

**AN EXPLORATION OF NURTURE GROUPS IN SECONDARY
SCHOOLS: HOW THEY ARE WORKING IN ONE LARGE
SHIRE COUNTY IN THE SOUTH-EAST OF ENGLAND**

AMANDA FURNESS

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to explore the structure and rationale of nurture groups currently running in secondary schools. Research in this area is limited and little is currently known about how these groups run. Thus this exploratory research examines the potentially highly varied approaches to nurture in Key Stage 3 in six schools across a large shire county in the south-east of England. A sequential mixed methods design was used to gather quantitative data about the structure of these groups and in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out to gauge staff perception of the rationale behind them.

The findings indicate that all participating schools have developed their own NG model in response to the needs of their most vulnerable pupils and the needs of the school organisation leading to great variation in the NG approach. Despite differences between the approaches, some aspects of the structure and rationale of secondary school NGs were consistently raised by participants as important considerations. The more complex organisational structures and needs of adolescent pupils require a more flexible and age-appropriate approach to nurture at KS3 and beyond. Further development of an appropriate model is required with a particular focus on developing communication systems, selection and assessment processes to monitor impact and embedding the nurture approach within the wider school context.

This research has some potentially important implications for Educational Psychologists (EPs) with regard to supporting school transition work, delivery of training and implementation of appropriate intervention for pupils with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) in mainstream settings.

Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted for any degree and it is not being concurrently submitted for any degree.

This research is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology.

The thesis is the result of my own work and investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references in the text. A full reference list is included.

I hereby give my permission for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for reading and for inter-library loans, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

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Dedication

For Isla.

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List of Abbreviations Used

SEBD – Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

NG – Nurture Group

NGN – Nurture Group Network

SEN – Special Educational Needs

ECM – Every Child Matters

EPS – Educational Psychology Service

EP – Educational Psychologist

TEP – Trainee Educational Psychologist

EYFS – Early Years Foundation Stage

KS – Key Stage

BPYP – Boxall Profile for Young People

LSA – Learning Support Assistant

SENCo – Special Educational Needs Coordinator

SMT – Senior Management Team

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Chapter Overview

There is an apparent increase in the number of children in mainstream schools displaying Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD), which presents a particular challenge to teachers in managing behaviour and meeting their needs (Colley, 2009). There may also be far-reaching implications for the learning and experience of other pupils. SEBD itself is poorly defined and the causes are largely unknown but are most often attributed to adverse social circumstances in homes, schools and communities. A ‘nurturing approach’ has been developed to support these children, in particular through the use of ‘nurture groups’ (Boxall, 2002). This chapter explores the definition of Nurture Groups and SEBD and places the current research within the national and local context.

“Deprivation is a downwards inwardly spiralling process of despair and depression. Nurture is an upwards and outwards spiralling process of hope and growth”

(Boxall, 2002; p 18)

1.2 What are Nurture Groups?

The ‘classic’ nurture group approach has become very popular in nursery and primary settings. It was developed by Marjorie Boxall in the 1970s as a flexible and inclusive early intervention, aimed at tackling barriers to learning and development attributed to SEBD (Boxall, 2002). The Nurture Group (NG) itself was designed to be a small class of around ten to twelve children supported by a teacher and specially trained learning support assistant, who provide structured learning experiences combining emotional, social and cognitive developmental strands (Boxall, 2002).

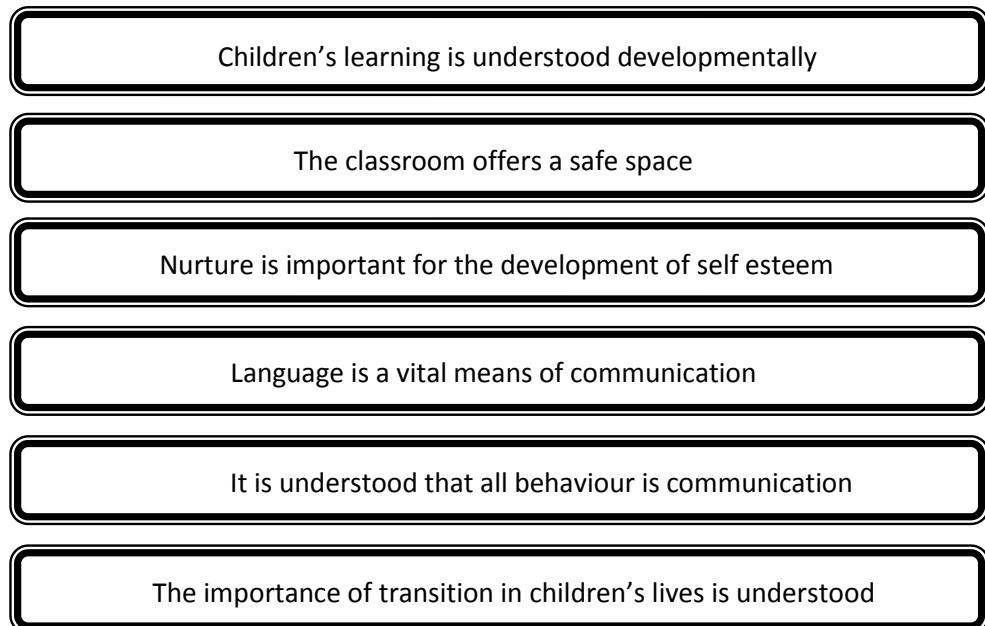
The children in the group may be behaving in ways that would be unacceptable when compared to their peers but performing at a level that would be appropriate for a much younger child in terms of their social and emotional development. Thus experiences within a NG are designed to teach children in a developmentally appropriate way rather than focusing on age appropriate teaching, ensuring that the children's needs are responded to and they are provided with a positive model of relationships both with and between adults (Boxall, 2002).

The NG takes place in a 'Nurture Room', which provides a warm, welcoming environment and secure base where learning and social activities such as eating can take place (Nurture Group Network, 2013). The members of the group spend a substantial amount of time each week as part of the group but remain members of their own class, returning for activities regularly. This is especially important, as the aim of the group is to reintegrate the children into the mainstream class when they are ready. The group is based on the 'Six Principles of Nurture' (see figure 1.1), which highlight the importance of language and communication skills in development. The group should be embedded within the whole school and all staff should be aware of the approach in order to ensure that the pupils are given consistent support.

Identifying pupils for whom NG support would be appropriate can be a sensitive issue, as the nature of NG support and underlying assumptions that are associated with it can carry with them a negative stigma. The social and emotional issues for pupils requiring support are sometimes obvious and can be communicated clearly through negative behaviours. However, in cases where pupils internalise their difficulties, it can be more challenging to identify them as requiring NG support. In

order to establish some consistency in the approach for selection of pupils, assessment tools have been developed.

Figure 1.1: Nurture Group Principles (Lucas, Insley and Buckland, 2006)



Pupils are usually referred into a group and assessed via the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall 1998), which aims to assess a young person's levels of social, emotional and behavioural functioning, providing a holistic profile of needs. More recently, the Boxall Profile for Young People (BPYP; Bennathan, Boxall and Colley, 2010) was developed, in order to assess the needs of older pupils. Additional measures for monitoring and evaluating NG support include the Boxall Quality Mark Award (Nurture Group Network, 2013) and the 'Nurture Group Reintegration Readiness Scale' (Doyle, 2001).

In developing the NG approach, Boxall drew on the principles of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), proposing that difficult behaviour in school was the result of poor or faulty attachments. Thus the prime function of a nurture group is to create the opportunity for children who have missed out on these crucial early experiences to

‘start again’, be nurtured and re-experience early attachment in school (Boxall, 2002). For a more in depth discussion of the theoretical aspects of NGs, please see Chapter 2 ‘Literature Review’.

The flexibility of this approach has resulted in the model being adapted to suit the needs of schools. This ‘model drift’ can be seen in the emergence of variants of the Nurture Group approach, as highlighted by Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (1998) in one of the few large-scale studies of Nurture Groups across England and Wales. Other than the ‘Classic Boxall Nurture Group’, which conforms to the model established by Marjorie Boxall, three alternative approaches were identified.

The first of these is described as ‘New Variant Nurture Groups’, which retain the core structural features of classic groups but may vary in the amount of time children attend. They may also target different age ranges and can therefore be found in Key Stage 3 or may serve a cluster of schools. The second approach is described as ‘Groups informed by Nurture Group principles’. These may be referred to as Nurture Groups but do not adhere to the organisational principles set out by Boxall (2002), instead often providing social and emotional support but not retaining an academic focus. This type of group may be found taking place outside of lesson time, for example existing as break-time or lunch-time clubs (Cooper, Arnold and Boyd, 1998). Finally ‘Aberrant Nurture Groups’ are identified. These may favour control and containment, undermining the key defining features of the classic model by lacking educational or developmental focus.

Cooper and Whitebread (2007) propose that only the ‘Classic’ and ‘New Variant’ approaches can be seen as genuine Nurture Groups. In contrast, ‘Groups Informed by Nurture Group Principles’ are said to provide emotional support as opposed to

focused intervention and ‘Aberrant’ groups could be considered as a potentially dangerous model promoting a distorted image of the original approach.

1.2.1 Nurturing Schools

If working effectively, the impact of a nurture group can be witnessed throughout the school, as staff and children embrace many of the practices and principles of effective nurturing (Boxall, 2002). This is supported by the work of Cooper and Whitebread (2007), who unexpectedly found that schools with a nurture group on site appeared to better support pupils with SEBD in mainstream classes than those who did not, even if the pupils themselves did not actually attend the nurture group. Beyond this, the school can continue to evolve into a ‘nurturing school’, in which all staff embrace these changes and systemic change occurs. To effectively support children with SEBD, this could involve changes in: leadership, core values, behaviour policy and practice, understanding of SEBD and teaching skills and the curriculum (Daniels, Cole, and Reykebill, 1999). This indicates a move from nurture groups as a small-scale wave three provision toward a whole-school wave one intervention.

A nurturing school is one that understands and respects members of its community – ‘All are special, all are of equal value’ (Lucas, 1999, p 14). It recognises the integral role that the context of secure relationships has in development and ensures strong links with parents. In addition, shared resources and training can support professional development for mainstream staff. A key concept in the development of a nurturing school is, ‘the fitting of the curriculum to the child, rather than the child to the curriculum’ (Doyle, 2004, p 30). This is a concept that benefits all children within a

school, including those with SEBD and can be seen as the next step toward establishing nurturing mainstream schools.

1.3 Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD)

At any one time, a number of children in schools cause great concern regarding progress in learning, physical or emotional well-being or behaviour. Any one of these factors can have significant effects on their ability to learn and function in a school and can have far reaching consequences for both the pupil and those around them. For teachers, children with SEBD can often present as the most challenging in mainstream classrooms, as their behaviour can be difficult to manage and can induce feelings of stress and uncertainty (Bennathan, 2000). For other pupils, children with SEBD can disrupt their learning and make the classroom an unpleasant place to be. Given this, it may come as no surprise that the majority of year seven pupils questioned at a mainstream secondary school in one study (N=175) indicated that they would be unhappy to be in a class with an SEBD pupil (Visser & Dubsky, 2009).

SEBD can be manifested outwardly, through disruptive demonstrations of anger or aggression, or be ‘internalising’, causing concern for an individual’s safety and well-being. The children displaying disruptive behaviour may be more commonly recognised and reported, due to the noticeable impact that they can have on class dynamics and learning. However, it is the child with SEBD, who does not disrupt the class but instead quietly internalises their difficulties that may often not be recognised. Therefore the number of children with SEBD in schools today is difficult to quantify. In addition to this, there are challenges in defining this special educational need. It has previously been said that, ‘There is no absolute

definition...The difficulties are genuine. But EBD [*Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*] are often engendered or worsened by the environment, including schools' or teachers' responses' (DfE, 1994b, p4). One description of this complex concept states that a child can be considered to have emotional and behavioural difficulties if they are '...withdrawn or isolated, disruptive and disturbing, hyperactive and lack concentration; those with immature social skills; and those presenting challenging behaviours arising from other complex special needs' (DfES, 2001, p87).

It is the popular opinion, as reflected in media, that the number of children with SEBD is ever increasing in schools and the prevalence of SEBD among young children is said to be increasing (Colley, 2009). One indicator of this was a huge increase in the number of exclusions from school during the 1990s, reaching a high of over 12,000 in 1996/97 (DfEE, 1999). However, this could also be seen as an indicator of reduced tolerance for behaviour in schools during this time. A steady decrease in the number of permanent exclusions has since been recorded (estimated to be around 5,080 in 2010/11; DfE, 2012), with a slight increase noted in the most recent figures (5,170 in 2011/12; DfE 2013). This decrease perhaps reflects improved support for schools in managing challenging behaviour and meeting the needs of SEBD pupils. The number of fixed term inclusions also continues to decrease (DfE, 2013) but remains high, particularly for boys, pupils with Special Educational Needs and those requiring free school meals. Considering the unsupportive and sometimes difficult circumstances that children with SEBD may face at home, it could be argued that exclusion from a stable school environment may do more harm than good. Furthermore, it could be said that exclusion ignores the real needs of these children by simply removing 'the problem' from the school community and implies a

‘within-child’ view of the difficulties faced rather than an interactive view of the child in context (O'Connor & Colwell, 2002).

A further possible indicator of an increase in the number of children with SEBD is a rise in the prevalence rates for mental health problems among 11-16 year olds (Cooper, 2008). This can have a serious impact on a child's achievements and engagement with school, leading to life-long consequences for a child or young person both in terms of individual success and for the rest of society. This is supported by Smith (1995) who discusses the evidence for behaviour disorders in childhood as predictors of antisocial adult behaviour. Thus, in the absence of effective intervention, a young person with SEBD is at great risk of experiencing deterioration in their presenting behaviours or challenges as they get older (Rutter & Smith, 1995).

The causes of SEBD are largely unknown but are most often attributed to adverse social circumstances in homes, schools and communities. According to Bennathan and Boxall (1996, p.100) “many of these children live under conditions of hardship and stress in overburdened and fragmented families”. There are complex systems in place in any child's life that could contribute to SEBD type behaviour at any time. Thus, it has been argued that children with SEBD should not be seen as intrinsically different. Instead, it should be recognised that the developmental processes that have shaped their behaviour may be at the extreme end of those that all children progress through (Bennathan, 2000).

From a psychoanalytical perspective, a child who has experienced a disorganised and dysfunctional upbringing may attempt to create an environment that mirrors their internal world, thus transferring this dysfunction to their school setting, acting out

their needs, deprivation and disorganisation in the classroom (Fonagy, 2001). An awareness of these developmental factors and experiences affecting children with SEBD can lead to a better understanding of their emotional needs. This awareness would potentially support early identification and intervention for these young people. Nurture Groups represent one way of providing an intervention designed to meet the needs of the child rather than change the child to meet the needs of a mainstream educational setting.

1.4 National Context

There has been a sharp rise in the number of NGs running across the UK in the last decade and recent data indicates that there are around 800 members of the NGN and around 1500 active NGs groups are now running nationally (Nurture Group Network, 2013). The number of unofficial NGs (not registered with the NGN) is unknown but could be expected to be much higher.

The increasing interest in NGs as a strategy for meeting the needs of young children with SEBD is reflected in a recognition of the value of this approach within official documents that demonstrate the government's commitment to inclusion of Special Educational Needs (SEN) pupils within mainstream schools. NGs are described as an example of early identification and intervention (DfEE, 1997; DfEE, 1998) and more recently, the DfES (2005) and Ofsted (2005) advocate NGs as good practice. Ofsted (2011) also highlighted the benefits of a NG approach in the development of social, emotional and behavioural skills, as well as linking it to support for pupils at risk of exclusion.

Recognising the importance of equal access to education and acknowledging the need to focus on educational, physical, social and emotional needs, the Every Child

Matters agenda (ECM; 2003) influenced the development of inclusive practice within mainstream schools. This is highly relevant to developing provision to support pupils with SEBD within mainstream schools and is consistent with the principles of the NG approach. It could however be considered to be in contrast with developments in delivery of Educational Psychology Services, as many move towards becoming traded services thus driven by individual service plans rather than by the wide-reaching ECM agenda. It should be noted that the ECM agenda is no longer current and new legislation is now being developed, as outlined below (DfE, 2013).

The SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) described a staged approach to supporting the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream education. This was relevant to pupils with SEBD, as they were also considered to have SEN due to associated difficulty in accessing learning. An important development for these pupils was the requirement for schools to promote emotional well-being and specifically address the needs of pupils with difficulties in this area (Children Act, 2004). More recently the importance of early intervention with particular reference to social and emotional support has been emphasised (Allen, 2011). The DFE (2012) paper ‘Pupil Behaviour in Schools in England’ recognises the impact of poor behaviour on teachers’ capacity and on other children’s learning, arguing for more effective management of behaviour and appropriate provision for pupils with SEBD.

Recent changes in legislation provide an alternative view, arguing for the removal of a ‘bias towards inclusion’ (‘Support and Aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability’; DfE, 2011). It proposed that parents should have a greater choice of school and thus all mainstream schools would benefit from expanding or improving their provision. The green paper ‘Support and aspiration: A

new approach to special educational needs and disability' describes a culture of low expectations and a desire to raise aspirations for pupils with SEN. This is relevant for pupils with SEBD, as they can be subject to low expectations and may lack the confidence or skills to reach their potential. It highlights the importance of early identification and empowering young people and parents, recognising the potential impact of difficult circumstances that apply to some families.

This paper informed the guidance on SEN within the Children and Families Bill (2013), which aims to transform the system for children and young people with SEN so that services consistently support the best outcomes for them. It places SEN within the wider picture of public services, extending the SEN system from birth to 25 and promoting greater control for young people and parents, which is demonstrated through the introduction of personal budgets. This mirrors the importance of parental involvement within the NG approach. The Children and Families Bill (2013) includes the development of an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), which aims to improve cooperation between services and involve children and parents in reviewing and developing provision, thus promoting a more streamlined and collaborative approach through unified planning. The paper also emphasises rights and provision for young people accessing further education (FE). A local offer of support must be published both by the local authority and for individual schools improving transparency and empowering parents. This may encourage schools to develop their provision for pupils with SEN including SEBD, in order to meet the needs of pupils with a requirement for social and emotional support documented within an EHCP. These changes are currently undergoing a period of consultation and new legislation is to be implemented by September 2014.

Also undergoing a period of consultation and due to be published in Spring 2014 is the new SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 2013). This document provides detailed guidance for schools and professionals involved with children and young people with SEN on the application of new legislation, as outlined previously. It describes the move towards a single support category of SEN, which includes difficulties with communication and interaction, cognition and learning, sensory and/or physical needs and social, mental and emotional health. It is notable that the ‘behaviour’ aspect of SEBD has been removed perhaps reflecting a shift in thinking towards consideration of challenging behaviour as a symptom of social and emotional difficulties rather than as an isolated issue. This has a potential impact on how pupils with SEBD are understood and in relation to NGs in particular, it may affect pupil identification and selection in the future.

1.5 Local Context

The research takes place across a county in the south-east of England, including participants from schools in each area of the local authority. This is a large county with a wide range of schools within which provision for pupils with SEBD varies. A new SEN policy is currently being developed to bring practice in line with new government legislation in response to the publication of the Children and Families Bill (2013) and the new proposed SEN Code of Practice (2013).

Specialist provision for pupils with significant needs in relation to SEBD has undergone significant changes in recent years in the county. The current local authority owned provision has been reduced to two secondary schools, providing places for around 100 pupils and one primary school provision, which is residential. In addition, some temporary support is available for pupils at risk of permanent

exclusion and day places at small privately owned provisions are used for some pupils at great cost to the local authority. Further changes are expected to take place in the near future with an application for a Free School, which is hoped to provide a greater number of places for pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs for SEBD requiring specialist support. This however potentially leaves a large number of pupils with less severe needs without adequate intervention struggling in mainstream settings.

An increase in the number of pupils experiencing SEBD in primary schools has recently resulted in the development of the ‘Grow Project’, which provides highly individualised support for a small number of pupils who are causing the most concern with the aim of keeping them in successful mainstream placements. Although based within mainstream settings, this is not a nurture project and as such does not fit with the model of NGs but is instead an alternative enhanced provision for pupils in key stage 1 and 2 who would otherwise be potentially moving to specialist SEBD provision.

Recent changes in how the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) functions as a traded service has also had an impact on the level of support received by some schools who had not bought the service in and as a result, there has been an increase in the number of requests for statutory assessment. This in turn has triggered further changes and in response, the EPS is now providing more support to schools across the county funded by the local authority. In practice, a category of need that is frequently highlighted in requests from schools is that of SEBD thus highlighting a need for adequate provision to meet the needs of these pupils within mainstream settings.

There are currently no known secondary school members of the Nurture Group Network in the county although some training has been provided. Despite this, there has been an increase in the number of NGs set up in primary schools across the county and following this, some previous work by EPs has focused on the evaluation of nurture groups in primary schools.

Increased interest from secondary schools has also been noted by EPs and attempts have been made by several schools to set NGs up for their most vulnerable pupils. This has historically been encouraged by the EPS in line with research supporting NG outcomes in primary schools. However, due to a lack of appropriate guidance and support, there is huge variability in how these groups are run for pupils in key stages 3 and 4. Thus, despite an increase in the number of secondary schools claiming to run nurture groups, nurture in Key Stage 3 remains a relatively little researched and unknown area. The high level of interest and low levels of information and support for setting up NGs at this stage clearly identify a need for further research.

1.6 The Current Research

Originally designed for use in Nursery and Primary School settings, Nurture Groups are increasingly being used in secondary schools to support some of the most vulnerable pupils. This appears to be the case in the county where the research will take place, although little is currently known about the intended purpose, structure and effectiveness of these groups. The interest in this area grew from the researcher's own experience in teaching pupils at Key Stage 1, where a shift from a more behaviourist approach to behaviour management to a more nurturing approach was noticed and the benefits for these pupils could be seen. As a Trainee EP in the

county, the researcher became interested in how this could be applied at secondary schools following work with older pupils at Key Stage 3, particularly with regard to transition. The original interest was in evaluating the groups that had been set up at secondary schools, however in order to evaluate this approach, it is first important to understand the model being used, which has potentially evolved to be highly varied across settings and different from the ‘classic’ nurture group model. Understanding the structure and rationale behind the groups leads to potentially far-reaching implications for developing effective SEBD provision within mainstream secondary schools, which may have further benefits, for example through reducing exclusions.

As so little is currently known about how these groups are working in mainstream secondary schools across the county, this research has no specific hypotheses but instead is exploratory research with the following aims:

- To explore the structure of NGs currently running in mainstream secondary schools.
- To explore the rationale behind setting up these groups and how they are run to meet the needs of vulnerable pupils at key stage 3.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, the theoretical background of Nurture Groups will be explored and the results of a systematic review of the literature will be discussed. The implications of previous research on the current study will then be considered.

2.2 Theoretical Background

The rationale behind Nurture Groups is based largely on attachment theory. This theory derives from the work of Bowlby (1969) who introduced the concept of attachment, described as a "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (Bowlby, 1969, p. 194). He suggested that a warm and nurturing relationship with the primary care-giver is essential for later healthy psychological functioning. However, the development of unsatisfactory attachment is argued to lead to a child becoming 'stuck' at an earlier developmental stage and displaying developmentally inappropriate behaviours, which are disruptive in the classroom environment. This theory will now be discussed in more depth before considering other psychological theories that inform NGs.

Attachment theory emphasises the importance of the relationship between the child and the primary care-giver in developing a pattern of interaction through which the child becomes increasingly confident to explore and experiment in their environment, thus ultimately developing individuality and independence. Through this relationship, the child is also supported to develop age-appropriate behaviour, decreased ego-centrism and an increased awareness of others expectations (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007). This relationship should be consistent and provide security for the child in testing boundaries

and engaging in learning experiences. A child with secure attachments will seek proximity to their attachment figure in any situation that causes them anxiety or if they are unsure of how to respond or behave. In this way, an attachment figure becomes a secure base from which the child can explore and return to as required.

Given appropriate early attachment experiences, it is argued that the child will internalise aspects of this sensitive and responsive relationship to create internal working models of social relationships. These internal working models form the expectations that a child will take into new experiences, informing their beliefs about how others will behave towards them and in turn influencing the way that they behave towards others. Attachment theory therefore provides a framework for understanding interpersonal relationships. It is argued that children who have experienced appropriate early nurturing experiences will develop secure attachments and will therefore develop a healthy self identity in which they feel worthy and loved. This in turn impacts upon their ability to initiate and maintain positive relationships and develop perseverance, attention, cooperation and curiosity, which in turn provides a strong basis for effective learning (Boxall, 2002).

Bennathan and Boxall (2000) argue that children who do not experience supportive and responsive behaviour from an attachment figure will develop internal working models that depict others as unavailable and the self as unworthy and unlovable. In the absence of sufficient early nurturing and a secure relationship, the child may not develop a consistent understanding of social relationships, will not feel secure to partake in exploration or new learning experiences and will rely on their own underdeveloped resources, which in turn can lead to distorted social emotional and cognitive development. These children may be identified as having low self esteem, poor emotional literacy, reluctance to learn and general mistrust of adults and therefore often

struggle to cope with the social and academic demands placed on them in a mainstream learning environment (Bennathan and Boxall, 2000).

Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters and Wall (1978) carried out a study in which infants were separated from their main caregiver and placed in a ‘strange situation’. They observed the infants’ responses and identified patterns of attachment, including secure attachment and three types of insecure attachment, namely: avoidant, ambivalent and disorganized attachment. Children with each of these patterns of attachment are likely to display different behaviours and respond differently and it is therefore important for NG practitioners and educators in general to have a good understanding of them.

In the ‘strange situation’ study, infants with ‘avoidant attachment’ were seen to show little distress when their caregiver left the room and ignored or avoided contact upon their return (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters and Wall, 1978). Geddes (2006) suggests that pupils with this pattern of insecure attachment are likely to perceive the teacher-pupil relationship as threatening and may avoid interaction, preferring to focus on a task. Thus these pupils may avoid asking for help or reject support, which can be frustrating for adults supporting them in class.

In contrast, infants demonstrating ‘ambivalent attachment’ were observed, in the ‘strange situation’, to be anxious and very distressed when separated from their caregiver. They were thought to find little security or comfort in the caregiver’s return, rejecting contact. Geddes (2006) suggests that pupils with ambivalent attachment may display high levels of anxiety or uncertainty, attention needing behaviours and difficulty attempting tasks independently in class.

Finally, Ainsworth et al (1978) identified infants demonstrating a pattern of attachment that was described as ‘disorganised attachment’. These infants did not appear to have adopted consistent strategies for dealing with stress. Pupils with disorganised attachment may display intense anxiety and behaviours which can be interpreted as controlling, difficulty forming trusting relationships and responding to authority and unwilling to accept when they are incorrect (Geddes, 2006). It is this pattern of attachment that can lead to some of the most challenging behaviour in schools, causing high levels of frustration and anxiety in pupils, parents and teachers. Pupils with insecure attachments in any of the patterns described may be given the label of having SEBD, although this can be more likely for pupils displaying higher level disruptive behaviours in class.

Bomber (2007) indicates that there are a number of risk factors that can increase the chances of children developing insecure attachments. These include factors such as post-natal depression, bereavement or loss, abuse or illness. Many children will experience a combination of risk factors throughout their development but not all of these children will go on to experience emotional and behavioural difficulties as a result. Protective factors such as strong family support, a positive outlook, peer relationships and support within the community or educational setting can all help to build resilience, potentially reducing the long-term impact that risk factors are likely to have on emotional well-being and development.

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) has been criticised for its hypothetical nature and is therefore said to be ‘un-testable’, not allowing adequate insight and understanding of how internal working models develop (Rutter, 1995). It can also be said to be simplistic, not taking adequate account for complexities in family dynamics. Attachment theory was initially rejected by psychoanalytic psychologists, who favoured ‘drive’ theories, viewing a need for attachment as instinctive rather than evolutionary (Fonagy, 2001). It

was described as being “mechanistic, non-dynamic and explicated according to misunderstandings of psychoanalytic theory” (Fonagy, 2001, p1). Conversely, Bowlby’s theory has been praised for providing a clear model of normal child development (Slater, 2007), which was thought to be lacking from psychoanalytic perspectives at the time. Psychologists have since demonstrated an acceptance that attachment and psychoanalytic theories have many similarities and are not mutually exclusive in seeking explanation of social development (Slater, 2007).

It has also been suggested that this theory provides one of the most important frameworks for understanding risk and protective factors in social and emotional development (Zeanah, 1996) and it has become one of the dominant approaches to understanding early social development. The modern day impact of attachment theory can be seen in policy and practice across agencies working with children, including those that work closely with Educational Psychologists and education professionals. It is, however, suggested that the potential for multiple attachments and a more flexible critical period is greater than first proposed (Colwell & O’Connor, 2004). This clearly has implications for professionals in education and older children, who may benefit from intervention focusing on attachment. Despite criticisms, additions and alterations, the basic principles of attachment theory are now widely accepted and provide a solid theoretical basis for nurture groups.

