Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology

Programme Director: Vivian Hill

Institute of Education

Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology

Doctoral Thesis

An exploration of the common characteristics and features of Nurture Groups in a London Borough

Nora Dwyer

Word Count: 37086

I, Nora Dwyer confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Acknowledgements

Abstract

A Nurture Group (NG) is a targeted intervention aimed at supporting pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties (Bennathan & Boxall, 2013). The current study explored the features of NGs in a London Borough, adding to a limited body of research concerning the characteristics of NGs across England.

A social constructivist epistemological position was adopted throughout this research. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with N =19 participants; whereby n=5 SENCOs; n=1 NG teachers; n=7 TAs and n= 6 NG pupils. Interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. In addition, qualitative observations of eight NGs were used to further contextualise the findings.

The results revealed that all NGs examined differed in their approach, with the majority of the NGs deviating from the guidelines for an effective NG as set out by Nurture UK (2019). A salient characteristic was that the majority of NGs were managed by Teaching Assistants rather than Teachers. Interestingly, all NG staff reported that their own version of nurture was viewed positively by their pupils. In addition adult participants reported a perceived positive impact upon the pupils who attended. The study also revealed that Schools who most adhered to the criteria set out by Nurture UK (2019) seemed to have a higher number of formal processes in place. The implications of the findings suggested that, by adopting some form of nurturing principles, 'nurturing' groups may have a positive effect upon CYP, although the larger or longer term effects have been observed in pupils attending an NG which strictly adheres to the guidelines (Sloan et al., 2020). NGs in England would benefit from support from an outside service such as an Educational Psychologist (EP), who could assist with the management of the NG, ensuring it is being run to its full potential.

Impact Statement

This study explored the structure and characteristics of Nurture Groups in a London Borough. The findings highlighted that the majority of NGs were managed and operated by TAs, indicating that the most vulnerable pupils in the school are being supported by those who are least qualified (Blatchford et al., 2013). In addition, all NGs differed in their structure and all deviated in some form and approach from the guidelines of an effective Nurture Group set out by Nurture UK (2019). As schools were not following the criteria as expected, limitations such as a whole-school absence of awareness regarding NG function and lack of financial resources were reported as barriers to the NGs' creation and management. There seemed to be a lack of knowledge from school staff concerning the role of nurture within education. Interestingly, NG staff and SENCOs stated that they felt their own version of nurture had a perceived positive impact upon the pupils who attended. In addition, NG pupils from three distinct NGs also stated that they enjoyed attending their NG and felt supported by NG staff.

The evidence from the study suggests that there may be a lack of knowledge concerning how NGs are being operated across England, as other nations in the U.K ask their NGs to follow strict policies and procedures (Nurture UK, 2019). Therefore there is a role for EPs to support the management of NGs in England. EPs can use their knowledge of nurture and attachment t o support schools in creating nurture groups that work to the best of their potential. In addition, EPs can support schools in disseminating the topic of nurture at a whole-school level so that behaviour policies are consistent throughout the school. Furthermore, EPs can offer supervision to nurture group staff to explore NG practice.

Future research relating to NGs in England should compare the short-term and long-term implications of NGs diverting from the *classic* and part-time models (Bennathan & Boxall, 2013). In addition, a comparison could be made between the role and impact of nurture in education within each British nation, assessing whether national policies have a part to play in the long and short-term effects.

Table of Contents

List of Appendices

List of Tables   **Page**

List of Figures   **Page**

List of Acronyms

BP   Boxall Profile

BPS   British Psychological Society

CYP   Children and Young People

DfE   Department of Education

DoH   Department of Health

DSL   Designated Safeguarding Lead

EP   Educational Psychologist

EPS   Educational Psychology Service

HT   Head Teacher

LA   Local Authority

NG   Nurture Group

Ofsted Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills

SDQ   Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire

SDQ-t   Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire marked by teacher

