group, leading to mainstream reintegration, (e.g. Doyle 2005), but equally it should be acknowledged that nurture groups are not the best placement for all children. Ofsted (2006) reported on the reasons why an infant school may engage in repeated exclusions of a single pupil where there is otherwise a low exclusion rate. They found that this generally happened when the child demonstrated challenging behaviour and the school felt they had exhausted all their strategies to manage the situation, felt the incidents were too serious not to use exclusion, was making a cry for help to the local authority or was using exclusion as part of a planned strategy with the involvement of the parents. (Ofsted 2006 p12-13). Whilst it is difficult to draw firm conclusions regarding this one pupil, several of the Ofsted findings could apply to this situation, particularly as the nurture group was not fully operational at the time which may have been a strategy to use to support this child.

#### ***6.6.5 Summary:***

Nurture groups should not be seen as an alternative to FTE or PEX, nor are they a “sin bin” where the most challenging pupils are placed to reduce the schools potential exclusion figures. In this case study, the nurture group does appear to be an effective strategy for reducing the number of exclusions. There is no research literature as yet to cross reference with my findings in this study and it would be challenging to randomly control sample schools with schools with nurture groups to look at this area due to the complexity of the number of potential variants. However, anecdotally many working within nurture groups see them in part as a strategy to support pupils “at risk” of exclusion. Further research in this area would be valuable to substantiate this claim.

It is impossible to predict the alternate outcomes for the many extremely aggressive or non-conformist pupils who were referred to the nurture group over the four years in this study. However, the decrease in numbers of FTE and PEX suggests that these children's experiences in school could have been far less positive without the support the nurture group was able to give them.

#### **6.7 Has the nurture group supported an increase in the identification and understanding of a wider variety of needs of individual children?**

In order to analyse this supplementary question, I looked back at the key reason for referral to the group and the patterns of referrals over the four year study period. My initial feeling was that the earlier children referred had been mainly for significant acting-out, anti-social and non-conformist behavioural difficulties. However, I felt that later referrals were a mix of these behaviours but also a number of quieter and socially more withdrawn children.

When I reviewed the reason for initial referrals, I noted that, as I suspected, the overall pattern of referrals did alter, but it is difficult to fully assess the impact of this due to the difference between enquiries about places and those children offered input from the group. There were always a higher number of potential referrals to the group than available places., Those eventually being offered a place would be done so on the basis of need, but also with regard to maintaining a balance of different requirements within the nurture group at any one time. Therefore, although some children were referred to the group, they may not have been offered a placement once full consideration of the needs of the other children in the group had been undertaken, and a different child may have been prioritised at that time instead.

The nurture group was operational for twelve terms in total and was able to offer places to a total of 55 pupils during this time. The chart below identifies the mix of new referrals to the nurture group each term, based on initial reasons for referrals.

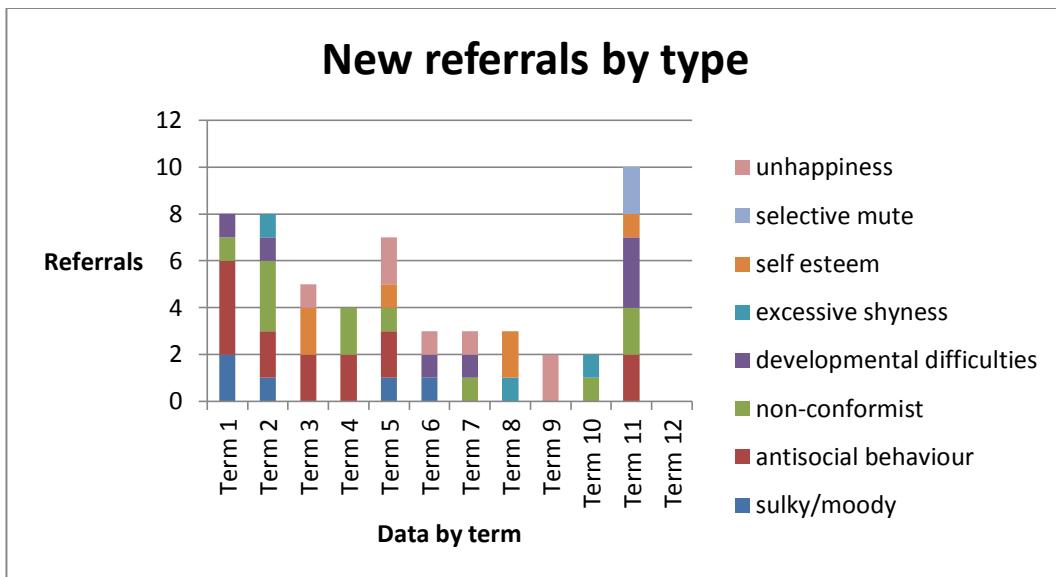


Figure 4: New referrals by type

Whilst the chart demonstrates that there was a persistently good mix of children with a range of needs accepted for placements into the group, it is not possible to draw any clear conclusion from this relating to the change in the types of referrals made to the group during its four years of operation. During any one term there would be children both newly referred to the group and those who had been in placements for some time. There were ten full time equivalent places in the nurture group each term from term 2 to term 12. There were no new referrals in term 12 as the work focused on reintegration of the pupils still with placements due to the end of the study period.

This research question looked at not just the pupils referred to the nurture group but at the overall identification and understanding of different needs across the school. Anecdotally, colleagues have spoken of being able to “look behind the behaviour” to see the possible cause. They altered their classroom areas and used principles of nurture group work with a wider range of children. They actively engaged with professionally development opportunities in regard to nurture group working. There did appear during discussion to be an increased awareness of wider needs, especially towards pupils who were less demonstrable in their anger and frustration. Two colleagues were able to provide insight on this issue during semi-structured interviews at the end of the study period.

*"I think now I feel differently about some of the children in my class. Before I focused a lot on the ones with behaviour problems or the really obvious learning difficulties that needed individualised curriculums. There is always a group of children who don't get noticed quite so much. They are the ones who just get on with things, don't upset the apple-cart and don't cause any behaviour concerns. Now I think I pay a little more attention and try to find ways to push them forward to see what they can do. It sounds bad, but if they are not upsetting anyone then they sort of get overlooked in a busy classroom. I am much more tuned in to that group now and make a point of spending a little more time with them.*

*"I notice the quieter children more now too – that is a bigger change. I used to just accept that we all have different personalities and there are quiet kids in the classroom just as much as the loud ones. Now though, I pay a little more attention and just make sure I am happy that it is just a personality trait and not because they are overwhelmed or stressed. The nooks have been really interesting actually with that group. When I have noticed them venturing into the nook more than once I find a time to sit and talk to them in there. They are the ones who only use nooks at times when the others are busy engaging in something else, you know, free play type things, and so you don't always see that they have selected to withdraw into the nook. I spend more time looking for behaviours like that now and trying to find ways to support. That is what nurture does to you – it makes you look for ways to nurture all the children and not just think about the bigger behaviour issues."*

Y2 class teacher

Transcribed section from a semi-structured interview May 2004

*"I never understood the idea of breakfast in the nurture group until I took part in it. The routine, the social conversation and the responsibility the children take for everything, setting the table, buttering the toast and even washing up afterwards was a real eye-opener for me. I used to wonder what all the fuss was really, and thought it looked like an easy option in that classroom. Having spent time in there with some of those children and been part of it, I can see now that it is anything but easy.*

*Some of it is heart-breaking, when they come out with some of their worries. It makes me look at things differently when I am in my classroom now and I think behind what I can see – it is more like an iceberg really, with the ten per cent you see above the water being the bit that throws the chairs but under the water, that is what you have to look for to help them.”*

Teaching assistant from KS1

Transcribed section from semi-structured interview April 2004

Whilst my feeling remains that there was a change to the type of referrals being made during the time the nurture group was operational, which would support my belief that there was a wider range of needs identified by colleagues in school, this cannot be fully corroborated by looking at the new referral data above as it does not reflect the full number of enquiries made regarding potential placements.

### **6.8 The overall impact of having a nurture group:**

Having looked back at the research questions and used them as a focus for this chapter, there remains no doubt in my mind that in this case study school the nurture group made a significant contribution in a wide variety of ways. Staff professional development needs were met in informal and formal ways, the level of exclusions diminished and the ethos of the school became one of a nurturing environment. In this case study school, the nurture group was an integral part of provision for pupils with SEBD, centrally located and with both my nurture group assistant and I fully involved in all aspects of the school.

Ofsted highlighted the positive practice within the nurture group during their inspection, and an independent evaluation of the provision identified positive impact including all staff understanding the purpose of the nurture group and the strategies and routines being used to support pupils' social development. It also identified the strength in arrangements for reintegration and noted that this was well planned between myself and the mainstream staff and recognised the role of the nurture group as an intrinsic part of the school's provision for pupils with SEBD.

The group hosted many visitors during its four years from across the UK. One head teacher from an inner city school who had visited wrote the following to me:

*"I thought that after 27 years in this wonderful profession, that I had seen it all. What I saw in your Nurture Group has left me totally awe-inspired. I met children, many of whom were identical in every way to those in my school, but the difference in attitude, manners, politeness and confidence was staggering.*

*The impact that you both have on those children has to be admired, bottled and sold to every school in this country. I wish I could have videoed my morning from minute one to the very last minute. I have tried to explain to friends and colleagues what I saw and felt, but it is impossible. What I am doing now is trying to assimilate everything and put into practice what we can use and must benefit from."*

Personal correspondence. February 2002

The final quote in this chapter relating to the impact the nurture group had on the school and those within it comes from a Y1 boy who had been referred for antisocial and non-compliant behaviour as one of the original children identified for a placement at the start of the initiative. He was asked by a visiting county advisor what he was doing in the nurture group that day, to which he replied "We're having fun and getting clever".