A NG aims to support children who lack secure attachments in order that they can learn to value themselves through the experience of being valued and cared for by others. Boxall (2002) indicates that the experiences provided by the NG allow children to develop attachments to the adults involved, developing more appropriate internal working models, receiving approval and experiencing satisfactory outcomes. In addition to providing additional key attachment figures in the nurture group practitioners, the

group itself functions as a secure base from which to explore the whole school environment. The use of attachment theory itself can also provide staff with an alternative way of understanding challenging behaviour often displayed by pupils with SEBD and can therefore allow them to consider more developmentally appropriate responses (Geddes, 2006). Thus a NG can be considered to be a sustainable therapeutic intervention, not only for the pupils directly involved but also for staff and peers in developing their understanding of confusing behaviour in order to facilitate inclusion for these pupils in mainstream settings (Cooper, 2008).

Nurture Groups can also be understood by considering a number of alternative theoretical approaches including social-constructivist, humanistic and cognitive learning theories. Approaches to learning within a NG can be seen as consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) theory of child development in which cognitive development is supported by social interaction. In this theory, learning is facilitated by a more competent helper, who models and provides gradually decreasing levels of support, as confidence and competence increase. This is known as 'scaffolding' (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976) and usually takes place within the 'zone of proximal development', requiring knowledge of the learner's current level of expertise and their learning potential when mediated by an 'expert'. Vygotsky also emphasised the role of language in development of internal thought. The relationships fostered within the NG are seen as an essential part of the learning and the importance of language is recognised in the six principles of nurture.

Principles of social learning theory (Bandura 1977) are also relevant to NG practice, as members of the group are exposed, through social activities such as eating, to positive models of behaviour and appropriate emotional responses. In this way, pupils can be expected to learn about appropriate behaviours in a social context.

From a social constructivist perspective, reality is constructed by individuals through language and interaction (Burr, 2003). Thus, it could be argued that, by providing an ‘alternative model of reality’ through discussions and experiences within the NG, the reality for the pupils involved is altered for the better.

It could be argued that NGs meet the needs of children who may experience a lack of security, safety or basic care (Cooper and Whitbread, 2007). By meeting these basic human needs, it could be argued that NGs then allow children to access higher level needs required for successful learning and meeting their potential. This view is consistent with the humanistic perspective taken by Maslow (1943) in his hierarchy of needs (see appendix 1).

An alternative view is provided by cognitive theories of development such as Piaget’s (1951) theory, which describes learning and development in stages. One of the principles of nurture (see figure 1.1) states that learning should be understood developmentally, thus teaching in NGs focuses on the stage of development at which pupils are currently functioning rather than the stage that would be appropriate given their chronological age. Although Piaget’s model lacks flexibility, it can be useful to consider the stages of learning in NG practice. Behaviourism also influences approaches to learning within the NG. Although punishment is not considered a useful concept, positive and negative reinforcement are used to encourage appropriate and positive behaviours within the group. This type of feedback is based on Skinner’s (1953) theory of operant conditioning, in which behaviours are encouraged through the use of positive reinforcement such as rewards or praise and less desirable behaviours are negatively reinforced, for example through ignoring them.

Therefore, although NGs are based primarily on the theory of attachment (Bowlby, 1969), this approach draws on multiple theoretical influences focusing on different aspects of learning and development. Furthermore, Nurture Groups maintain a positive focus, looking for development opportunities rather than looking at deficits. This draws on the principles of the increasingly popular approach of positive psychology, is empowering for schools and can change the atmosphere from despair to optimism (Boxall, 2002).

2.3 Systematic Literature Review

A systematic literature review exploring previous research into the value of NGs in primary schools and NGs in secondary schools was conducted on the EBSCO databases ‘Psycinfo’, ‘Academic Search Complete’ and ‘Education Search Complete’. Initial searches using the term ‘nurture groups’ yielded between 77 and 91 results. Additional search terms of ‘effectiveness’ and ‘secondary schools’ yielded N=8 and N=7 results respectively. As so few journal articles had been identified, search terms were then expanded (as detailed in Appendix 2) to ensure that other literature had not been missed. From these results the following 11 articles were selected for inclusion in the systematic review (see section 2.3.1 ‘The Value of NGs in Primary Schools’). In addition, a total of N= 6 articles were selected in relation to NGs in secondary schools and are critiqued in section 2.3.2 (‘Nurture in Secondary Schools’). Relevant studies were selected in reference to the following inclusion and exclusion criteria (see table 2.1).

Additional searches were conducted using the terms ‘nurture groups and effectiveness’ and ‘nurture groups and secondary schools’ on Google and Google Scholar. This identified the Nurture Group Network, which was considered to be a valuable source of information. In addition several documents including Ofsted reports were identified and

reviewed. These were felt to add value in understanding the wider approach to nurture but did not meet inclusion criteria. Reference is therefore made to such sources but they were not felt to be appropriate for inclusion in the systematic literature review.

Table 2.1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
<p>Studies exploring the effectiveness or value of NGs within either primary or secondary settings.</p> <p>Studies focusing on NGs in secondary schools.</p> <p>Studies involving pupils attending mainstream educational settings.</p> <p>Studies that have taken place between 1990-2013.</p> <p>UK based studies.</p>	<p>Studies focusing on NGs in special schools or other specialist provisions.</p> <p>Studies that took place prior to 1990.</p> <p>Studies based outside the UK.</p>

The reference sections of all identified studies were checked for further articles not revealed through the online searches. No further studies were selected for inclusion in this review. Articles that have been included in the systematic review are summarised in table 2.2 and table 2.3 (see Appendix 3 for a more detailed overview).

Table 2.2: Summary of studies included in systematic review (primary schools)

Study	Focus/Methodology
Iszatt and Wasilewska (1997)	308 students (288 NG students, 20 non-matched controls). Interviews focusing on outcomes.
Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001)	25 schools. 2 matched comparison groups. National, longitudinal study focusing on effectiveness of NGs.
O'Connor and Colwell (2002)	3 NGs, 68 students. Repeated measures evaluation of NGs. Follow-up after two years.
Cooper and Whitebread (2007)	359 students. 187 matched students in four groups. Focused on outcomes, effect on mainstream and re-integration, wider school context
Sanders (2007)	17 NG students, 9 controls. Repeated measures evaluation of NG pilot using Boxall Profile over a one year period.
Binnie and Allen (2008)	6 NGs, 36 students. Repeated measures evaluation of NGs.
Reynolds, MacKay and Kearney (2009)	16 NGs, 16 controls (179 students). Repeated measures evaluation focusing on pupil outcomes and parental views.
Scott and Lee (2009)	4 NGs (25 NG students, 25 matched controls). Repeated measures evaluation of part-time, cross-age NGs.
MacKay, Reynolds and Kearney (2010)	Review of literature. Focus on pupil outcomes particularly with regard to academic attainment.
Seth Smith, Levi, Pratt, Fonagy and Jaffey (2010)	10 NGs, 5 control groups (83 students). Repeated measures evaluation of NGs focusing on pupil outcomes.
Shaver and McClatchey (2013)	3 NGs (33 students). Repeated measures evaluation of NG. Also collected pupil and staff views.

Table 2.3: Summary of studies included in systematic review (secondary schools)

Study	Focus/Methodology
Cooper, Arnold, and Boyd (2001)	25 schools. 2 matched comparison groups. National, longitudinal study focusing on effectiveness of NGs.
Cooper and Whitebread (2007)	359 students. 187 matched students in four groups. Focused on outcomes, effect on mainstream and re-integration, wider school context
Cooke, Yeomans and Parkes (2008)	Evaluation through case studies. Focused on progress made by KS3 pupils in an individual case study.
Colley (2009)	Exploratory research using interviews. Focused on views of Head Teachers and NG practitioners in secondary schools.
Garner and Thomas (2011)	3 NGs. Content analysis and interviews with staff, pupils and parents focusing on the role and contribution of NGs.
Kourmoulaki (2013)	2 NGs within 1 Scottish secondary school. Interviews with staff, pupils and parents. Focused on structure, function and impact of NGs.

2.3.1 The Value of Nurture Groups in Primary Schools

As discussed in section 1.2 ‘What are Nurture Groups?’ the NG approach was originally created for use in early years and primary school settings. Thus, the majority of research on this approach focuses on groups running in EYFS, KS1 or KS2. Although the issues for implementation of NGs in secondary schools are likely to differ to those relevant to primary schools, the increased interest in this approach for pupils in KS3 or above may be due to the perceived value of NGs for these younger pupils and the largely positive outcomes reported in previous research. Before looking at NG provision in secondary

schools, it is therefore important to understand their value within primary school settings. The context of research in this area is now introduced and relevant research identified through the systematic review will be discussed.

Despite the large amount of research focusing on the ‘classic’ NG model, the amount of good quality research into the effectiveness of NGs is limited, with many studies being small scale, retrospective or based on anecdotal evidence (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007). However, the literature consistently links NGs to positive outcomes, including benefits in school placement, emotion and behaviour as well as cognition and education (Reynolds, MacKay, & Kearney, 2009). Thus, although NGs themselves require considerable investment, the potential benefits for young children and their families are convincing (Ofsted, 2011). NGs have been promoted as an appropriate strategy for early identification and intervention in order to meet the needs of young children with emotional and behavioural difficulties (DFEE, 1998; DfEE, 1997; DfES, 2005; OFSTED, 2005). NGs were also described as ‘essential provision in supporting young children who were most in need and who displayed complex and compound behaviours’ (Ofsted, 2009; p6).

Demonstrating school placement and behavioural effects, a convincing large scale study was conducted by Iszatt & Wasilewska (1997). They found that of 308 children placed in nurture groups, 87% were able to return to the mainstream classroom after less than one year. At follow-up, 83% of the original group were still in mainstream placements with only 4% requiring SEN support beyond the schools’ standard range of provision. In a comparison group of mainstream pupils (N=20), who were identified as needing nurture group provision but did not receive it, a much higher level of persistent difficulties were found, with only 55% coping in mainstream settings and 35% moved to special school placements. However, the significance of these findings should be

interpreted with caution, as there were no adequate matching measures between the groups and they differed significantly in size. Ethical considerations are also raised here, in terms of equal opportunities for the control group to access support.

Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001) reported on preliminary findings of a two-year research project in which they studied a range of NGs across different ages and in different areas. They noted no significant differences between types of NG but consistent improvements in scores on the Boxall Profile (Bennathan & Boxall, 1998) and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997) for pupils accessing NG provision. The views of staff, parents and pupils were also obtained and results indicate perceived improvements for pupils in academic as well as social, emotional and behavioural outcomes. However, comparable objective data was not available for analysis regarding academic progress and so these claims remain subjective. This was also only an interim report and thus analysis of the complete data set had not been carried out. This research is also relevant for consideration of nurture in secondary schools and is thus referred to further in section 2.3.2.

Further to this, O'Connor & Colwell (2002) found, using Diagnostic Developmental Profile data, that significant improvements in cognitive and emotional development and social engagement could be seen for five-year-old pupils placed in nurture groups for three terms. These findings support those of the previous study, showing that improvements were maintained after two years. However, the long-term effect of NGs cannot be interpreted with confidence from this research, as follow-up data was only available for 12 of the original 68 participants. A potential lack of consistency in the person assessing the pupils and the presence of demand characteristics are also acknowledged by the researchers.

In the University of Leicester Nurture Group Research Project, Cooper & Whitebread (2007) conducted a national longitudinal study, measuring the progress of nurture group students (N=546) in personal, social and educational outcomes. They found statistically significant improvements in all areas for pupils who attended nurture groups and noted that the most effective groups were those that had been established for more than two years. A criticism of this research (and indeed many other studies of this type) is in the use of teacher assessment measures and the possible influence of expectancy effects. However, a control group was used to account for this and no expectancy effects causing distortions in the data were found. This research is reviewed in more detail in section 2.3.4 ‘Nurture in Secondary Schools’.

Further research claiming to demonstrate the advantages of NGs for pupils in relation to improved behaviour, self-esteem and academic outcomes was conducted by Binnie and Allen (2008). This research took account of parent and staff views as well as within child measures, such as the Boxall profile, in evaluating part-time NGs within six schools. By including the views of Head Teachers, the researchers were also able to draw conclusions about the positive impact that NGs had on the wider school context (see section 1.2.1 ‘Nurturing Schools’). However, it could be argued that the research did not take adequate note of the voice of the child, neglecting to obtain their views and instead acquiring ‘within-child’ data through objective measures. Although objective measures are important in evaluation of outcomes, from a critical realist perspective, the experiences of pupils are also an important consideration and thus should be acknowledged in exploring the mechanisms underpinning the intervention.

In an evaluation of part time and cross age NGs, Scott and Lee (2009) also found significant improvements in Boxall Profile scores for pupils accessing NG provision compared to matched controls. Additional gains were observed in academic attainment

and motor skills although these were not significant. The researchers indicate that pupils accessing the provision at a younger age were seen to make the most progress in the measures used. The findings of this research are convincing, however despite matching controls within the same schools as target pupils, difficulties in recruiting control participants who were appropriately matched in terms of their social and emotional functioning are identified by the researchers. Thus, although methodological attempts to control for unequal baseline measures were made, this potentially impacted on the results.

Recent research by Shaver and McClatchey (2013) provides further support for the claim that NGs are an effective intervention for pupils with SEBD. In this research, the effectiveness of NGs in Northern Scotland was investigated through collection of pre- and post-intervention Boxall Profile scores across three primary school NGs. These showed significant gains for children accessing the groups. The views of children (N=19) and staff (N=5) were also obtained, indicating that pupils enjoyed the NGs and that improvements had been noted by staff. This is quite convincing research in favour of NGs, although the study was small-scale and thus generalisability of the findings could be challenged.

In a review of the literature, MacKay, Reynolds, & Kearney (2010) examined the relationships between attachment, academic achievement and the impact of nurture groups, providing evidence for the proposal that nurture groups result in educational benefits. In summary, they report a clear link between attachment and academic achievement, that nurture groups directly tackle attachment issues and therefore have a positive impact on academic achievement.

The claim that nurture groups directly address issues of attachment perhaps comes as no surprise, as this intervention has been developed from and is guided by assumptions of attachment theory itself. Despite the acceptance of nurture groups as an attachment intervention, it must be noted that the beneficial effects of nurture groups could also be due to a range of other factors. For example, the effect of class size may have a substantial impact on outcomes, as in smaller classes pupils have more focused time, in which they are engaged in active interaction and learning, with a teacher (MacKay, Reynolds and Kearney, 2010). It could be argued, however, that class size alone is unlikely to have such a notable effect, given the severity of the problems faced by children with SEBD who are selected for nurture groups. Regardless, it seems clear that research on the efficacy of nurture groups should endeavour to control for this extraneous variable.

Support for the claim that nurture groups have a positive impact on academic achievement is less well established. There are few studies demonstrating this impact and many of these are flawed due to the use of subjective outcome measures (MacKay, Reynolds and Kearney, 2010). In addition to personal, social and emotional outcomes, as noted previously, Cooper and Whitebread (2007) indicate that improvements in cognitive engagement, as measured using the Boxall Profile, were noted following participation in nurture groups. However, attrition rates were high and no controls were used so the effect can therefore not be isolated from potential improvement over time.

Sanders (2007) did use controls and also reported academic gains for pupils attending nurture groups, as measured by the Boxall Profile. Scores were compared for KS1 and KS2 pupils attending a NG and those without access to this provision as part of a pilot project. Students accessing the groups were reported to have made significantly greater

gains. However, the smaller control group sample (N=9) generally had higher entry scores on the Boxall Profile than the students accessing the NG (N=17), thus limiting the validity of the comparison. Sanders did however ensure triangulation by collecting views from pupils, staff and parents, which is a criticism for much of the previous research.

More recently, two controlled studies have replicated these findings, comparing controls and using objective measures, thus supporting the view that nurture groups are linked with gains in academic achievement. Reynolds, MacKay and Kearney (2009) conducted a large-scale investigation of nurture groups across schools (N=32) in Glasgow. They completed pre and post measures of emotional functioning and literacy development. It was found that children who attended the nurture groups showed significant gains in achievement compared with matched controls ($p < 0.001$) and additionally, emotional and behavioural functioning was improved for these children. However, the following limitations should be noted. Nurture group schools were originally selected by the local authorities and so the factors influencing their decisions could not be controlled for. Blind assessment procedures could also not be used and so assessment outcomes were potentially influenced by teacher perception.

In support of these findings, Seth-Smith, Levi, Pratt, Fonagy and Jaffey (2010) also reported gains in academic achievement, as measured by National Curriculum levels in literacy and numeracy, for children (N=83) attending nurture groups in comparison with a matched sample. Improvements were also noted for pupils with regard to social, emotional and behavioural functioning in comparison to the control group. These gains were found to persist over five months. However, the children accessing the NG were younger, had substantially lower levels of academic attainment on entry to the group and academic progress was measured solely through teacher assessment, thus potentially

providing opportunity for bias. In addition, the time that teachers had been working in the NGs ranged from two months to six years, implying that teacher experience may be a factor that could potentially have had an impact on the progress of pupils.

Improvements in social, emotional and behavioural development are consistently reported in the literature and it is suggested that this in itself provides a basis for further academic development (MacKay, Reynolds and Kearney, 2010). Other indirect influences on academic achievement may occur through systemic changes, beginning with a nurture group's positive influence on the whole-school ethos and the school's subsequent improved ability to support children with SEBD (Binnie and Allen, 2008). Better behaviour management, attendance and fewer exclusions are all likely to have a positive impact on academic outcomes.

In summary, the findings of studies in this area are promising. There are strong indications that nurture groups have many beneficial effects and can effectively support children with SEBD. Although nurture groups themselves can be an expensive intervention, the potential benefits in reducing the cost of antisocial behaviour and alternative school placements and provision are convincing (MacKay, Reynolds and Kearney, 2010). However, as noted, there are a number of limitations in the current research. These include methodological weaknesses such as small samples, lack of controls and the absence of quantitative measures of change.

2.3.2 Nurture in Secondary Schools

Although the model for NG provision is well established for use in primary schools, the evidence base and research on NGs as a secondary school provision is relatively undeveloped with only six relevant published sources located through the searches

conducted for this literature review (see table 2.3 and Appendix 3). Evidence of the success of this approach for adolescents is often anecdotal, limited to Ofsted reports (Ofsted, 2008) and professional testimonies, perhaps mirroring the evidence base for ‘classic’ nurture groups during their development. However, these early findings appear to be promising. For example, Steer (2009) reports that head teachers recognise the importance of nurture groups at key stage three (KS3) in supporting pupils most at risk and that enhanced relationships with parents can also occur (Colley, 2009).

In support of the concept that it is not too late to intervene in KS3, neuroscientists have also found that brain plasticity is at its height in the first three years of life and again during early adolescence (Schore, 2005). Thus it follows that early adolescence may be the ideal time to offer missed nurture and an opportunity to form secure attachments (Cooke, Yeomans, & Parkes, 2008). In addition, a shift of focus from containment and control towards development and promoting positive outcomes in relation to challenging behaviour also supports the use of a nurture approach for older pupils in secondary schools.

An example of research highlighting the benefits of NGs for older pupils is provided by Cooper and Tiknaz (2007). A brief review of their findings is included as it adds value to the understanding of NGs within a secondary school context, however it was not included as part of the systematic review, as the research lacks rigour. Cooper and Tiknaz (2007) investigated the views of children in KS3 NGs, finding that some children do benefit from being involved in this intervention. The pupils involved enjoyed the individual attention, activities, the environment and the calmness and quietness of the group and were reported to feel safe and comfortable. Key areas of support were reported to be around anger management, developing coping strategies and peer relationships. However, only the views of a small number of children appear to

have been included in the research and little information is given about the procedures used for obtaining these views or the way the groups were implemented.

Recent literature indicates that secondary schools are increasingly using a NG approach to support pupils with SEBD (Colley, 2009). Cooper, Arnold, and Boyd (2001) note that an emphasis on early experiences and activities aimed at early development are clearly not age-appropriate for secondary school pupils. In these cases adaptations must be made in order to develop age appropriate strategies for meeting the social, emotional and psychological development needs of adolescents (Cooke, Yeomans, & Parkes, 2008). Given the documented success and popularity of this approach in primary schools, it is becoming clear that there is a central need to establish age appropriate strategies for delivering the nurture group approach to older children (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000), who may otherwise face exclusion from secondary schools. Six key pieces of research focusing specifically on nurture in secondary schools, identified through the systematic review detailed in section 2.3, will now be discussed.

As outlined in section 2.3.1 ‘The Value of Nurture Groups in Primary Schools’, Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001) carried out an initial comparison between the two secondary schools included in their sample and primary NGs. They reported no significant differences in improvements, which could be taken to suggest that the findings for primary NGs can be generalised to secondary NGs. However, these findings are tentative and due to the small sample size, generalisability is limited. In addition, it has been argued that NGs are less effective for older children in KS2 (for example see Scott and Lee, 2009).

Cooper and Whitebread (2007) investigated the effectiveness of NGs in primary and secondary schools in a longitudinal study over two years and across 11 Local Education

Authorities in England. They gathered quantitative data using the Goodman Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997) for both NG participants and controls and the Boxall Profile for NG participants to explore outcomes associated with social, emotional and educational functioning, the effects of variation in NG structure and the impact on the wider school. The researchers report that statistically significant improvements were found for pupils attending NGs in terms of social, emotional and behavioural functioning. They also found that NGs which had been in place for more than two years were significantly more effective than groups which had been in existence for less than two years and significant improvements in behaviour were also seen for other pupils with SEBD in mainstream classes in comparison to those in schools that did not have any NG provision. The latter finding is argued to indicate the positive impact of NGs on the wider school community.

In criticism of this research, only three secondary schools, running groups described as ‘groups informed by NG principles’, were included within their sample of 34 schools so it is difficult to attribute the significant findings to the success of secondary school nurture groups in particular.

Research looking specifically at secondary school Nurture Groups by Cooke, Yeomans and Parkes (2008) describes a KS3 nurture group in practice over the course of one year and describes in detail a successful case. For this NG, which ran in year seven and eight, children were selected through communication with year six teachers and administration of the Boxall Profile. Pupils attended the Nurture Group in the afternoons for a term and a half after which a follow-up therapeutic group was gradually introduced to support reintegration. A typical session mimicked those of a classic NG for younger pupils, consisting of a greeting, snack, directed activity, free choice and a structured goodbye activity. However, differences to the ‘classic’ model can be seen in that the timetabling

of sessions was flexible so that pupils did not miss the same lessons each week and Year 8 pupils did not attend the group every day.

Cooke, Yeomans and Parkes (2008) report that improvements could be seen for the pupils involved, as measured on the developmental strands of the Boxall Profile. However, there is no indication as to whether these improvements would be considered to be statistically significant or not. In addition, there was no comparison to a control group of pupils within the school with SEBD, thus the improvements cannot be confidently linked solely to the impact of the NG itself. The significance of these findings can also be questioned due to the subjective nature of the measures used.

The researchers also reported more inconsistent results for scores on the diagnostic profile section of the Boxall Profile. While some aspects showed progress toward the normal range in scores, others showed a move toward the ‘concern’ range of scores, suggesting that in some areas, the intervention may have had a negative effect. Cooke, Yeomans and Parkes (2008) offer an explanation for this in that these changes could simply reflect normal adolescent development. This highlights the importance of the use of age-appropriate measures, which are developed according to normal adolescent development and standardised for this age range. The recently updated Boxall Profile for Young People (Bennathan, Boxall, & Colley, 2010) would now address this issue. The researchers also accept that the length of time pupils spent in the group and the length of time between pre- and post-intervention measures may not have been sufficient.

Cooke, Yeomans and Parkes (2008) also include detailed qualitative data, in the form of a case study, describing the experience of a pupil from the NG. This suggests that the group was a highly successful intervention for this pupil and could be a valuable

resource for some pupils in secondary schools. They argue that adolescence can be viewed as a developmental process, in which the individual is required to separate from their early attachment figures, thus tending to regress to earlier states of mind. These changes could reflect in what is often described as the challenging behaviour of the pupils. For the more vulnerable pupils, who have experienced poor attachment or loss at a young age, a nurture group can be a support for them as they go through this process.

Further positive outcomes were noted for the wider school in that staff were reported to be very supportive and positive about the group and stronger links were seen to develop between primary and secondary schools in the area through which training and good practice could be shared (Cooke, Yeomans and Parkes, 2008). This has potential implications for transition, particularly as parents appeared to view this provision positively when making school choices . Although this research supports the value of NGs in secondary schools, for pupils with SEBD, anecdotal evidence of this kind based on an individual case, is perhaps not strong enough to justify the time and resources required for schools to set up NGs of their own.

Colley (2009) asked secondary school practitioners to reflect on NG provisions running within their schools, examining similarities and differences to the ‘classic’ model, looking at experiences, perceived outcomes and assessment. Reflections on the piloting of the ‘Boxall Profile for Young People’ (BPYP; Bennathan, Boxall, & Colley, 2010) are also included. He suggests that although similarities to ‘classic’ nurture groups can be seen in secondary settings (Boxall, 2002) and the six principles of nurture can be employed appropriately, clear differences in the models have also been identified. Firstly, the number of young people who could benefit from being part of a Nurture Group, is potentially much larger at secondary schools than the number of places available. Therefore the approach is required to become broader and may include other

interventions specific to learning and behaviour needs. These may also focus on a wider range of issues, raised by adolescent experience, such as positive life choices linked to sex, drugs and alcohol (Colley, 2009). Although attachment difficulties may be central to how pupils cope with changes and difficulties raised in adolescence, life experiences themselves can be more complex than those experienced by pupils in the early years and this should be acknowledged in the support given through a NG. Attendance may also be limited by time and space constraints, resulting in the group taking place over a more varied number of hours, different times of day and a number of locations. It could be argued that the latter point goes against the principles of nurture however, in practice, this flexibility is potentially beneficial in permeating nurture throughout the school (Colley, 2009).

Colley (2009) also indicates that differences may be seen between a primary and secondary school approach to developing nurture in the wider school context. Given the much larger size of secondary schools, a whole-school initiative may not be practical and a gradual approach may be more appropriate. Allowing the benefits of a NG to ‘speak for themselves’ in raising awareness also means that the credibility of this approach is more likely to be accepted by staff (Colley, 2009). Links to the wider community may also be supported through the NG, for example through supporting the relationship of the school Police Community Support Officer with students and creating links with other professionals that pupils may come into contact with outside of school or where they can turn for support in the community (Colley, 2009).

In criticism of this research, its exploratory nature could be considered to lack value in terms of establishing the effectiveness of NGs within a secondary school setting and in identifying an appropriate model for practical application. However, it could also be argued that the value in this type of research is in developing knowledge and

understanding of the approach in practice thus providing a base upon which further research can develop and expand. The research does not appear to be guided by explicit research questions and could therefore be considered to lack direction. The absence of pupil and parent views means that the opportunity for triangulation is missed and no objective measures are used. It does however, provide valuable and in-depth data by exploring the views of Head Teachers and NG practitioners with regard to their current position and also with regard to potential changes to the approach for the future.

Following on from this research, there was recognition that the original Boxall Profile (Bennathan & Boxall, 1998) may not appropriately reflect adolescent development, in terms of assessing the outcomes of NGs for this age group. Therefore recent development of age-appropriate resources has resulted in the creation of a secondary version of the Boxall Profile called the ‘Boxall Profile for Young People’ (Bennathan, Boxall, & Colley, 2010). This is a restandardised version of the original, providing a framework for the assessment and intervention for young people with SEBD in addition to a means of monitoring and evaluating NG outcomes. A resource is also currently being developed to support nurture group leaders in delivering focused support through strategies to target aspects of the BPYP. In addition, reflecting a recognition of increasing interest in the area of NGs for adolescents, recent revisions to the training course provided by the Nurture Group Network have taken into account the needs of secondary schools in delivering this intervention. It is argued that further revisions to the ‘Boxall Quality Mark Award’ (Nurture Group Network, 2013), currently awarded to NGs to reflect ‘gold-standard’ practice, may also be required for NGs in secondary schools (Colley, 2009).

A recent study by Garner and Thomas (2011) explored the role and contribution of secondary school NGs through the perceptions of children, parents and staff. This

focused on three nurture groups running in UK secondary schools, which were selected according to specific inclusion criteria to ensure that they were based on Boxall's original model (Boxall, 1996). Groups were selected if they had been established for at least a year and contained one member of staff who had received NG training. Focus groups and individual interviews were used to obtain participants' views.

The findings of this research highlight the value placed on NGs by children, parents and staff and indicate that such groups can run successfully in secondary settings. However, in support of previous research, core differences from the 'classic' NG model were also found to exist. This therefore challenges the basic premise of NGs as a means of replacing missed early childhood experiences and accepts that a variant of the original NG approach may be more appropriate for children at this stage of their lives and in the differing secondary school setting. The research identified key recommendations for nurture group practitioners, including the importance of staff, provision of a secure base, developing socio-emotional independence, relationships with parents and support systems for the group in the wider school context.

This study addresses a gap in the research and the inclusion of a range of views in establishing the value of NGs is a strength. However, several limitations can also be identified. Firstly, very few parents were engaged with this research, thus limiting the strength of findings drawn from this data. In addition, a theory-driven analysis, focusing on the principles of nurture, means that other interesting themes that could have potentially been identified from the data may have been lost. The research also only focused on nurture groups that had been established for at least a year following official NGN training. The number of these available is still relatively limited and so a very small number of nurture groups were included in the research. Although this enables a detailed and in-depth view, a broader comparison of the use of this approach in schools

is not possible and the strength of the findings is limited. By using strict selection criteria, the research also did not consider groups that have been set up independently by schools, which is increasingly common, as there is a wide range of information readily available. The structure and rationale behind these ‘alternative Nurture Groups’ is thus an area for further development.

