

## Title

**Implementation of the 'How Nurturing is our School?' Accreditation Toolkit – a pilot study of an initiative designed by Fife Council Educational Psychology Service**

## What did we ask? (Research Questions)

1. Can we identify early indications of the impact on children's learning experiences through these evaluative measures of the toolkit?
2. How useful are the self-evaluation and audit tools, training materials and evaluative measures?
3. How effective is the implementation model built into this staff skills development pack?

For this initial phase, we concentrated on sub-questions related to Q1:

Gathering staff perceptions of:

- the cohesion/usefulness of the pack
- the effectiveness of the readiness questionnaire in planning for the implementation of the initial engagement with the Educational Psychology Service
- the quality of the training delivered
- the impact of this in changing aspects of the school environment/support networks
- how relationships with young people, particularly those in the target groups (SIMD 1-3) have developed

## What is the evidence base? (link to your definition of the poverty gap)

Definition of those living in poverty: Those who fall below the minimum acceptable living standards for the society they live in, because of a lack of resources.

For the purpose of this project, our target group are those young people living in SIMD 1-2.

In 2016 in Fife, 17.9% of children were classed as living in poverty, compared to 16% nationally.

There is good evidence to demonstrate the importance of strong relationships between staff and children in schools, in order to engage pupils effectively in learning, develop their learning behaviours and increase attainment (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Bergin & Bergin, 2009).

Some children come in to school already disadvantaged, including through poverty and other adverse circumstances. In 2016-17 Scottish Government data showed that children affected by poverty were significantly behind their peers from more affluent families in both literacy and numeracy.

Therefore, initiatives which develop staff skills in building effective relationships with young people, particularly those who are disadvantaged, are necessary as one of the measures to improve educational outcomes for these groups.

Nurture groups have been a dominant model in schools across the UK and are largely regarded as having a positive impact upon pupils' emotional health and wellbeing and subsequently enhancing their readiness to learn (Doyle, 2003; Boorn, Hopkins Dunn & Page, 2010). However, questions are now being raised in relation to how nurturing principles utilised with this segregated and exclusive context can be transferred to the mainstream classroom (Garner & Thomas, 2011). Consequently, increasing recognition is now being given to the more inclusive whole-school nurturing approaches, with the underlying philosophy that nurture is a whole-school responsibility. A whole school approach provides an opportunity for all pupils to observe and learn from nurturing adult role models at all levels within the school system.

Developing whole-school nurturing approaches can help all staff to understand attachment theory, its implications for the behaviour of children and young people and the role they can play in providing trusting relationships (Boorn *et al.*, 2010). This supports pupils to internalise some control over their environment and behaviour (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000), allowing them to become more independent and resilient. It is recognised that some exposure to manageable difficulties builds resilience (Music, 2011). Learning to face challenges, and to process and regulate associated emotions, helps to protect against later stressors (Lyons, Parker, Katz & Schatzberg, 2009). This also links to potentially mitigating against the effects of adverse experiences.

## What did we do?

Fife Council EP Service developed the 'How Nurturing is our School?' Toolkit (link to toolkit will be available in Autumn 2019). The purpose was to support schools to establish excellent practice in making effective relationships between staff and those young people least engaged with the learning experience, and to extend the original work on HNIOS to include a toolkit that offers specific evaluative measures and readiness tools. The pack contains:

Readiness Tools, to identify whether schools had the necessary elements in place to successfully sustain this initiative, and action planning supported by the EP to get these things in place.

Three specific sections for staff development – Relationships, Staff Style and Approach, and Curriculum, Learning and Teaching. Each of these sections include an Audit Tool to identify development needs, specific training materials and activities, Professional Practice action planning, and tools to gather impact evidence to demonstrate change.

The pack was piloted in six primary schools and three high schools by their link Educational Psychologist (EP). Each of these schools had a mixed demographic including elements of disadvantage.

The EP worked with school leadership to identify specific areas of focus, using the Readiness tools and existing school data (attendance, exclusions, attainment, staff/pupil/parent feedback).

Specific plans were made with each school based on their needs, and an agreed programme of staff training, follow up, support within school to sustain change and initial evaluative data agreed.

## What have we found?

Early feedback from EPs and schools indicate a range of findings:

- positive feedback about the coherence of the pack, and the training designed by the EP service to complement each section
- the Readiness tools have been helpful in identifying tasks which need to be done in advance of using the nurture training resources; in some of the schools this has resulted in the need to defer implementation of the training resources while this is done
- in some schools, changes in school leadership and staffing difficulties have impacted on timescales for implementation
- the School Environment Readiness tool has been the preferred focus for a number of schools. Reasons include that it supports 'quick wins' in advance of more challenging aspects of the pack such as Staff Style and Approach
- positive feedback from staff about training input, and ongoing coaching and support from EPs
- support from school leadership is key in sustaining staff commitment and engagement
- internal school support networks are necessary to sustain commitment to specific changes in behaviour, approach and style
- the initiative is at too early a stage to demonstrate impact on children and young people's educational outcomes; however, informal feedback from some school staff indicates that they feel changes in their own approach is resulting in positive changes in young people's engagement in learning

## What do we plan to do next?

Towards the end of the school session we will gather:

- feedback from HTs on utility of self-evaluation/audit tools
- feedback from staff on utility of training materials
- feedback from HTs on appropriateness of evaluative measures
- any early indication of impact on children's learning experiences through evaluative measures, including an increase in children carrying out tasks independently and an increase in the time that children will persevere with a challenging task

- feedback through teacher focus groups about how relationships with young people have developed, particularly those in the target groups (SIMD 1-3)
- feedback from EPs about the utility of the Toolkit and any changes which would enhance its effectiveness

## References

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## For further information contact:

Vivienne Sutherland, Principal Psychologist, Fife Council EP Service

[Vivienne.sutherland@fife.gov.uk](mailto:Vivienne.sutherland@fife.gov.uk)

Lynne Millar, Depute Principal Psychologist, Fife Council EP Service

[lynne.millar@fife.gov.uk](mailto:lynne.millar@fife.gov.uk)