SEBD   Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulty

SEMH   Social Emotional Mental Health

SEN   Special Educational Needs

SENCO   Special Educational Needs Coordinator

SEND   Special Educational Needs and Disability

SLT   Senior Leadership Team

TA   Teaching Assistant

TEP   Trainee Educational Psychologist

Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

A Nurture Group (NG) is a British school-based intervention for children whose social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, as measured by the BP (Boxall Profile) or SDQ[1] (Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire), are not being met in the mainstream classroom. In other words, the CYP's (child or young person) behaviour is too complex to be supported by the mainstream class teacher, as it is assumed these CYP have experienced multiple traumas and adverse experiences (Huges & Schlösser, 2014). The NGs exist as a synthesis of the classroom environment and a therapeutic setting for CYP who demonstrate signs of SEMH difficulties (Bennathan & Boxall, 2013). A NG consists of fewer than 10 pupils with a teacher and TA supporting who have both been trained in NG practices. These practices include following a precise classroom routine and using emotional literacy materials to support the SEMH needs of the pupils (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007). Pupils within the NG typically have difficulty accessing the mainstream school curriculum (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000). These SEMH behaviours normally include withdrawn and/or aggressive behaviour in addition to temper tantrums, often impacting how a pupil interacts in the classroom setting (Bishop, 2008) often leading to school exclusions. For these reasons, an NG's purpose is to support pupils in managing their behaviour and effectively regulating their emotions (Cooper & Tiknaz, 2009). Consequently, NGs are often perceived as an alternative intervention to school exclusions (Cole, 2015), and indeed, UK government reports suggested that NGs can be effective in reducing school exclusions for their attendees (Estyn, 2007; Ofsted 2011 & Timpson 2019). Thus, research and evidence suggest that NGs are an effective educational and preventative intervention for CYP with SEMH difficulties.

Whilst this may be the case, (Cooper & Whitebread, 2009; Reynolds, McKay & Kearney, 2009 & Seth-Smith et al., 2010), researchers have noted that only two models of nurture (the *classic* and the *new variant* model) are effective and adhere to an evidence-base. In addition, Cooper and Whitebread (2007) suggest that there are 'aberrant' models of nurture practised throughout the UK which are ineffective (the characteristics of these models will be described in chapter 2). Reynolds, MacKay and Kearney (2009) indicated that several studies of NGs have failed to state clearly the type of NG models being studied, resulting in a lack of clarity in relation to which features of nurture are most effective. In order to address which specific features of nurture primary schools are adhering to, this research aimed to explore common

---

[1] Assessment tools used to measure an individual's social and emotional development.

characteristics of NGs in a London Borough. This was explored through staff and pupil perceptions and was further contextualised through qualitative observations.

In order to explore NGs as a mental health intervention, since they are purposed for children with SEMH difficulties, this chapter will first explore recent mental health initiatives as well as defining the term SEMH.

1.2 Mental Health Initiatives

Research suggests that NGs work as early preventative measures for CYP with an identified SEMH need (Gerrard, 2006, Sanders, 2007 & Scott & Lee, 2009). In other words, pupil participation in an NG has seen a reduction in 'antisocial' behaviour in the classroom (Reynolds, McKay & Kearney, 2009 & Sloan et al., 2020). In the last two decades, the promotion of mental health and wellbeing for CYP in education has gained momentum. The Green Paper 'Transforming children and young people's mental health provision' (2017), highlighted ways in which English local governments can support local areas in adopting a new collaborative approach to enabling identification of signs of mental health issues among CYP in primary and secondary schools. The Green Paper suggests that schools should adopt a 'whole-school' approach in supporting their pupils SEMH needs. In other words, efforts within the school environment should be school wide, span age groups, and be consistent across multiple contexts within the school, as a whole-school approach aims to integrate skill development into daily interactions and practices using collaborative efforts that include all staff, teachers and pupils (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Despite its focus on the benefits of the 'whole-school' approach to mental health, critics of the Green Paper argue that it is a missed opportunity (BPS 2018), as it does not focus on preventative mental health measures for CYP. Consequently, the Paper appears to recognise the potential causes of mental health issues without recommending preventative strategies. Thus, schools are left without any guidance as to which preventative mental health strategies they should practice, causing equivocation as to how strategies should be implemented (Cox & McDonald, 2018). Despite NGs being viewed as an effective preventative measure, they were not mentioned in The Green Paper. This is in stark contrast to governments in Scotland (Mackay, 2015) and Northern Ireland (Sloan et al., 2020) who have cited NGs as a fundamental preventative mental health practice in reducing emotional and disruptive behaviour among children who have SEMH difficulties.