Most recently, research by Kourmoulaki (2013) explored the structure, function and impact of NGs within a Scottish secondary school setting. Staff, pupils and parents were interviewed in relation to two NGs running for first and second year pupils. Staff had received training by the school EP. Pupils were identified at primary school and assessed using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997) and the Boxall Profile (Bennathan & Boxall, 1998). NGs were run in a designated room on a part-time basis with pupils attending on flexible timetables to accommodate their learning needs outside of the group. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to select participants for the research. These sampling methods create potential bias, as initial participants have the opportunity to select others who share their views and purposive sampling by its nature restricts the researcher to selection of participants meeting predetermined criteria.

Kourmoulaki (2013) found that NGs in the secondary setting facilitated a smooth transition from primary to secondary school, supported development of social skills and prepared them physically and emotionally for learning. They also make reference to the NGs providing a ‘safe refuge’ (p.65) for the members. The findings highlight differences in opinion regarding reasons for NG participation. The NG staff were indicated to be at the heart of the NGs being described as attentive and consistent, enabling a trusting relationship to be developed. Kourmoulaki (2013) found that the value of the NGs was considered to be reflected in feeling safe, feeling a sense of

belonging, promoting school readiness, development of social skills and devising anti-bullying strategies. The relationship between staff and pupils and the resulting increased knowledge that staff have of the pupils and their needs is highlighted. Supportive mechanisms at various levels were recognised as an important aspect of the NGs. Implications for the wider school context were found to include financial resources, support structures and information sharing. Systemic gaps were identified in the areas of formal communication, monitoring and reintegration processes.

The generalisation of findings from this study are limited by the number of participants and the method of sampling. As the research took place within one school context, the findings of this research cannot be thought to be representative of NGs running in other secondary school contexts. This also limits exploration and comparison of different approaches to running secondary school NGs, although this method did provide in depth data by focusing on parent, pupil and staff views. The sampling methods are potentially biased to some degree, although they are pragmatic and alternative, more random sampling methods are most likely inappropriate given the topic of the research and the potentially limited number of NGs available for study.

In summary, previous research into NGs in primary school settings has identified value in terms of school and pupil outcomes. There is however, a limited amount of previous research focusing specifically on secondary school NGs. Within this, research has included very few NGs (sometimes only a single group or school) and has often focused on the perceptions or experiences of pupils, parents and staff as opposed to the structure and rationale of these groups. Strict selection criteria has also, in some cases, limited the research to exploring only the traditional NG model and whether this can be applied to or have positive outcomes within secondary school settings. Little research has looked at what changes would need to be made to this model to create an approach that meets the

needs of secondary school settings and their pupils on a wider scale. Where the original NG approach may be inappropriate and without establishing an appropriate model, further work on evaluating NGs in secondary school settings is difficult.

2.4 The Current Research

The current research aims to address some of the identified limitations and gaps in previous research through the exploration of nurture groups. The structure of a range of nurture groups will be investigated and a more in-depth exploration of the structure and rationale behind selected groups will be included. A range of views will be gathered from staff at different levels within the school, providing an overview of the role of the nurture group in the wider school context. As the study focuses on the structure and rationale of groups set up in school settings rather than the experience of these groups or perceived outcomes, including the views of parents and children is beyond the scope of the current research but would be a key area for future research.

Thus, In addition to the aims outlined previously, this research aims to address the following research questions:

RQ 1. How are Nurture Groups structured in secondary schools in the County?

RQ 2. Which Nurture Group models are reflected?

RQ 3. What is staff's understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of Nurture Groups?

RQ 4. What do staff perceive to be the aims and objectives of Nurture Groups?

RQ 5. What do staff feel are the most important aspects for Nurture Groups in secondary schools?

Chapter 3 - Methodology and Data Collection

3.1 Chapter Overview

The review of literature in Chapter 2 highlighted a clear need for further research into secondary school NGs and the importance of examining whether this provision can be transferred from early years settings in order to meet the needs of vulnerable adolescents within secondary schools. In this chapter, philosophy of research will be discussed and the ontological and epistemological position taken for the current research, which aims to address these issues, will be established. Methodological issues and practices are discussed along with ethical considerations.

3.2 Ontology and Epistemology

This research could be approached from a number of different ontological and epistemological positions. Ontology can be thought of as the nature of reality (Fox, Martin, & Green, 2007) and different ontological positions are often referred to as ‘world views’. Epistemology refers to the explanatory principles that underpin knowledge and the relationship between the ‘knower’ and what can be known (Moore, 2005). The philosophical positions discussed in this chapter can be considered to form a continuum between the scientific objective world and the socially constructed world view. It is important for a researcher to consider the ontological and epistemological basis of their research and practice, as they will undoubtedly influence the approach taken towards the work, interpretation of the findings and the relevance of these for others (Moore, 2005). For this research, the positions of positivism, constructivism and critical realism were considered.

Positivists take the view that there is an objective reality, which can be described as a ‘world that exists independent of human belief, perception, culture and language we use to describe it’ (Hart, 1998; p85). This philosophical approach is often thought of as the ‘scientific method’ with a central aim of explanation (Robson, 2002). It is based on several assumptions, which are in sharp contrast to ontologies such as social constructionism. One assumption made by this approach is the observable nature of reality. In addition, knowledge is thought to be ‘value-free’ and not affected by cultural or philosophical beliefs (Fox, Martin, & Green, 2007). The epistemological assumption is that reliable quantitative measures can be used to test hypotheses based on fact and establish causal relationships between variables. With regard to the current research, a positivist position would mean that the researcher would focus only on observable factors and outcomes of NGs. This would not acknowledge individual perceptions regarding the NGs and would therefore potentially lead to the loss of rich and interesting data, allowing exploration of the groups on a superficial level only. Associated research methods such as random sampling and control groups would also not be appropriate given the aims of the current research.

The positivist position has been criticised widely by researchers from different philosophical positions. It has been argued, for example, that this scientific approach is inappropriate in the context of psychological research and to social sciences as a whole (Robson, 2002). Other approaches also reject the view that research should only focus on observable phenomena and state that facts and values are in fact inseparable. The positivist approach is criticised for ignoring social phenomena and, in striving to achieve objectivity, treating participants as objects rather than partners in research (Robson, 2002). A further criticism of this approach is that, in distancing themselves from

research, researchers do not acknowledge or reflect on possible influences of their own perception, although these may still be present.

The subsequent development of post-positivism has addressed some of these concerns. This approach supports the view that there is an objective reality that can be researched but challenges the concept of finding the absolute truth, acknowledging imperfections in the research process that are particularly apparent when studying human behaviour (Creswell, 2003). As evidence is believed to be imperfect and fallible, a researcher cannot prove a hypothesis but can instead seek to show that it cannot be disproved (Creswell, 2003). This has important implications for the use of a null hypothesis in quantitative research design. It is also acknowledged, from this ontological position, that the beliefs and experiences of the researcher will inevitably affect the research. It is a deterministic and reductionist philosophy, which maintains that causal relationships exist and attempts to reduce ideas to small, discrete and testable variables. The epistemological stance remains one of objectivity leading to investigation through measurement and observation, where control of confounds, reliability and validity issues are important (Creswell, 2003).

In the context of the current research, as with positivist positioning, the difficulties in using objective and controlled measurement of identified variables remain. Identifying, measuring and controlling for variables is challenging in a research area where little is currently known and disproving hypotheses requires a degree of prior exploration in order to inform hypothesis formulation. This was therefore also considered to be an inappropriate ontological position to be adopted for the current research.

In contrast to positivism, a social constructionist (or relativist) world view assumes that individuals seek understanding of the world and develop subjective meanings of their

experiences. These meanings are constructed by groups of people through social interaction and the use of language, often in response to historical and cultural norms (Creswell, 2003). Thus, there is no one true reality but rather multiple perspectives. Research underpinned by this philosophical approach often focuses on processes of interaction and different perspectives and experiences. The importance of social and historical context is also recognised. Qualitative methodology, using broad and general questioning, can be used to explore and make sense of the socially constructed realities of the participants and reflexivity plays an important role in recognising the potential impact of a researcher's own constructs (Robson, 2002).

This perspective also differs from that of the positivist and post-positivist positions in that it is largely inductive, with researchers often developing a theory or patterns of meaning from the data rather than testing a predetermined theory through hypotheses and experimental strategies (Creswell, 2003). For the current research, this would mean that the experiences of NGs would be explored and the structural aspects of the groups would not be acknowledged in the same way. Although this is more appropriate than a strictly positivist approach, in that in-depth data can be gathered with regard to the rationale and experience of NGs in secondary settings, it was felt that it would not enable sufficient exploration of the structure of the groups, thus only partially meeting the aims of the research. It was also felt that a constructionist ontology may not allow a deductive approach or an appropriate level of acknowledgement for the existence of a developed NG approach and its theoretical underpinnings.

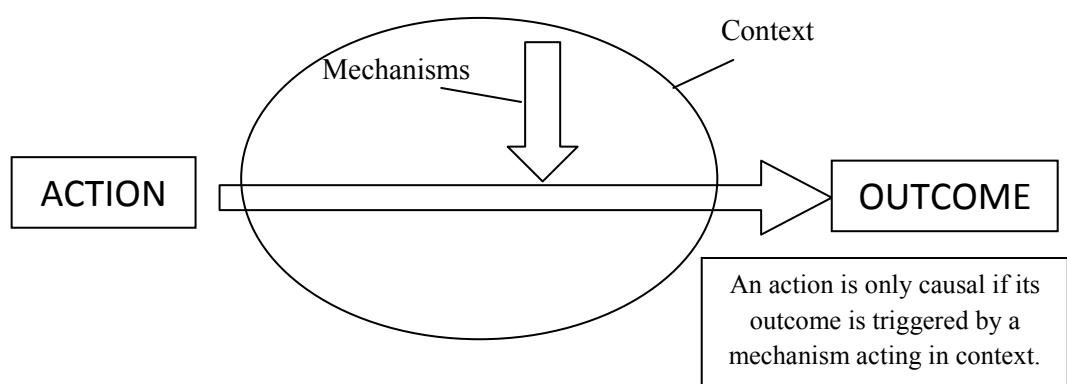
Lying on a continuum between the extremes of positivism and constructionism and bearing some resemblance to post-positivism, critical realism recognises that attempts to explain the world are bound to be fallible and that absolute knowledge of reality is not possible (Scott, 2005). Drawing on positivist principles, critical realism maintains that a

reality does exist but it also reflects relativist principles, in that there is a degree of acceptance of multiple experiences of this reality. Thus it can be seen as a philosophical approach that combines a realist ontological perspective with relativist epistemology (Issac, 1990).

Critical realism proposes that ‘causal outcomes follow from mechanisms acting in contexts’ (Pawson & Tilley, 1997; p58). This assumption is referred to as ‘generative causation’ and is represented in figure 3.1. The benefits of this approach include looking beyond the surface to search for underlying processes. In order to gain this knowledge, critical realists take an epistemological stance of a combination of objectivity and subjectivity, using both deductive and inductive approaches. This assumes an interactive link between the researcher, the context and the participants and is often represented by a mixed-methods design.

Thus the proposed research takes a critical realist stance to form a framework for better understanding the mechanisms involved in delivering Nurture Groups as a secondary school provision. The benefits of this approach include looking beyond the surface to search for underlying processes and is therefore applicable to understanding how Nurture Groups work in practice.

Figure 3.1: Generative Causation (Pawson & Tilley, 1997; p58)



3.3 Purpose

The researcher's initial interest in evaluation of NGs at secondary schools led to consideration of an evaluative purpose for this research. However, with very few NGs set up using a classic NG model and no appropriate criteria to evaluate against, it was decided that the purpose of the research should be more exploratory in nature.

Exploratory research aims to gain an understanding of a new area or particular phenomenon (Robson, 2002). It does not seek to find causal relationships between variables and as such has no specific hypotheses and is well suited to qualitative research. This is supported by Patton (2002; p193) who stated that 'in new fields of study where little work has been done, few definitive hypotheses exist and little is known about the nature of the phenomenon, qualitative inquiry is a reasonable beginning point for research'. As there is relatively little currently known about the delivery of secondary school nurture groups, this is the most appropriate purpose for this research.

3.4 Research Questions

Hedrick, Bickman and Rog (1993) outline four types of research question: descriptive, normative, correlational and impact questions. Descriptive research questions seek to explore and describe a phenomenon or population in relation to the research area whereas normative research questions expand on this and examine data related to standards or norms. Correlative research questions seek to establish the strength and direction of a relationship between two variables and finally, impact research questions seek to establish causal links between variables (Mertens, 2010).

The following research questions identified for the current research could therefore be labelled descriptive questions, which aim to explore the structure and rationale of nurture groups in secondary school settings.

RQ 1. How are Nurture Groups structured in secondary schools in the County?

RQ 2. Which Nurture Group models are reflected?

RQ 3. What is staff's understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of Nurture Groups?

RQ 4. What do staff perceive to be the aims and objectives of Nurture Groups?

RQ 5. What do staff feel are the most important aspects for Nurture Groups in secondary schools?

The structure of NGs are explored primarily through RQ1 and RQ2, whilst RQ3,4 and 5 focus more on the underlying rationale for setting up a group and running it in the chosen way. The current research aims to answer these questions using the following design.

3.5 Research design

The ontological and epistemological stance of critical realism taken for this research means that mixed methods is the most appropriate choice in terms of methodology. The design is strengthened by taking this approach, as it addresses the weaknesses of using either method alone, giving a higher degree of confidence in the findings. For example, quantitative methods, most commonly associated with positivist positioning, can result in losing rich information provided by multiple perspectives. In contrast, qualitative methods, most commonly associated with social constructionist positioning, can result in loss of generalisability. The decision to choose mixed-methods was also influenced by the purpose of the research. As there are no specific hypotheses and the experiences

of NGs are likely to be varied, the quantitative data will provide clear and structured information on how the groups are run, whilst the more open nature of qualitative data collection techniques allows a more in-depth view of the rationale behind these groups and experiences of them in practice.

A sequential design was used. The first phase of research used quantitative methods as the complementary method, providing a broad overview of the structure of Nurture groups. From analysis of this descriptive data, groups of interest were selected and qualitative data was collected from these participants. As richer information on the structure and rationale of Nurture Groups can be gained from the qualitative data, this was the principle method. A representation of this design is shown in figure 3.2. Thus, in keeping with the critical realist perspective, the quantitative data collected reflects the ‘reality’ in terms of the structure of Nurture Groups, whilst the subsequent qualitative data gives a more detailed insight into the experience of this reality for participants.

Figure 3.2: Representation of exploratory sequential mixed-methods research design (quan-QUAL)



3.5.1 Research participants

The population for this research includes all secondary schools with a provision that they classify as a NG in the county where the research took place. This was potentially all secondary schools across the county ($N=78$), although it is recognised that it is very unlikely that every secondary school setting offers a NG provision.

From this population, N=12 eligible schools registered an interest in the research. Of these, N=7 completed consent forms and returned questionnaires, giving a return rate of 58%. N= 6 of these were included in the quantitative data analysis. One participant did not return a fully completed consent form with the questionnaire, which required signatures from both the NG practitioner as the primary participant and the Head Teacher on behalf of the school. Despite following this up, it was therefore not possible to obtain informed consent and this participant was excluded from the research at this stage.

Four participating schools, one from each geographical area of the county, were selected for follow-up interviews to gather more in-depth qualitative data. It should be noted that one school withdrew from the research at this point and in a second school, interviews were only agreed for the NG practitioner and a member of the senior management team due to staff changes. Thus, for two of the three remaining schools, three participants were interviewed in order to gather a range of views and triangulate information. In the third school, an interview was conducted with a member of SMT and an interview was conducted by email with the NG practitioner, as they were unable to engage in a face-to-face interview at this time. This gave a total of eight participants providing data for qualitative analysis.

In order to preserve anonymity, details of participants and their schools have been kept deliberately brief. Table 3.1 provides basic information regarding the participants taking part in the qualitative phase of the research.

Table 3.1: Details of Participants

Participant Number	Role in School
1a	SENCo
1b	Deputy Head
1c	Learning Support Assistant (LSA)
2a	SENCo
2b	Head of House
2c	LSA
3a	SENCo
3b	Deputy Head

3.5.2 Sampling and Selection Procedures

NG practitioners were selected to take part in this research as it was felt that they were best placed to provide complete and detailed descriptions and reflections on the structure and rationale of the NGs they run. Additional views were sought from a member of the senior management team and an LSA working with the group to gain insight into how the NG is perceived at different levels across the school and to triangulate information.

A purposive sampling strategy was used for initial participant selection, enabling the researcher to select participants who currently have direct involvement with a provision that they consider to be a NG. Purposive sampling of this type has been criticised for limiting generalisability of the research findings. However, in the current research, the value of this approach in gathering highly relevant and in-depth data through qualitative methods was recognised to be well suited to the exploratory nature of the research and was selected as the most appropriate strategy.

Care was taken not to impose strict selection criteria based on the ‘classic’ NG model, so as not to limit responses and potentially miss interesting and popular adaptations to this model. However, it was felt that some basic inclusion criteria should be set in order to ensure that the provisions included were within the area of NGs. Therefore, schools were asked to consider their groups in accordance with the criteria in table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Inclusion criteria for participant eligibility

Inclusion Criteria
Small group of pupils
An open ended rather than fixed, short term intervention
Focusing on social and emotional well-being alongside learning
Supporting vulnerable pupils
Run by qualified staff (i.e. not peer support)

All secondary schools were initially approached in order to identify schools eligible for participation in the research and eligible schools registering an interest in the research were then invited to take part. Participants for the quantitative phase of the research were NG practitioners (N=7) and completed questionnaires providing data focusing largely on the structure of their NG. For the qualitative phase of research, selection of participants was based on responses from the questionnaires with a view to obtaining a diverse range of views (Mertens, 2010). In this way, a range of Nurture Groups that vary in structure and that are based in schools of varying size in different areas of the county could be further explored. It was ensured that schools from each of four geographical areas across the county were included.

Additional participants from each school were recruited for the qualitative phase of the research in order to also gather views of the NG in the wider school context. These included a member of the senior management team and a Learning Support Assistant (LSA), who were identified by the NG practitioner within the school who had completed the initial questionnaire. In this way, although the potential for bias is greater, appropriate members of staff could be approached and consent gained prior to entering the school which was beneficial for pragmatic reasons.

3.5.3 Quantitative Data collection

Questionnaires were chosen as the method of quantitative data collection, as this allows responses to be gained from a larger number of participants in a short time. No known measures currently exist that would be appropriate to use for the collection of information regarding the structure of Nurture Groups. Therefore, the questionnaire (see appendix 4) was designed by the researcher and was based on the classic model of nurture groups used most commonly in primary school settings. This raises issues in terms of a lack of reliability and validity data for the questionnaire. As this was unavailable, the questionnaire was piloted with three primary school teachers and six EPs in the local authority. No changes were required following feedback from these professionals. The questionnaire consisted of 19 questions focusing on the structure of the NG and included an option to take part in follow-up interviews for the qualitative phase of the research.

3.5.4 Qualitative Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews (see appendix 5) were selected for qualitative data collection, as they allow an insight into individual perceptions of the NGs (Willig, 2008). In addition, this approach allowed further clarification of issues arising from questionnaire responses and ensured that the same basic lines of inquiry were followed for each participant. In order to protect the data from potential interference by the constructs of the researcher, all interviews were recorded prior to transcription.

An advantage of this approach is that additional aspects of language, such as social cues interpreted through body language, can be observed when using face-to-face interview techniques. However, care should be taken to avoid influencing the participant through social cues exhibited by the researcher (Opdenakker, 2006) and a good interview atmosphere conducive to gathering honest and detailed data can be very much dependent on the researcher's skill in both verbal and non-verbal communication. This highlights the need for good interpersonal skills and an awareness of the potential influence one can have whilst interviewing. This effect can be controlled for to some extent by the structured element of semi-structured interviews, which also provides the advantage of opportunities for some comparison between interviews during analysis. In addition, conducting interviews in person promotes spontaneous responses from participants, which could be thought to increase honesty (Opdenakker, 2006), although the opportunity to reflect on answers, for example in email interviews, perhaps allows for richer and more in-depth information to be provided.

Denscombe (2007) describes 'interviewer effects', in which participants may respond differently depending on how they perceive the interviewer. Factors such as age, sex and profession can therefore have an impact. This was an important consideration for the

current research, given the interviewer's professional links with the local authority. Gomm (2004) also describes the importance of considering 'demand characteristics' in which responses are influenced by what the participant feels the situation requires. Attempts to control for these issues were made through a clear introduction outlining the aims and exploratory nature of the research, reassuring participants that their responses are unique and valued and putting them at ease. The importance of establishing and maintaining trust is critical to gathering honest and open responses from participants and an awareness of ethical issues, such as confidentiality and anonymity, is key when using interviewing as a technique for qualitative data collection (Newton 2010).

The open ended nature of the questions used in the interview schedule (See appendix 5) allows participants to give more detailed, open and honest responses (Patton, 2002) and include experiences and opinions that are unlikely to be included in written responses, for example through questionnaires. However, the personal nature of responses provided through interview can mean that findings are difficult to generalise and a further disadvantage to using semi-structured interviews is the time commitment required for interview and transcription, meaning that sample sizes are often small.

Alternative methods such as focus groups were not considered appropriate, as the expected variety in the way the NGs are run would potentially make the discussion challenging and group dynamics may lead to practitioners altering their responses. It was felt that, although a structured interview approach may be more reliable, its limited flexibility means that it would be inappropriate in this case and would not create a relaxed atmosphere thus it would potentially be an uncomfortable experience for the participant. An intensive interview technique was also considered to be inappropriate, as the interview schedule needed to focus on key areas in order to answer the research questions.

3.5.6 Interview Schedule

For semi-structured interviews, the wording and order of questions were pre-determined (see appendix 5) but flexibility for the researcher was provided in the form of clarifying responses and asking for further detail based on the answers given by the participant. In order to support the participant in feeling comfortable and in accordance with recommendations by Krueger and Casey (2009), the interview schedule was designed to follow a particular questioning route. Thus, more descriptive and general questions were used at the start of the interview before moving on to more in-depth questions at a later stage.

3.6 Data analysis

An analysis of the nominal quantitative data provided by the questionnaires was used to establish the structure of groups being delivered in participating schools. This resulted in descriptive data that provides information on general trends within the sample (see chapter 4 ‘Findings’).

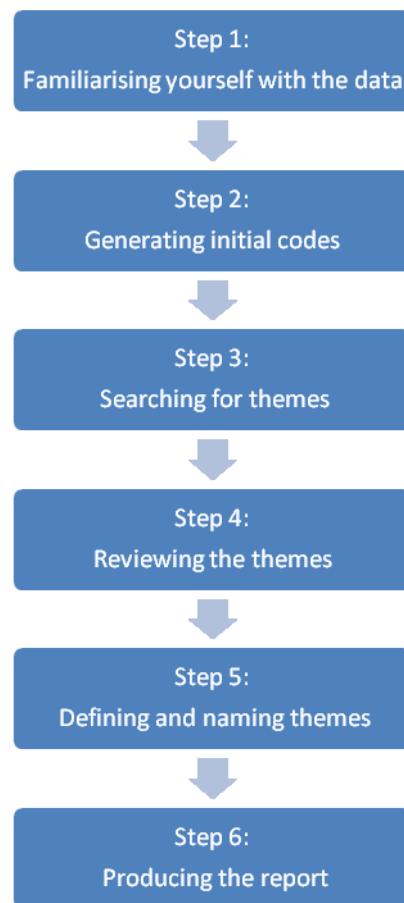
Qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews was analysed using thematic analysis. This method is reported to be one of the most commonly used methods of qualitative analysis (Howitt & Cramer, 2008). Thematic analysis is not necessarily limited to use within one theoretical framework and has been described by Braun and Clarke (2006) as a ‘contextualist’ method residing between the two extremes of positivism and constructionism. Thus it is compatible with the critical realist position of this research, reflecting the reality of Nurture Groups but also looking beyond the surface of this ‘reality’ for participants.

The method itself consists of identifying, analysing and reporting on themes across the data set. Themes are often determined by prevalence but there is also an element of researcher judgement in identifying important or interesting themes that are relevant to the research questions. The identification of themes can be driven by a deductive (theory driven) or inductive approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The former analysis would be analyst-driven with themes of interest identified prior to analysis, relating to the researcher's theoretical knowledge and previous research. This can provide a less detailed description of the data overall, instead providing rich data on some aspects but potentially overlooking others. The latter approach bears some resemblance to grounded theory in that the themes are identified from the data and the analysis can therefore be considered to be data-driven. The principles of nurture provide a clear starting point for deductive analysis and data was therefore coded for these principles initially. However, although there is a strong theoretical background to Nurture Groups themselves, their use in secondary schools is poorly understood so the current research also used an inductive approach to analysis in order to identify themes that reflect the entire data corpus. The themes identified are also likely to be at the semantic level including description and interpretation of the data. This is more consistent with the critical realist paradigm than analysis at the latent level, which would examine underlying assumptions within the data.

An advantage to using thematic analysis is that it clearly identifies key features of a data set and can provide rich data related to the research questions. In doing this, both similarities and differences across the data set are highlighted and unanticipated insights can be gained. The flexibility of thematic analysis can also be seen as advantageous, allowing the researcher to use a variety of approaches within this method to analyse the data. However, this also means that care must be taken to ensure that the actual methods

used are clearly identified. Thematic analysis has been the focus of relatively little detailed study in comparison to other qualitative analysis methods such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and the approach has therefore been criticised due to a lack of clarity and consistency in the procedures used. One clear and replicable model of thematic analysis is provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) and this was felt to be an appropriate model to use. A summary of Braun and Clarke's (2006) model of thematic analysis identifies the process that was undertaken (see figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3: Summary of Braun and Clarke's (2006) method of thematic analysis



3.7 Research Procedures

Ethical approval was requested in January 2012 and obtained for this research on 25th January 2012 (see appendix 6). Before approaching participants, the questionnaire developed by the researcher was piloted on primary school teachers in schools that the researcher was working in where a NG was running, in order to assess face validity and relevance of the questions. Experienced EPs were also asked to provide feedback on the appropriateness and clarity of the questions. From the feedback given, no changes were required.

Following this, initial telephone contact was made with the SENCo at all mainstream secondary schools across the county (N=78) to briefly explain what the research was about, to establish firstly whether a nurture group that met the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined previously was currently running and secondly to identify an appropriate contact within the school. For schools expressing an interest in taking part in the research, an information sheet and consent forms were sent along with the questionnaire to the named contact.

Quantitative data was gathered from the responses and was used to create descriptive statistics allowing an overview of the structure of a range of different NGs from across the county. Four key participating schools were then selected for interview ensuring that schools in different geographical areas and of various sizes were included.

Contact was then made with the selected participants to make arrangements for semi-structured interviews with themselves and other staff members who had given their consent. The interviews took place at the schools during term time and were carried out by the researcher. They varied in length and participants were verbally debriefed and thanked for their participation at the end of the interview. All interviews were recorded

on a digital voice recorder and stored in a password protected file. Original interviews and participant data will be kept securely for one year and then destroyed. Each interview was then transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions were checked for accuracy at this point by the researcher and a second coder. An example of a transcript can be found in Appendix 7 (see Appendix 14 for all transcripts). Anonymised transcripts and collated data will be kept securely for a total of three years after the completion of the research.

Before qualitative analysis began, the transcripts were read a number of times and the recordings were checked to ensure that they were correct and that the researcher was fully immersed in the data. This is consistent with step 1 of Braun and Clarke's (2006) model, 'familiarising yourself with the data'. Initial handwritten notes were added to the transcripts including areas of interest and initial interpretations. This was important in identifying any influence of personal experience or bias. Transcripts were then coded initially (step 2) for the six principles of nurture, using key phrases (see appendix 8). Given the small sample size and variation in the personnel interviewed in each school, transcripts were included in a single group for analysis.

The researcher then revisited each transcript in turn to identify areas of interest or concepts that had been raised by multiple participants, using an inductive approach to identify and code for further potential themes. Inductive and deductive coding were differentiated by colour (see appendix 9). Given the small number of participants and the expected variation in responses, potential themes were not identified solely on frequency but also on perceived importance by the researcher and the degree of emphasis by the participant. The anonymised transcripts were then given to a second coder in order to check inter-rater reliability. The second coder was in agreement with 38 out of 40 coded extracts, giving an agreement rate of 95%. The second coder was

then given an overview of all coded transcripts and differences were discussed.

Subsequently coding was agreed allowing analysis of the data to begin.

The researcher then used coded extracts to identify emerging themes (step 3). The coded transcripts were cut out and placed on a flat surface so that they could be grouped together into themes and sub-themes. The researcher checked back to the original transcripts regularly to ensure that relevant quotes were included and captured by the themes that had been identified (step 4). At this stage the researcher was flexible in the labelling of these themes to ensure that they captured the true nature of the responses. Once it was felt that appropriate themes and sub-themes had been identified, these were labelled carefully to ensure that the names given to the themes reflected the participants' responses accurately (step 5). At this stage again, support was requested from the second coder to ensure that there was agreement on the themes identified. This was important to ensure that the themes were not only a result of the researcher's own interpretation of the data. Agreed themes were then included in the form of a thematic map in Chapter 4 (step 6).