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusion:**

#### **7.1 Aims of the chapter:**

In this concluding chapter I will discuss some of the factors that may have affected the case study school and nurture group, and in so doing, could have impacted on the results. I will also summarise the outcomes for the children who attended during the period of the study.

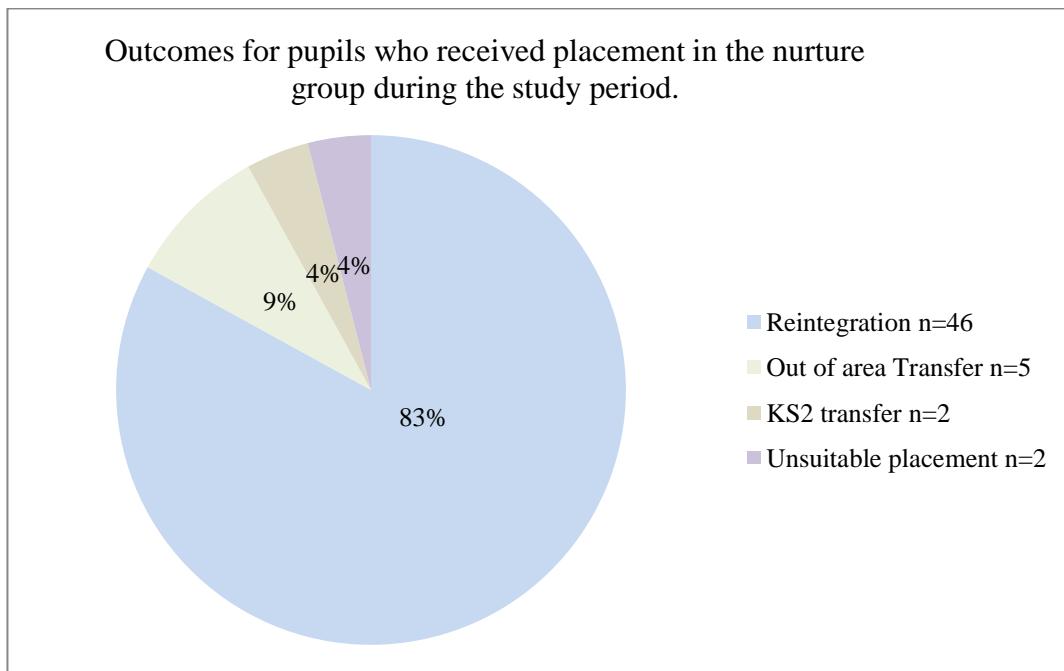
#### **7.2 The persistence of nurture groups in the literature – a brief note:**

There is much evidence in the published literature that suggests that nurture groups are effective provision for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. (E.g. Seth-Smith et al 2010; Reynolds et al 2009; Cooper and Whitebread 2007; Sanders 2007; Scott and Lee, 2005). Nurture groups have persistently been cited in government publications as examples of effective ways to manage behaviour. (E.g. Ofsted 2011; Steer Report 2005; Ofsted 2005; DfEE 1997; Warnock Report 1978). Throughout this thesis there are narratives from staff indicating that the provision is effective and addresses the needs of a particular group of children well. There continues to be sufficient interest for research and publications.

#### **7.3 Placement outcomes during the study period:**

During the period of the study, from May 2000 to May 2004, a total of 55 pupils received input from the nurture group. They were selected from YR to Y2 and had varied needs as already discussed. Once a placement was agreed, the children entered the nurture group on a full time basis until assessed as ready to reduce the time spent in the group, using the specifically created reintegration readiness scale (Doyle 2001) outlined in Chapter 5. During the study period, reintegration for identified pupils was achieved with 100% success. Success was measured within this case study as a pupil who was able to maintain their placement in the

mainstream environment following nurture group intervention without needing additional specialist provision until the end of Y2. This success rate applied to 46 of the 55 pupils who attended the group over the study period. The remaining nine children were unable to complete a nurture group placement and therefore to engage in a reintegration programme. There were no children who required a second period of time in the nurture group during the study period.



*Figure 5: Outcomes for pupils receiving placements in the nurture group between May 2000 and May 2004.*

The reasons for the nine children initially entering the nurture group but not completing placements varied. Four had been pre-selected for inclusion within the nurture group by the educational psychologist and school senior management team prior to my appointment. With hindsight, these children would not have been included within the nurture group as they did not meet the criteria for this type of intervention provision. Two of these four children transferred to the local junior school after less than one term of input. Normally, these two children would not have received a placement so close to transition as the expectation is that a child will attend for between two and four terms for the provision to be successful. It was not possible for the therapeutic work to have sufficient time to become established prior

to the transfer to another school taking place. In these cases, short-term transitional support would probably be more beneficial.

Of the remaining two children pre-selected for inclusion in the group, one exhibited very specific difficulties which were not supported by the nurture group approach. He was able to receive support from a local Child and Adolescent Mental Health team after his brief period in the nurture group. He was also in the final term of school prior to transition to junior school at the time of placement. The other child was identified as having severe learning difficulties and whilst the nurture group placement was not appropriate to meet her needs, it was able to offer an opportunity to undertake some in-depth assessments of her developmental stage. Through undergoing a statutory assessment, she was able to secure a placement in a special school with a differently structured learning environment that was more suited to her overall needs.

A characteristic of the school was the relatively high level of mobility with families moving in and out of the areas, which was also reflected in the outcomes for pupils receiving placements in the nurture group. Over the four year operational period of the group, a total of five children (9%) moved outside of the school catchment area and were unable to complete their placements. In these circumstances, detailed reports were provided for the family so that they could share this with the receiving school. These outlined strategies and support measures which had been on-going at the point of transfer in an attempt to offer some continuity of the work which had already been undertaken.

#### **7.4 The evolution of the school:**

The context of the school was an interesting one to undertake this research project in. It had experienced a turbulent history prior to the nurture group with a significant number of issues leading up to the Ofsted imposed special measures. The staffing had been inconsistent, with some on long-term sick leave, long-held vacancies that were difficult to recruit to and a lack of consistent leadership. The building had been in a poor condition, with inadequate hygiene facilities, graffiti inside and out and poorly managed resources for the children.

The appointment of a strong leadership team, recruitment and retention of experienced teaching staff and support from both LEA and subsequently the EAZ advisors supported the development of the academic and pastoral curriculum. The nurture group came into place towards the end of this turbulent period. Although there was still a considerable amount of work to support the development of nurturing practices and identification of children with SEN, the question arises as to whether the nurture group would have had the same impact if it had been established earlier during the more turbulent period. Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) found that "... schools are likely to get the best out of Nurture Groups when the school as a whole community is committed to maximising the social and educational engagement of all pupils". My feeling is that the staff would have been less likely to take on board the concept of the nurture group whilst they were undergoing such intensive scrutiny from HMI and the LEA. They were under intense pressure to provide demonstrable results term-on-term in literacy and numeracy and their own behaviour management and identification of SEN was also monitored as part of the post-Ofsted action plan. Whether there would have been a positive response to having another initiative at the same time or not is subject to speculation.

Looking at the high exclusion rates prior to the nurture group was revealing, and there is a correlation between the reduction in numbers of exclusions and the establishing of the project, discussed in Chapter 6.

Reflecting back during the writing of my thesis, I feel that the timing of establishing the nurture group in the development of the school was right for a number of reasons for it to potentially achieve success. That in no way diminishes the level of effort involved in both setting up and maintaining the nurture group. However, the school had actively sought to find an appropriate intervention for the pupils with SEBD and had made a successful funding bid to establish a nurture group. They had appointed from outside of their existing staffing and demonstrated a commitment to having a permanent base for the nurture group by voluntarily giving up their own staffroom and having a much smaller space within the school. There was a desire to have a nurture group, but a lack of full understanding of what this would entail in terms of maintaining joint responsibility with me for the pupils with SEBD. This relates to

the “philosophical bias” Davies (2011) outlines as a possible contributing factor to the success of a nurture group in her thesis.

It is also important to consider the natural evolutionary process within the school. The head teacher at the time had been appointed three years before the start of the nurture group. The school initially needed a focus of intensive leadership and management to take it through special measures. After that, the head was able to look more objectively at other initiatives and the running of the school. Whilst the setting up and establishing of the nurture group, developing a nurturing school and the transformation of classrooms to incorporate the practices in the nurture group was led by me, some elements of practice could well have evolved naturally over a longer period of time if it was a school leadership and development priority.

In some ways I feel the school was at a point of readiness to make the changes it did under my guidance. The willingness of staff to undertake changes, even when they initially demonstrated reluctance, supported my work and research study. If the nurture group had been established earlier during the time of intensive monitoring visits, it may have been seen as one initiative too many and not responded to positively. Whilst I am sure the children with the most challenging behavioural difficulties would still have been referred to the group, It could have become isolated in its work, making reintegration harder with children returning to classrooms where there was less understanding of the process of nurture, and less teacher knowledge in meeting SEBD needs.

Many of the positive changes in the school at around the time that the nurture group was set up are also likely to have had a beneficial effect on staff morale and some of the positive outcomes highlighted in the thesis may in part be due to these other changes. I suggest however, having in-depth first-hand knowledge in situ of the situation, having been such an integral part of the process due to my role as the nurture group teacher as well as the researcher, that the findings presented in the previous chapter suggest the main driver for positive change was the nurture group.

## **7.5 Are nurture groups a cost-effective provision?**

The only published data available at the time of writing this thesis relating to the costs of setting up a nurture group is over thirteen years old and relates to costs in Enfield, London and therefore not appropriate to use in this thesis. (See Bennathan and Boxall 2000) I have therefore based this analysis on a comparison of provision costs in an East Anglian local authority to illustrate this area.

During the time of the research project, over four years, a total of fifty five pupils attended the nurture group. Funding was available for a full time teacher and a full time teaching assistant for the four year period. This funding was paid to the school at £50000 per year. Given that there were fifty five children in receipt of places during the four years, this equates to an average of £3636 cost per pupil during the study period.