The term SEMH is a relatively new term as it superseded the category of social, emotional and behavioural difficulty (SEBD) with the publication of the revised 2015 SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015). The change from 'behavioural difficulty' to 'mental health', exposed a growing recognition that the challenging and antisocial behaviour often displayed by CYP is likely to due to an underlying mental health difficulty. Altering the terminology also reveals a

shift in the understanding of mental health difficulties among CYP. The change indicated that professionals were moving away from a 'within-child' model, where previously a CYP's behaviour had been reported as a biological condition, such as ADHD (attention deficit hyperactive disorder) (Storebø et al; 2016). This new term recognises the implications of attachment theory, trauma and poverty and how these adversities can effect a CYP's mental health and behaviour (Kennedy, 2015 & Stanbridge & Mercer, 2019).

The current SEND Code of Practice in England stated that the term SEMH describes CYP who are experiencing a range of social and emotional difficulties which manifest in many different ways. These behaviours may be expressions of underlying mental health difficulties such as self-harm, anxiety, and depression (DfE, 2015). The label of SEMH is very much an umbrella term which can be used to describe a list of both internal and external behaviours such as challenging, disruptive or withdrawn behaviour. Within education, CYP with SEMH difficulties generally tend to be individuals who have experienced trauma, abusive environments and/or disorganised attachment relationships. CYP who have experienced these problems are considered to be at risk of exhibiting behaviours associated with SEMH (Collishaw et al., 2004 & Colman et al., 2009).

Employing evidence from the SDQ, the Office of National Statistics (ONS, 2017) survey of mental health in England recently reported that one in eight (12.8%) 5 to 19 year olds had at least one mental health disorder when assessed at that time, meaning mental health disorders are a prevalent and widespread difficulty within England. Furthermore, this survey indicated that mental health difficulties among CYP has increased, as the previous ONS survey conducted in 2004 (ONS, 2004) found that one in ten CYP (10.1%) had a mental health disorder. These specific mental health disorders within the ONS survey were grouped into four broad categories: emotional, behavioural, hyperactive and other 'less common disorders' such as ASD (autism spectrum disorder) and eating disorders. The ONS found that emotional disorders such as conduct disorder were of the most prevalent type experienced by 5 to 19 year-olds in 2017 (8%). The review also found that children with an emotional disorder were more likely play truant in comparison to children without a disorder. Additionally, school exclusions were also more common in children with a disorder. Therefore, children with an emotional disorder are more likely to not engage in within-school activities causing tensions between the child and the school staff. In addition, the survey revealed that pupils with a mental health disorder were more likely to have a parent with poor mental health and could be expected to have experienced multiple traumas and adversities. Thus, research reveals that CYP with a mental health disorder were also more likely to come from a lower income household. Researchers have cited growing child poverty as an explanation for this increase of emotional disorders among CYP (Wickham et al., 2016). Reiss (2013) found that

socioeconomically disadvantaged CYP were two to three times more likely to develop mental health problems. Additionally, these children are more likely to experience emotional difficulties such as challenging behaviour in a school environment. This survey relates to the sample of CYP found in NGs, who are also more likely to be from socially disadvantaged families (Sloan et al., 2020).

Similar to the ONS (2017) survey, the DfE (2016) stated that in England there were around 193,657 children in education classified as having anSEMH difficulty as a primary need (DfE, 2016). Additionally, the DfE (2016a) found that the number of pupils with a permanent and fixed-term exclusion in England between 2014 and 2015 had increased by 5,800, with 'persistent disruptive behaviour' cited as the most common reason for permanent exclusion. According to Sheffield and Morgan (2016) the label of SEMH is the most commonly occurring label of Special Educational Need (SEN) within Education in the UK. A significant detail, as these CYP experience disproportionate rates of exclusion from school compared to other pupils without SEN (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2013). Carroll and Hurry (2018) commented that one exclusion from school places a pupil at risk for further and multiple exclusions during their school life. As with the ONS survey, the DfE (2016) report suggests that preventative action needs to be taken to reduce the amount of CYP with a SEMH need being excluded, leading the DfE (2019) to commission the Timpson Review. This review emphasised the importance of inclusion and of school cultures working for all children. It also recommended more training for teachers in understanding the underlying causes of negative behaviours often associated with attachment difficulties, trauma and speech, language and communication needs (O'Neill et al., 2010). The Timpson review stressed that implementing these recommendations would be a step in the right direction in addressing the underlying emotional needs which are often judged, superficially, as difficult behaviour.