3.8 Validity, Reliability and Generalisability

As the design of this research is mixed methods, validity issues for both quantitative and qualitative data must be considered. Thus it was important in the first instance to pilot the questionnaire to ensure face validity. This is a measure of the degree to which the questionnaire is subjectively viewed as an appropriate tool for assessing the concepts it was designed to measure. Internal validity, which refers to the control of confounding or irrelevant variables within the questionnaire design, was also established so that the data collected can be said to represent the intended measure (structure of groups). As there

are no known alternative ways of recording group structure already in existence, concurrent validity is difficult to establish however some agreement may be seen between the quantitative and qualitative data.

Boyatzis (1998) describes inter-rater reliability as the consistency of judgement amongst multiple observers and it is generally perceived to be a method of verifying coherence in understanding and thus strengthening the findings in qualitative research (Marques and McCall, 2005). Therefore this approach was considered to be important in increasing the reliability of the current research findings. Several checks took place to establish inter-rater reliability throughout the analysis process, as outlined in section 3.7 (Research Procedures).

As the principle method of the proposed research is qualitative, care should be taken to reflect on and acknowledge the role of the researcher throughout. Ensuring transparency regarding the philosophical positioning of the researcher and the methods used in data collection and analysis is therefore paramount. Thus a research diary was kept throughout to support transparency and reflexivity (see extract: appendix 10a). Interpretations have been justified and the processes of analysis and interpretation have been made explicit, in order to increase confirmability within the research. Dependability is addressed through the use of guided questions in semi-structured interviews. In analysis of the qualitative data, the potential impact of the researcher's own views must be considered. Therefore, in order to support inter-rater reliability, a second coder was used for analysis of the qualitative data. Triangulation was also used to ensure reliability, through a second coder analysing the same extract from a transcript to verify the accuracy of the themes identified.

Given the specific nature of the sample, generalisability is potentially limited and so maximising response rate for the quantitative data collection was an important consideration. In order to do this, several attempts were made to contact participants who had expressed an interest in taking part in the research. Participants were offered information on NGs and feedback from the research upon its completion as an incentive to take part. Most potential participants expressed a keen interest in this. Qualitative responses reflect individual experiences of each NG and are therefore unlikely to be generalisable to the wider population, although the common themes identified through thematic analysis demonstrate key areas that were raised across the sample.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) indicate that researchers have a duty to ensure the quality of their research and should therefore supply sufficient detail for the research to be replicable. This is more of a challenge in qualitative research, however several steps were taken to ensure the quality of this research. At the end of interviews, responses were summarised for participants and checked with them. Numerous checks were also built into data analysis, such as the inclusion of a second coder with whom to discuss and reflect on the data set. Transferability is also increased by providing a detailed account of the methodology and any changes that took place throughout data collection and analysis.

3.9 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is an important process in personal and professional development and can be defined as, ‘thoughtful, conscious self-awareness’ (Finlay, 2002, p532). In research, reflexivity maintains openness and honesty (Creswell, 2003) in addition to helping the reader to understand the researcher’s perspective and reasoning. This may be beneficial

when others question the research. Reflexivity is also essential to ensure that the views of participants are fairly represented (Finlay and Gough, 2003). A researcher will have multiple influences on design, collection and interpretation of data. It is therefore essential to reflect upon one's own beliefs and the rationale for selecting methodology for a piece of research, as well as taking into consideration the possible effects of the researcher's positioning on interpretation of findings. Reflexivity is particularly important in qualitative research in order to increase integrity and trustworthiness (Finlay, 2002) and is congruent with the critical realist perspective, which emphasises maintaining accuracy of viewpoints in addition to acknowledging the effect of the researcher on interviewees (Finlay and Gough, 2003). It is therefore important that the researcher is open and honest about one's own thoughts, beliefs, prejudices assumptions and opinions in order to improve the transparency of the research (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007).

Within Chapter 1 'Introduction', the personal and professional background of the researcher was outlined and the theoretical assumptions made for this research were described in Chapter 3. This has been included so that the reader can have some insight into the researcher's role throughout the research process. An important consideration during this research was the potential impact that the positioning of the researcher with regard to profession could have on the responses of participants. The researcher in some respects occupied a dual position throughout the research, acting both as a researcher and as a representative of the Educational Psychology Service. Although attempts were made to keep these roles as separate as possible, the potential impact that this may have had on the relationship with the school and responses provided by participants should be recognised. This impact was potentially larger in the area of the county within which the

researcher was working as a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the time the research was carried out.

General relationships between schools and the EPS in light of the local context and changes with regard to service delivery are also an important consideration, as these were in some cases strained following withdrawal of services. The schools may also have been aware of links between professionals, for example the researcher knowing their link EP. This has potential implications for the degree of honesty provided in responses, as participants may have been unlikely to want to admit to any differences between their ideal or intended provision and the NG in practice. Although anonymity and confidentiality were assured, it should be noted that participants may have retained a level of anxiety about responses being unofficially shared with colleagues within the EPS or with other schools.

By keeping a research diary, it was possible to reflect on personal views and potential biases in order to acknowledge them and attempt to minimise the impact they had on analysis of the data. This is known as ‘reflexive bracketing’ (Ahern, 1999). Reflection on personal views was also undertaken during the data collection process (see research diary extract, Appendix 10b).

As a research method, interviewing requires strong interpersonal skills, such as putting the participant at ease, the use of active listening and providing support and empathy without introducing interview bias (Oppenheim, 2000). These are skills that were felt to have been developed well as a result of the researcher’s professional background and personal skills. However, a professional interest in the area of research and in promoting a NG approach to support pupils with SEBD that has developed through educational psychology and teaching practice, could potentially raise issues for the interpretation of

responses and the expectations that the researcher has with regard to research outcomes. It was therefore important to recognise and separate as far as possible previous experiences and knowledge of this approach from the current research.

3.10 Ethical Issues

Ethical considerations in research design, as outlined in the BPS (British Psychological Society, 2000) and HCPC (Health and Care Professions Council, 2008) ethical guidelines, have been considered and made explicit to participants in the information sheet (see appendix 11) and consent form (see appendix 12) in order to gain fully informed consent. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) state that it is good practice to revisit the issue of consent within the interview itself. Thus, the participants were asked if they still wished to be interviewed before starting and were reminded that they could leave at any time. As the research took place in schools, permission was sought from staff directly participating in the study but also from head teachers. In addition the researcher has Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) clearance, allowing access to schools. Interviews took place during term time in school settings, thus minimising potential risks for the researcher and any potential inconvenience for participants. Risk of harm for participants is also minimal and information was provided for participants on where they can get more support with running their NG, should they want to access this following the research.

It was made clear that participants have the right to withdraw from the research without giving a reason and that they could do this at any point. All data is kept securely and all transcripts were anonymised prior to the involvement of the second coder. Data was available only to the researcher, the academic and professional tutor and examiners.

Details of research participants are kept separate and confidential in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998; amended 2003) and used only for the purposes of the research as agreed. Data will be kept securely for a year following completion of this research. To ensure that the research satisfactorily meets ethical guidelines, permission was gained from the County Research Board and the University of East London Ethics Board before making contact with schools. Formal ethical approval was granted from the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) on 25th January 2012 (Appendix 6).

Additional ethical considerations were raised through the professional positioning of the researcher, as outlined in section 3.10 (Reflexivity). Given the dual roles of the researcher within the county where the research took place, it was important that participants in schools where the researcher has formed a professional relationship through work as a TEP were not selected for the qualitative phase of the research. This would have placed both the researcher and the participants in a difficult position and would have raised a number of issues in relation to interviewer bias and demand characteristics. It should also be considered that the researcher, as an employee of the EPS, would have a duty of care to identify NG provisions where practice was thought to place pupils at risk of harm. This was not the case during the research but potential variability in the quality of support provided for pupils also raises an ethical dilemma for the researcher. However, participants were assured that responses during interview would remain confidential, anonymous and be used for the purposes of the research only.

Chapter 4 – Findings

4.1 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, the findings of this research will be presented and analysed. Descriptive statistics are provided for the quantitative data with a view to exploring the structure of NGs. Following this, the qualitative data analysis process is described and the findings of the thematic analysis are reported in the form of a thematic map to represent views from across the data corpus. The findings within this chapter are presented exclusively with the interpretative analysis and without theoretical discussion or connection to the relevant literature. These elements will be discussed in the following chapter.

4.2 Quantitative Data

In total, seven questionnaires were returned. Although this number is small, it reflects a satisfactory response rate of 58%. In one case, fully informed consent could not be obtained so this questionnaire was not included in analysis. Questionnaire responses from the remaining six participants are summarised in the tables below. Responses have been grouped into ‘practical considerations’ for group structure (table 4.1) and ‘processes’ in relation to running the group (table 4.2). These responses provide information largely in relation to RQ1, with some responses relating to aims and objectives (RQ4).

4.2.1 Practical Considerations

Questionnaire responses relating to practical elements of NG structure have been summarised in table 4.1 and will now be considered.

- Responses indicate that all participating schools prioritised Year 7 pupils for participation in the NGs. There was some variation however, in the number of additional year groups from which pupils were accepted into the NG provision, with only one school allowing access to the NG for pupils beyond Key Stage 3.
- The number of sessions for each group also varied from one session per week to up to 25 sessions per week giving a range of support hours between one and 30. The school with the most support hours indicated that these were spread throughout lessons, as opposed to timetabled sessions, allowing NG staff to support pupils in an inclusive manner within mainstream classes.
- All other participating groups indicated that the provision runs in the mornings, with four of the six schools also providing access to the NG in the afternoons.
- The number of pupils accessing the NG provisions ranges from two to 23. It is important to note that the number of pupils accessing each group session was not reported to exceed twelve and that the largest number (N=23) represents two separate groups of eleven and twelve pupils.

Table 4.1: Summary of Questionnaire Responses: Practical Considerations

	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	School F
Year groups	7, 8, 9, 10, 11	7, 8	7	7, 8, 9	7	7, 8
Number of sessions per week	25	10	24	2-17	1	*
Number of hours per week	25	*	30	*	1 hr 20 mins	*
When sessions take place	AM, PM	AM, PM	Throughout lessons	AM, PM	AM	AM, PM
Additional Access?	Breakfast club, break, lunch	Throughout whole day and after school	Lunchtime	*	No	Lunchtime
Number of pupils	5	6	6	2-12	14	23
Staff involved	1 Lead Teacher, 3 LSAs	1 manager, 1 assistant	1 assistant SENCo, 1 LSA	1 teacher, 2 LSAs	year leader, assistant year leader, home school liaison officer	1 teacher, 3 LSAs
NG base location	School house	Classroom	Classroom, School house	Classroom	Classroom	Classroom
Designated space?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Room organisation	Permanent set up	Permanent set up	Permanent set up	Permanent set up	Adapted for each session	Permanent set up
Common Elements	Kitchen, relaxation area, work area, food	Kitchen, relaxation, work area, food, free choice play	Kitchen, relaxation	Work area, circle time	Circle time	Work area

(* Information not provided)

- Five out of the six schools reported having a base for the NG that was permanently set up, either in a classroom or a separate building (the ‘school house’) with one school indicating that a classroom was adapted for each session.
- Responses indicated that four of the six schools offered additional opportunities to access the NG, all of which included lunchtime access. Two of the groups also provided additional support outside of school hours.
- The questionnaire also required schools to provide the name of their group in order to explore whether there were any similarities or common themes within this. No common themes were identified and the names have not been included in table 4.1 in the interest of anonymity.
- Five out of the six participating schools had groups that utilised the expertise of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) although for some groups only one LSA was involved, whilst others had up to three LSAs working with the pupils. In further discussion with participants, the role that LSAs were asked to take on also varied in that some were required to take more of a lead role in running group sessions, whilst the majority were in a supportive role to the main NG practitioner.
- Half of the participating groups were lead by a qualified teacher with an additional two groups being lead by an assistant SENCo and a ‘manager’ who are involved in working with pupils with SEN across the school.
- Only one group was run by a member of the SMT, namely the year leader and an assistant year leader with the support of a specialist professional from

outside the school staff. This school also indicated a desire to recruit a specialist primary school teacher to support their pupils in the NG.

- Of the elements commonly associated with ‘classic’ NGs, three of the six participants indicated that their NG had access to kitchen facilities and half of the NGs also provided a work area. Only one participant made reference to free choice play.

4.2.2 Processes

Questionnaire responses relating to ‘processes’ have been summarised in table 4.2 and will now be considered.

- Responses indicate that the aims of participating nurture groups emphasize meeting the needs of pupils (particularly emotional well-being), inclusion in the mainstream setting and supporting transition. This is consistent with comments made by participants during interviews.
- Half of the participating schools indicated that staff training had taken place prior to setting up the NG, with one of these schools indicating that they had attended official Nurture Group Network training.
- Pupil selection procedures also varied between participating schools, although four of the six indicated that discussions with staff were used to identify pupils in need of attending the NG. Transition data was also highlighted by two schools and specific measures such as the Boxall Profile or a measure of reading age were used by half of the participating schools.

Table 4.2: Summary of Questionnaire Responses: Processes

	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	School F
Aims	To provide a safe base to meet the needs of pupils to support, get school refusers back into lessons	Behaviour and emotional support, get school refusers back into lessons	To develop skills to operate successfully in mainstream setting	To develop confidence, self-esteem, ensure appropriate NC levels	To aid transition, to boost self esteem	To aid successful transition, to continue nurture from ks2
Staff training provided?	Yes	*	Yes (Nurture Group Network)	Yes	No	No
Pupil selection	Meetings with senior staff and heads of house	Referral by head of year	KS2 transition information, observation, Boxall Profile	Discussion with primary school, data analysis, trial session, parent/staff meeting	Test data, staff feedback	SEN need, Reading age
Length of stay	Until ready for reintegration	Until ready for reintegration	Until ready for reintegration	Until ready for reintegration	One term	Until ready for reintegration
Support for reintegration	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Assessment	School's own proforma	*	Boxall Profile, informal observation	Boxall Profile, informal obs, annual reviews, NC levels, IEP, targets	Informal observation	Informal observation, P scales, reading age
Information Sharing	Staff meetings, informal discussion s	Staff meetings, informal discussions , written feedback	Written feedback	Staff meetings, informal discussions, written feedback, SEN info	Staff meetings, informal discussions, written feedback	Staff meetings, informal discussions
An integral part of the school?	Yes	*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

(* Information not provided)

- Only one school consulted with parents regarding pupil selection for the NG and one school carried out pupil observations as part of this process. In contrast, observation was part of assessment procedures for pupils attending the NGs in four of the six participating schools and the Boxall Profile was used by two schools to assess pupil progress.
- Five of the six schools indicated that support was provided for reintegration into mainstream classes once pupils were ready to leave the group.
- Five participating schools felt that the NG should be an integral part of the school.
- Participants indicated that information about the NG is shared largely through staff meetings and informal discussions with four of the six schools including an element of written feedback.
- No participants mentioned a particular NG model that they believed themselves to be following. However, data gathered about the structure of the groups can be used to inform discussion and identify similarities with NG models identified by previous research (see Chapter 5, ‘Discussion’).

In summary, the quantitative data collected through questionnaire responses indicates that there is a large amount of variation in how NGs are run within secondary schools across the county where this research took place. This is particularly apparent in the number of sessions and the hours for each NG. There were however some general trends in the data. The NGs were generally aimed at supporting pupils in Key Stage 3

and NG support was timetabled throughout the day. The majority of NGs took place in a designated space and pupils were provided with support for reintegration once it was felt that they were ready to leave the group. All participants, where information was provided, indicated that they felt the NG should be an integral part of the school.

4.3 Qualitative Data Analysis Process

Qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis following the model outlined in chapter 3 (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It was felt that there was no value in analysing interview responses separately due to variability in the personnel interviewed in each school and the overall small sample size. All responses were therefore grouped together for thematic analysis.

4.3.1 Deductive and Inductive Thematic Analysis

Initial coding was deductive, focusing on the six principles of nurture (Lucas, Insley, & Buckland, 2006; see figure 1.1). Participants reported little or no explicit knowledge of these principles during interviews, however many were referred to indirectly by the majority of participants and were therefore coded and considered when generating potential themes.

Additional codes were then identified using inductive reasoning to ensure that interesting information was not missed. A list of both deductive and inductive codes used for analysis can be found in Appendix 8 and an example of a coded transcript can be found in Appendix 9.

4.3.2 Generation of Themes

Although participants did not explicitly identify the six principles of nurture during the interviews, comments relating to these principles were coded and have been included within the themes and subthemes. Deductive codes, with the exception of coding relating to transition, were not considered to feature strongly enough to be considered themes in their own right. Codes generated from inductive analysis of the data were also used to identify potential themes and sub-themes. This resulted in the identification of key issues such as attendance and relationships.

In order to establish inter-rater reliability, anonymised transcripts were coded and checked by a second coder (a qualified EP working within the local authority where the research took place) before being cut up and organised into potential themes. Relevant data was then collected and grouped within these potential themes and sub-themes were developed to create an initial thematic map (see figure 4.2). An example of this process is recorded below in figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: Example of generation of themes

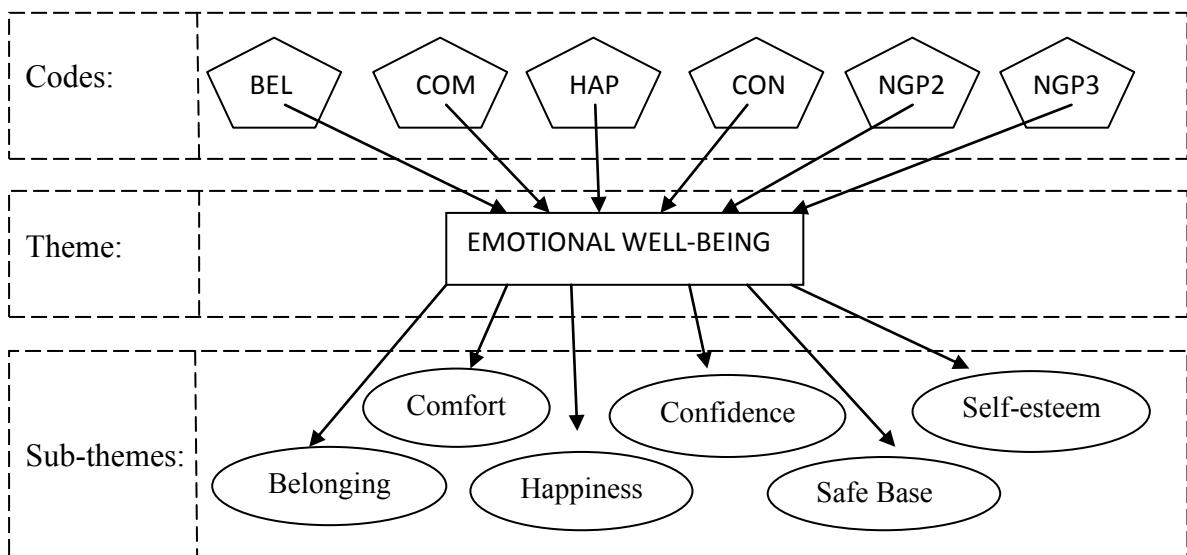
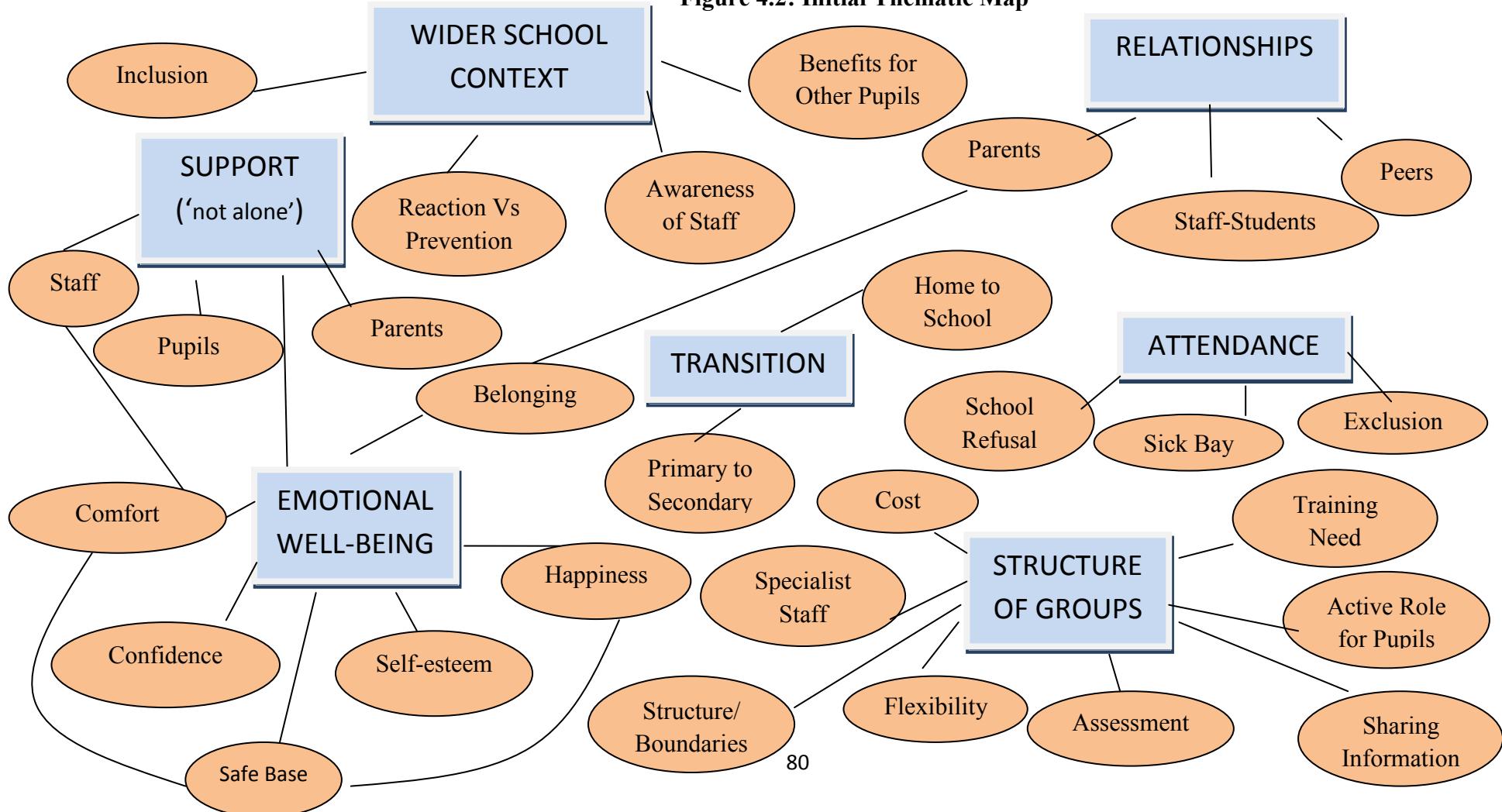
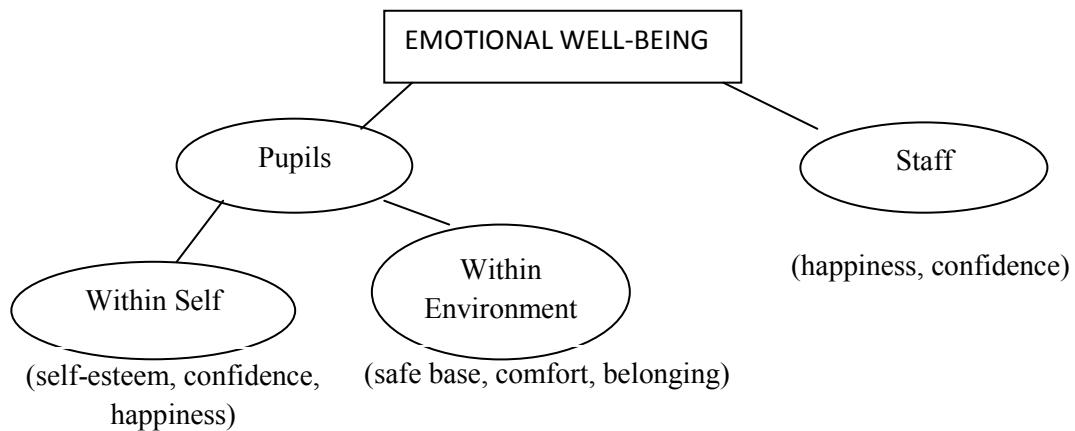


Figure 4.2: Initial Thematic Map



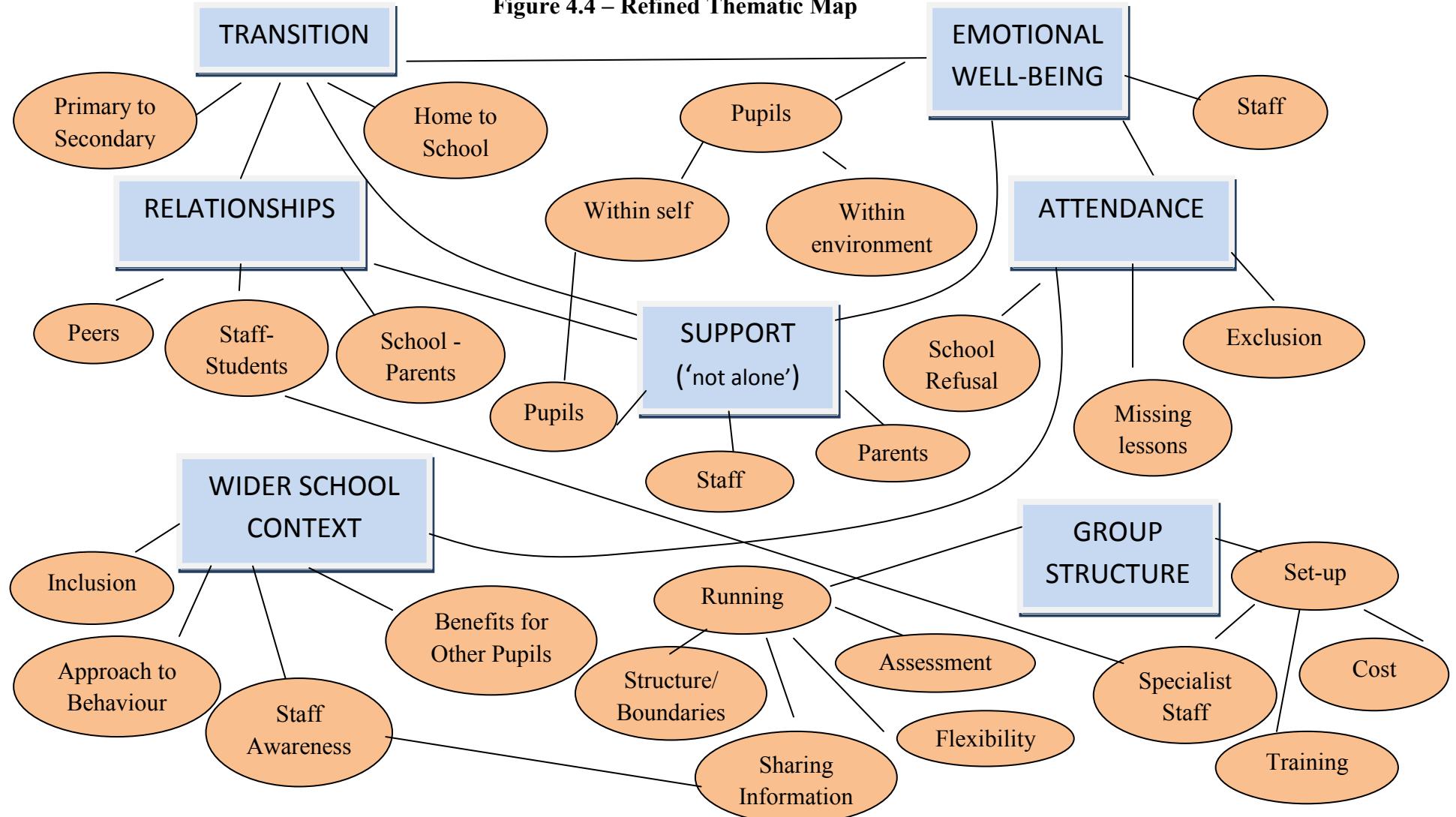
Themes and sub-themes were then reviewed. The entire data set was re-read to ensure that coded extracts and views expressed in the data corpus could be accurately represented by the themes and sub-themes identified. This gave the opportunity to code any additional data that had been missed previously and identify more subtle differences in the data. An example of this process is outlined in figure 4.3 below. In this theme, the subthemes initially identified were collapsed and the difference between comments relating to staff and pupils was identified.

Figure 4.3: Example of refinement of themes



The findings were then checked by a second coder, as outlined in section 4.3.3 ‘Further Refinement of Themes’, which facilitated further refinement of the thematic map (see figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4 – Refined Thematic Map



4.3.3 Further Refinement of Themes

Once initial themes and sub-themes had been identified, a total of 50 data extracts were sent, along with descriptions of the themes and subthemes to the second coder. Of these 50 extracts, the second coder initially agreed with 46 coded extracts and their respective themes and sub-themes, giving an inter-rater reliability of 92% before discussion. Following discussion, it was agreed that several sub-themes could be collapsed and that the thematic map should be rearranged. Subsequently, the second coder agreed with 100% of the coded extracts and their placement within themes and sub-themes. A final thematic map representing the data gathered through interviews was created and is presented in figure 4.5.

4.4 Qualitative Data

The thematic map (see figure 4.5) shows seven main themes that emerged from the data. These are displayed in rectangles, whilst sub-themes relating to these are displayed in ovals. More detailed descriptions of the themes are included in appendix 13.