For children with SEBD, the most common response to supporting their needs in the school prior to the nurture group was to employ a full time TA to work within the classroom for twenty five hours per week. At the end of the study period the average hourly rate for TAs was £4.65 per hour, payable for 38 weeks during the year, equating to £4417.50 per pupil per year. Over a three year period, covering the pupil from the reception year to the end of year two which was the school transition point, the cost would amount to £13252.50 for each pupil. Even assuming the pupils with SEBD all entered the school in the same class for the duration of the full three years of attendance, which, given the nature of the school was unlikely, then to be more cost effective than the nurture group provision, the TA would need to simultaneously support a minimum of four pupils. The reality, given that there were a minimum of two classes per year group, is that more than one TA would need to be employed to support the pupils with SEBD in this way.

These illustrative calculations do not include any teacher time, which is a key area for nurture group practice as opposed to other SEBD support strategies such as “quiet place” initiatives (Renwick and Spalding 2002) where the emphasis is on therapeutic provision, not the academic curriculum. Nurture groups, as a key characteristic, do teach the National Curriculum albeit in a differentiated and

developmentally appropriate manner. The recently released government SEN and disability Green Paper clearly highlights the need for the most vulnerable children to have access to quality teaching and less reliance on TA support. (DfE 2011 p63)

Alternative provision, such as pupil referral units, or the financial costs of exclusion, home tuition through education other than at school (EOTAS) provision or the cost of specialist provision for pupils with SEBD vary between service providers, but are considerably higher.

Whilst providing a full time teacher and teaching assistant for a small number of pupils appears on the surface to be a difficult to sustain expense for some schools, I argue that the alternative expenditure to meet the needs of pupils is overall higher. Given that the pupils in the nurture group were able to sustain mainstream placements after reintegration without further support other than that available to all pupils in their classrooms, then not only does it appear that nurture groups are cost effective, but they also provide good value-added outcomes for the children who are able to achieve developmental progress that supports their inclusion in the classroom with their peers.

## **7.6 My role and its effect:**

It is important to reflect during the writing of a thesis on the role the researcher has had on the outcomes of the research project. From the outset, I have made my place within the study as a participant observer clear to the readers, and to my colleagues and the other subjects of the research. I have clarified this role within chapter 3 and throughout the theses my role has been explicit.

Reflecting at the point of finalising this thesis does raise some issues for myself as a researcher. It was never possible to stand back and observe the case study school and the nurture group in operation without being part of the process being observed. As the practitioner within the nurture group, my influence on the children, the work of my nurture group assistant and the wider school was evident. I have made no attempt to disassociate from this in the writing of the thesis as it was an integral part of the case study.

In terms of my ability to influence the wider developments in the school, that came with the confidence of being part of the senior leadership team in the school, and the drive and enthusiasm I brought to the project following several years involved in SEN teaching prior to taking up the nurture group teacher post. What I have learnt is that much of this work was personality dependent; both being a naturally reflective practitioner in the classroom and having the confidence to influence colleagues, even those most reluctant, is an intrinsic part of my persona in a teaching situation. Being a nurture group teacher requires the ability to be intuitive and receptive to the often unvoiced needs of vulnerable children. Being able to identify the reasons behind behaviours exhibited and responding in a nurturing way requires the ability to empathise and a level of detachment from the emotional drain this could have on me on occasions. Being pragmatic and maintaining a positive relationship with children who had kicked, punched and bitten me in their rage was challenging. It is not something that all adults working with children would have been able to do, or wanted to do. It takes a particular personality to do this type of work. Those colleagues who were the most challenging in terms of their responses to the wider nurturing principles had different personalities to me, worked in different ways and provided as much resistance as some of the children in allowing nurture to become part of their classroom.

It is important also to acknowledge the potential for cognitive dissonance within the narrative in this thesis. The effect of me being a colleague and friend to some of the subjects could have caused them to have conflicting feelings when asked to respond to my questions, wanting to say what they felt I wanted to hear. Having a researcher who you have known well for up to four years may not have been the easiest person to be interviewed by even in the informal and semi-structured manner I engaged in. I was aware that this could influence responses and acknowledged it to my colleagues at the start of each semi-structured interview. I engaged in stakeholder feedback and demonstrated willingness to act on that. When I disagreed, I voiced this but also acknowledged my colleagues opinions as valid contributions. I have taken care in this thesis to reflect a range of opinions and not just the positive statements. I have also used public documents such as evaluation reports and Ofsted reports to triangulate what I observed or collated to reduce the possible impact of this

familiarity with the researcher. As a participant observer, I have been clear that I am aware that I could potentially be influencing the outcomes. However, by being open about this, both within the methodology and the outcomes, the reader will be able to draw their own conclusions of the impact this may have had. I aimed to maintain transparency into the processes involved in this case study to inform the reader.

### **7.7 Limitations to the study:**

As reflected above in the discussion on my role within the study, a limitation of this case study was the part I played in the overall developments. Throughout the thesis I have referred to this and outlined ways where I attempted to reduce the potential for researcher bias, such as in the use of stakeholder feedback. The observer effect cannot be discounted as a limitation in this study as I was so integral to the project due to my dual roles. However, it is also a strength in enabling such an in-depth case study which would not have been possible if I was not fully part of the operation of the school during the study period.

The limitation of being a single case in an infant school has also been raised in the discussion above. However, case study research, by its nature, is an in-depth examination of a single situation over a period of time and this was achieved by being in the one school.

### **7.8 Future potential areas for research:**

My original research questions have been answered within the confines of this research project, specifically in chapter 6.

I began this study by asking “**what is the impact of a nurture group on an infant school?**” Having spent four years looking at this question, I feel confident that I have reflected the impact of the nurture group in the case study school accurately and provided answers to the supplementary questions within this thesis. However, this is one example, in-depth, of a single case. To identify whether similar outcomes would result in a different nurture group and school, would require further investigation. Case study research, as discussed in chapter 3, is not designed to

provide generalisable outcomes and it was never the intention of this project to attempt to do that. In describing processes I have been able to give some element of transparency in order that others may replicate elements of this study in their own context for comparison. It would be useful to determine whether the findings in this thesis are comparable to those in other nurture groups. There is some evidence that there are similarities in the broader areas of the effect of having a nurture group on the ethos of the school and the knowledge and understanding of staff within the main school environments in recent publications. (e.g. Binnie and Allen 2008; Sanders 2007; Cooper and Whitebread 2007)

An area that I feel is lacking in the current body of evidence is the longitudinal data relating to pupil outcomes. Whilst a number of studies look at data and outcomes for individuals at the beginning and end of a nurture group placement, the longer term impact of the effect of a nurture group placement warrants further investigation. In this case study, of the fifty five children who attended the group, forty three achieved full reintegration with 100% success for the duration of their school placement. However, this was an infant school and the children transferred to other environments at the end of KS1 where the influence of the nurture group and nurturing school was not evident. Longer term follow-up of these children to see if they were able to sustain their progress would be very valuable data. Other researchers have also called for longitudinal studies to determine the long term efficacy and sustainability of nurture group provision. (e.g. Reynolds et al 2009).

An area for further development would be the reintegration readiness scale (Doyle 2001). This has undergone some standardisation within the case study school during the research project, as outlined in chapter 5. However, there are limitations to this as all involvement has been in one infant school with a specific catchment and not used wider. It would be useful to engage in a more formal standardisation process with this which would increase its validity. However, it has also been well used in schools outside of the case study school, and included in a national publication from the Nurture Group Network. Its usefulness to assess and monitor social and emotional competence of a Y1 pupil in a New Zealand primary school was the subject of a small- scale research project which demonstrated it to be a useful tool for planning and implementing a class-wide social skills unit on sharing and turn-

taking. (Allison 2007). The wider use of the reintegration readiness scale and the social development curriculum resource document would be potential areas for further research to determine their efficacy.

### **7.9 Summary:**

I embarked on this research project when the nurture group was a new and unknown entity. The school had transformed from one where pupil needs were unmet and parts of the environment were considered hazardous by Ofsted to one which was looking for a solution for a group of children with SEBD and were prepared to be creative in their approach to embracing that solution. I had no idea at the start of this research what the outcomes would be, and there was little in the way of publications to inform my hypothesis.

During the study period I have been able to add to the publications and in so doing, to the body of evidence relating to nurture groups. There is a small but steady interest in the field and increasingly, evaluations are produced that demonstrate, at least in the short term, that nurture groups are effective provision for a group of socially and emotionally vulnerable children. (E.g. Reynolds et al 2009, Scott and Lee 2009; Binnie and Allen 2008; Cooper and Whitebread, 2007).

I had a unique opportunity to be both a researcher and a practitioner in an initiative that I could shape from its instigation. I was given the chance to establish a classic nurture group and to develop the nurturing school from this, alongside my colleagues. It was a very challenging, intensive period of time and the work could be emotionally exhausting at times, but it was an incredibly rewarding experience. I learnt much about myself as a practitioner as well as myself as a researcher.

The study makes a contribution to the wider knowledge on nurture groups through its in-depth study over a period of time to look at the processes involved rather than individual outcomes. This is an area that is not predominant in the existing research on nurture groups. There are a number of quantitative studies available that focus on outcome data using measures such as the Boxall Profile and SDQ. Reynolds et al (2009) also use a range of measures of academic attainment, as have some others.

(E.g. Sanders 2007). However, there are limited studies looking at the qualitative impact of a nurture group in the way this particular case study addresses this. The reintegration readiness scale also makes a contribution to the broader knowledge and literature surrounding nurture groups and its wider implications in supporting nurturing interventions alongside the social development curriculum resource.

The resultant thesis, presented here, I believe will add a significant contribution to the current body of evidence and makes a unique contribution to the knowledge and understanding within the field.

