



Knockavoe School

Focus on nurture provision

Knockavoe School is located in Strabane. The school provides education for 122 children aged 3-19 with moderate or severe learning needs and serves a wide catchment area, which includes Sion Mills, Castledearg, Clady, Victoria Bridge and Strabane.

This case study focuses on the school's nurture provision, which inspectors described as of exemplary standard and highly effective in meeting the needs of the children experiencing social and emotional difficulties (SEBD).

The ETI Inspection of November 2016 reported that the school's achievement and outcomes and its provision for learning were both very good, leadership and management was good and the school's nurture provision was 'sector leading.' Inspectors concluded that the school had the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interests of all learners.

The report commented on the children's good levels of motivation, their enthusiasm for learning as well as their very good social skills.

Pastoral care was described as 'outstanding' and working relations throughout the school were found to be 'particularly strong.' Children were keen to learn and worked amicably with one another. They were polite, courteous and confident. Senior children had good social skills and were confident in engaging with adults and visitors.

Context - evidence based practice

In September 2016, the Department of Education commissioned Queen's University Belfast to research and report on the impact and cost-effectiveness of nurture groups in primary schools in Northern Ireland.

The report identified key components of successful delivery; these included the commitment of the school leadership, the choice of staff, the careful identification and referral of children, staff training and very careful on-going planning.

These pre-requisites to a successful nurture programme are evident in Knockavoe. The provision is effective, the school is supportive of this work and staff are fully committed to its

sustainability and expansion.

The school's nurture provision formally began in September 2016, it focuses on five key areas:

1. Targeted support

While it is widely regarded that the ethos of a special school is a nurturing one at all levels, Knockavoe recognised that for some children further nurturing provision was necessary due to the significant trauma and loss that many of the pupils had experienced.

Many of the pupils presenting with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties were remaining in survival mode (fight, flight or freeze) and despite many efforts by experienced staff it was becoming very apparent that these pupils needed some time away from the main body of the class to help them begin to form trusting relationships and feel safe. Only then would these pupils be more ready to learn and reach their full academic potential.

2. Staff training and development

The senior management team is committed to ensuring that the whole school receives additional training in the best way to support pupils who have experienced early trauma and loss and who have attachment difficulties.

All staff received attachment training from Mrs Jennifer Nock in Sept 2016 on how to meet the needs of different attachment styles in the classroom and received support from Dr Lynne Connor, senior clinical psychologist for the 'Looked after Children' team. This was essential so that the whole school could take a step together and began their journey in moving from an attachment aware school to an attachment informed school.

Staff who have completed nurture group network training are involved in nurture provision to assist and support those children who are identified as requiring specific and targeted support.

3. Nurture class – “the sunshine room”

Nurture groups are made up of a small number of pupils and all staff have received the specialist training. Knockavoe Special School's nurture class, “the sunshine room,” opened in September 2016.

The working environment in the nurture room is one in which there is much focus on the individual child and on addressing the gaps in their early childhood learning. One to one support is a key characteristic of this provision and there is an emphasis on effective role modelling by the adults present to support the pupils' development.

Children in the nurture classroom access the same curriculum as their peers. This requires careful and detailed planning within and across year groups to ensure their individual learning needs are met effectively.

The classroom provides a safe, caring, structured environment wherein children can develop their language and self-esteem. This is created through ensuring there are very limited changes to staff and any changes to the timetable are discussed with the children and who are given time to process the changes.

Children attend nurture groups but remain an active part of their main class group, spending appropriate time within the nurture group according to their need. This integration with their class requires cautious planning with each child accessing different levels of support during these periods.

The nurture group staff ensure consistent and regular contact occurs between class teachers, parents or guardians and all other professionals involved with the children to ensure that their child's best interests remain central.

4. Nurturing child development

Staff nurture the development of self-esteem by working and playing closely alongside the children and pointing out quickly how proud they are of all their efforts. Staff send happy notes home to let everyone know how well the pupils are doing.

A lot of time is spent discussing feelings and helping the children to understand their own feelings and emotions better. Many of the children enter the nurture class thinking they are "bad" and staff work closely with them to reframe this mind-set.

The school day is very structured and meal times take place around the kitchen table. This is where the children share food and conversation with trusted adults and is a crucially important time.

As the children learn academically and socially they develop confidence, become responsive to others, learn self-respect and take pride in behaving well and achieving.

5. Boxall profile

The Boxall profile is a resource for the assessment of children and young people's social, emotional and behavioural development. Staff in Knockavoe use the Boxall profile to highlight any gaps between where the pupil is currently operating and where they should be operating.

Principal's statement

Since opening the nurture class in Knockavoe school we've gathered both quantitative data (Boxall profiles) and qualitative data (observations, less physical interventions) that clearly demonstrate that this provision is providing a necessary platform from which our pupils, experiencing social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, are able to have a more positive learning experience and a brighter future.

The nurture staff are fully committed to continued training and working towards receiving the Marjorie Boxall Award.

The Board of Governors fully support this innovative step and are kept fully informed at all meetings. Our steering committee consists of a wide range of professionals, nurture staff, Principal, Vice Principal, heads of departments and a nominated governor.

For further information, please contact:

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