NGs feature prominently in the review, with Timpson reporting that "done well, they can be an effective approach in reducing children's social, emotional and behavioural difficulties while strengthening their academic performance (p70)"

The report demonstrated the value and potential impact NGs can have an as early intervention for CYP with a SEMH need. NGs were hailed as being a preventative measure in reducing the number of CYP being excluded across the UK (Ofsted, 2011). Interestingly, within the review, Timpson noted that he had never seen an NG in action, however he was aware of their effect in reducing schools exclusions for children with a SEMH need. Furthermore, Timpson suggested that there are approaches to nurture which can be unsuccessful and have little impact upon a CYP. This is implied in his term: 'done well.' By using this statement, Timpson is implying that there are NGs which are not being practised effectively. A major

limitation of Timpson's report is that he failed to mention the specificities and structure of an effective NG. By simply referencing NGs and not explicitly describing their structure and processes, it could be argued that Timpson is causing ambiguity as to how the intervention should be implemented and which model of nurture schools should use.

There are currently different models of nurture being practised across England (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007). The structure of an NG and the different models of nurture will be described in more detail in section 1.4. The original *classic* NG was developed by Majorie Boxall in the 1970s as a planned response to the needs of young pupils who were exhibiting SEMH difficulties (Boxall, 2002). Initially, the label of a *classic* NG model was not necessary, as only one model existed. Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (1999) noted that the NG model evolved over time as research and evidence concerning the model became more prominent and acknowledged.

1.3 Boxall's Nurture Group

According to Boxall (2002), NGs are a small structured teaching or learning group of 6 to 12 pupils who are supported by two adults trained to provide SEMH support in a mainstream school setting. NGs were designed to take a small group children out of the mainstream classroom for a defined length of time over the course of one school year. The aim of the NG was to model positive attachment relationships and provide opportunities for social learning. For this reason, the NG places a strong emphasis on the physical environment; Colley (2009) commented that the nurture room provides a safe, welcoming and caring environment for learning, which replicates the home environment with a comfortable seating area, a kitchen facility for preparing food and a working area to address formal curriculum demands. A range of activities are undertaken which aim to help the young people to develop trust, communication skills and grow their confidence and self-esteem.

 In Boxall's creation of the first NG in East London, her main concern was not with the theoretical underpinnings of the model, but rather the idea of providing children with experiences appropriate to their development level (Boxall, 2002). Boxall (2002) created the original classic NG model and stated that as the model progressed and, arguably, succeeded in developing a CYP's emotional and social needs, links to theoretical models became evident.

The most central theoretical framework reinforcing NGs is attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969). An NG is now based on the concept that by improving attachment experiences with other

adults, CYP are better able to manage their emotions and empathise with others (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007 & Sanders, 2007). Attachment theory argues that the type of attachment formed between an infant and their caregiver is essential in the development of the infant's learning and thinking. The type of early attachment relationship developed in infancy or early childhood provides a 'template' for the individual's later relationships. Children who experience unsupportive and negative early parental attachments are more likely to develop a negative internal working model of the self, which is unlovable and unworthy. Bowlby commented that children who have this negative internal working model are more likely to develop feelings of low self-esteem, mistrust and unresolved needs for nurturing (Price, 2012).

Pupils with SEMH difficulties often experience feelings of insecurity and anxieties which can become amplified within a school setting. Negative attachments can impair the development of social, emotional and cognitive skills which, in turn, can affect a CYP's educational development (Bellis et al., 2014). In addition, CYP with an insecure attachment have been categorised as avoidant, anxious and disorganised. These attachments can be viewed as defensive strategies the CYP has developed in an attempt to maintain contact with inconsistent or rejecting carers (Linsell et al., 2009). Consequently, the CYP's ability to soothe themselves, regulate their emotions and form relationships is adversely impacted. As a result, access to learning opportunities can be delayed as the pupils' SEMH needs act as a barrier to their learning (Steinsbekk & Wichstrøm, 2018).NGs aim to support these children through the promotion of positive and secure relationships with a teacher and TA.