**Appendix 1:**

**Nurture Group Quality Mark Award Part II (Standards)**

**Part II (Standards and evidence)**

1. Whole Establishment Management and Staffing	Area and Standards	Consider	Suggested Evidence
	<p><b>1a. Is located clearly within the policies and structures of the school's continuum of special educational needs provision*</b></p> <p><i>Is taken full account of in school policies and is fully considered in their development and review. (* In Scotland this refers to ASL – Additional Support for Learning)</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Reference to the nurture group in behaviour, inclusion and special needs* and staff support policies</i></p> <p><i>(*In Scotland: Additional Support Needs)</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <i>There may be an additional policy relating to the nurture group</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Nurture group team work regularly with the SMT and mainstream colleagues to review school policies</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Policies refer to the developmental factors which underpin successful learning and the Boxall profile</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Policy has been reviewed within the last 12 months</p>	Copy of policies
	<p><b>1b. Promotes the active involvement of mainstream staff in the life of the nurture group</b></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Protocols are evident for the involvement of other staff</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Evidence of whole establishment training relating to nurture group</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Staff are regularly invited to join with activities in the nurture group</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Mainstream staff show knowledge of nurture group routines and the reasons for them</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Staff are able to offer consistent expectations and routines across both settings</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Nurture group successes are celebrated in the mainstream and vice versa</p>	<p>Minutes of staff meetings.</p> <p>Records of training</p>
	<p><b>1c. Is staffed by two adults of whom at least one has completed the 4-Day Certificate Course in The Theory and Practice of Nurture Group Work</b></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Nurture group staff have completed the 4 day certificate course</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Nurture group staff are never required to cover for absent colleagues</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The group does not run with temporary staff</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Visits by other children and adults are carefully planned</p>	Copies of certification provided Protocol written to deal with absence.
	<p><b>1d. Is staffed by adults who have and promote a positive attitude towards parents/carers of all children and encourage their involvement in activities supportive of the nurture group programme</b></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Feedback from parents about their perceptions of the nurture group and how well they feel listened to</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Parents/carers are regularly invited to join in for nurture group activities</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Staff support parents in non-contact times</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Staff provide ideas/equipment for adult/child activities at home</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Staff support parents to develop appropriate management and interaction strategies</p>	<p>Parental feedback form completed.</p> <p>Description of how parental work happens.</p>

	<p><b>1e.</b> Encourages multi-agency approaches to support children and parents</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff in the nurture group regularly discuss and support referrals to outside agencies <input type="checkbox"/> Staff liaise directly with outside agencies where appropriate and support interventions where ever possible	<p>Evidence of outside agency involvement.</p> <p>List of current multi agency working</p>
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	<b>Area and Standards</b>	<u>Consider</u>	<u>Suggested Evidence</u>
<b>2. Attendance</b>	<p><b>2a.</b> <i>Has a pattern of attendance whereby children / young people attend the group for substantial and regular sessions.</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Timetable is clear <input type="checkbox"/> Routines for collection from mainstream classes ( where applicable) <input type="checkbox"/> Evidence of planning	<p>Copy or example of a timetable.</p> <p>Description of how the group operates</p>
	<p><b>2b.</b> Offers short or medium term placements, usually for between two and four terms, depending on the child's specific needs</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual child / young person records <input type="checkbox"/> Boxall profile scores <input type="checkbox"/> Minutes of termly admission and review meetings	<p>Minutes of relevant meetings.</p>

	<b>Area and Standards</b>	<u>Consider</u>	<u>Suggested Evidence</u>
<b>3. Assessment, Resettlement and Evaluation</b>	<p><b>3a.</b> Ensures that children / young people attending the nurture group remain members of a mainstream class where they register daily and attend selected activities. ( where applicable)</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Shared planning and target setting <input type="checkbox"/> Termly admission and review meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Clear communication between the nurture group staff and the mainstream staff.	<p>Copy of I.E.P.</p> <p>Description of how communication takes place.</p>
	<p><b>3b.</b> Ensures placements are determined on the basis of systematic assessment using the Boxall Profile and other appropriate diagnostic and evaluative instruments, with the aim always being to return the child/ young person to full-time mainstream provision</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Clear selection and resettlement procedures <input type="checkbox"/> Boxall Profiles are completed termly <input type="checkbox"/> Use of observation schedules/records to identify progress with behaviour, use of language, social interaction skills <input type="checkbox"/> Individual resettlement plans exist with clear targets, strategies and responsibilities identified <input type="checkbox"/> Individual child / young person records	<p>Who has final say on attendance in the nurture group?</p> <p>Examples of observations completed.</p>

	<p><b>3c.</b> Is monitored and evaluated as to its effectiveness in promoting the positive social, emotional and educational development of each child/young person</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Completed Boxall profiles</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> IEP targets clearly linked to Boxall Profile areas to be developed</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Use of Goodman Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Use of all other available information and reports e.g. parental and child/young person views, EP and other agency reports etc.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Tracking evidence of progression with social, emotional, behavioural and educational targets</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Tracking evidence of educational progression and achievements, including attainments following re-settlement and as they progress through education.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Collection of parental and mainstream staff's views of children's/ young people's progress</li> </ul>	<p>Copy of: Boxall profile.</p> <p>Goodman's S.D.Q. data.</p> <p>Tracking data.</p> <p>Parental views.</p> <p>Children / young people's views</p>
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	<b>Area and Standards</b>	<u>Consider</u>	<u>Suggested Evidence</u>
<b>4. Environment</b>	<p><b>4a.</b> Supplies a setting and relationships for children in which missing or insufficiently internalised essential early learning experiences are provided</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Room provides opportunities for early learning experiences</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How progress has been made on the Developmental Strands section of the Boxall Profile</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Planning reflects how children/ young person's learning is understood developmentally</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> A variety of stimulating activities are planned around individual needs with evidence of adult flexibility to respond to children/young people's needs in the here and now</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Positive relationships between adults and children/ young people in which adults show interest in and enthusiasm for developing their learning needs</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The national curriculum is explicitly interwoven into all learning experiences.</li> </ul>	<p>Photograph of the room.</p> <p>Timetable Planning.</p> <p>Boxall profile scores.</p>
	<p><b>4b.</b> Provides a warm, welcoming and educational environment, that incorporates aspects of both home and school and where children/young people are accepted and valued</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Emphasis on sharing social experiences often based around food, and developing recognition of emotions</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Children / young people's attendance and time keeping is seen to improve</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Predictable and stable daily routines are known and understood by the children</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate praise/reward is offered and children/young people are encouraged to value the efforts of others as well as their own</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Children / young people are able to describe the progression in their own learning</li> </ul>	<p>Attendance information.</p> <p>Reward and sanction system.</p> <p>Discussions with the child / young person.</p>

	Area and Standards	Consider	Suggested Evidence
5. Curriculum and Activities	<p><b>5a. Ensures that the requirements of current national curriculum guidance and legislative requirements are fulfilled</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Joint planning with appropriate staff</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Planning records indicate good knowledge of individual attainments and set appropriate challenges</i></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Classroom resources and routines allow for frequent incidental reinforcement of basic skills in numeracy and literacy</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> A thematic approach is taken to the curriculum that starts with children/young people's direct experience and immediate environment</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Evidence of both adult and child / young person led activities</li> </ul>	<p>Example of curriculum planning.</p> <p>Portfolio of work completed by the children / young people.</p>
	<p><b>5b. Provides opportunities for social learning through co-operation and play in a group with an appropriate mix of children / young people</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Selection of children/young people routinely takes into account the current dynamics of the nurture group</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> School routines and rules and social and conversational behaviours are explicitly taught and reinforced in small incremental steps</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Individual and group planning accommodates the level of support required by each child / young person at that time and builds in opportunities for challenge that enable progression in the application of skills</li> </ul>	<p>Outline of selection procedure.</p>
	<p><b>5c. Recognises the importance of quality play experiences in the development of children's learning</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Planning and support strategies show recognition of an individual's stage of play and aims to extend this</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Adults play regularly with the children, with similar age appropriate activities for young people, modelling language, behaviours, emotional states and the use of equipment</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> There is a broad range of play equipment available</li> </ul>	

	Area and Standards	Consider	Suggested Evidence
<p><b>6. A Nurturing Approach</b></p>	<p><b>6a. Offers support for children/young people's positive emotional, social and cognitive development at whatever level of need the children / young people show, by responding to them in a developmentally appropriate way</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Children / young people are praised explicitly for all achievements</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Children are not criticised for inconsistencies in their performance</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Staff are able to help children / young people regulate their more extreme emotional responses</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Staff provide experiences which challenge the child / young person's specific difficulties</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Staff model good relationships</li> </ul>	

	<p><b>6b. Places an emphasis on communication and language development through intensive interaction with adults and children / young people</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Language is a central element of all nurture group activities</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Children / young people are explicitly taught the words for emotions and feelings</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The emotional literacy of all is supported and developed</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Adults are skilled at actively listening to children/young people</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Children / young people engage adults through conversation rather than behaviour</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Opportunities to model and practice interactional language are built into the nurture group routines</li> </ul>	
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## **Appendix 2:**

**Sample pages from the questionnaires and histograms for the Boxall Profile**

## Section I

# DEVELOPMENTAL STRANDS

**Enter scores for Section I items in the appropriate column of Section I histogram**

**Score each item in turn according to the Key below**

- 4 Yes, or usually
- 3 At times
- 2 To some extent
- 1 Not really, or virtually never
- 0 Does not arise, not relevant, or cannot be assessed