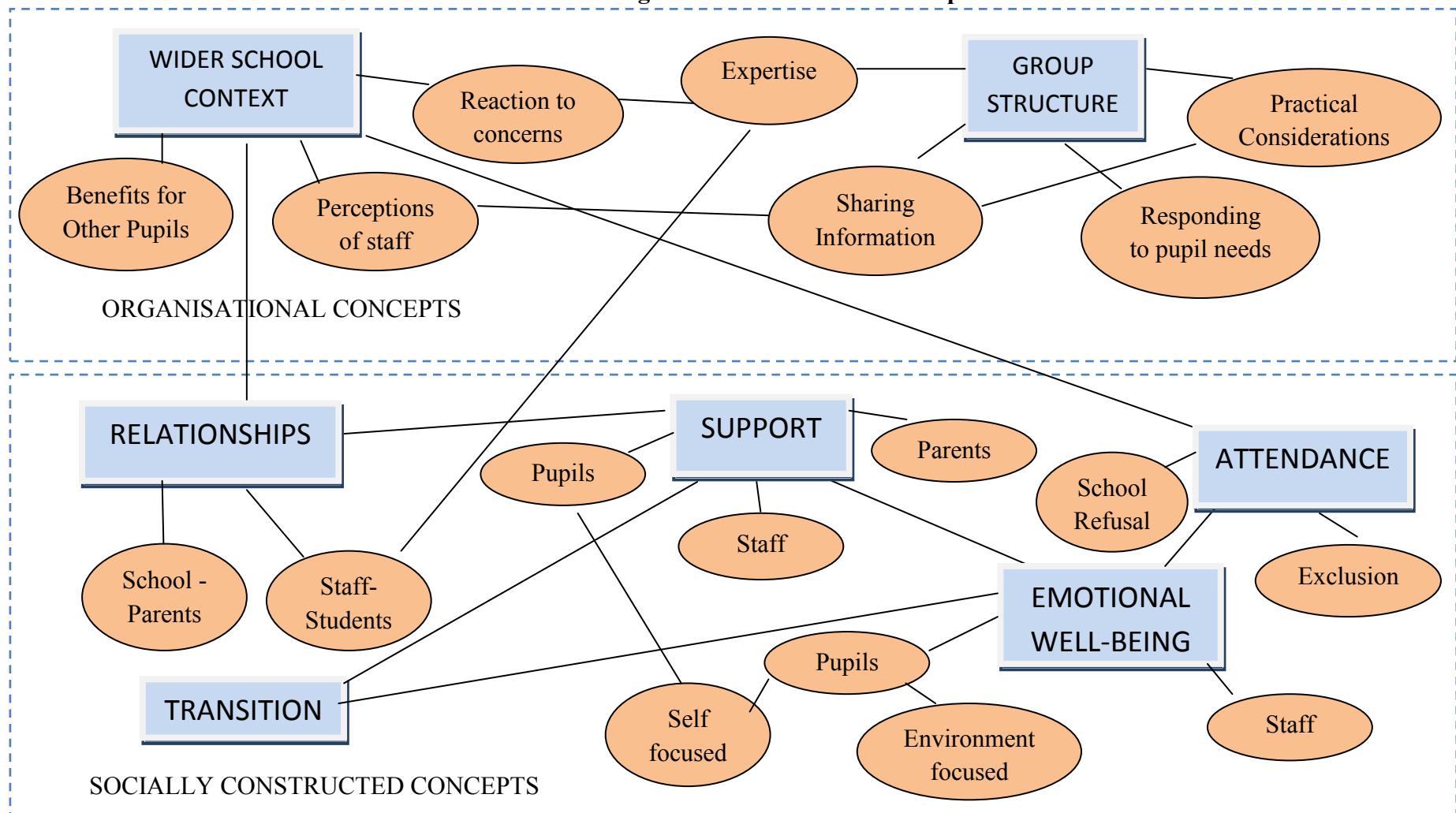
The themes appeared to separate into two overarching themes. The first reflected more concrete or organisational concepts such as group structure and the wider school context and the second reflected more abstract or socially constructed concepts such as transition, attendance, emotional well-being, relationships and support. Participants, in general, emphasised the former themes less although the impact of practical considerations such as how the groups are run was recognised and thus they were felt to be important to include. The researcher also recognised that consideration of these organisational concepts allows for the formation of the more

socially constructed concepts thus it was felt that the former should be presented at the top of the thematic map.

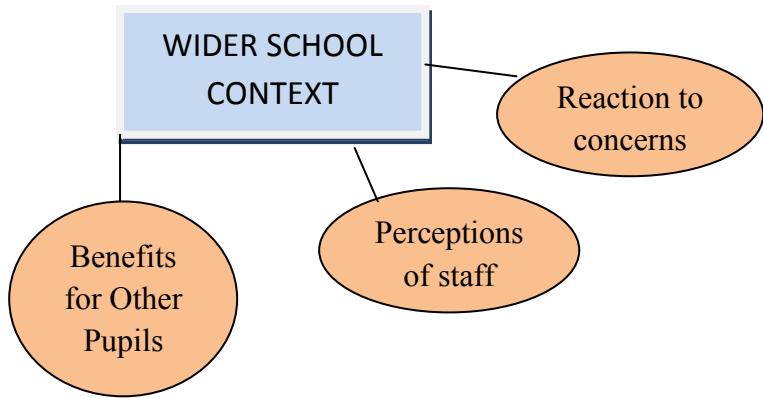
The separation of the thematic map into these two overarching themes can be seen to reflect the critical realist perspective taken for this research, with the concrete concepts acknowledging the existence of NGs and the more abstract concepts reflecting participant's individual perceptions of this reality. The theme of 'support' is located centrally on the thematic map, as it was felt to link into most other themes and was emphasised as a key aspect of NGs for all participants.

Each theme will now be explored in turn and supporting statements from interview transcripts will be provided. Links to the research questions will be made as appropriate.

Figure 4.5: Final Thematic Map



4.4.1 Theme of ‘Wider School Context’



Participants were asked what impact, if any, their NG has had on the wider school context. In response to this question, many participants highlighted the impact of the group on the whole school community, particularly with reference to the well-being of pupils beyond those involved in the NG itself. Staff also commented on their reasons for setting up the group, most commonly referring to recognising a need for additional support following concerns raised by staff within the school. Impact for staff was also discussed and responses varied from those who felt that the NG was recognised and valued by other members of staff to those who felt that wider knowledge of the group was not common or necessary. This sub-theme has strong links with the sub-theme of information sharing, given the importance of the latter to inform knowledge of the group within the wider school context.

Links can also be made between this theme and the theme of relationships, as the relationships between staff and students are likely to impact on the perception of the NG and outcomes within the wider school context. Finally, links can be made between attendance and the wider school context, as the issue of attendance is one that will affect the school as a whole, as well as individuals.

4.4.1.1 Benefits for other pupils:

Participants indicated that the NG had benefits not only for the pupils directly involved with it but also for other pupils in the wider school context. For example, one participant commented on the benefits of the NG in terms of reducing the impact of negative behaviours from the target pupils on their peers in class. They imply that this can have beneficial effects on the learning of pupils in the school.

'I think it's had benefits in terms of erm again individuals perhaps who could disrupt a class of thirty, erm those children, those twenty nine other children, can get on with their learning so that's a wider impact...'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 2b, line 257)

Participants also indicated that the NG may benefit other pupils in terms of social or emotional well-being through an indirect impact on the atmosphere around school and in reducing tensions among peers.

'I think that the school benefitted as a whole because other students could see that something was being done and that these students were being cared for in their own way...I hope it leads to a calmer atmosphere around the school.'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 3a, line 51)

'...possibly it's benefitted not the pupils that attended, but the pupils in their class because maybe in social situations, perhaps it's alleviated some of the issues that were arising...'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 1b, line 117)

In this respect, even if the NG is not well known in the wider school context, it can be beneficial at a number of levels.

4.4.1.2 Perceptions of staff:

Participants indicated that the NG has had an impact on the understanding that staff have of individual pupils and, more generally, the approach to managing behaviour in the wider school context.

'...also from my perspective and my job, you get to know the children as well, a little better which was quite nice and understand them I'd say as well.'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 1b, Line 154)

'It's changing the ethos of the school that, you now, exclusion is not, erm, does not resolve a problem... so it's if you like a different behaviour strategy.'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 2b, Line 231)

Some participants indicated that they felt staff in the wider school context had limited awareness of the NG or a poor understanding and that this would be a priority for further work.

'...my work for this half term is to promote erm and to explain and listen to concerns and anxieties the staff might have about the provision.'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 1a, Line 497)

Others implied that, although the wider staff may be aware of its existence, a detailed understanding is neither expected nor important.

'Yea I think in general erm staff wouldn't have a huge awareness of it which can be good because what it can't become is an isolation room and I think some staff which are busy, teaching five lessons a day, lots of children in and out of their classroom, it's important that I think they understand the basic systems of what happens in there erm but again you know you can share too much information in this day and age...'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 2b, Line 151)

'...in terms of the wider staff, I'm not sure how much they'll know about what's going on because theoretically if it's working they won't notice it...'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 2c, Line 178)

This has links to the practical considerations for setting up a NG in a secondary school context where the number of staff and opportunities for information sharing differ greatly to that of a primary school setting.

4.4.1.3 Reaction to Concerns:

Many participants indicated that the NG was implemented in response to concerns raised within the school with regard to individual pupils or behaviour as a whole.

'...if we don't intervene early enough or if somebody doesn't, if nothing changes...then all we know is that we are going to get more of the same...'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 1a, Line 523)

'...for those who can't cope with mainstream education [it is a] proactive rather than reactive approach.'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 2b, Line 4)

'...we were finding more and more students whose needs were, were complex and whose needs were falling outside what could be catered for in mainstream classes...'

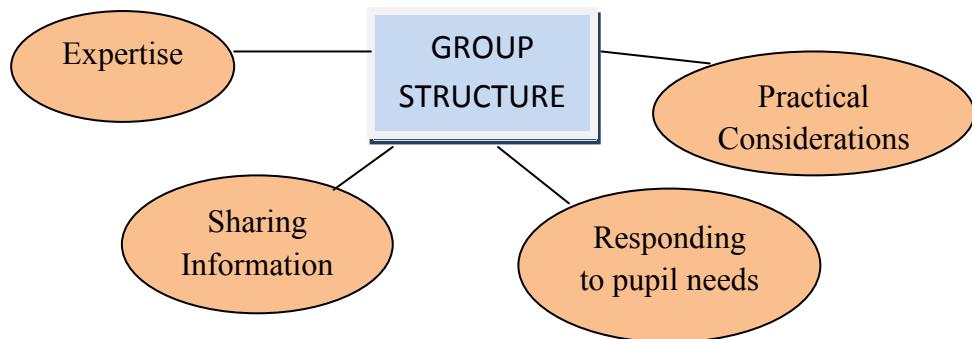
(Appendix 14: Transcript 1a, Line 4)

'...[there is] the continued desire to reduce exclusions...we do get behaviours... that need challenging and changing and so on but I think there is growing pressure to reduce exclusions...'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 3b, Line 15)

Some participants referred to the NG as a preventative measure, tackling ‘behaviour issues’ before they lead to more extreme sanctions such as exclusion and enabling pupils with complex needs to be included in the mainstream learning environment, thus providing further links with the theme of attendance.

4.4.2 Theme of ‘Group Structure’



Participants were asked to discuss the structure of their group and any adaptations that they have had to make in order to create a provision that works well for their pupils within a secondary school setting. This was an opportunity to clarify and expand on questionnaire responses. Participant responses indicated that there was huge variety in how the groups are run but some aspects were consistently expressed as important considerations for a secondary school NG. These have been included within the sub-themes that follow.

4.4.2.1 Expertise:

This sub-theme relates to issues raised by participants around training and the need to involve specialist or dedicated staff in the NG.

'...I think her [the home school liaison worker] knowledge is quite a lot, I think she has done a lot of training on this so I think as an expert to come in and advise on how to run it, I think she was very good.'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 2c, Line 290)

'This year we have made real use of the EP and Assistant EP support.'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 3a, Line 89)

'I wouldn't say I had any training whatsoever... [going to secondary schools] observing them, getting to speak to the students who have actually participated in it, the members of staff that have run it to see how they would structure it, that would probably be the best training we could have.'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 2a, Line 386)

In relation to RQ3, a lack of understanding is also apparent in relation to theoretical knowledge of the rationale behind the NG approach for most participants. When asked about the principles of nurture and knowledge of the theoretical background of NGs, the vast majority of participants indicated that they had little to no knowledge of these concepts.

'To be honest, not a great deal [of knowledge].'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 3a, Line 65)

'Erm, you probably need to tell me what your principles are... from a nurture group perspective...'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 1a, Line 222)

Some participants however, alluded to concepts that are consistent with this approach despite stating that they had no explicit knowledge of the theory behind them.

'What I perceive it to be is almost to act in this kind of quite parental, maternal, motherly side really, erm just to kind of coach them and guide them... it's almost like a parental role in school.'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 2a, Line 140)

Links between this sub-theme and the sub-theme of relationships between staff and students can be made as it was felt that the skills and dedication of the specialist staff involved in the groups facilitated the establishment of good quality and supportive relationships between staff and students.

4.4.2.2 Sharing Information:

Participants in general felt that information sharing was important but the methods for doing this varied considerably from more formal written methods to brief discussions. Participants also commented on how information can be shared with SMT.

'we sort of liaised with each other really and I sort of gave her information and said oh well this has happened, this has happened...'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 1b, Line 39)

*'I also fill in a reflective log, which has two purposes. One is to let me know what has gone on in the day erm which students have accessed the **** provision and why... it also gives that member of staff a chance to put it down on paper, erm they type it and send it to me by email and then I make comments on it... to stimulate their reflection...'*

(Appendix 14: Transcript 1a, Line 66)

As explained previously, this sub-theme is linked to ‘staff perceptions’, as the perceptions of staff in the wider school context can be informed by how information is shared with them.

4.4.2.3 Responding to Pupil Needs:

Most participants described their NG as responsive to pupil needs both in planning and delivery. This includes reference to the principle of nurture that states that ‘learning is understood developmentally’ and that ‘all behaviour is communication’.

‘Between us we decide what kind of support a student needs and how to meet this need.’

(Appendix 14: Transcript 3a, Line 93)

‘...for every behaviour that you see, there is a reason behind it and that reason isn’t always conscious.’

(Appendix 14: Transcript 1a, Line 266)

‘...most of the behaviour... has meaning and therefore behind that meaning then there is a whole social history...’

(Appendix 14: Transcript 3b, Line 32)

In relation to RQ5, the issue of flexibility was raised by most participants, as important in making a NG work for their pupils and their school. Although participants also implied that the consistency and structure provided by the group was beneficial, flexibility within the group and also with regard to how the NG works within the wider school context was considered essential. This has links with practical considerations such as timetabling and available space.

'...we came to realise that their needs were so different that a strict structure did not really meet their needs or ours! We now have a more flexible approach and support all students who need it....'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 3a, Line 84)

Some participants also mentioned the importance of flexibility with regard to making the content of NG activities relevant for adolescents.

'...so obviously we've had to develop them [tasks] to the needs of a secondary school and think about the things they need to know at secondary school...it's about really making the actual topics that are delivered and the tasks that are set, er, suitable for that age bracket really.'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 2a, Line 283)

For all participants, the NG was felt to provide opportunities to further develop their understanding of the pupils and their needs, which is not as easily facilitated in a mainstream class within a secondary school setting.

4.4.2.4 Practical Considerations:

This sub-theme reflects issues raised by participants around practical considerations for running their NG in a secondary school setting. This included issues such as the complexity of timetabling, the location of a group and the cost involved. Overall, participants discussed the cost of setting up a group in relation to training and resources as a limiting factor.

'...we're putting a lot of funding into that [the NG], we're dedicating a room in the school and resources to that and sort of two or three teachers and have a big chunk of their time just working with that group.'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 2c, Line 273)

'That is a weekend training... it's a big investment in terms of money...'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 1a, Line 564)

Difficulties relating to the large size of secondary schools, such as complex timetabling and space constraints were also raised as limiting factors and highlight the need for SMT involvement. Participants mostly indicated that having a dedicated space that was away from the general teaching rooms was beneficial.

'... I think having moved the provision out to the school house and having a secure base [is an adaptation we have had to make]. '

(Appendix 14: Transcript 1a, Line 432)

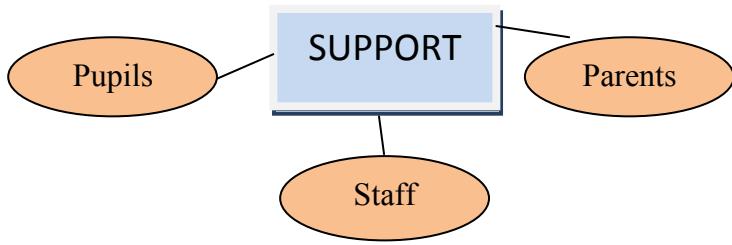
Practical considerations also links with information sharing, as effective methods for doing this may be more challenging given the number of staff and pupils in a secondary school.

*'...well I have a link meeting every fortnight with **** and **** [head of year and assistant year leader] and as part of that link meeting we talk about vulnerable students and um causes for concern and as part of the discussion we discuss about the NG and how it was going, but really um our middle leaders here because it's quite a large organisation, have quite a lot of distributed leadership of issues like this... '*

(Appendix 14: Transcript 2c, Line 52)

The use of technology, such as email, to share information was described by some participants and although impersonal, this was felt to be an effective way to share information.

4.4.3 Theme of ‘Support’



This theme refers to mechanisms of support. Participants raised the issue of support frequently during interviews, highlighting the role of the NG in supporting pupils, parents and staff. The concept of feeling supported and knowing that they are not alone was referred to consistently both for pupils and staff.

4.4.3.1 Support for pupils:

Participants described the NG as providing support for pupils in a number of ways. Support with social skills and managing emotions such as anxiety or anger was raised by most participants and this was felt to be beneficial both in terms of peer relations and accessing education.

‘that model [the school’s nurture group] will probably carry on with next year’s year sevens as a kind of supportive, socially supportive, measure.’

(Appendix 14: Transcript 2c, Line 151)

[The group provides]… effective support for students who have such tremendous issues stopping them from accessing their education.’

(Appendix 14: Transcript 3a, Line 113)

‘[The nurture group supports positive outcomes for pupils by] …giving them a space to cool off if needed, offload their concerns and worries, have support mending bridges with teachers, developing social skills and anger management skills.’

(Appendix 14: Transcript 3a, Line 21)

Some participants also referred to the importance of support continuing after leaving the NG, during reintegration and beyond.

'...we kind of coach and guide them and support them and make them feel as if they could come and talk to us about any problems that they have and they know that even though the nurture group's finished, that if they have any issues they can come and see us...'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 2a, Line 146)

Participants often mentioned the importance of being able to talk through problems and implied that the NG provided an opportunity to gather support by talking to others. This relates to the principle of nurture that describes language as a vital means of communication.

*'Students know that if they have a problem they can come to the **** and speak to a member of staff.'*

(Appendix 14: Transcript 2a, Line 162)

As well as opportunities to use language to communicate needs, the NG was also felt to provide support in developing the skills needed to communicate needs effectively.

4.4.3.2 Support for staff:

Participants spoke mostly about the NG providing support for mainstream teaching staff in working with target pupils.

'... it gave staff another strategy to use if they were having difficulties with the students- another line of help and advice.'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 3a, Line 30)

Some participants also highlighted the importance of providing support for staff working within the NG, recognising the difficulties that may be encountered and the resulting need for supervision.

'...it also means that they're the ones in the firing line all the time. The work is very draining and demanding for them because they are putting themselves into that role so it mustn't be forgotten that the staff need that constant support all the time.'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 1a, Line 213)

Some participants felt that they were in a better position to provide support in the form of supervision than others depending on training received and their role within the school.

4.4.3.3 Support for parents:

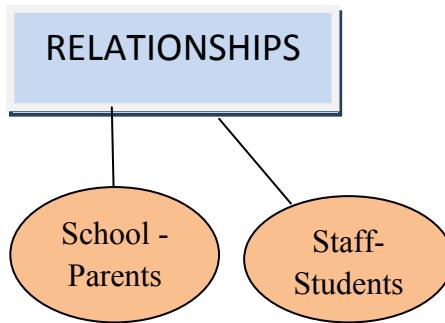
Participants indicated that the NG played a supportive role for parents in terms of letting them know that they were not alone and in providing positive feedback about their children.

'...These were often parents/single parents (mostly) who were having real difficulty with them at home too. This was a big part of our support and parents were supported too in a way. They were contacted each week, with good news as well as bad. We also set up a parent support group... they realised they were not the only ones!'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 3a, Line 38)

The concept of feeling that they were not alone also indicates that parents felt supported by each other.

4.4.4 Theme of ‘Relationships’



Participants described how the NG has had a positive impact on relationships both between staff and students within the school and between parents and the school, particularly in reassuring parents that the school is being pro-active in supporting their child.

4.4.4.1 Between school and parents:

Participants highlighted the importance attributed to building and maintaining relationships between home and school and the perceived value of increased contact.

‘I also think it helps develop relationships with parents because its a three way triangle – child (pupil), parents- erm because they see the school doing something positive not just punishment...’

(Appendix 14: Transcript 2b, Line 263)

‘...I suppose you could say home school relations with those students and the parents of those students will be feeling that those students will have been well supported by the school...’

(Appendix 14: Transcript 2c, Line 248)

‘The contact between school and home was essential.’

(Appendix 14: Transcript 3a, Line 47)

Participants indicated that the level and type of contact with parents once pupils were accessing the intervention was different to pupils in mainstream classes and helped to foster positive interactions.

4.4.4.2 Between staff and students:

This sub-theme refers to the effect that the NGs were reported to have on developing positive relationships between staff and students both within the group and in the wider school context. This was described as a positive outcome for both staff and students.

'.. giving some staff the opportunity to develop better working relations with some of our most difficult students.'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 3a, Line 26)

Reference was made by some participants to the concept of attachment and the value of understanding pupils in order to interpret their behaviour as communication of needs.

'...they have made attachments and relationships with the staff there and they know what to expect...'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 1a, Line 378)

Links can therefore be made with the NG principle that states that 'all behaviour is communication'.

4.4.5 Theme of ‘Transition’

TRANSITION

Participants often referred to supporting transition, both as a reason for setting up a NG and as a benefit of the group for pupils. Despite no subthemes being identified as directly related to transition, it was felt to be important to include as a theme in its own right due to the emphasis placed on it by participants. This theme links with other themes such as emotional well-being and support, as participants often discussed the NG in relation to supporting pupils through a difficult transition from primary to secondary school and helping them to feel settled in the secondary school setting.

‘...it’s letting students know that there is someone they can talk to and also that they are not the only ones that are struggling or not the only ones that feel vulnerable or sensitive to the situation, because it’s such a huge change coming from primary to secondary school...’

(Appendix 14: Transcript 2a, Line 258)

‘...and it did help sort of alleviate their fears I think, for some of them because it is a big transition from primary to secondary...’

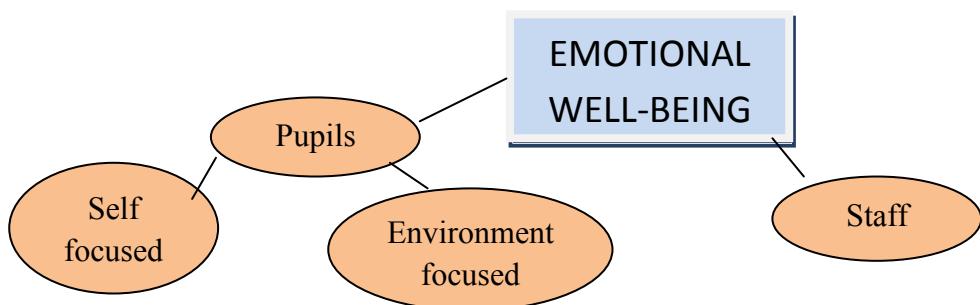
(Appendix 14: Transcript 1b, Line 142)

‘...it [setting up the nurture group] was a reaction to the fact that we had a number of year seven students who had come up who were um struggling to settle into secondary life... so it was students we felt had struggled with the transition from primary to secondary.’

(Appendix 14: Transcript 2c, Line 5)

This theme has strong links with the principle of nurture that refers to the importance of transition in children's lives. No reference was made by participants to other transitions, for example from home to school except in relation to primary school nurture groups.

4.4.6 Theme of 'Emotional Well-being'



Participants discussed NGs in relation to positive outcomes with regard to emotional well-being in general for both pupils and staff. Participants consistently raised emotional well-being as an important consideration in relation to the aims of the group and outcomes (see RQ4). They spoke about internal factors such as self esteem as well as external factors such as 'settling in' to the school environment.

4.4.6.1 For pupils (self focused):

Key areas highlighted by participants for pupils largely included confidence, happiness and self esteem. These within child factors were considered to fit into the

‘within self’ category of this sub-theme and were felt by the researcher to link with the sub-theme of ‘support for pupils’.

‘...they’ll feel much more comfortable and confident and [this] will hopefully have a direct impact on their GCSE results.’

(Appendix 14: Transcript 2a, Line 134)

‘... it’s boosting their confidence and making them feel happier in school... trying to get their erm their emotional stability, their emotional well-being and really give it the attention that it needs. That, you can do in nurture group where you can talk to them...that’s the element that works best I think, just giving them that extra bit of emotional support in school.’

(Appendix 14: Transcript 2c, Line 220)

*‘It gives students some idea of their self worth and some of the things *** has put into place have seen real progress... the violent student we have linked to a special school where she helps out with some children with real needs and this has really boosted her self-confidence and worth.’*

(Appendix 14: Transcript 3a, Line 115)

This sub-theme is particularly relevant to the principle of nurture that highlights ‘the importance of nurture for the development of self-esteem.

4.4.6.2 For pupils (environment focused):

Participants also indicated that the NG had been advantageous in promoting emotional well-being for the pupils within their environment.

‘...it’s helping the students to feel they have an attachment to the staff um and then later to the wider community of the big school so that they have a purpose for being here um to feel safe and contained...’

(Appendix 14: Transcript 1a, Line 41)

'...their child was coming home from school happier erm and not scared about coming into school...'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 2a, Line 110)

This has links to the principle of nurture that describes the classroom as providing a ‘safe base’. Participants spoke about pupils feeling safe and comfortable within school as well as experiencing a sense of belonging.

'...it is giving them a secure base to start off with because until you've got that, they can't learn. They can't access learning if they're all over the shop emotionally...'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 1a, Line 240)

The active role that pupils are encouraged to take within the group was thought to contribute to this feeling of belonging.

'They've [the pupils] actually got involved in the whole building of the project, erm, so again it's not something that has been done to them, it's something that has been done with them.'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 1a, Line 394)

A sense of ownership and pride was also fostered by involving pupils and this can be linked to developing peer relationships.

4.4.6.3 For staff:

Emotional well-being was also highlighted as an important consideration for staff. It was raised both as an indirect positive outcome of the group and in relation to support that may be required following negative experiences when working with pupils within the group.

'... [It] created a happier environment, the students felt more settled so therefore obviously the members of staff felt happier as well to be able to see their students happy.'

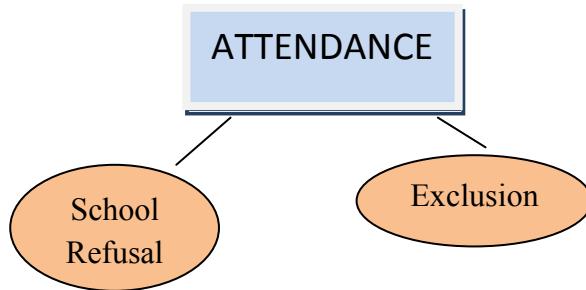
(Appendix 14: Transcript 2a, Line 93)

'...whereas staff might have a natural ability to work in that way, they have anxieties erm which very much get in the way of the work. They pick up anxieties from the students erm and they become anxious and derail very easily if they're not listened to and contained...'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 1a, Line 56)

This also highlights the strain that can be experienced by staff working in such an intense way with vulnerable or challenging pupils.

4.4.7 Theme of 'Attendance'



Through inductive analysis, the theme of attendance emerged as an important issue both in the rationale for setting up a NG and as positive impact of the group. This relates to RQ4. Participants discussed attendance in relation to absence from school or lessons by pupil choice and in relation to fixed term or permanent exclusion as a sanction for inappropriate behaviour. This theme is linked to the theme of 'wider school context', as increased attendance was highlighted to be an issue for the school

as a whole. It is also linked to emotional well-being, as participants speculated that increased attendance may be as a result of pupils feeling happier or less anxious about coming to school.

4.4.7.1 School refusal/not attending lessons:

Participants raised the issue of pupils not attending lessons through choice, either by missing individual lessons, for example through attending the medical room, or through refusing to come to school altogether. Some participants discussed these issues in relation to positive outcomes following involvement in the NG provision.

'...attendance has increased for some students in the first term, for example one of our students, her attendance has was 74.2% er yet in the second term that increased to 87.2% so it was quite a significant jump...'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 2a, Line 34)

'...some of them had quite poor attendance or sporadic attendance or they were late in sometimes, so those kinds of erm that...that's an impact as well so I think their attendance has improved and I think there was one or two of them, every week they'd be in the medical room feeling sick and that, that's stopped or it's much less so I think those are key impacts.'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 2c, Line 253)

'The school refuser does now go into lessons (albeit on a very flexible timetable)'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 3a, Line 117)

The supportive role that the NG has played for parents was also highlighted in relation to attendance by some participants.