Since its inception, attachment theory has evolved from an emphasis solely on the main child-carer attachment to a consideration of CYP attachments in their wider context (Geddes, 2006 & Parker & Levinson, 2018). Therefore, the foundation of an NG is embedded in the pupils forming positive relationships with the NG staff, as pupils can experience multiple attachments with people in different positions around them (Geddes, 2006). Therefore, NGs are an appropriate setting to support a CYP in developing positive attachments to teaching professionals due to the smaller class size and emphasis on supporting the CYP's SEMH needs.

In addition to early negative attachments impacting a CYP's self-esteem and the ability to effectively regulate their emotions, negative attachments can also impact a CYP's language development. The link between language delay and early interactions was studied by Holditch-Davis et al. (2000) in children born prematurely. They revealed that mothers of language-delayed prematurely born children provided less interactive stimulation than mothers of children with typical language skills, suggesting that their child's poor

comprehension discourages maternal involvement. In addition, Assous et al. (2018) also found that adolescents with mixed language disorders were likely to have less secure and disorganised attachments to their primary caregivers. Thus, early attachment styles can influence an individual's language development. The significance of language and communication is one of the core principles of NG theory (Nurture UK, 2019). The belief is that children may lack the vocabulary to express their emotions so may instead "act out" their feelings. The social use of language within a NG is encouraged through play not just as a function for developing vocabulary, but also as a tool to develop empathy and understanding of the actions and reactions of others.

Similar to attachment theory, NGs can now also be linked to the theory of adverse childhood experiences (ACES) (Chapman et al., 2004). This theory implies that individuals who experience four or more adverse experiences such as poverty, domestic abuse, parental incarceration, emotional trauma or parental divorce are more likely to develop a mental health disorder. McInerney and McKlindon (2017) stated that children who have experienced four or more ACES develop patterns of behaviour which can develop into further trauma. As a result, these individuals do not think or behave within societal norms (Felitti et al., 2016). NGs can support these children in developing behaviour and patterns of thinking that are developmentally and societally acceptable. This is due to the child developing a trusting and nurturing relationship with the NG teacher and TA, where socially acceptable behaviours are modelled by staff (McInerney & Mcklindon, 2017

Additionally, NGs can be theoretically linked to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1970) (See figure 1) which suggests that cognitive learning can only take place when emotional needs are met through the CYP feeling safe and secure (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000). In other words, the lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy need to be satisfied in order to enable the development of children's higher-level needs (Cooper & Tiknaz, 2005). NGs cater specifically to pupils who have a difficulty in achieving a sense of security and safety, as it is assumed that these difficulties have restricted their ability to access to the higher level needs of affiliation, self-esteem and self-actualisation. NGs aim to address the areas Maslow proposed, through the environment of the NG setting, as well as in the routines and activities that take place.
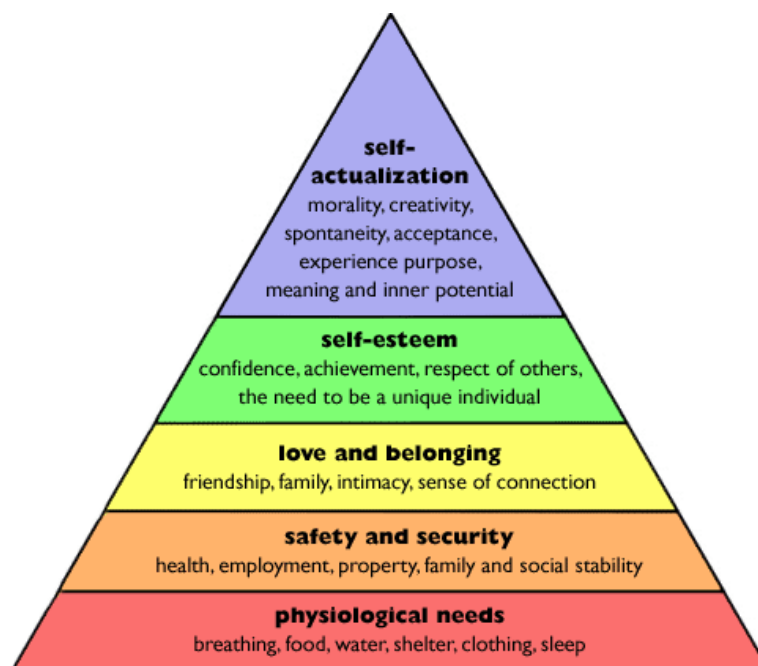
Figure 1 – Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1970).