		Score	Column
1	<b>Listens with interest when the teacher explains something to the class</b>		A
2	<b>Takes appropriate care of something s/he has made or work s/he has done</b> <i>investment of feeling in his/her achievement is implied, and self esteem</i>		F
3	<b>Appreciates a joke or is amused by an incongruous statement or situation</b> <i>disregard lack of appreciation of a joke which is at his/her expense</i> <i>disregard amusement that is clearly inappropriate</i>		D
4	<b>Begins to clear up or bring to a close an enjoyable work or play activity when the teacher, with adequate warning, makes a general request to the group</b> score 2 if a personal and specific request is needed		G
5	<b>Makes and accepts normal physical contact with others</b> <i>e.g. when holding hands in a game</i>		H
6	<b>Makes appropriate and purposeful use of the materials/equipment/toys provided by the teacher without the need for continuing direct support</b> <i>disregard repetitive activity which does not progress</i>		A
7	<b>Maintains acceptable behaviour and functions adequately when the routine of the day is disturbed</b> <i>e.g. when there are visitors in his/her class, or the class is taken by a teacher s/he does not know well</i>		H
8	<b>Makes an appropriate verbal request to another child who is in his/her way or has something s/he needs</b> <i>disregard situations of provocation</i>		H
9	<b>Complies with specific verbal prohibitions on his/her personal use of classroom equipment</b> score 2 if s/he complies but often protests or sulks		G
10	<b>Abides by the rules of an organised group game in the playground or school hall</b> <i>interacts and co-operates and continues to take part for the duration of the game</i>		J
11	<b>Accommodates to other children when they show friendly and constructive interest in joining his/her play or game</b>		H
12	<b>Listens, attends and does what is required when the teacher addresses a simple positive request specifically to him/her</b> <i>e.g. to get out his/her work book</i>		A
13	<b>Works or plays alongside a child who is independently occupied, without interfering or causing disturbance</b>		G
14	<b>Shows awareness of happenings in the natural world, is interested and curious, and genuinely seeks explanations</b>		B
15	<b>Of his/her own accord returns to and completes a satisfying activity that has been interrupted</b> <i>e.g. s/he finishes a painting or carries on with a written story later in the day or the following day</i>		C
16	<b>Is adequately competent and self-reliant in managing his/her basic personal needs</b> <i>i.e. clothes; toilet; food</i>		A

17	<b>In freely developing activities involving other children s/he constructively adapts to their ideas and suggestions</b>		I
18	<b>Turns to his/her teacher for help, reassurance or acknowledgement, in the expectation that support will be forthcoming</b> <i>disregard occasional normal negativism</i>		F
19	<b>Accepts disappointments</b> <i>e.g. if an outing is cancelled because it is raining, or s/he is not chosen for favourite activity, s/he does no more than complain or briefly moan</i>		J
20	<b>Takes part in a teacher centred group activity</b> <i>e.g. number or language work, or finger games</i> <i>score 2 if s/he does no more than try to follow</i>		A
21	<b>Shows genuine interest in another child's activity or news; looks or listens and gains from experience</b> <i>does not intrude unduly; does not take over</i>		B
22	<b>Shows genuine concern and thoughtfulness for other people; is sympathetic and offers help</b>		I
23	<b>Recalls information of relevance to something s/he reads or hears about and makes a constructive link</b>		C
24	<b>Makes constructive and reciprocal friendships which provide companionship</b> <i>score 3 if the friendship is with one child only</i> <i>score 2 if no friendship lasts longer than a week</i> <i>score 1 if the association is fleeting, albeit constructive and reciprocal</i>		D
25	<b>Contributes actively to the course of co-operative and developing play with two or more other children and shows some variation in the roles s/he takes</b> <i>e.g. in the Play House, other free play activities, or improvised class drama</i>		E
26	<b>Is reasonably well organised in assembling the materials s/he needs and in clearing away</b> <i>reminders only are needed</i>		B
27	<b>Communicates a simple train of thought with coherence</b> <i>e.g. when telling or writing a story, or describing an event</i>		C
28	<b>Responds to stories about animals and people with appropriate feeling; appropriately identifies the characters as good, bad, funny, kind etc.</b> <i>disregard response to nursery rhymes or fairy stories</i>		D
29	<b>Makes pertinent observations about the relationship between two other people; appropriately attributes attitudes and motives to them</b>		D
30	<b>Engages in conversation with another child</b> <i>an interchange of information, ideas or opinions is implied</i>		E
31	<b>Looks up and makes eye contact when the teacher is nearby and addresses him/her by name</b> <i>i.e. heeds the teacher; does not necessarily pay attention</i>		F
32	<b>Sits reasonably still without talking or causing disturbance when the teacher makes a general request to all the children for their attention</b>		G
33	<b>Gives way to another child's legitimate need for the classroom equipment s/he is using by sharing it with him/her, or taking turns</b> <i>no more than a reminder is needed</i>		H
34	<b>Shows curiosity and constructive interest when something out of the ordinary happens</b> <i>is secure enough to accept a change or the introduction of something new, is alert to the possibilities of the event and gains from it</i>		D

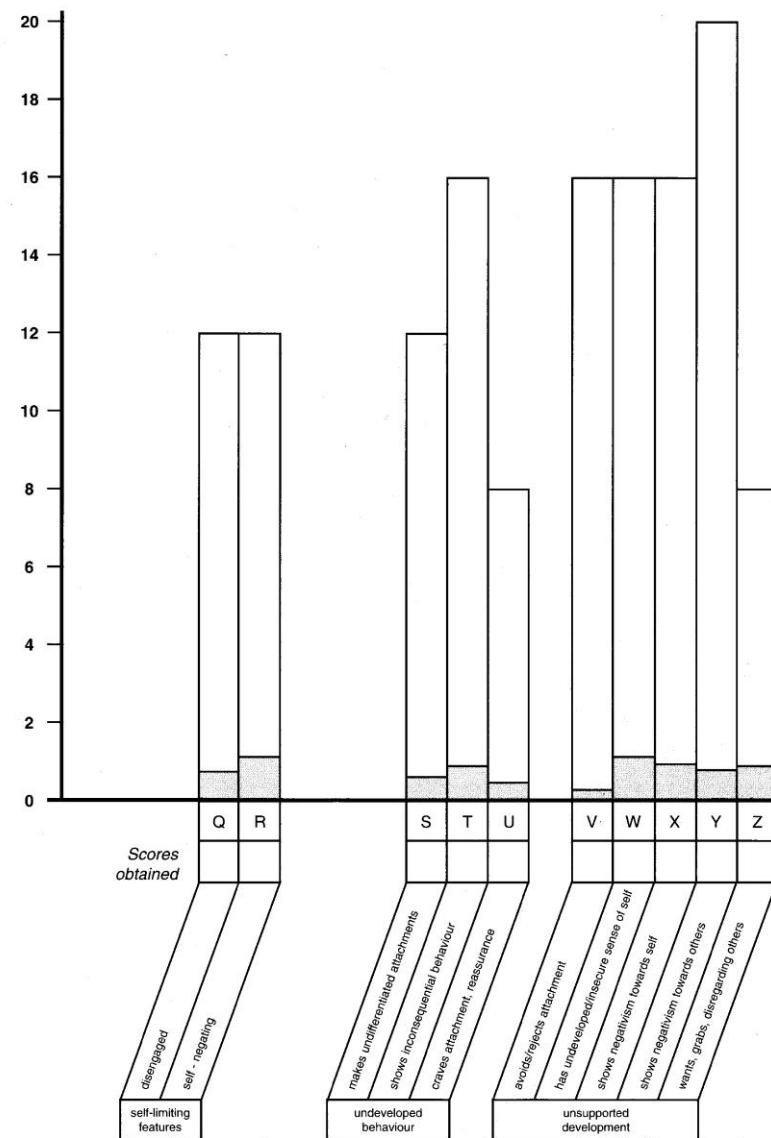
Any additional comments to amend or extend the information provided by the Profile?

## Section II

### DIAGNOSTIC PROFILE

The scores for the items in Section II are entered in the histogram below in the column indicated by the relevant letter (Q, R etc ...Z). The outline is irregular because the number of items varies from column to column.

The shaded green areas indicate the range of average scores in a sample of competently functioning children in five age groups from 3 years 4 months to 8 years.



II B ON II SECTION II S

**Appendix 3:**

**Teacher version of the Goodman's Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire  
(SDQ)**

## Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

T<sup>4-16</sup>

For each item, please mark the box for Not True, Somewhat True or Certainly True. It would help us if you answered all items as best you can even if you are not absolutely certain or the item seems daft! Please give your answers on the basis of the child's behaviour over the last six months or this school year.

Child's Name .....

Male/Female

Date of Birth.....

	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
Considerate of other people's feelings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often complains of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shares readily with other children (treats, toys, pencils etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often has temper tantrums or hot tempers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rather solitary, tends to play alone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Generally obedient, usually does what adults request	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Many worries, often seems worried	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Constantly fidgeting or squirming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has at least one good friend	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often fights with other children or bullies them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often unhappy, down-hearted or tearful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Generally liked by other children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Easily distracted, concentration wanders	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nervous or clingy in new situations, easily loses confidence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kind to younger children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often lies or cheats	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Picked on or bullied by other children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often volunteers to help others (parents, teachers, other children)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thinks things out before acting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Steals from home, school or elsewhere	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gets on better with adults than with other children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Many fears, easily scared	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sees tasks through to the end, good attention span	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you have any other comments or concerns?

**Please turn over - there are a few more questions on the other side**

Overall, do you think that this child has difficulties in one or more of the following areas: emotions, concentration, behaviour or being able to get on with other people?

No	Yes- minor difficulties	Yes- definite difficulties	Yes- severe difficulties
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you have answered "Yes", please answer the following questions about these difficulties:

- How long have these difficulties been present?

Less than a month	1-5 months	6-12 months	Over a year
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Do the difficulties upset or distress the child?

Not at all	Only a little	Quite a lot	A great deal
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Do the difficulties interfere with the child's everyday life in the following areas?

	Not at all	Only a little	Quite a lot	A great deal
PEER RELATIONSHIPS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CLASSROOM LEARNING	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Do the difficulties put a burden on you or the class as a whole?

Not at all	Only a little	Quite a lot	A great deal
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Signature ..... Date .....