'...and they've noticed a real improvement in their attitude, in the student towards coming to school and they've found it much easier getting them in...'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 2c, Line 209)

Connections can therefore be made between this and the subtheme of 'support for parents'.

4.4.7.2 Exclusion:

Participants discussed exclusion as a sanction for negative behaviour and implied that the NG provision has had a beneficial effect by reducing fixed term or permanent exclusion rates.

*'Our exclusion rate dropped considerable after the *** was set up.'*

(Appendix 14: Transcript 3a, Line 50)

'The overall trend in this school is that exclusions are coming down, erm, I don't think that is because behaviour has necessarily improved, I just think we've widened, widened our resource in how we deal with it and I think that is a good thing for all concerned.'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 3b, Line 232)

Other participants highlighted the same issue by expressing the desire to maintain an inclusive approach to education, enabling pupils who would otherwise have been excluded to remain in mainstream education.

'...to enable them to stay within mainstream school, alright, rather than be permanently excluded from and fulfil their potential in a mainstream school...'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 1a, Line 25)

Participants in general expressed a preference to avoid permanent exclusion and a desire to prevent the NG from being perceived as a type of fixed term exclusion.

*'...you could have other staff thinking you know I don't want this child in my class let's put them in the ***** provision and that's not how we work here...'*

(Appendix 14: Transcript 1a, Line 95)

'...our pupil referral units are full to bursting in the area...um... we wanted to make sure that we had a provision that could meet the needs of students with complex needs...'

(Appendix 14: Transcript 1a, Line 18)

The pressures of a lack of alternative provision within the county and the resulting need for mainstream schools to have suitable provision for pupils with challenging behaviour was referred to in passing by some participants.

4.5 Overview of main findings

This exploratory research has used both quantitative and qualitative methodology to explore the structure and rationale of NGs currently running in secondary school settings in the county where the research took place. The use of a questionnaire has enabled the researcher to obtain an overview of the structure of nurture groups on a larger scale. In addition, deductive and inductive thematic analysis of semi-structured interview responses has enabled the researcher to explore rich and detailed data about

staff perceptions of the groups. The main findings of this research are summarised below:

- There is great variety in the structure of NG running in the county where the research took place. No consistent approach to structuring the NG could be identified although some similarities were identified.
- No specific NG models were referred to by participants, although similarities to models identified by previous research will be discussed in relation to group structure in the following chapter.
- No explicit knowledge of the theoretical underpinnings of the NG approach was demonstrated by participants. However, some aspects of this approach were referred to indirectly and are reflected in practice. Training needs were identified by participants.
- Participants identified a range of aims and objectives of the NGs, which were closely linked to and often discussed in relation to outcomes. The following areas were identified by most participants: attendance, transition, emotional well-being, relationships and support. Participants discussed the formation of their NG in the context of responding to concerns about behaviour expressed within the wider school context.
- Despite variety in the approach to running a NG, several things were consistently identified by participants as important aspects of NGs in secondary school settings. These include the importance of responding to the needs of the individual pupils in attendance. A flexible approach in relation to NG content and practical limitations of the setting were also highlighted.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter discusses the main findings of this research in relation to the five research questions. Implications for Educational Psychology and implications in the wider educational context are then explored. Following this, limitations of the current research are discussed along with opportunities for further research.

5.2 Discussion of Findings

The aim of this research was to explore the structure and rationale of NGs that are currently running in secondary school settings across the county where the research took place. Following a review of the literature, the following five research questions were developed:

RQ 1. How are Nurture Groups structured in secondary schools in the County?

RQ 2. Which Nurture Group models are reflected?

RQ 3. What is staff's understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of Nurture Groups?

RQ 4. What do staff perceive to be the aims and objectives of Nurture Groups?

RQ 5. What do staff feel are the most important aspects of Nurture Groups in secondary schools?

The main findings are now discussed in relation to the research questions and in the context of previous research and theoretical frameworks.

5.2.1 RQ1 – How are Nurture Groups structured in secondary schools in the County?

There is great variety in the structure of NGs running in the county where the research took place. No consistent approach to structuring the NG could be identified, although some similarities could be seen between the different groups. This can be thought of as a reflection of the needs of the different schools and the resulting approach to running the group taken within each setting. The structure of the groups is discussed in relation to practical considerations and processes.

5.2.1.1 Practical considerations

All participating schools indicated that they had prioritised Year 7 pupils for participation in the NG. This may be a reflection of the importance placed on the NG as a mechanism of support for transition from primary to secondary school. This is consistent with the view of NGs as an early intervention strategy applied to a secondary school setting rather than early years or primary school settings. Whereas the classic NG approach was designed to support pupils only during these early formative years, the NGs in this research indicated that they had been more flexible in pupil selection, with most groups promoting access to the NG across KS3 and one school including pupils in KS4. This supports the view that adolescence is not too late to provide effective intervention to meet the emotional and learning needs of vulnerable pupils (Schore, 2005; Cooke, Yeomans and Parkes, 2008).

Flexibility was felt to be essential in creating a NG provision that could be accessed by pupils in need of extra support. This is reflected in the structure of the groups with regard to the number of sessions, which varied greatly between schools and also in

the number of pupils accessing the provision. Some groups were run in a more open way in which nurture support was provided within the mainstream classrooms. In this way the school felt that they were promoting inclusion and transference of skills, enabling the pupils to receive the support they need within the context of a mainstream classroom. In comparison, other settings required pupils to access the group in a separate location for timetabled sessions, which more closely replicates the traditional model. However, these sessions were rarely full mornings or afternoons and were mostly an hour in duration, sometimes spread throughout the day or week to allow for consideration of timetabling of other subjects. Some participants indicated that the pupils were allowed to access the NG provision with some degree of independence, for example when they felt that they were struggling to cope in mainstream classes. This could indicate acknowledgement of developmentally appropriate decision making skills and independence for these older pupils in comparison to primary school pupils, for whom this type of access may not be appropriate.

Some schools also felt that additional opportunities to access support from the group, for example during lunchtime or before school was important. This again reflects consideration of the mobility of pupils and recognition that there are times of the day when issues are more likely to arise for the pupils and when they would therefore require additional support.

Flexibility was also important with regard to where the NG is based. Whereas the traditional model promotes a permanently established room with certain elements, such as a ‘work area’ and ‘play area’, the NGs in this research were more flexible in how their space was organised. This may be due to limitations of space and resources, as well as consideration of age appropriate activities. Some participants

emphasised the importance of involving the pupils in designing their space and giving them some ownership over the project. The vast majority of NGs were permanently set up in one location, as per the traditional model, providing stability and consistency, with one NG room adapted per session due to time and space constraints. However, permanent changes to the room were in most cases difficult to implement as the space was used at other times for different purposes.

The number of pupils accessing the NGs ranged from five to 23 and again was flexible in order to meet the needs of the pupils. Half of the groups reported the number of pupils to be six or lower, which is around half of the number recommended in the traditional NG model. This could be understood in terms of practical considerations relating to space and consideration of additional factors such as group dynamics or complexity of needs. Selection procedures for the group generally included referral from members of the SMT. This is discussed in more depth in the following section on processes (see section 5.2.1.2).

Thus the structure of NG settings in relation to practical considerations varies greatly. A flexible approach ensures that the group can work around pressures of secondary school settings, such as timetabling, mobility of pupils and demands on space.

5.2.1.2 Processes

Given the potentially large number of pupils requiring support in a secondary school setting, selection processes were required to be more stringent than class teacher recommendation. In most cases, meetings about vulnerable pupils were taking place, usually including Heads of Year or the SENCo and in some cases additional

information was gathered through assessment, observation or from transition information provided by the primary school. In this way, pupils causing concern were identified and discussed on an individual basis before considering whether it was appropriate for them to access the NG provision or not. This requires a degree of cooperation between staff working at different levels across the school and in some cases with parents also. This can be more challenging given the larger size of secondary school settings and the higher number of staff likely to be involved in educating each pupil. The involvement of parents in relation to this was discussed by only one school, which may be a reflection of the challenge of building and maintaining close relationships with parents given the size of the school and the number of pupils in attendance.

The issue of parental permission is an important consideration for schools running NGs, as pupils are usually required to be removed from some lessons in order to attend. One could assume that, as is good practice, parents were consulted before their child was included in any additional interventions; however this may not have been the case. The level of involvement of parents can also vary from giving verbal permission or signing a simple consent form to more in-depth discussions, which may be likely to lead to more positive outcomes due to a consistent approach and a shared understanding being established. This issue was not addressed directly by the researcher in discussions with participants in the current research and would be an important consideration for further exploration.

The majority of participating schools indicated that pupils remained in the NG until they were felt to be ready for reintegration into mainstream classes. However, the processes for identifying when this might be were neither clear nor robust. This is linked to a less formal and variable approach to assessment across the groups, which

may in turn be linked to training needs and familiarity with appropriate assessment resources. The development of the Boxall Profile for Young People (Bennathan, Boxall and Colley, 2010) has potential implications for the development of more appropriate and robust assessment procedures for secondary school NGs. The majority of NGs indicated that support was provided for reintegration back to mainstream classes, usually in the form of LSA support or drop in sessions with the NG.

It was felt by participants that the NG should be an integral part of the school, although in practice this could be affected by the size of the school and effectiveness of communications systems within the organisation. In previous research, Colley (2009) found that embedding the NG within the wider school system was more challenging in secondary school contexts and that this was more likely to be successful through a ‘bottom up’ approach, allowing positive outcomes to speak for themselves. Staff perceptions of the NG in the wider school context were very much influenced by information sharing processes, which varied by method and frequency across settings. These included formal written methods of sharing information about pupils in the group and group activities to brief informal discussions between members of staff. The importance attributed to information sharing also varied, with some schools feeling that it was vital to share information with the SMT and mainstream teaching staff whilst others felt that knowledge of the NG across the school was less of a priority. The issue of information sharing and staff perceptions is discussed in more depth in relation to RQ5 (see section 5.2.5, ‘RQ5’).

5.2.2 RQ2 – Which Nurture Group models are reflected?

No specific NG models were referred to by participants, although similarities to models identified by Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (1998) in previous research can be seen. None of the models are thought to be demonstrative of a ‘classic’ NG. This is perhaps unsurprising given that the approach was designed for young pupils within smaller early years settings and is therefore considered inappropriate for secondary schools. Positively, none of the groups were thought to be ‘aberrant’ NGs, favouring control and containment without a developmental or educational focus. The groups that were the focus of this research therefore most closely resembled ‘new variant’ NGs and ‘groups informed by NG principles’.

As indicated, it would be very difficult and perhaps even inappropriate to replicate the ‘classic’ NG model in a secondary school setting, as the needs of the pupils and the organisation differ greatly from those of an early years or primary school setting. Thus, as a result of the need to adapt the original model to meet the needs of secondary school pupils and of the larger secondary school organisation, all participating schools were running a combination of ‘new variant’ NGs and ‘groups informed by NG principles’.

All NGs were part-time and for older pupils than those for which the traditional model was originally designed. Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (1998) indicate that ‘groups informed by NG principles’ may provide social and emotional support but lack in academic focus. All participating schools were running groups with aspects of this approach, for example providing drop-in sessions at lunch times, support with developing social skills and a safe place to which pupils could retreat to at times of distress. However, the majority of groups also retained an academic focus, providing

opportunities and support for completing work and in some cases explicit teaching of subject knowledge and learning skills to support low achieving pupils. Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (1998) indicate that ‘new variant’ groups like these should retain the core structural features of a classic NG despite serving pupils of different age ranges or on a part-time basis. Although participants reported little to no explicit knowledge of these core structural feature or the principles of nurture, this research indicates that they can be found within the structure and rationale of the secondary school NGs. This lack of knowledge and variability in the approach to running each NG could be attributed to some degree to a lack of formal training. Further training and development of the groups would be required to place them firmly within this NG model, giving them more credibility and stability. Finding the balance between supporting pupils emotionally and supporting them academically will be important in establishing ‘new variant’ NGs within secondary school contexts.

5.2.3 RQ3 – What is staff’s understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of Nurture Groups?

Importantly, no explicit knowledge of the theoretical underpinnings of the NG approach was demonstrated by participants. However, some aspects of this approach were referred to indirectly and are reflected in practice. Only one participant directly referred to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) during interviews, although in-depth knowledge of this theory and its application to NG practice was not explained further in interview responses. It could be argued that attachment theory is not as relevant to adolescent pupils, as the original theory describes the process of obtaining a secure attachment in relation to early development as an infant. However, many of the NG practitioners and other staff within the participating schools referred indirectly to the

development of secure and trusting relationships between pupils and staff to facilitate further social, emotional and academic development in school. Participants also made indirect reference to vulnerable pupils lacking appropriate models and support at home therefore giving rise to the need to provide this within school. In this way, the NG could be seen to be providing a safe place for secondary school pupils to develop secure attachments to additional attachment figures in school perhaps in a way that cannot be provided at home. This then enables the pupils to feel secure in exploring their new environment and taking on the challenges that adolescence presents.

The lack of direct reference to nurture and attachment may reflect a broader issue in relation to labelling. The term nurture can be considered to be relevant to young pupils only and therefore, although the processes and principles are still identifiable for adolescents, participants may not have made explicit links to the terminology.

The six principles of nurture (figure 1.1) were also not referred to directly, but links to these have been made in the previous chapter and will be explored further here.

5.2.3.1 Nurture Group Principle 1 – Children’s learning is understood developmentally

Adaptations to NG practice included the provision of age-appropriate activities and developmentally appropriate discussion and learning tasks. A strong theme emerged around meeting the individual needs of the pupils and focusing NG content and support on these needs rather than following a prescriptive framework. Thus, it was felt that the NG was able to provide support for social, emotional and academic development for these pupils in a more focused, individualised and appropriate way

than in mainstream class. Thus, by providing pupils with developmentally appropriate support both emotionally and academically, a secure platform for academic progress is established.

5.2.3.2 Nurture Group Principle 2 – The classroom offers a safe base

This principle was strongly associated with NG practice in schools where the NG had a permanent base. Participants spoke about providing a safe place for pupils to go where they would feel supported and the importance of creating an ethos of acceptance and understanding within the group. The group was also less curriculum-driven than mainstream classes, providing a ‘refuge’ from the demands of secondary school education, as was found by Kourmoulaki (2013). The provision of a safe base could be seen to be more challenging in a secondary school context where demands on space and resources may be high. However, in schools where a permanent designated space could not be established, NGs provided a more flexible ‘safe base’ through access to key adults and by opening up opportunities to access support throughout the day and beyond the NG sessions, for example at lunchtimes.

5.2.3.3 Nurture Group Principle 3 – Nurture is important for the development of self esteem

Participants consistently highlighted building confidence and self-esteem as an aim and positive outcome of the NGs. This has strong links with improving emotional well-being in general as a key function of the NG for both pupils and staff. It was felt that by improving individual’s self esteem and confidence, far reaching positive effects could be expected, for example in the areas of attendance, development of

peer relationships and academic progress. Pupils who have had their basic needs met through the NG environment can be thought to be physically and emotionally prepared for learning and are therefore more able to cope in the mainstream learning environment (Kourmoulaki, 2013).

5.2.3.4 Nurture Group Principle 4 – Language is a vital means of communication

Participants spoke about the NG providing opportunities for pupils to talk about their problems contributing to a feeling of belonging and of being understood. This replicates the findings of previous research highlighting the feelings of safety and belonging that are fostered through discussion and cooperative work within a NG (Kourmoulaki, 2013). The use of language to build relationships between pupils and staff is a consideration that can be overlooked in a busy mainstream secondary school setting and the NG provided time and space to have conversations with pupils and get to know them. The NG may also provide an opportunity for pupils to develop and use social communication skills in an environment where they feel comfortable and supported (Kourmoulaki, 2013).

5.2.3.5 Nurture Group Principle 5 – It is understood that all behaviour is communication

Participants spoke about the NG providing opportunities for them to get to know their pupils better and understand them differently. By providing a ‘safe place’ for pupils to explore their emotions and time for staff to support this process, it was felt that NG practitioners were able to better understand the reasons behind different

behaviours and work with the pupils on moving forward and expressing themselves in a more appropriate way. This level of contact and degree of understanding may be hard to facilitate within mainstream classrooms, given time constraints and the need for a teacher's focus to be shared amongst all pupils in the class.

5.2.3.6 Nurture Group Principle 6 – The importance of transition in children’s lives is understood

Participants demonstrated the strongest degree of recognition of this principle in their comments about transition from primary to secondary school. The NGs were felt to be a valuable support system to enable pupils to make this transition smoothly and support them with the challenges that this can raise. Transition times during the school day were also recognised implicitly through the provision of NG support at break and lunch times and also before school to support transition from home to school, although these were not explicitly identified by participants during interviews. These issues are discussed further in section 5.2.4.2 ('Transition').

In summary, the six principles of nurture can be seen to be applied in secondary school NGs, although perhaps not always in a clearly identifiable and ‘pure’ form. The finding that there is little explicit knowledge of the theoretical underpinnings of the NG approach indicates that there is a need for staff training. This need was identified by participants. It was felt that useful experiences for training would include observation of an established NG within a secondary setting, as although observations of primary school NGs were felt to be helpful, participants noted that this model was not really suited to secondary schools and therefore needed to be adapted. Only half the participating schools indicated that they had received any

training, with only one of these having received formally recognised training from the Nurture Group Network. This could indicate limited knowledge or availability of training courses or could be a reflection of the limitations of the financial commitment required.

5.2.4 RQ4 – What do staff perceive to be the aims and objectives of Nurture Groups?

Participants identified a range of aims and objectives of the NGs, which were closely linked to and often discussed in relation to outcomes. The following areas were identified by most participants: attendance, transition, emotional well-being, relationships and support. These areas will now be discussed in turn.

5.2.4.1 Attendance

Participating schools indicated that one of the aims of the NG was to reduce exclusion rates and increase attendance in lessons for pupils who were choosing to miss school. This would also be applicable to pupils who would otherwise be placed within specialist provisions, where there is limited space. This is consistent with the findings of previous research, which describes NGs in secondary settings as a way to keep people in mainstream education (Colley, 2009).

The NG was also discussed in relation to pupils refusing to attend school. It was felt to support the process of reintegration into education for pupils after a period of long-term absence, as was found by Colley (2009). This may be due to the part-time basis of the NG, the provision of a ‘safe place’ to which pupils can retreat or the focus on ensuring that pupils are physically and emotionally ready for learning

before placing any further expectations upon them with regard to academic attainment.

Participants felt that it was important that a NG is not seen as an alternative to fixed term exclusion or as a sanction. It must instead be a supportive measure. In the context of previous research, if the NG were to become a provision focusing on containment or punishment it would more closely resemble an ‘aberrant’ NG (Cooper, Arnold and Boyd, 1998), which goes against the principles of nurture and could potentially do more harm than good for vulnerable pupils.

This theme has links to support for pupils and parents, as attendance issues can put pressure on the relationships between parents and their children and also between home and school. It links also with the importance of transition which may be a very difficult process for pupils who are having difficulty separating from their parents at home or getting used to a new environment.

5.2.4.2 Transition

As discussed previously (see section 5.2.3.6 ‘The importance of transition in children’s lives’) transition emerged as a strong theme during analysis. Supporting transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 was one of the main objectives for many participants and the NG was felt to be an effective strategy for working with vulnerable or anxious pupils during this time. West, Sweeting and Young (2010) indicate that transition is an event in young people’s lives that can cause changes in their identity and well-being. They highlight that issues raised by transition, which may impact more heavily on vulnerable young people, include concerns around school structure and size, interactions with older peers and bullying. Thus, a NG

providing support for pupils in tackling these concerns can be invaluable as a provision to support transition. Links between secondary schools and their feeder primary schools could also be a benefit of a NG supporting transition, enabling the sharing of good practice, training and resources, as was suggested by Cooke, Yeomans and Parkes (2008).

In addition to the ‘big transitions’ such as moving schools, secondary school pupils experience many transitions each day, between home and school, from lessons to breaks and between lessons themselves. The view of adolescents as ‘mini-adults’ can lead to the opinion that they are able to manage these transitions with minimal difficulty and it is not always recognised that these transitions can be experienced as very challenging. The recognition of the challenging nature of transition is more likely for younger pupils. Older pupils may also lack confidence in their ability to acknowledge difficulties around transition or they may not even be able to identify these themselves and thus support from staff is essential. The finding that NGs are considered key for supporting transition is consistent with previous research indicating that a NG can be an effective platform for providing pupils with the skills they need to manage these transitions and the emotional support they may require at these times (Kourmoulaki, 2013).

5.2.4.3 Emotional Well-being

Supporting emotional well-being of pupils was consistently raised as an aim for the NGs. It was felt that pupils benefitted in terms of increased confidence, happiness and self esteem. These benefits also extended to how the pupil functions within the secondary school environment. This was particularly relevant for the settings, as

pupils had to learn to cope with big changes in their learning environment, including a larger school, different teachers and classrooms and a new or extended peer group. The NG was therefore felt to provide a safe base, more closely associated with a primary school environment to which pupils could retreat and where they felt safe to learn.

Additional benefits were found for staff, as the NG provided an alternative approach to behaviour management and support for mainstream staff who were struggling to work with pupils exhibiting challenging behaviour. However, consideration of the strain that can be placed on staff working intensively with pupils who may experience high levels of anxiety, anger or frustration is also important. Thus, supporting the emotional well-being of staff involved in the NG should not be overlooked.

5.2.4.4 Relationships

The NGs were felt to support development and maintenance of positive relationships between staff and students, which could otherwise be under strain following episodes of challenging behaviour. This applies to relationships with mainstream teaching staff and with NG practitioners, although these relationships are likely to differ depending on context. The importance of trusting relationships with NG staff is reflected in the findings of Garner and Thomas (2011) and Kourmoulaki (2013) who found that NG practitioners were at the heart of the groups.

Increased contact with parents was also highlighted as a positive outcome in terms of developing better communication and good relationships between home and school. As noted previously, contact with parents in secondary schools is much less

than in primary schools due to the number of pupils and staff and the increased independence of pupils so improving the links between home and school for vulnerable pupils accessing the NGs is beneficial. This is consistent with previous research by Colley (2009) and Garner and Thomas (2011) who found that enhanced relationships with parents can occur through NGs. In addition, an increased emphasis on the role that parents play is included in current legislation (DfE, 2013) and the newly developed Education, Health and Care Plans. Thus, an intervention that encourages a more collaborative approach and recognises the importance of parental involvement is consistent with changes in policy and practice within education.

5.2.4.5 Support

The theme of support was central to discussion about the aims and objectives of NGs and relates to mechanisms of support for pupils, staff and parents. Positive outcomes in relation to support at these levels were also found by Kourmoulaki (2013) in NGs running in a Scottish secondary school. In addition, the author also found that support mechanisms at a systemic level were important considerations for secondary school NGs and this was reflected in the current research through the view that the NGs supported mainstream teaching staff and wider school issues such as attendance and behaviour management.

As highlighted previously, the opportunity to talk through problems was provided for pupils, linking with the principle of nurture that describes language as a vital means of communication. Support for pupils was also felt to be provided both through direct involvement with the NG and through additional opportunities during

reintegration and beyond. Learning from experiences within the group was felt to support the pupils in situations within the mainstream school environment.

Support for mainstream teaching staff and supervision of staff working with the NG was also felt to be important. The group was also felt to be beneficial in providing support for parents in terms of providing positive feedback about their children and letting them know that they were not alone in some of the difficulties they may be facing at home. This demonstrates the wider impact that a NG can have beyond the pupils directly involved with it.

5.2.4.6 A Proactive Approach

Participants discussed the formation of their NG in the context of responding to concerns about behaviour expressed within the wider school context. Thus an aim of the NG was to act as a preventative measure in tackling challenging behaviour before it leads to more extreme sanctions such as exclusion. It was also felt to be a proactive approach to inclusion of pupils with complex social, emotional and behavioural needs within a mainstream learning environment. As a provision, a NG therefore provides a secondary school with a means to cater for vulnerable pupils or pupils with challenging behaviour, who would otherwise struggle to succeed in a mainstream setting. Given the sometimes limited space in specialist provision for these pupils, secondary schools have to become more skilled and able to provide for them.

5.2.5 RQ5 – What do staff feel are the most important aspects of Nurture Groups in secondary schools?

Despite variation in the approach to running a NG, several aspects were consistently identified by participants as important for NGs in a secondary school setting as opposed to important considerations for a NG in general. These include adaptations that have had to be made to the traditional model in order to ensure the NG is appropriate for the pupils and setting. The importance of responding to the needs of the individual pupils in attendance is now discussed.

Participants emphasised the importance of a flexible approach to running their NG in order to make it work within their setting, focusing on several factors. One such factor was the relevance of the material for the age group in attendance. Participants recognised that the issues faced by adolescents and in particular by pupils in relation to transition to a secondary school setting were unlikely to be the same as the issues faced by young pupils in primary schools or early years settings. Thus, NG teaching and activities had to have a specific focus on these issues in addition to providing more general support for social and emotional development. The issues highlighted as being particularly relevant for secondary school pupils included familiarity with the setting, as transition to a much larger school with different procedures and expectations was felt to be a major obstacle potentially causing concern to vulnerable pupils.

Other issues included the importance of age-appropriate activities such as discussion of ‘teenage concerns’, particularly around friendship and bullying with a reduced emphasis on more traditional aspects of a NG such as free play. This replicates Colley’s (2009) finding that secondary school NGs may focus on a wider range of

issues raised by adolescent experience. This is also partially consistent with the findings of Cooper and Tiknaz (2007) who indicated that key areas of support in secondary school NGs were reported to be around anger management, coping strategies and peer relationships.

Participants also felt that, although structure was important in providing a safe base for the pupils, freedom to adapt each session as required to meet the needs of the pupils on each occasion was essential. Thus advance planning of NG content was more challenging and staff members involved in running the group were working in many cases with high levels of autonomy.

Flexibility was also considered important with regard to practical considerations such as timetabling, where it was felt that the traditional model of a full-time NG or a group that runs for a substantial period of time each day was inappropriate. Instead, sessions tended to be shorter to fit in with the structure of the school day and were fewer in number or spread throughout the day and week. Participants indicated that the NGs were organised so as to cause limited interference to attendance of mainstream lessons and groups were often timetabled to ensure that pupils did not always miss the same subject, as was found by Cooke, Yeomans and Parkes (2008). The consideration of timetabling is much more complex within a secondary school setting, where pupils attending the group may all be on different timetables, thus presenting a challenge to NG practitioners.

Alongside timetabling issues, space constraints within a secondary school setting and the mobility of staff and students can make it challenging to find a suitable NG environment from which to run the group. This is supported by findings from previous research, which indicate that secondary NGs are forced to be more flexible

in terms of location and timing owing to the limitations presented by the setting (Colley, 2009). In this previous research, the potential benefits of this in relation to permeating nurture throughout the school were highlighted, although strictly speaking this fluidity could be seen to go against the principles of nurture in the traditional model.

Identification of pupils for the NG is also likely to be more complex given the potentially large number of pupils in each year group and the reduced contact that any one member of staff may have with those pupils. This is therefore likely to involve a number of staff members, as opposed to just a class teacher and/or the SENCo at a primary school, and is reliant on strong and effective communication systems within the school. Although this emerged as an important consideration for secondary school NGs, it was an area where practice varied and where work to develop well-defined systems could be an area for development.

Colley (2009) found that the NG approach was required to become broader in secondary school settings due to the number of pupils requiring support being potentially much larger than the number that can be catered for within a focused NG provision. This is also reflected in the current research through the inclusion of additional intervention work outside of the group and additional opportunities to access the NG. This diluted model is shown clearly in one school, where a more widespread approach to nurture has been adopted, providing support for pupils throughout the school day and within mainstream lessons. The value of retaining intense and focused NG support in addition to more widespread support should not be overlooked however, as a more diluted model implemented in isolation moves away from the principles of the original NG approach.

Expertise is a key issue that needs to be considered when setting up a secondary school NG. Staff may be working with pupils who are functioning at a developmental level that is similar to that of a much younger child and this may be outside of their main area of expertise as teachers or support staff working within secondary education. The importance of empowering staff to feel confident working with a NG model is linked to an identified need to provide training and perhaps involve specialist staff to support development of expertise extending to younger age ranges and of theoretical underpinnings of the NG approach itself. This may in turn facilitate good links with feeder primary schools and enable staff to make appropriate judgements about how their expectations of pupils attending the NG may need to be adapted.

Although not directly raised as an important aspect of running a NG for all participants, information sharing emerged as a key issue for running a NG in a secondary school setting. As discussed previously (see section 5.2.1.2 ‘Processes’), processes of information sharing varied greatly between participating schools, with some favouring more formal written methods or meeting and others favouring informal discussions. Information sharing procedures are likely to vary considerably and may be far more complex than those that can be employed within a primary school setting due to the size of the organisation and the number of staff working at multiple levels, as was found by Colley (2009). This has direct links with the perceptions of the wider school staff and therefore with the degree to which the NG can be viewed as integral to the school (see section 5.2.6 ‘Additional Findings’ for further discussion).