NG are also based in Vygotskian theory as Garner and Thomas (2011) stated that Vygotskian theory provides a rationale for the more educational elements of NGs. Vygotsky (1978) asserted that higher mental functioning had a socio-cultural origin and was developed through interaction with significant people in a child's life. Vygotsky developed the term 'Zone of Proximal Development', which is used to describe the distance between a CYP's actual developmental level and what they could achieve in the presence of a more knowledgeable induvial through the use of scaffolding[2]. Vygotsky argued that in order for a CYP to effectively progress, the pupils should be assisted by a more competent peer who had knowledge of the CYP's individual needs, as these individuals can support the CYP appropriately in their next stage of development. Vygotsky's theory of scaffolding and the ZPD mirrors the emphasis that Boxall places on NG's staff relationship with their pupils, as NG staff use the BP and knowledge of the pupil's cognitive profile to support both the CYP's emotional and cognitive needs. Vygotsky also emphasised the role that language plays in a child's development of internal thought, and the provision of play opportunities, both key elements the NG model (Garner & Thomas, 2011).

1.3.1 The Six Principles of Nurture
The theoretical basis of nurture is embedded within the six principle of nurture (table 1). These form the basis of each NG and should be applied within each NG setting. These principles were devised and agreed during national training courses and as part of the first phase of

---

[2] Scaffolding refers to a variety of instructional methods used support pupils progress towards a stronger understanding and, ultimately, greater independence in the learning process.

research project looking at the nature, number and spread of nurture groups in England and Wales. (Cooper et al 1999).

Table 1- The Six Principles of Nurture

1. Children's learning is understood developmentally
The principle suggests that staff should respond to pupil's developmental progress assessed through the BP. The response to each individual CYP is underpinned by a non-judgemental and accepting attitude.
2. The classroom offers a safe base
The structure of the NG room should reduce the anxiety and stress levels of the pupils. For this reason the nurture room contains a balance of educational and domestic experiences aimed at supporting the development of the pupil's relationship with each other and with the staff. The routine of the NG is structured around a predictable routine, with staff being reliable and consistent in their approach to the pupils. Therefore, the NG is organised around a structured day with positive behaviour support which enables emotional containment and cognitive learning (Lucas et al., 2006).
3. Nurture is important for the development of self-esteem
Nurture involves listening and responding. An emphasis in the NG is placed on staff engaging with the children in reciprocal shared activities e.g. play / meals / circle time. Pupils within the NG should be shown an unconditional positive self-regard which can improve the pupils self-esteem and self-worth (Swarra et al., 2017).
4. Language is understood as a vital means of communication
NG pupils may have a difficulty of verbalising their feelings and lack the vocabulary to name how they feel, for this reason they may exhibit challenging behaviour. Within the NG setting, pupils are given emotional literacy sessions which include formal lessons which involve teaching emotional language skills.
5. All behaviour is communication
This principle underlies the adult response to the children's often challenging or difficult behaviour. 'Given what I know about this child and their development what is this child trying to tell me?' Understanding what a child is communicating through behaviour helps staff to respond in a firm but non-punitive way by not being provoked or discouraged. If the child can sense that their feelings are understood this can help to diffuse difficult situations. The adult makes the link between the external / internal worlds of the child.

6. Transitions are significant in the lives of children
The NG helps the child make the difficult transition from home to school. However, on a daily basis there are numerous transitions the child makes, e.g. between sessions and classes and between different adults. Changes in routine are invariably difficult for vulnerable children and need to be carefully managed with preparation and support.