Class Teacher/Form Tutor/Head of Year/Other (please specify):

**Thank you very much for your help**

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**Appendix 4:**  
**Reintegration Readiness Scale**

## **Nurture Group Reintegration Readiness Scale.**

<b>Pupil's Name:</b>	<b>Date of completion:</b>		
<b>Placement type:</b>	FT	PT am/pm	<b>Time in group:</b>
<b>Attendance:</b> Good/average/poor	<b>Completed by:</b>		

For each criteria, circle the most appropriate answer using the following scoring system:

- 1 Rarely fulfils this criterion
- 2 Can occasionally fulfil this criterion
- 3 Frequently fulfils this criterion
- 4 Almost always fulfils this criterion

On completion, plot the score for each set of criteria on the table below and establish an overall score. **A score above 218 (70%) would indicate readiness to reintegrate into mainstream classroom.**

	<b>Score</b>
Self control and management of behaviour	/52
Social skills	/80
Self awareness and confidence	/52
Skills for learning	/84
Approach to learning	/44
<b>Total</b>	<b>/312</b>

Significant factors which may affect the scores obtained: e.g. English as additional language, hearing or communication difficulties, recent traumatic events etc.

Future priority areas for target setting: e.g. areas where least progress has been made over the past half term/ areas showing the lowest scores at present

1 = rarely fulfils this criterion  
 3 = frequently fulfils this criterion

2 = can occasionally fulfil this criterion  
 4 = almost always fulfils this criterion

<b>Self control and management of behaviour:</b>				
Can accept discipline without argument or sulking	1	2	3	4
Can arrive in classroom and settle down quietly and appropriately	1	2	3	4
Does not leave the room without permission	1	2	3	4
Can accept changes to plans or disappointment with an even temper	1	2	3	4
Shows some self-discipline when others try to encourage deviation	1	2	3	4
Is aware of normal sound levels and can be reminded of them and respond appropriately	1	2	3	4
Does not seek confrontation during unstructured times e.g. break	1	2	3	4
Behaves in a socially acceptable manner in public e.g. outings	1	2	3	4
Can maintain appropriate levels of behaviour when the class routine is disrupted	1	2	3	4
Will abide by the accepted rules of an organised group game	1	2	3	4
Behaves appropriately in all areas of the school building	1	2	3	4
Goes to and stays in designated areas when requested e.g. playground, hall etc.	1	2	3	4
Controls emotions appropriately when faced with difficulties e.g. does not fight, strike out immediately, run away and hide or become excessively withdrawn	1	2	3	4
<b>Score: /52</b>				

<b>Social skills:</b>				
Can cope with large numbers of people	1	2	3	4
Can accept that teacher time needs to be shared	1	2	3	4
Can ask a question and wait for the answer	1	2	3	4
Can take turns in question and answer sessions	1	2	3	4
Has appropriate communication skills e.g. talking, asking questions & listening	1	2	3	4
Can work alongside others in a group situation without disruption	1	2	3	4
Interacts and plays in a positive way with peers	1	2	3	4
Apologises without reminder	1	2	3	4
Asks permission to use objects belonging to another person	1	2	3	4
Shows empathy for and comforts playmates in distress	1	2	3	4
Chooses own friends and maintains reciprocal friendships	1	2	3	4
Makes and accepts normal physical contact with others	1	2	3	4
Accommodates other children who ask to join an activity	1	2	3	4
Is self-reliant in managing own hygiene and basic needs	1	2	3	4
Shows genuine interest in the news or activities of another child	1	2	3	4
Contributes actively to play with two or more children	1	2	3	4
Shows variation in the roles undertaken during co-operative play e.g. is not always in the role of the dominant character etc.	1	2	3	4
Engages in appropriate conversation with another child, exchanging information and using appropriate dialogue	1	2	3	4
Addresses adults and children appropriately by name with eye contact	1	2	3	4
Shares legitimately required equipment with another pupil	1	2	3	4
<b>Score: /80</b>				

1 = rarely fulfils this criterion  
 3 = frequently fulfils this criterion

2 = can occasionally fulfil this criterion  
 4 = almost always fulfils this criterion

<b>Self awareness and confidence:</b>	1	2	3	4
Willing to ask for help	1	2	3	4
Can accept responsibility for his/her actions without denial	1	2	3	4
Can acknowledge own problems and is willing to discuss them	1	2	3	4
Can risk failure	1	2	3	4
States feelings about self e.g. angry, happy, sad	1	2	3	4
Maintains appropriate eye contact	1	2	3	4
Contributes to class discussions	1	2	3	4
Participates in group work, making constructive suggestions and adapting ideas	1	2	3	4
Responds appropriately to stories, identifying the characters e.g. funny, kind, bad, scary	1	2	3	4
Participates in large class activities e.g. dance, role plays, performances	1	2	3	4
Accepts public praise and congratulation appropriately e.g. when good work is shown to peers etc.	1	2	3	4
Shows pride in achievements and presentation of work	1	2	3	4
Has esteem for self	1	2	3	4

**Score:** /52

<b>Skills for learning:</b>	1	2	3	4
Can work alone without constant attention for brief periods	1	2	3	4
Can listen to explanations and instructions and attempt to act on them	1	2	3	4
Understands the structure within the day	1	2	3	4
Understands the roles of the teacher and other adults in the school	1	2	3	4
Understands the structure of discipline - what happens if he/she doesn't complete work, does not conform to playground rules etc.	1	2	3	4
Understands that there are different places for lessons other than the classroom e.g. library, PE hall etc. and behaves appropriately	1	2	3	4
Can constructively use unstructured time in the classroom	1	2	3	4
Can organise him/herself if help is not immediately available	1	2	3	4
Responds appropriately to personal request from teacher	1	2	3	4
Will work alongside another pupil without attempting any distractions	1	2	3	4
Can organise the materials needed for a task and clear them away appropriately	1	2	3	4
Shows appropriate levels of curiosity when changes to the normal routines are observed	1	2	3	4
Reading and numeracy up to a level that can be coped with in a mainstream classroom given reasonable support	1	2	3	4
Shows a willingness to improve own literacy and numeracy	1	2	3	4
Can read sufficiently well to understand basic instructions needed for completion of tasks	1	2	3	4
Has developed some self help strategies (at own level) e.g. using reference materials such as word banks	1	2	3	4
Does not get up and wander around classroom without purpose	1	2	3	4
Needs a mainstream curriculum	1	2	3	4
Does not get impatient if help is not immediately forthcoming	1	2	3	4
Is willing to try to complete a task independently	1	2	3	4
Pays attention to class discussions and instructions	1	2	3	4

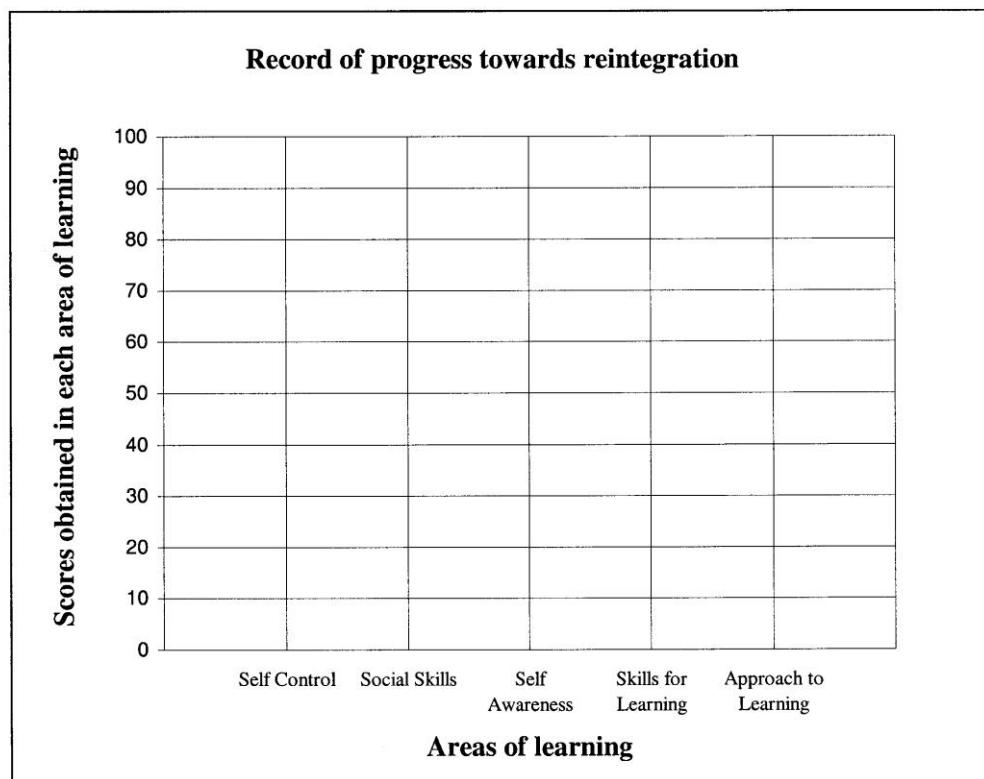
**Score:** /84

1 = rarely fulfils this criterion  
3 = frequently fulfils this criterion

2 = can occasionally fulfil this criterion  
4 = almost always fulfils this criterion

<b>Approach to learning:</b>	1	2	3	4
Is prepared to work in lessons				
Uses appropriate language and gestures	1	2	3	4
Wants to be re-integrated	1	2	3	4
Has parental support	1	2	3	4
Is courteous, and shows a positive attitude towards staff	1	2	3	4
Can show a positive interest in lessons	1	2	3	4
Treats school property with care	1	2	3	4
Listens with interest to class explanations	1	2	3	4
Can accept disappointments e.g. when not chosen to participate in an activity	1	2	3	4
Will sit appropriately without causing disturbance in both class and general school areas on request	1	2	3	4
Shows a sense of humour	1	2	3	4
<b>Score:</b>				<b>/44</b>

On completion, plot the overall scores from each set of criteria on the chart below. Complete the chart using subsequent half termly scores to monitor progress towards reintegration over time.