A question raised by participants was, ‘who needs to know about the NG?’ For some schools, information about the group in general was shared on a ‘need to know’ basis

with staff, pupils and parents who have direct involvement with the group. However, this may not be beneficial for supporting transferability of skills and learning from within the NG to the mainstream class context and may reduce the consistency of the approach taken to dealing with the needs of individual pupils. Other schools prioritised increased knowledge of the NG amongst the entire staff team in order to embed the approach within the school and promote more widespread recognition of the needs of the pupils and more nurturing ways of working. Information about individual pupils engaged with the NG was generally appropriately shared on a need to know basis with relevant staff and parents. There may be some concern that sharing information freely, particularly among peer groups, could lead to an increased risk of bullying or biased behaviour towards individual pupils. Thus care should be taken that information is shared appropriately and with consent where necessary through transparent systems.

5.2.6 Additional Findings

Additional findings of the current research relate largely to the NGs in the wider school context. Participants indicated that the benefits of the NG extended beyond those pupils who were directly involved in it to include other pupils within the school. These benefits were discussed in relation to the impact of improved behaviour on mainstream classes and therefore the learning of other pupils and the impact the NG has had on the general ethos of the school. This is consistent with the findings of previous research such as Cooper and Whitebread (2007), who found improvements for other pupils with SEBD within the schools who were not directly accessing NG provision.

The impact of the NG in the wider school context is largely dependent on the perceptions of staff and students as well as how information is shared. A positive view of NGs was reported across various levels of staff in the current research, as a provision for vulnerable pupils in secondary schools, despite the challenges of setting up this provision within their settings. The perceptions of mainstream teaching staff are more difficult to explore and are most likely varied but are potentially influenced by complexities in information sharing and the degree to which observable behavioural changes can be identified.

In the current research, the NGs functioned in relative isolation from the rest of the school. This may be because they were in their infancy so NGs that have been established for a longer period of time may be more integrated within the wider school context. The importance of the NG being an integral part of the school is recognised within the original approach (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000) and within research on developing ‘nurturing schools’ (Doyle, 2004).

Despite voicing a desire for the NG to be an integral part of the school in questionnaire responses, it is noted that this did not appear to be the case during interviews and participants in general appeared to feel that the group wasn’t recognised within the school in the wider context. This goes against the requirement for the principles of nurture to be embedded within the school ethos that is expressed within the original approach and distances these groups from the potential benefits highlighted within previous research on ‘nurturing schools’ (Doyle, 2004). Colley (2009) proposed that a whole school initiative may be challenging given the size of secondary schools and so a more gradual approach may be more appropriate. This is consistent with the findings of the current research, in which schools appear to be

taking a ‘bottom up’ approach, allowing the NG itself to first become established and allowing the positive outcomes to speak for themselves.

In addition to the impact of the group within the wider school context, approaches to measurement of impact for individuals varied. One participating school provided data on the effectiveness of their group based on factors such as exclusions, attendance and detentions as measureable outcomes. This may be good practice in relation to measurement of impact which remains an issue for NGs in secondary school settings. The use of appropriate measures such as those described above and standardised measures such as the BPYP (Bennathan, Boxall, & Colley, 2010) may be useful for informing further research on the evaluation of such NGs.

A potential issue was also identified in the current research in reference to engagement of parents and pupils in the NG provision. The nature of NGs implies that the pupils accessing these may have complex or challenging family dynamics outside of school. Thus, in order to engage these pupils and their parents in the approach at any stage, the school may have to be more creative and work on building a relationship with the family beyond that which would normally be expected for pupils in mainstream secondary schools. As the current research did not address this issue directly, at what stage and to what degree parents are involved with the NG is not clear and would be an area for further exploration. The importance of involving parents and the benefits of building a positive relationship with parents was recognised by participants.

The exploration of the structure and rationale of secondary school NGs has revealed much variation in the approach and some key considerations for secondary schools wishing to develop a NG as a means of supporting vulnerable pupils across KS3 and

KS4. Several areas for development have also been identified. These include the need for more in depth knowledge of the theory and principles underpinning the approach and perhaps development of a core model that could still be adapted within each setting, to improve consistency. These issues could be tackled through the provision of appropriate training to NG practitioners. In addition, the current research is in agreement with the findings of Kourmoulaki (2013), who identified a need for development of more efficient communication and monitoring systems, as well as a focus on systemic issues, such as acceptance in the wider school context.

A barrier to setting up a secondary school NG in addition to the complexities discussed previously is the cost associated with training, resources and staffing as well as the time and space commitment. Thus the establishment of a suitable model, involvement of SMT, acceptance of the wider school staff and measurement of impact would be desirable developments for this approach.

5.3 Implications for Educational Psychology

This research has some potentially important implications for Educational Psychologists (EPs). The first of these is to inform EPs about the nurture provision in secondary schools in their area. Given the emphasis placed on the benefits of NG provision for supporting transition, this could in turn support EP and school transition work for vulnerable pupils from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. The findings of this research in identifying common themes and aspects of this approach in practice may also support EPs in discussions with schools regarding developing a nurture group approach as an intervention, particularly for supporting inclusion of pupils with SEBD within mainstream settings.

Identification of areas for development allows scope for EP involvement in design and delivery of training for secondary schools expressing an interest in establishing a NG. Informal feedback from schools when recruiting participants indicated that the level of interest is high and all participants indicated that they felt further training in this area would be beneficial. This research also provides a base upon which further research can build and which EPs can be involved with, such as more exploratory work into experience of NGs from parents and pupils or evaluation of secondary school NGs, once an appropriate model has been developed and implemented.

The importance of support for staff involved in running the NGs was highlighted in part through this research but robust support systems and formal supervision opportunities were not identified. Thus, although school staff may be skilled in providing informal support for colleagues, supervision of staff remains an area in which EP input may be valuable. This could potentially be through direct input or by providing staff with training opportunities to develop their own supervision skills and systems, thus empowering staff to put in place more formal measures of support.

Another potential role for EPs within secondary school NGs is providing support for identification of pupils for referral to the NG. Again, this may be through direct work with schools, for example during planning meetings and individual work with pupils. A more widespread impact could be achieved through systems work, focusing on developing an appropriate referral system within schools, which was identified in this research as an area for development. This system may look very different depending on the school context, the needs of the pupils and the level of need identified by staff.

The current research raised questions about the engagement of parents in the NG approach within secondary settings. It is suggested that, although the importance of parental involvement is recognised, there may be a current lack of robust systems for involving parents and also for actively acknowledging the voice of child. These factors could potentially have an impact on engagement and outcomes for pupils accessing a NG and are important considerations. It may be appropriate for an EP to support development of more robust systems in these areas and also potentially directly support engagement with hard to reach parents and families.

Although participants report that they provide support for pupil reintegration to mainstream class following involvement in the NG, the nature of this support is not clear and in most cases, well thought out systems of support for reintegration could not be consistently identified. Thus, this is an area for further development within secondary school NGs and is an area in which EP involvement could be beneficial. Support could be provided by EPs through training and direct involvement with the group to apply knowledge of learning and transition to support transference of skills and reintegration.

More broadly, an EP's involvement in schools at various levels enables them to be in a position where they can support systemic change toward becoming a 'nurturing school', embedding the principles of nurture within the school ethos. This may involve work with senior management teams, work on policy development, research, development of appropriate systems and providing training for staff.

5.4 Implications in the Wider Educational Context

This research also has implications for schools beyond the involvement of an Educational Psychologist. It has the potential to raise the profile of a nurturing approach in secondary schools across the county and, if positive impact is evidenced through further research, the potential to raise the profile of this approach nationally. By integrating nurture into a school ethos, this approach has the potential to change perceptions of SEBD pupils and how behaviour is understood. Potentially, establishing a flexible model of secondary school NG provision that can be adapted for each school provides the basis for all schools to be able to effectively support pupils with SEBD within a mainstream environment. In order for this to become a reality, evaluation will be essential to evidence impact, given the financial and time implications for schools.

On a local level, this research has identified positive outcomes in areas such as developing links between schools and sharing good practice. This enables schools to develop a mutually supportive approach to transition between primary and secondary settings and builds relationships and a support network for secondary settings in their local area. Teaching staff can develop their skills and knowledge and develop a supportive relationship both within school and with parents, thus supporting key issues such as attendance and transition.

Improving attendance was identified as a key aim and outcome of NGs in this research. This has implications for schools in which several pupils may be on the brink of exclusion. It provides an alternative approach to managing the needs and behaviour of these pupils and can be discussed with schools in relation to the potential positive impact it may have on exclusion rates and attendance in general. A

mainstream school providing effective NG intervention for pupils with SEBD could also be considered an alternative for placement within specialist provisions, where places are limited.

5.5 Critique of the Current Research

5.5.1 Aims and Scope

The current research focused specifically on the structure and rationale of NGs within a secondary school setting and thus only considered staff views. This allowed an in-depth exploration of the structure and rationale for participating NGs and was therefore appropriate for the aims of the research. However, additional information on the experience of these groups was not explored on this occasion. The views of pupils and parents may have added value in exploring important aspects of secondary school NGs and what makes them work. Focus groups may be a more appropriate method of data collection for these participants, as this would support the generation of ideas and would potentially be a less challenging forum for discussion.

Although multiple views were explored at different levels across the school staffing structure in the current research, it was not possible to obtain the views of mainstream teaching staff. This is partly due to the time commitment and the willingness of these staff members to participate but also reflects an acknowledgement by NG practitioners that the level of awareness of the NG in the wider school context is currently low. It would be interesting to explore differences in views where a NG is well established within a secondary school setting and is felt to be an integral part of the school.

Differences in the perspectives of staff members in a range of roles were also not identified. This is largely due to the variation in the roles of personnel interviewed and the small sample size and thus it was not felt that analysing them separately would add value on this occasion. However, differences may have been more apparent if it were possible to obtain the qualitative data from mainstream teaching staff and other members of staff not directly involved in the running of the group or with reduced awareness of it.

When recruiting participants, it was noted that secondary schools were sometimes unfamiliar with the concept of a NG, instead running short term interventions focusing on areas such as social skills. These were not felt to be appropriate for the current research but could be considered to provide similar levels of support to some of the NGs included in the research. This may reflect an issue with identification and understanding of provisions that are consistent with the NG approach. Stringent inclusion and exclusion criteria to identify eligible groups are therefore important and could be applied more rigorously in further research but in this exploratory research it may have resulted in the loss of interesting and relevant data.

The current research also focused on NGs where little to no formal training had been provided, which potentially explains the large amount of variation seen in the approaches. This was because secondary schools across the county have set up groups largely independently and in response to positive outcomes perceived by primary schools who have received formal training. It is perhaps also a reflection of a reluctance to commit finances and time to training for an approach with little evidence base within secondary school settings.

By including quantitative data gathered from a larger number of schools across the county, this research was able to provide an overview of the structure of NGs currently running in secondary school settings. This data, although brief, also provided an opportunity to identify common elements within the approach and aspects that were felt to be important by participants. The large degree of variation in the approach taken to running a NG within a secondary school setting was also identified and this recognition has value in itself. Although reflecting a good response rate, the number of responses included within quantitative data analysis was small due to the number of eligible NGs running within the population and therefore it would have been valuable to expand this element of the research to include a greater number of participants.

5.5.2 Research Design and Methodology

The use of a mixed methods design for this exploratory research was felt to add value by ensuring that both quantitative data regarding group structure and qualitative data regarding rationale was collected. In quantitative data collection however, the return of questionnaires was slow, requiring follow-up by the researcher and in some instances complete information was not provided or was unclear. Although follow-up interviews allowed for clarification of questionnaire responses, this option was not available for all participants providing quantitative data. Given the small number of responses, telephone surveys may have provided more information and an opportunity to clarify and expand on responses. This however would have been inappropriate if there were a large number of participants providing quantitative data.

For quantitative analysis, a greater number of questionnaire responses would have allowed a more in-depth analysis of the data and may have revealed patterns in the data that could not be identified in the current research. For qualitative analysis, the use of both a deductive and inductive approach to thematic analysis worked well to identify both similarities and differences to the classic NG approach.

Additional considerations in critiquing this research are the issues encountered when recruiting participants, for example the absence of an LSA participant for interview in one of the schools due to staff changes and the withdrawal of another school from the research. Although this was unavoidable and participants were entitled to withdraw from the research at any time in accordance with ethical guidance, it is important to note, as it could potentially have impacted on the balance of the findings. However given that the themes identified were largely consistent between schools and across participants in differing roles, this is unlikely. It should also be noted that one participant accessed the interview schedule electronically and provided a written response. Although this differs from the face-to-face interviews conducted with the other participants, it provided equally rich and relevant data and was not felt to be any less valid.

5.5.3 Ethical Issues and Reflexivity

Ethical considerations in relation to the dual positioning of the researcher in the county where the research took place (as discussed in section 3.9 ‘Reflexivity’ and section 3.10 ‘Ethical Issues’) are also highly relevant in critiquing this research. In one respect, working as a TEP within the Local Authority allowed the researcher to conduct highly relevant research within the local context. However, although controlled for as much as possible, a possible conflict of interest must be

acknowledged and the potential impact of factors such as the relationship between the school and the EPS should not be ignored. This dual positioning of the researcher was reflected upon throughout the current research and potential implications for subjective analysis were considered. In addition, the impact that this may have had on participant responses in relation to their perception of the EPS and EPs in general as well as a potential desire to be seen to be ‘doing the right thing’ is an important consideration.

5.6 Opportunities for Further Research

Previous research, as highlighted in Chapter 2 ‘Literature Review’ remains limited and varies in quality. Therefore, further research, in the form of large scale longitudinal studies, is required to strengthen the evidence base for NGs in general and their associated benefits, particularly within secondary school settings. MacKay, Reynolds, & Kearney (2010) argue that such research should also investigate the effects of class size and different models of nurture support, using more robust methodology and including objective measures of outcomes.

Given the limitations of this research, it would be valuable to also explore on a larger scale the views of children and parents in relation to experiences of the NG and what they feel to be valuable aspects of this approach. Young people’s views on their experiences of a NG in a secondary school setting remains a relatively unexplored area (Kourmoulaki, 2013). In addition, it would be valuable to explore NG models being implemented on a larger scale and across different local contexts. As informal feedback during the research process indicates that the level of interest in this approach is high among secondary school practitioners, the number of potential

participants may increase following establishment of an appropriate model, increasing awareness of the approach and access to training opportunities.

It would also be interesting to explore the differences between the models employed by schools where formal NG training has been given and those that have been set up independently to see if the model is applied differently by practitioners with more in-depth theoretical knowledge. Although the current research has explored to some extent the skill base of staff running secondary school NGs, this remains an area for further research, particularly within NGs where staff have received formal NG training. The findings of this research suggest that the skill base of staff varies a great deal and there is potential for further development, perhaps highlighting the need for training. It would be valuable to establish what skills are important and what impact they have.

A key area for further research is in the evaluation of this approach within secondary school settings. Evaluating established NGs, can only be done once an appropriate model has been developed and set up within the school. Therefore action research would be appropriate. Further research into areas for development such as support beyond Key Stage 3, successful transference of skills and referral and reintegration processes would also be valuable. As highlighted previously, involvement of parents and recognition of the voice of the child are also key areas in which further exploration may be beneficial.

Very little previous research has focused on the impact of NGs within the wider school context and beyond that for pupils directly involved in the intervention (Kourmoulaki, 2013). Thus exploration of NGs in relation to systems in operation within the school as a whole and indeed outside of the school organisation would be

beneficial and link to nurturing schools and communities. Such research would address the question of whether schools on a wider scale can adopt NG principles in theory and practice. The research suggests that adoption of the principles within the wider school context is currently limited. It would also explore how the NG fits into the wider school context. Although this is likely to vary depending on the needs of individual settings, further research could shed light on common aspects within a secondary school systems that can support or present challenges to development of a NG provision.

5.7 Conclusion

This research aimed to explore the structure and rationale of NGs running in secondary schools across the county within which the research took place. The findings indicate that all participating schools have developed their own NG model in response to the needs of their most vulnerable pupils and the needs of the school organisation leading to great variation in the NG approach. None of these models can be seen to be consistent with the ‘classic’ Boxall NG but all were implicitly informed by NG principles, thus reflecting models of ‘new variant’ NGs and ‘groups informed by NG principles’ (Cooper, Arnold and Boyd, 1998). Little knowledge of the original approach, its principles and theoretical underpinnings was demonstrated.

Despite differences between the approaches, some aspects of the structure and rationale of secondary school NGs were consistently raised by participants as important considerations. These include the importance of flexibility with regard to both practical considerations and NG content in order to meet the needs of pupils facing challenges presented by a secondary school setting or by adolescence itself. In

addition, NGs were viewed as an important and valuable provision to support transition and foster supportive relationships. It was seen as a proactive approach with important implications for attendance and emotional well-being.

The challenges of setting up this provision within a secondary school context remain and further development of an appropriate model is required with a particular focus on developing communication systems, selection and assessment processes to monitor impact and embedding the nurture approach within the wider school context.

In conclusion, the more complex organisational structures and needs of adolescent pupils require a more flexible and age-appropriate approach to nurture at KS3 and beyond. Further development of an appropriate model of NG provision for secondary schools is required and a need for training and evaluation of impact has been established. Implications for EPs have been discussed in relation to training, research, systemic support with challenging behaviour and support for pupils with SEBD.

It is hoped that the findings of this research will increase knowledge and understanding of the approach to nurture that is currently taking place within the local context. In addition, it is hoped that the findings can contribute to the future development of a consistent and effective model of NG provision that meets the needs of secondary schools and some of their most vulnerable pupils. Given the increased level of interest in NGs within secondary schools and the identified need to support pupils with SEBD within mainstream settings, development and evaluation of an effective NG model appropriate for implementation in the secondary sector would potentially benefit professionals, parents and pupils.

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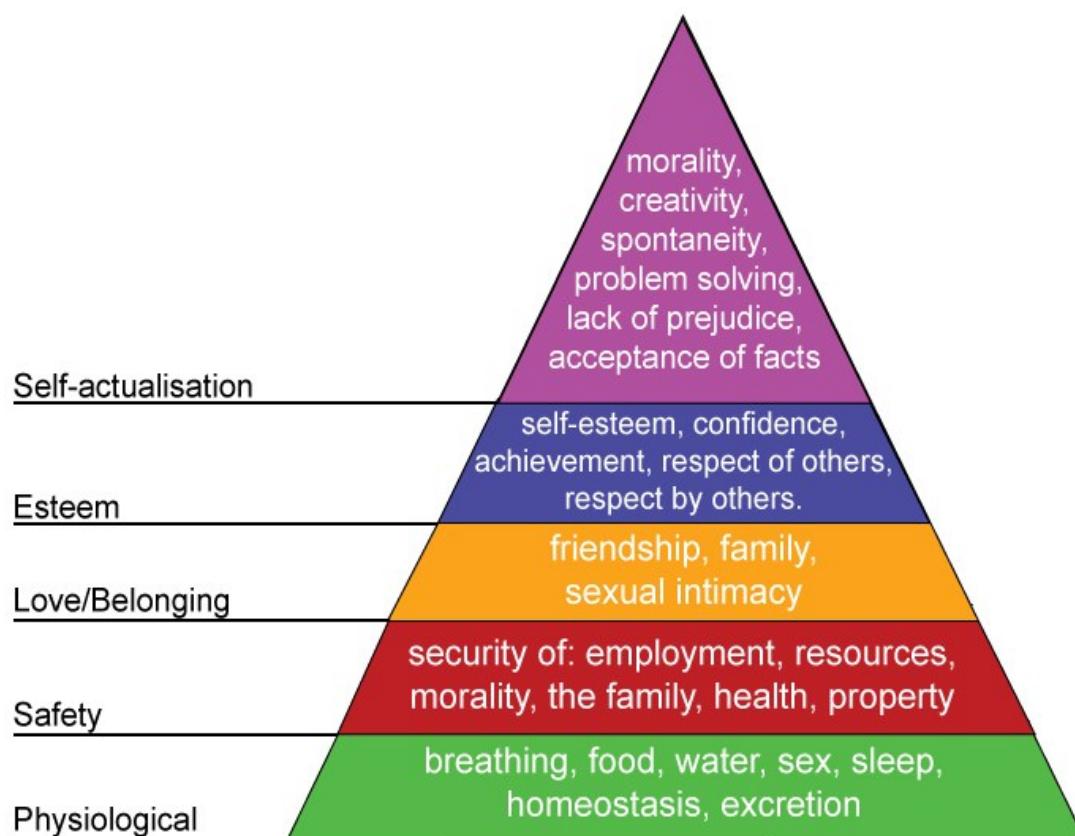
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

(Maslow, 1943)



Appendix 2: Literature Review Search Terms

Literature review searches conducted – 6th December 2013

The Value of Nurture Groups in Primary Schools

		EBSCO Database		
		Psych info	Academic Search Complete	Education Research Complete
S1	Nurture groups	81	91	77
S2	S1 and effectiveness	8	11	12
S3	S1 and value	4	9	6
S4	S1 and school placement	1	1	1
S5	S1 and benefits	7	7	7
S6	S1 and outcomes	9	6	7
S7	S1 and transition	2	4	1
S8	S1 and learning	16	17	24
S9	S1 and behaviour	36	36	38
S10	S1 and emotion	3	1	1

S11	S1 and social skills	1	2	3
S12	S1 and education	38	45	56
S13	S1 and progress	7	7	8
S14	S1 and attainment	1	2	3
S15	S1 or S2 or S3 or S4 or S5 or S6 or S7 or S8 or S9 or S10 or S11 or S12 or S13 or S14	81	91	77

Nurture in Secondary Schools

EBSCO Database				
		Psych info	Academic Search Complete	Education Research Complete
S1	nurture groups	81	91	77
S2	s1 and secondary schools	7	10	13
S3	school based intervention	9502	1548	1042
S4	Nurture	4843	5136	2350
S5	support groups	16253	18585	4483

S6	s1 and emotional disturbance	15	0	0
S7	s4 and secondary school	28	83	164
S8	s1 and key stage 3	1	1	1
S9	s1 and adolescence	1	2	2
S10	s1 or s5	16323	18669	4552
S11	s10 and secondary school	74	198	232
S12	s1 or s2 or s3 or s4 or s6 or s7 or s8 or s9 or s10 or s11	30420	25231	7845

Appendix 3: Table of Studies Selected for Systematic Literature Review

The Value of Nurture Groups in Primary Schools

Authors and Date	Methodology	Participants	Findings
Iszatt and Wasilewska (1997)	Interviews Comparison group	308 students 288 former NG students 20 non-matched students	87% able to return to mainstream classroom in less than one year. 83% remained in mainstream placement at follow-up 4% required SEN support beyond standard range of provision Only 55% of comparison group coped in mainstream placements
Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001)	*See following table 'Nurture in Secondary Schools' for details		
O'Connor and Colwell (2002)	Measured pupil progress on the Developmental Diagnostic Profile pre nurture, post nurture (after three terms) and two years later	3 Nurture Groups 68 students (average age 5 yrs) 12 students re-tested at follow-up	Significant improvements in cognitive and emotional development and social engagement. Improvements maintained at follow-up

Cooper and Whitebread (2007)	*See following table ‘Nurture in Secondary Schools for details		
Sanders (2007)	<p>NG pilot evaluation</p> <p>Included control group</p> <p>Pre and Post assessment conducted using Boxall Profile</p> <p>Included collection of parent, staff and pupil views.</p>	<p>3 NGs</p> <p>17 students attending NG</p> <p>9 students without NG access</p>	<p>Significantly greater academic gains and additional gains in social and emotional development for pupils accessing NG.</p>
Binnie and Allen (2008)	<p>NG evaluation</p> <p>Data obtained through repeated measures using Boxall Profile and SDQ</p> <p>Evaluation questionnaires completed by parents and staff</p>	<p>6 NGs</p> <p>36 students</p> <p>Staff and parents of pupils attending the NGs</p>	<p>Improved behaviour, self-esteem and academic outcomes for pupils attending the NGs.</p> <p>Positive views of staff and parents. Positive impact on school in the wider context.</p> <p>Challenges of setting up a NG also highlighted.</p>

Reynolds, MacKay and Kearney (2009)	Pre and Post assessments using Boxall Profile, SDQ, BIOS, Base Line Assessment and Parental questionnaire	16 NGs 16 control schools 179 students	Significant gains in achievement found for NG pupils. Additional improvements for emotional and behavioural functioning.
Scott and Lee (2009)	Pupils matched by age and level of need Evaluating part-time, cross age NGs Used Boxall Profile and academic assessments pre, mid and post nurture.	4 NGs 25 NG students 25 in control group	Significant improvements in Boxall Profile scores for pupils accessing NG provision. Additional gains noted for academic attainment and motor skills (not significant). Most significant improvements were seen for younger pupils.
MacKay, Reynolds and Kearney (2010)	Review of literature	N/A	Identified a clear link between attachment and academic achievement. Argue that NGs have direct impact on academic achievement.
Seth Smith, Levi, Pratt, Fonagy and Jaffey (2010)	Pupils assessed pre and post nurture.	83 children 10 NGs 5 control groups	Improvements in NC levels and social, emotional and behavioural functioning. Gains persisted over 5 months.

Shaver and McClatchey (2013)	Boxall Profile scores collected pre-and post-nurture. Views of children and staff collected.	3 primary school NGs Scores collected for 33 children. Children interviewed (N= 19) Staff interviewed (N=5)	Significant gains for pupils accessing NG. Positive view of group by parents. Staff noted progress for pupils. Children enjoyed the group and were happy.
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Nurture in Secondary Schools

Authors and Date	Methodology	Participants	Findings
Cooper, Arnold, and Boyd (2001)	Mixed methods. Provides preliminary findings including indication of staff, parent and pupil perceptions. Semi-structured interviews were used with parents by phone and with teachers and children in person.	342 pupils, 216 cases, 84% 4-7 years, 16% 7-10 years. 25 state funded schools, 23 primary, 2 secondary across 8 LEAs of varying sizes. Types of nurture group studied include 17 'classic' groups, one full time variant, two secondary school groups and five groups run on a half time basis.	Quantitative - No significant differences found between types of NG. One LEA is reported to have had greater increases in academic progress. Qualitative – some progress noted by 196 teachers. Positive perceptions from 89 parents. 79 teachers – 96% said that NG had a positive impact on whole school (46% strong, 50% positive, 4% some positive impact, none negative) in terms of development of more nurturing attitudes,

		<p>changes in ways of thinking/talking to children, contribution of nurturing principles to whole school policy, increased sense of empowerment with difficult students, increased awareness of developmental issues and relationship between SEAL and learning.</p> <p>Parents: 55% felt children were better, 21% saw no change, 4% felt they had worsened. Many parents feel progress would not have been made in mainstream. Common cited improvements were child's attitude to school and motivation to attend. Behaviour was thought to improve, parents felt less anxious and more optimistic.</p> <p>Pupils: Issues raised about accessing views. Valued aspects of NG included quality of interpersonal relationships in NG, openness of staff, opportunities for free play, quiet and calm, pleasant nature of NG environment, snack and meal were engaging, predictability of NG routine.</p>
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Cooper and Whitebread (2007)	<p>Longitudinal design (1999-2001) Five NGs were assessed using Boxall profile and S&D questionnaire.</p> <p>Teachers were interviewed twice. Parents filled in a questionnaire.</p>	<p>Progress of 546 students (mean age 6yrs 5 mths) monitored. 34 school NGs, 11 LEAs all in the lowest quartile according to SATs scores.</p> <p>Group 1a: 284 pupils, 23 schools, 8 LEAs, 22 schools for primary. 85% between 4-7yrs, 15% 8-10 yrs. One school included secondary school children – 6 KS3 children (13-14yrs), 2% of total sample. 21 out of 22 conformed to classic Boxall model, secondary group was variant 3, other primary was variant 2 (50% attendance).</p> <p>Group 1b – 75 pupils, 3 Leas, 11NGs, 2 secondary school NGs (variant 3) 8 primary (6 variant 1 and 2 half time)</p> <p>Group 2 – CONTROL 64 pupils matched to random sample in terms of age, gender and</p>	<p>Results analysed using t-tests and chi square SDQ – improvement rate for NG pupils were significantly greater than that of non SEBD controls (independent samples t-test $p=0.000$)</p> <p>Difference between NG children and children with SEBD marginally not sig ($p=0.050$)</p> <p>Longest established groups rate of improvement was sig higher and greater proportion of abnormal scores in established NGs. They also had sig higher rate of improvement in comparison to controls.</p> <p>Boxall profile: NG children showed sig improvement between terms 1 and 2. Highly significant improvement occurred between terms 1 and 4.</p>
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		<p>perceived academic ability.</p> <p>Attending same schools as 1a</p> <p>Group 3 – CONTROL 62 pupils perceived to have no SEBD. Matched as before. Attending same schools as 1a</p> <p>Group 4 CONTROL 31 pupils with SEBD attending schools without NGs. Matched as before</p> <p>Group 5 27 pupils perceived as no SEBD and no NG. Matched as above.</p>	
Cooke, Yeomans and Parkes (2008)	<p>Case study of a secondary school nurture group.</p> <p>Year seven and year eight pupils attended timetabled sessions every afternoon (year seven) or twice a week (year eight). Pupils were supported in reintegration through replacement therapeutic interventions.</p> <p>Boxall profile scores were taken in year six and after two terms in year seven.</p>	<p>Key stage three children. No additional information provided.</p> <p>Individual case study – Year seven girl.</p>	<p>Boxall Profiles – improvements seen for the group on the developmental strands. Diagnostic profile showed some scores dropped (self-negating, shows inconsequential behaviour, shows negativism towards self). Highest scores noted on avoids, rejects attachment, shows negativism.</p> <p>Length of time in group was described as inefficient to compensate for negative</p>

	A successful case was described.		<p>effects of main school setting or for pupils to adopt coping strategies. Length of time between pre- and post- intervention measures was insufficient. Some elements were thought to simply reflect normal adolescent development.</p> <p>Case study – showed a dramatic increase in self-confidence, achievements and engagement with school. Improvement in reading levels noted.</p>
Colley (2009)	Exploratory, qualitative research using interviews.	Head teachers and NG practitioners.	<p>Key differences in NG approach compared to the classic model.</p> <p>Need for adaptations in order to ensure age-appropriateness and flexibility with regard to physical constraints of the setting.</p> <p>Value of NGs was identified by staff.</p> <p>A need for a revised, age-appropriate assessment tool was established.</p>
Garner and Thomas (2011)	Explored the role and contribution of secondary school NGs through focus groups and individual interviews Content analysis was carried out to identify	3 NGs in UK secondary schools – must have been established for at least one year and staff must have received training.	<p>NGs were valued by all participants.</p> <p>Core differences from the classic NG approach were identified. Highlights importance of staff, provision of secure base,</p>

	similarities in the NG approach.	Collected views from parents, pupils and staff.	developing socio-emotional independence, relationships with parents and support systems in the wider school context.
Kourmoulaki (2013)	<p>Interviews were conducted with staff, pupils and parents to explore the structure, function and impact of NGs.</p> <p>Purposive and snowball sampling was used to select participants.</p>	<p>Two NGs based within one Scottish secondary school.</p>	<p>Benefits of NGs with regard to facilitating a smooth transition from primary to secondary school, supporting development of social skills and preparing students physically and emotionally for learning.</p> <p>Emphasised the relationship between staff and pupils and the development of a safe refuge.</p> <p>Identified gaps in practice in the areas of formal communication, monitoring and reintegration processes.</p>

Appendix 4: Questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to complete this short questionnaire.