**Key:** enter date and colour of pen used for ease of identification

Date:		Date:		Date:		Date:	
Date:		Date:		Date:		Date:	

**Appendix 5:**  
**Emma's Story**

### **Emma's story: (see page 81)**

Emma entered the nurture group following a referral from her reception class teacher who was increasingly concerned about her. Whenever thwarted, even in the smallest of ways, Emma would run to the classroom door and repeatedly kick it, screaming and crying. Her class teacher identified the only triggers for the behaviour was that whenever Emma was unable to have what she wanted immediately, whether that was from a child or an adult, the behaviour ensued. If the classroom door was open, Emma would run out to the cloakroom area, sit under her coat and continue to scream and cry, rejecting any adult attempt to re-engage her in the classroom. These tantrums could last for up to twenty minutes and were very disruptive for the other children.

Emma came into the nurture group for her first visit and spent the morning pushing boxes of toys off surfaces and tipping their content onto the floor. Her interest in the contents was fleeting and she refused to help to pick anything up and return it to the box. Any attempt to engage her in clearing up when she had tipped up a box resulted in screaming, crying and retreating to the quiet area. Each time this happened, the adults encouraged the other children to help to put items back in their boxes and to leave Emma alone in the quiet area until she felt able to come out herself. Emma watched this initially through her hands which were partially covering her face. Each time there was a tantrum, the adults and children tidied up the equipment and returned to what they had been doing. Emma continued this behaviour for the first three days of attendance. The only attempt she made to join in was at breakfast time, but she made limited attempts to follow the routines there and rejected social attempts to engage her by pushing away other children or putting her head down on the table if anyone spoke to her.

On the fourth day of attendance, I noticed that Emma was paying attention to the children who were drawing at a table, engaging in conversation about their families as they drew them. I placed a fresh piece of paper by an empty space, with a selection of colouring pencils but without any reference to Emma, who was sitting in the quiet area after another tantrum. The other children continued to talk about their

family pictures with me as I helped to label the drawings as the children identified the characters they had drawn.

Emma walked over to the table and stood by the empty space. I moved the chair out from the table and asked if she wanted to sit there. Emma turned her back and walked away, but did not push the pencils or paper to the floor this time. She stood across the room but kept watching the other two children working with me. The two boys completed their pictures, tidied up their work areas and left the table. I remained at the table, taking a fresh piece of paper and began drawing characters on my page. Emma approached the table and stood by the already set up place again. I provided a running commentary on my picture, naming my family members as I drew them, talking about the colour of their hair, what they liked doing and their relationship to me.

Emma sat at the table and fiddled with the pencils for a while, watching my drawing before pointing to one of the characters and asking who it was. I said it was my father and he liked to ride a bike. Emma said she could ride a bike. I said I was not sure how to draw a bike and Emma laughed and said “well you are stupid then”. I told Emma that those words made me feel unhappy and Emma shrugged her shoulders. I continued to draw on my paper, adding the sun and some clouds. Emma continued to watch until the clouds were drawn and then said “Henry is in the clouds”. I asked who Henry was and Emma said “My baby. He’s dead”. I did not have any information that indicated that there had been an infant death in the family. I said that was a very sad thing to hear. Emma did not look at me but began to gently roll the colouring pencils across the table and said “I might draw Henry. I will give it to mummy and stop her crying.” I moved the container of pencils in between Emma and me so they were easier to reach. This was not rejected by Emma.

Emma began to draw her family and included a cloud with a figure on it. She was silent while drawing. I had continued to talk about my own picture, including stating that I had now finished it and would write people’s names on it so I could remember who I had drawn. Emma looked at me and said “Put names on mine”. I asked Emma to tell me about the picture so I would know what names to include. Emma began to identify parts of her picture, starting with Henry in the clouds. She

then identified a figure and said it was Mark and he had injections. She indicated where she had drawn a syringe and identified it as Mark's drugs stating "I ain't allowed to touch it". She identified other characters and then talked about Mark's friends coming to the house when her mother was out and how she would be sent upstairs to look after her younger sibling on her own. Emma used the street names for class A drugs and said they were in the bedroom Mark and her mother shared. Emma described making up bottles of milk to feed her younger sibling when he cried because Mark and his friends would shout at her to keep him quiet which scared her.

When she completed her picture, Emma left the table and went to another area of the nurture group room. As it was then lunchtime, the nurture group assistant was able to take the children back to their classrooms and I had time to contact Emma's mother to talk about the content of the picture. During the discussion it emerged that Emma's mother had had a stillborn child two years after Emma was born. She stated it was not something she wanted to talk about and did not feel she wanted everyone to know her business. The baby had the same father as Emma and they had separated shortly afterwards and no longer had any contact. Emma was not seeing her father and her mother now had a new partner, Mark, who had a history of drug addiction but she was adamant that this was before she had met him and he was not using drugs currently. No explanation was offered for how Emma had been able to describe and draw the image of a person using intravenous drugs. After a long discussion with Emma's mother, a child protection referral was made, with her knowledge but not with her agreement. Her immediate reaction was to say she would take Emma out of the school. Accusations were made that indicated that I must have encouraged Emma to draw the syringe in Mark's arm and made up the rest of the allegations.

Emma and her family were subject to a child protection case conference with me as one of the participants in the discussion. At that meeting it emerged that Mark had met some old friends who were known drug users and had once again started to use class A drugs. He indicated that he wanted help to stop and support was able to be put in place for a referral to a local narcotic support agency. Emma's mother had never received any bereavement support following the stillbirth of her son. This was

also arranged as an outcome of the social care meeting. The family circumstances were discussed and a referral was made to the local family centre for some intensive support work for the entire family together. Emma's mother reluctantly agreed for her to stay in the nurture group, although she openly stated that she did not feel this was helping her daughter. The relationship between Emma's mother and myself was damaged and she stated that she would only talk to the mainstream teacher about Emma. It was agreed that a daily record of Emma's day would be given to her mainstream teacher until her mother felt she wanted to talk to me again, with or without another person present for support.

Emma remained in the nurture group for a further two terms before her mother approached me with the original picture, following several months of family support work. Shortly after this, Emma's family moved to another town and therefore left the school prior to the end of her the time in the nurture group.

At the time, the parent said that when the original drawing had been shown to her she had felt that she wanted to remove her daughter from the school and leave the area to get away from the situation. However, after the support, she was able to recognise that the circumstances around her daughter's behaviour problems could be in part due to the difficult situation the family found themselves in at the time.

**Appendix 6:**  
**Social Development Curriculum**

Area of Development:	Social Skills		
Learning Objective	Possible Teaching Activities	Learning Outcome	
<p><b>The child should learn to:</b></p> <p>Recognise that other people have feelings that need to be considered.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Circle time <i>e.g. using cards or emotions puppets to identify how situations make you feel.</i></li> <li>■ News&gt;Show and tell sessions <i>- reinforcing rules such as listening to the person who is talking, showing consideration for the speaker</i></li> <li>■ Stories <i>e.g. Badger's bad mood</i></li> <li>■ Box of feelings games <i>e.g. emotions cards posting activities, emotion masks</i></li> <li>■ Talking object <i>e.g. doll/shell/ball etc. Only the child holding the talking object at that time should be speaking, before passing it to the next person.</i></li> <li>■ Drama/role play</li> <li>■ Puppets <i>e.g. dialogue relating to feelings</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>The child will be able to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• show empathy for others</li> <li>• show genuine interest in the news or activities of others</li> <li>• apologise without reminders</li> </ul>	

**Area of Development:** **Social Skills**

<b>Learning objective:</b>	<b>Possible teaching activities:</b>	<b>Learning Outcomes:</b>
<p><b>The child should learn to:</b></p> <p>Make and maintain reciprocal friendships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Matching pairs games/snap games</li> <li>■ Turn taking board games</li> <li>■ Lotto/bingo games <i>initially adult led, progressing to peer led, taking turns to be the caller etc.</i></li> <li>■ Role play/drama/Puppets <i>e.g. creating dialogue between two puppets, enacting well-known stories etc.</i></li> <li>■ Parachute games</li> <li>■ Construction activities <i>e.g. marble run, where collaboration aids the structure and design</i></li> <li>■ Stories about cooperative working <i>e.g. "The enormous turnip", "The lion and the mouse" with story props to retell independently.</i></li> <li>■ Rhymes and songs that need others <i>e.g. "row, row, row your boat" or "the farmer in the dell" etc.</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>The child will be able to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• contribute actively to play with two or more children</li> <li>• show variation in the roles undertaken during co-operative play</li> <li>• interact and play in a positive way with peers</li> <li>• accommodate other children who ask to join an activity</li> <li>• make and accept normal physical contact with others</li> <li>• abide by the accepted rules of an organised group game</li> </ul>

**Area of Development:** **Social Skills**

<b>Learning Objectives:</b>	<b>Possible Teaching Activities:</b>	<b>Learning Outcomes:</b>
<p><b>The child will learn to:</b></p> <p>Work alongside others without disruption</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Experimental science/math activities where equipment needs to be shared</li> <li>■ Sand/water/sensory tray activities <i>e.g. sharing equipment</i></li> <li>■ Roamer/ICT robotics <i>e.g. turn taking, co-operative working etc.</i></li> <li>■ Construction <i>e.g. Lego where sufficient amounts are available to create individual projects, but where dialogue can be encouraged between peers.</i></li> <li>■ Circle of friends</li> <li>■ Drama/role play</li> <li>■ Small world role play <i>e.g. small figures that allow the child to identify their problem, but remain talking in the third person whilst working through the difficulties, if necessary.</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>The child will be able to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• share legitimately required equipment with another pupil</li> <li>• ask permission to use objects belonging to another person</li> <li>• cope with large numbers of people</li> </ul>