Your responses will be used to explore the structure of Nurture Groups in secondary schools in Essex.

Please return completed questionnaires with consent forms to:

Amanda Furness (Trainee Educational Psychologist), Crossman House, Braintree, CM7 2QD by 24th February 2012.

1. What is the name of your Nurture Group?

Name:.....

2. Please indicate which year groups this provision is available for (please tick):

Yr 7 Yr8 Yr9 Yr10 Yr11

3. How many sessions/hours does the group run for each week?

Number of Sessions:..... Number of Hours:.....

4. When do the sessions take place? (please tick)

Mornings Afternoons Other (please specify)

5. How many pupils attend the nurture group?

Number of Pupils:.....

6. Please indicate the number and role of members of staff that run the group.

Number of staff : Job Title(s):
.....
.....

7. Have staff received training on nurture groups? (please tick) Yes No

If yes, who was the training provider?

Nurture Group Network Educational Psychology Service

Other (please specify)

8. Where is the nurture group based? (e.g. classroom/hall/library etc)

Nurture Group Base:

9. Is this a designated space? (please tick)

Yes No

10. How is the room organised for the Nurture Group? (please tick)

Permanently set up Adapted for each session No particular set up

Other (please specify)

**11. Below is a list of elements commonly associated with Nurture Groups.
Please tick those that apply to your group.**

Kitchen facilities Play area Relax area Work area
Food provided Circle time Free choice play

12. Please give a brief summary of how pupils are selected for entry to the Nurture Group.

.....
.....

13. How long do pupils stay in the nurture group?

1 Term 2 Terms 3 Terms Until they are ready to reintegrate
Other (please specify):.....

14. Is support for reintegration to a mainstream class part of the Nurture Group?

Yes No

15. How are pupils assessed and monitored in the group?

Boxall Profile Informal Observation Other (please specify):.....

16. Are there additional opportunities for pupils to access the group? Yes No

If yes, what opportunities are available?

Breakfast club Access at lunch time Access at break time
Other (please specify)

17. Please provide a brief description of the aims of your Nurture Group.

.....
.....

18. How is information about the Nurture Group shared with other staff?

Staff meetings Informal discussions Written feedback
Other (please specify):..... Information is not shared

19. Do you feel that the Nurture Group should be an integral part of the school?

Yes No

In the next phase of the research I would like to interview members of staff about their Nurture Groups. Please tick if you agree to being contacted.

This questionnaire has been completed by:

This information will be kept confidential (known only to the researcher) and all responses will be anonymised.

Name..... Position.....

Contact Number..... School.....

Please send me further information on Nurture Groups.....



Appendix 5a: Interview Schedule (for NG practitioners)

These ten questions are a guide for the interview. Responses can be expanded upon using prompts as required.

1. Why did you decide to set up a nurture group?
 - a. What is your main purpose/aim in setting up a Nurture Group?
2. What are your hopes for the Nurture Group with regard to outcomes?
 - a. For pupils?
 - b. For staff?
 - c. For parents?
 - d. For the school as a whole?
3. What is your understanding of the theory behind Nurture Groups?
4. What is your understanding of the principles of nurture and do you feel that they are applied in your group?
5. [What is the structure of your Nurture Group? (Opportunity to clarify and expand on questionnaire responses if required).]
6. What aspects of the Nurture Group do you think are most important and why?
7. How have you made the Nurture Group approach work for your school?
 - a. Are there any aspects that you have had to change/adapt to make the group appropriate for your needs as a secondary school? How?
8. To what degree do you feel that the group is accepted/understood in the wider school context?
9. What impact, if any, do you feel the group has had on the wider school context?
10. What was included in the training (if training has been received) and would you be interested in further training opportunities? If so, what do you feel would be useful?

Participants will be asked if they would like to share any other information about their Nurture Group and if they would like to ask any questions at the end of each interview.

Appendix 5b: Interview Schedule (for other staff)

These seven questions are a guide for the interview. Responses can be expanded upon using prompts as required.

1. What is your understanding of the reasons for running a Nurture Group in the school?
2. What is your understanding of the structure of the Nurture Group in your school?
3. Do you feel that it is important for information about the Nurture Group to be shared with you?
 - a. How is information shared with you about the Nurture Group?
4. Do you feel that the Nurture Group is an important part of the school? Why?
 - a. For pupils?
 - b. For staff?
 - c. For parents?
5. Which aspects of the Nurture Group do you feel are most important?
6. What impact, if any, do you feel the Nurture Group has had on the wider school context?
7. Have you received any information or training on Nurture Groups? Would you be interested in further information or training opportunities?

Participants will be asked if they would like to share any other information about the Nurture Group and if they would like to ask any questions at the end of each interview.

Appendix 6: Ethical Approval

ETHICAL PRACTICE CHECKLIST (Professional Doctorates)

SUPERVISOR: Mary Robinson **ASSESSOR:** Caroline Edmonds

STUDENT: Amanda Furness

DATE (sent to assessor): 18/01/2012

Proposed research topic: An exploration of Nurture Groups in Secondary Schools: how they are working in one large shire county in the south-east of England.

Course: Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology

1. Will free and informed consent of participants be obtained? YES
2. If there is any deception is it justified? N/A
3. Will information obtained remain confidential? YES
4. Will participants be made aware of their right to withdraw at any time?
YES
5. Will participants be adequately debriefed? YES
6. If this study involves observation does it respect participants' privacy? NA
7. If the proposal involves participants whose free and informed consent may be in question (e.g. for reasons of age, mental or emotional incapacity), are they treated ethically? NA
8. Is procedure that might cause distress to participants ethical? NO
9. If there are inducements to take part in the project is this ethical? NA
10. If there are any other ethical issues involved, are they a problem? NA

APPROVED

YES	YES, PENDING MINOR CONDITIONS	NO
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MINOR CONDITIONS:**REASONS FOR NON APPROVAL:**

Assessor initials: CJE Date: 25.01.12

**RESEARCHER RISK ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST
(BSc/MSc/MA)****SUPERVISOR:** Mary Robinson**ASSESSOR:** Caroline Edmonds**STUDENT:** Amanda Furness**DATE (sent to assessor):** 18/01/2012

Proposed research topic: An exploration of Nurture Groups in Secondary Schools: how they are working in one large shire county in the south-east of England.

Course: Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology

Would the proposed project expose the researcher to any of the following kinds of hazard?

1 Emotional NO

2. Physical NO

3. Other (e.g. health & safety issues) NO

If you've answered YES to any of the above please estimate the chance of the researcher being harmed as: HIGH / MED / LOW

APPROVED

<u>YES</u>	YES, PENDING MINOR CONDITIONS	NO
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MINOR CONDITIONS:**REASONS FOR NON APPROVAL:**

Assessor initials: CJE Date: 25.01.12

SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY

Dean: Professor Mark N. O. Davies, PhD, CPsychol, CBIol.



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School of Psychology

Professional Doctorate Programmes

To Whom It May Concern:

This is to confirm that the Professional Doctorate candidate named in the attached ethics approval is conducting research as part of the requirements of the Professional Doctorate programme on which he/she is enrolled.

The Research Ethics Committee of the School of Psychology, University of East London, has approved this candidate's research ethics application and he/she is therefore covered by the University's indemnity insurance policy while conducting the research. This policy should normally cover for any untoward event. The University does not offer 'no fault' cover, so in the event of an untoward occurrence leading to a claim against the institution, the claimant would be obliged to bring an action against the University and seek compensation through the courts.

As the candidate is a student of the University of East London, the University will act as the sponsor of his/her research. UEL will also fund expenses arising from the research, such as photocopying and postage.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Finn'.

Dr. Mark Finn

Chair of the School of Psychology Ethics Sub-Committee

Stratford Campus, Water Lane, Stratford, London E15 4LZ
tel: +44 (0)20 8223 4966 fax: +44 (0)20 8223 4937
e-mail: mno.davies@uel.ac.uk web: www.uel.ac.uk/psychology



The University of East London has campuses at London Docklands and Stratford
If you have any special access or communication requirements for your visit, please let us know. MINICOM 020 8223 2853



Appendix 7: Example Transcript (Extract)

*Taken from Transcript 2a

Line No	Speaker	Transcript - Verbatim	Comments /Coding
1	R	Um, so the first one is er why did you decide to set up the nurture group in the first place, what was your main purpose and aim?	
5	P	Ok, um, well, it was my first year as a year leader, so I was only appointed last April, um and it was suggested by um our senior leadership team that we need to think carefully about how we would aid that transition from primary school to secondary school um and I went to observe a primary school in our local area, ***** Primary School um and from that we were able to see quite a good and successful model of how they actually kind of nurtured their students from home and their parents to being at primary school, um and from that we decided that actually we'd got quite an emotional year group and they needed some support in that transition from primary to secondary, cos it is a big jump um some of our students had come from really, really small primary schools so the students that were in a class of 14 students to then being in a school with now almost 1500 students so it's a big, big jump er so we needed to obviously put some measures in place to support those students, erm and also to help social skills as well and to make them feel more confident within the school and more settled so that was our main er objective	
30	R	Ok, um and what are your hopes for the nurture group with regard to outcomes for pupils first of all?	
35	P	Ok um well from the write up that I've given you er to have a look at, um the outcomes really are er evidenced so you can see that er attendance has increased for some students in the first term for example one of our students her attendance was 74.2% er yet in the second term that increased to 87.2% so it was quite a significant jump, er and several of our students did improve their attendance so that was definitely sort of one er point of evidence where we can say that it had imp...er had worked, it had been of benefit, er also um at the beginning of the year some of our students er liked to spend quite a bit of time in the medical room er they'd be quite teary tried to	

		make excuses in order to be able to go home because they were unhappy here erm and again I've got evidence to suggest that obviously visits to the medical room have decreased, one student for example in the first term he was in the medical room on 20 different occasions yet in the second term 7 different occasions er so there was definitely a decrease there, some of our other students as well er 5 times in the first term then not at all in the second term so again that was definitely evidence to suggest that it had improved. Um we also wanted not only to improve attendance and medical room visits erm but to actually improve their confidence in class er so staff, so the actual tutors, completed a review er so we've actually got some evidence which I can give you copies of um of actual staff feedback and what they thought about it so we had some kind of key questions er for the students, they had their own review er and also the staff review as well so from that we were able to obviously deduce how the students had improved in their confidence and how they seemed much more settled in class their progress checks as well which we complete one um a term as well in school, again a lot of those were able to evidence in their effort grades in class that they'd improved their effort because they felt more comfortable erm and confident and able to actually contribute in class so therefore that was increased as well er and obviously to stop the crying (laughs)	
	R	Oh dear, um ok and um the same question really, your hopes for the nurture group regard to outcomes for the staff....aims	
	P	Ok, er, so staff's quite difficult, erm it was lead primarily by myself and the assistant year leader and by our home school liaison worker but obviously outcome for the staff really is to make their life easier in class, especially the form tutors um a lot of our form tutors were spending a lot of time on the phone communicating home to try and er sort of ease any concerns that the parents might have or to try and get to the bottom of any issues as to why students weren't coming to school, so it obviously made their life easier in terms of within tutors groups as well erm an also created a happier environment, the students felt more settled so therefore obviously the members of staff felt happier as well to be able to see their students happy	

95	R	Ok, erm and again so for parents are there any outcomes erm for parents or your hopes regarding outcomes for parents?	
100	P	Um, a lot of our students we were able to kind of embed as the course went on so a parent might phone us up with a, a concern that they had erm so one parent was really concerned about the fact that their son didn't want to come in to school so we suggested obviously that they join the nurture group, erm and therefore as a result of that their attendance increased so for a lot of the outcomes for the parents was that their child was able to come into school and they were able to go to work, erm and also that their child was coming home from school happier erm and not scared about coming into school they felt more happier and confident as well and weren't being pestered by the school if they were in the medical room to come and collect them at all or upset	
105			
110			
115	R	Ok, um and then finally for the whole school, the school as a whole, the outcomes...	
120	P	Ok, that's a bit of a trickier one isn't it, um, obviously as we go up through the years the idea is that because they'll have been more settled and nurtured in that first year group that they'll feel more comfortable as they go through the year groups and able to deal with different members of staff, because obviously at primary school they have one teacher whereas when they come to secondary school not only have they got the tutor but they've got every different subject teacher er in some subjects they might have 2 or 3 teachers for that particular subject, so it's about being able to obviously work with different, different people, different personalities um and obviously as they go through the school it will make everybody's lives much easier and they'll feel much more comfortable and confident and will hopefully have a direct impact on their GCSE results	
125			
130			

Appendix 8: Thematic Analysis Codes

Deductive Analysis

NGP1 – Children’s learning is understood developmentally
NGP2 – The classroom offers a safe base
NGP3 – Nurture is important for the development of self-esteem
NGP4 – Language is a vital means of communication
NGP5 – It is understood that all behaviour is communication
NGP6 – The importance of transition in children’s lives is understood

Inductive Analysis

ABS – Absence	KNO – Knowledge of Theory
ACA – Academic Outcomes	NEE – Student Needs
AGE – Age Appropriate	OUT – Outcomes
ANX – Anxiety	PAR – Parental Involvement
ASS – Assessment	POT – Potential
AWA – Awareness of NG	PRO - Proactive
BEL - Belonging	PUP – Pupil Involvement
BOU – Boundaries	REA - Reactive
COST – Cost of NG	REF – Reflection
COM – Comfortable/settled	RE-IN – Reintegration
CON – Confidence	REL – Relationships
EXCL – Exclusion	SKI – Skill Development
FLEX – Flexibility	SPE – Specialist Provision/Support
FRI - Friendship	STA – Staff Skills
HAP – Happiness	STRU – Structure of NG
HON – Honesty	SUP – Support
INC – Inclusion	TRA – Training
INFO – Information Sharing	WID – Wider School Context

Appendix 9: Example Coded Transcript

Interview Transcript – Participant 3a*

Line No	Speaker	Transcript - Verbatim	Coding
1	R	Why did you decide to set up a nurture group? What is your main purpose/aim in setting up a Nurture Group?	
5	P	The nurture group has existed for quite some time. It was originally the *** (******) where 2 LSAs ran an intensive support programme for a small group of students who were finding school life difficult- for a variety of reason- or who faced permanent exclusion. This was set up a number of years ago. Pupils spent period 1 and 5 in the ***, where they did some aspects of behaviour support and reviewed their progress/ dealt with issues, and then the other periods were back in class, with an *** card to map their progress. 3 targets for the day. Targets met added up to a reward on a Friday- usually a trip to a local café!	STRU EXCL STRU
10			
15			
	R	What are your hopes for the Nurture Group with regard to outcomes? For pupils:	
20	P	lower fixed term exclusion rates, developing personal skills to allow them to access lessons appropriately. Giving them a space to cool off if needed/ offload their concerns and worries/ have support mending bridges with teachers. Developing social skills/ anger management skills.	EXCL SKI NGP2 SUP SKI
25			
	R	For staff	
	P	Giving some staff the opportunity to develop better working relations with	REL

30		some of our most difficult students. The LSAs in charge of the *** would monitor progress in lessons, and offer support in class if necessary. It gave staff another strategy to use if they were having difficulties with the students- another line of help and advice.	SUP STA SUP
40	R	For parents:	
45	P	Being part of the *** was a big thing! It was looked on as a privilege. Parents were involved from the start with an interview, where the process and the types of support were set out in detail. These were often parents/ single parents (mostly) who were having real difficulty with them at home too. This was a big part of our support, and parents were supported too, in a way. They were contacted each week, with good news as well as bad. We also set up a parents support group, and some parents took this on with real enthusiasm. Often the advice and experience of the LSAs in charge helped the parents enormously- they realised they were not the only ones! The contact between school and home was essential.	PAR SUP INFO
50			SUP STA
55			SUP REL
60	R	For the school:	
65	P	Our exclusion rate dropped considerably after the *** was set up. I think that the school benefitted as a whole because other students could see that something was being done, and these students were being cared for in their own way. I think other students realised that individual students were going through tough times at home, which was impacting on their school life. I hope it lead to a calmer atmosphere around the school. The LSAs in charge of the *** were very experienced, and on countless occasions stepped in to resolve potential issues between students, and students and teachers.	EXCL WID WID STA SUP
70			
	R	What is your understanding of the theory behind Nurture Groups?	
	P	To be honest, not a great deal. We saw a	KNO REA

75		need, and put something in place to meet the need! The structure of the groups has changed over the years (see later response)	
	R	What is your understanding of the principles of nurture and do you feel that they are applied in your group?	
80	P	AS above	KNO
	R	What is the structure of your Nurture Group? (Opportunity to clarify and expand on questionnaire responses if required).]	
85	P	The original structure of the groupings has changed considerably! With changes to staffing, and a relocation of the *** (now called the ****) we felt that the structure of Periods 1 and 5 was not working- or could work better! Teachers were supposed to give work for students to complete in P5, but this was a running concern. Also, we had one really difficult group of Y8 boys, and we came to realise that their needs were so different that a strict structure did not really meet their needs, or ours! We now have a more flexible approach, and support all students who need it (whereas before it was limited to KS3, we now work with students up to Y11). This year we have made real use of the EP and assistant EP support to run ***** groups. This has worked really well. We also have a new *** manager, who is excellent. Between us we decide what kinds of support a student's needs and how to meet this need. It is often now in 121 or paired groupings, depending on the need of the student. The *** manager (****) has been working with a small group of students intensely, but not all at the same time! The small group includes students who: violent at home/ school refuser/ extreme anxiety	STRU
90			AWA
95			NEE
100			FLEX SUP
105			SPE
110			NEE REA
115			STRU ABS ANX ABS ABS SUP

120		issues to do with starting a new school/ one student who went completely off the rails(truanting from school, running away from school, rape victim). There is a smaller group of students who meet every morning in the **** to get their **** cards, and then are happy to have a normal day at school. The school refuslers need 121 support during the day, and high levels of support to get them into a lesson, which **** is able to offer	
125	R	What aspects of the Nurture Group do you think are most important and why?	
130	P	Effective support for students who have such tremendous issues stopping them from accessing their education. It gives a students some idea of their self-worth, and some of the things **** has put into place have seen real progress! The school refuser does now go into lessons- albeit on a very flexible timetable!- and the violent student we have linked to a special school where she helps out with some children with real needs- and this has really boosted her self-confidence and worth. The amount of time and effort spent on one particular student has been incredible, and although progress is very difficult to see sometimes, she is still coming to school and still going to lessons!	SUP NGP3 OUT ABS/OUT
135			NGP3 SUP OUT
140			
145	R	How have you made the Nurture Group approach work for your school? Are there any aspects that you have had to change/adapt to make the group appropriate for your needs as a secondary school? How?	
150	P	As above, we have changed to way we group students depending on their needs. Quite often now this is 121 or paired work, rather than small group work. We	STRU NEE

155		<p>hope that this is more effective in meeting individual needs. The How? Is to do with changing the way people work. The **** manager calls upon individual LSAs to support her in the **** as necessary. Flexible working is crucial. Responding to need.</p>	FLEX NEE
	R	To what degree do you feel that the group is accepted/understood in the wider school context?	
160	P	The working of the group is well established in the school, and **** attends staff briefing, where she often informs staff about what's going on. I think many staff realise the contexts of students, and know how difficult it must be to support them on a 121 basis. On the other hand, because many staff are unaware of particular students and how they live at home, I think it is still clouded in a bit of mystery.. but I think it has to. The kinds of revelations from students cannot be shared with the whole school...but staff realise this and understand it...I think!?	AWA INFO
165			
170	R	What impact, if any, do you feel the group has had on the wider school context?	
175	P	Certainly, since we relocated the ****, and appointed ****, it has had a lot more impact with students. Because the **** is open at lunchtime we do have increasing numbers of students using it. I think word of mouth works too! Students know that if they have a problem they can come to the **** and speak to a member of staff. We are very good at doing this! I think senior staff realise that **** solves a lot of issues, and deals with difficult students effectively.	WID NGP4 SUP STA
180			
	R	What was included in the training (if	

185		training has been received) and would you be interested in further training opportunities? If so, what do you feel would be useful?	
	P	Always interested in training...and I am sure that **** would be too.	TRA

*Responses received in written format

Appendix 10a: Research Diary Extract A

'I found semi-structured interviews difficult at times and sometimes felt uneasy with how one-sided the conversation was. However, the element of flexibility provided by being able to use prompts supported me in addressing this issue and the use of open ended questions allowed me to gather more in depth views from the participants'

Appendix 10b: Research Diary Extract B

‘I realised today that during interviews and analysis I was hoping to identify positive comments regarding NGs. I also noted that my own expectations with regard to the six principles of nurture were not consistent with the participants’ understanding of the theory behind NGs. I had to take great care, having identified this, not to guide questioning towards my own expected responses and also to ensure that coding and qualitative analysis was fair and as objective as possible. ‘

Appendix 11: Information Sheet

Researcher:

Amanda Furness

(Trainee Educational Psychologist)

EPS/SCF, Crossman House, Braintree, Essex CM7 2QD

07748 623711, amanda.furness@essex.gov.uk

'An exploration of Nurture Groups in Secondary Schools: how they are working in one large shire county in the south-east of England.'

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information that you need to consider in deciding whether to participate in this study. I am currently in my second year of training to become an Educational Psychologist at the University of East London and am on a placement with Essex Educational Psychology Service. I would like to invite you to take part in the following research and have your say about how Nurture Groups work for older pupils.

Why is this research being done?

The aim of this research is to explore the structure and rationale of Nurture Groups currently running in secondary schools. Although much research has been done on these groups for younger pupils, the use of the nurture approach for secondary age pupils is the focus of relatively little research. Nurture Groups are an increasingly popular intervention for pupils with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties and it is hoped that this research will result in a clearer understanding of the Nurture Group models being used in secondary settings. Understanding how these groups work has implications for schools and young people who may benefit from this intervention and for future research.

What does the study involve?

There are two phases to this research:

Phase 1 involves a member of staff who runs a Nurture Group completing a **short questionnaire**, which will be included with this information sheet. Also included is a consent form, which must be completed and returned with the questionnaire. As the research takes place within the school, consent is also required from the Head Teacher. The final question (number 20) asks participants to indicate whether or not they would be willing to take part in the second phase of the research. The questionnaire and consent should be returned by the 24th February 2012.

Phase 2: If you indicated that you would be willing to discuss Nurture Groups further, I may contact you to take part in **follow-up interviews** to discuss the experience of running a Nurture Group in a secondary school setting. All interviews will take place at your setting at a convenient time for you (to be arranged with the researcher). Interviews will take no more than one hour. These interviews will provide valuable information on the aspects of the intervention that you feel are useful to incorporate in a secondary school model of

nurture. I will also be asking some other members of staff if they would be willing take part in interviews at this stage, for which consent forms must also be completed. This will include, where possible: a member of the Senior Management Team, SENCo, a mainstream Class Teacher and a Learning Support Assistant. For accuracy, an audio recording will be made of all interviews.

Once questionnaires have been returned and interviews completed, I will send information on Nurture Groups to participants who request it. I will also feedback the results of the research to participating schools upon completion.

All responses will remain confidential and anonymous. Confidential electronic data will be stored securely at the Educational Psychology Service for one year after the research is completed and then destroyed. Anonymised data will be kept for three years after the research is completed and will then be destroyed.

You are not obliged to take part in this study, and are free to withdraw at any time up until data is anonymised for analysis. Should you choose to withdraw from the research you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason.

Any questions?

If you have any questions or you want to discuss this research further then please contact me at the address on the top of this information sheet. If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research please contact me or Dr Mark Finn, School of Psychology, The University of East London, Stratford Campus, Water Lane, London, E15 4LZ (Tel +44 (0)20 8223 4493, Email: m.finn@uel.ac.uk).

Thank you for taking the time to consider this study.

Appendix 12: Consent Form

'An exploration of Nurture Groups in Secondary Schools: how they are working in one large shire county in the south-east of England.'

I have read the information sheet relating to the above research in which I have been asked to participate and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.

I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to the data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research has been completed.

I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me. Having given this consent I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time up until my responses are anonymised and analysed without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Participant's Signature

.....

.....

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Researcher's Signature

.....

.....

Date:

Position.....

Headteacher's Consent

I have read the information sheet and understand the nature and purpose of this research. I understand that the researcher may need access to the school for interviews to take place. I consent to this research being conducted with participating staff at the school.

NAME:.....

Date:.....

Signature:

School:.....

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study.

The following forms should be completed for additional participants willing to take part in follow-up interviews.

I have read the information sheet and understand the nature and purpose of this research. I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me. Having given this consent I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time up until my responses are anonymised and analysed without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason.

Senior Management Team Member

NAME:.....

Date:.....

Signature:

Job Title.....

Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo)

NAME:.....

Date:.....

Signature:

Mainstream Class Teacher

NAME:.....

Date:.....

Signature:

Learning Support Assistant

NAME:.....

Date:.....

Signature:

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study.

Appendix 13: Description of Themes

<u>Theme/Subtheme</u>	<u>Description</u>
Wider School Context	The impact of the NG on the wider school context. Includes reference to processes and staff or pupils not directly involved with the NG.
Benefits for Other Pupils	Benefits of the NG for pupils who are not directly involved, for example classmates and pupils across the school.
Perceptions of Staff	Reflections on the level of staff awareness of the NG and the impact that it has had on staff perceptions. Includes reference to information sharing.
Reaction to Concerns	Reflections on the reasons for setting up a NG with regard to whole-school issues. Includes reference to concerns raised regarding behaviour or trends in pupil needs.
Group Structure	Reflections on practical considerations and processes related to how the NG is implemented.
Expertise	Issues raised relating to training, knowledge or specialist support.
Sharing Information	Reference to procedures for information sharing in relation to the NG.
Responding to Pupil Needs	Reference to a flexible approach that can be adapted to meet pupil needs both in planning and delivery. Includes reference to an age-appropriate approach.
Practical Considerations	Reference to practical considerations for the NG relevant to a secondary school setting such as timetabling, location, cost of training and resources.
Support	Mechanisms of support provided by the NG.
Support for Pupils	Reference to support for pupils in relation to skill development, providing a space to talk and emotional support.
Support for Staff	Reference to support for mainstream staff with regard to managing challenging behaviour or meeting the needs of pupils. Also includes reference to support mechanisms for staff working within the NG.
Support for Parents	Reference to how the group supports and promotes positive outcomes for parents.

Relationships	Reflections on how the NG has affected relationships at different levels.
Between School and Parents	Reference to promoting relationships with parents and the importance of this relationship.
Between Staff and Students	Reference to the impact of the NG on relationships between staff and pupils both within the NG and the wider school context.
Transition	Reference to transition from primary to secondary school.
Emotional Well-being	Reference to emotional well-being for pupils and staff both within the NG and in the wider school context.
For Pupils (Self focused)	Reference to internal factors such as self-esteem and confidence.
For Pupils (Environment focused)	Reference to external factors such as feeling safe and comfortable within the secondary school environment. Includes reference to a sense of belonging within the NG.
For Staff	Reference to both positive and negative effects of the NG on the emotional well-being of staff.
Attendance	Reference to issues relating to attendance for pupils involved in the NG and within the wider school context.
School Refusal/Not Attending Lessons	Reference to pupils not attending lessons through choice. Includes reference to positive outcomes for pupils in relation to missing lessons.
Exclusion	Reference to fixed term and permanent exclusions. Includes reference to enabling inclusion within mainstream education.

Note: Themes and sub-themes are linked as shown in the thematic map.

Appendix 14: Anonymised Transcripts (Disc)