**Area of Development:** **Social Skills**

<b>Learning Objectives:</b>	<b>Possible Teaching Activities:</b>	<b>Learning Outcomes:</b>
<p><b>The child will learn to:</b></p> <p>Use appropriate communication skills</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Recounting familiar stories using props</li> <li>■ Role play/drama <i>e.g. news reporter, television interviewer etc.</i></li> <li>■ Listening games <i>e.g. "Simon says", "What's the time Mr Wolf?"</i></li> <li>■ Data/ verbal information gathering activities</li> <li>■ Breakfast/snack times <i>e.g. social rituals reinforced by adult and peer modelling</i></li> <li>■ Verbal chants <i>e.g. "Who stole the cookies from the cookie jar?"</i></li> <li>■ Speaking objects <i>e.g. only the person holding the object is able to speak at that time before passing it along</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>The child will be able to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• engage appropriately in conversation with another child using appropriate dialogue</li> <li>• address adults and children appropriately by name with eye contact</li> <li>• ask a question and wait for the answer</li> <li>• take turns in question and answer sessions</li> </ul>

**Area of Development:      Self Awareness and Confidence**

Learning Objective	Possible Teaching Activities	Learning Outcome
<p><b>The child should learn to:</b></p> <p>Contribute to class discussions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Circle time</li> <li>■ Role play/drama <i>e.g. drama activities such as being a news or television reporter and interviewing a friend, or being the teacher and talking to a pupil</i></li> <li>■ Memory games <i>e.g. "My granny went to market and she bought ... " where child has to recall increasing list of objects, or studying a number of objects prior to the teacher removing one and recalling the missing item.</i></li> <li>■ "Have-a-go" book <i>e.g. small book with page divided in half vertically for the child to attempt a word prior to adult writing correctly spelt word on second half</i></li> <li>■ Classification games <i>e.g. sorting groups of objects according to own category. No right or wrong answer, just sorted according to own reasons that can be explained.</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>The child will be able to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• maintain appropriate eye contact</li> <li>• risk failure</li> <li>• accept public praise and congratulations</li> </ul>

<b>Area of Development:</b> <b>Self Awareness and Confidence</b>		
<b>Learning Objectives:</b>	<b>Possible Teaching Activities:</b>	<b>Learning Outcomes:</b>
<b>The child should learn to:</b>  Show pride in achievements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Mounting and displaying own work <i>e.g. selecting backing paper, trimming work to size, labelling etc.</i></li> <li>■ Best work books <i>e.g. original or copy of work that the child selects that they feel is their best work. Include photographs of non-written activities, certificates and stickers if appropriate</i></li> <li>■ Achievement boards <i>e.g. a mounted picture of each child on a prominent display board and each week write in an achievement they are particularly proud of. Make it part of the end of the week ritual and encourage others to look at the board</i></li> <li>■ Pupil art gallery <i>e.g. a gallery of the pupil's work that they select for inclusion, mounted and displayed and reviewed regularly. Encourage work completed at home, from colouring books, patterns etc.</i></li> </ul>	<b>The child will be able to:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• demonstrate esteem for self</li> <li>• show pride in the presentation of work</li> </ul>

Area of Development:	Skills for learning	
Learning Objective	Possible Teaching Activities	Learning Outcome
<p><b>The child should learn to:</b></p> <p>Understand the structure within the school day</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Pictorial charts/timetables <i>e.g. large displayed chart/timetable in classroom noting time and key transition points in the day.</i></li> <li>■ Drama/role play <i>e.g. being a lunchtime supervisor with disruptive pupils</i></li> <li>■ Story time <i>e.g. using the library for story activities.</i></li> <li>■ Library use <i>Inviting the local librarian in to show the children how a library operates.</i></li> <li>■ Lunchtime routines <i>Clearly structured routine immediately prior to the lunchtime transition point and during the meal session.</i></li> <li>■ People who help us topics <i>e.g. include lunchtime supervisors/MSA and discuss their role</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>The child will be able to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• behave appropriately in additional school areas e.g. library, PE hall</li> <li>• recognise that there are places other than the classroom for lessons</li> <li>• understand the roles of teachers and other adults within the school</li> </ul>

**Area of Development:****Skills for learning**

Learning Objective:	Possible Teaching Activities:	Learning Outcomes:
<b>The child should learn to:</b>  Use basic self help strategies at own level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Making word books <i>e.g. making a topic dictionary or picture dictionary with pictures cut from catalogues etc.</i></li><li>■ Vocabulary lists <i>e.g. display of relevant vocabulary in numeracy, key sight vocabulary lists, science topics etc.</i></li><li>■ “Have-a-go” book <i>e.g. small book with page divided in half vertically for the child to attempt a word prior to adult writing correctly spelt word on second half of page.</i></li><li>■ Timers <i>e.g. negotiating time limit to remain on task, (sand or wind-up kitchen timer)</i></li><li>■ White boards &amp; pens <i>e.g. try it first where it is easy to alter</i></li><li>■ Alphabet cards/key sight vocabulary cards, number lines on tables</li><li>■ Prompt sheets <i>e.g. have I got my pencil, number line, book? What do I need to complete the task?</i></li></ul>	<b>The child will be able to:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● use simple reference materials e.g. word banks.</li><li>● work alone without constant supervision for brief periods</li><li>● be willing to try to complete a task independently</li><li>● organise own materials required for a task and clear away afterwards</li><li>● show a level of patience if help is not immediately available</li></ul>

Area of Development:	Skills for learning	
Learning Objectives:	Possible Teaching Activities:	Learning Outcomes:
<p><b>The child should learn to:</b></p> <p>Constructively use unstructured time in the classroom</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Task board/daily activity board/class timetable clearly displayed</li> <li>■ Busy cards &amp; books <i>e.g. fun, independent learning activities and books to complete during unstructured times.</i></li> <li>■ Coloured bands/badges etc. to indicate number of children who can use an activity at any one time</li> <li>■ Quiet area/nook <i>e.g. designated quiet area, semi-screened with books, cassette tapes and headphones, cushions, soft toys etc.</i></li> <li>■ Writing table/number table <i>e.g. for independent reinforcement work with accessible activity</i></li> <li>■ Topic table/exploring table <i>e.g. books and objects linked to the current topic to investigate, or number/science investigating table</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>The child will be able to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• not wander around the classroom without purpose</li> <li>• work alongside another pupil without attempting distractions or becoming distracted</li> <li>• work alone without constant attention for brief periods</li> </ul>

Area of Development:	Skills for learning	
Learning Objectives:	Possible Teaching Activities:	Learning Outcomes:
<p><b>The child should learn to:</b></p> <p>Show willingness to improve own learning</p>	<p>■ “Simon says” games <i>to increase observation and listening skills.</i></p> <p>■ Have-a-go books</p> <p>■ Props <i>e.g. alphabet cards, number lines, counters etc.</i></p> <p>■ White boards &amp; dry wipe pens <i>e.g. as try it first/practice boards</i></p> <p>■ Games to encourage listening <i>e.g. musical statues, fruit salad, beans etc.</i></p> <p>■ Drama/dance/PE</p> <p>■ Action rhymes/finger rhymes</p> <p>■ Memory pairs games, snakes and ladders</p> <p>■ Lining up games <i>e.g. walk on tiptoes to the line, if your name begins with ..., give the children names of pieces of fruit or numbers and then call that group to line up etc.</i></p>	<p><b>The child will be able to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• respond appropriately to personal request from teacher</li> <li>• listen to explanations and instructions and attempt to act upon them</li> <li>• pay attention to class discussions and instructions</li> <li>• be willing to risk failure</li> <li>• be willing to ask for help</li> </ul>

**Area of Development:****Self Control and Management of Behaviour**

Learning Objective	Possible Teaching Activities	Learning Outcome
<p><b>The child should learn to:</b></p> <p>Behave appropriately in all areas of the school building</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Box of feelings <i>e.g. picture cards showing different scenarios and possible consequences of actions, relate to real events, sequences of events etc.</i></li><li>■ Task board/simple timetables</li><li>■ Library use <i>e.g. selecting an information book relevant to current work in the classroom appropriately</i></li><li>■ Playground strategies <i>e.g. buddy stop, organised games, selecting a buddy to play with before leaving the classroom.</i></li><li>■ Use playground games as PE warm ups <i>helps to ensure all children understand the rules and gives playground games additional status</i></li><li>■ Timed instructions using music <i>e.g. by the time this song has finished your coats will be hung up and you will all be on the carpet</i></li></ul>	<p><b>The child will be able to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• arrive in the classroom and settle down quietly and appropriately</li><li>• not leave the room without permission</li><li>• go to and stay in designated areas when requested e.g. playground, hall etc.</li><li>• understand that there are different places for lessons other than the classroom and behave appropriately</li><li>• not seek confrontation during unstructured times</li></ul>

<b>Area of Development:</b> <b>Self Control and Management of Behaviour</b>		
<b>Learning Objectives:</b>	<b>Possible Teaching Activities:</b>	<b>Learning Outcomes:</b>
<p><b>The child should learn to:</b></p> <p>Maintain appropriate levels of behaviour when the class routine is disrupted</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Noise level indicator <i>e.g. traffic light indicating red- listening, yellow – quiet working voices, green-normal voices with arrow to show what is expected during session.</i></li> <li>■ Drama/role play/Small world role play</li> <li>■ Quiet area /nooks</li> <li>■ Writing table <i>e.g. use for quiet independent activities</i></li> <li>■ Task boards, <i>e.g. indicate clear, familiar routines, limit choice of activities, reinforce good practice such as reminding pupils to ensure work area is ready for the next person to use etc.</i></li> <li>■ Consequence games <i>e.g. Kerplunk, Jenga, Buckaroo – fun ways to learn to control emotions when challenged or not in control of a situation</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>The child will be able to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• accept changes to plans or disappointments with an even temper</li> <li>• show some self-discipline when others try to encourage deviation</li> <li>• accept discipline without argument or sulking</li> <li>• control emotions appropriately when faced with difficulties</li> <li>• recognise and be aware of normal sound levels</li> </ul>

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