1.4 Measuring progress within an NG

The succession or progression of a pupils' social and emotional needs within an NG is assessed using either the BP or the SDQ. The BP, however, is bespoke to the NG as it was designed by Majorie Boxall to measure the social and emotional needs of the pupils within an NG (Boxall & Bethannan, 2002). Progression of CYP's involvement in a *classic* or *new variant* NG is assessed using the BP, previously known as the 'Diagnostic Developmental Profile' (Bennathan & Boxall, 1998).The BP is a detailed diagnostic tool used to assess a CYP's emotional and social functioning (Bennathan, Boxall & Colley, 2010). The BP contains 68 descriptors of behaviour and is divided into two sections; the developmental section measures the CYP's early developmental progress, and the diagnostic profile measures the CYP's social and emotional needs. The BP does not consider a CYP's cognitive abilities but assesses their social and emotional needs (BP, 2017). The BP is constructed with an attachment model in mind, where behaviours reflected social and emotional needs which had not been met (Seth et al., 2010). The BP was designed for teachers to rate and monitor the behaviours of the children in the NG (Boxall & Bethannan, 2002). Seth et al. (2010) stated that teachers and TAs must be trained in nurture and attachment in order to administer the BP, as the behaviours associated with the BP are deeply rooted within attachment theory, therefore teaching professionals would need to have a knowledge of the psychological theory. The BP is the now the standard method of assessing a CYP who attends an NG, due its bespoke creation for NG pupils (Boxall & Bethannan, 2002). The aim of the BP was to support NG staff in understanding and recognising their pupils' SEMH needs, as well as supporting staff in creating a planned intervention for their pupils, in addition to monitoring their pupils' progress (Broadhead, Chilten & Stephens, 2011).

The SDQ is often used in parallel to the BP and is also positively correlated with the assessment. In other words, both assessments complement one another as they both focus upon the social and emotional needs of the individual (Gerrard, 2006). However, both tools diverge with regards to their theoretical background. The SDQ items are directly linked to the psychiatric classifications of childhood psychopathology. The scores obtained on these scales allow one to know whether the child's behaviours are within the normal range or not.

Conversely, the BP items are arranged in a way that reflects how school staff interpret these features.

In contrast to the BP, the SDQ is briefer in content, as it contains 25 descriptors of behaviour in comparison to the BP's 68. Hall et al. (2019) commented that the SDQ is the most widely and internationally used measure of mental health among adults and children. This may be due to its simplicity and ease of access, as the SDQ is free to download in comparison to the BP which asks users to pay a subscription (Nurture UK, 2019). With regards to NGs, the SDQ can be used to gain pre and post data of the pupil progress. In contrast to the BP, it cannot be used to create an intervention for the pupil in question, as the SDQ offers no strategies or interventions to support the pupils, whereas the BP offers a range of interventions and strategies (Hall et al., 2019). However due to its simple nature, staff do not have to be trained to administer the SDQ assessment, therefore is may be deemed as the less complex and easier option for schools.

Comparisons between the SDQ and BP were conducted by Couter, Cooper and Royer (2011), who aimed to explore the validity of the two assessment tools. 202 CYP attending NGs in England, aged between 3-14 years, participated in the study. The study consisted of 142 and 60 girls from 25 schools in 8 LEAs. The SDQ and BP were completed by school staff for all pupils. The results from the study revealed that both instruments complemented each other, as both appeared to identify similar behavioural characteristics. Couter, Cooper and Royer (2011) commented that specific scores areas of the BP were shown to predict performance on specific sub-scales of the SDQ. This study however was not without its limitations, as the sample used was relatively homogenous, in other words it did not include a representative cross section of society. Nevertheless, the findings of the study indicate that both instruments are reliable tools to be used when assessing the SEMH needs of pupils. How the BP and SDQ are used is very much dependent on which model of nurture teaching professionals are applying to their practice.

1.5 NG Models

Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001) sought to identify the key characteristics by which an NG might be defined. In doing so they discovered different varieties of NGs in operation; the *classic* model, the *new variant* model and the 'aberrant' models of nurture. Only two of these models (the *classic* and *new variant*) corresponded with the original Boxall model in terms of embracing the principles of attachment. The *classic* Boxall NG, conformed in all respects with the original concept (pupils attend on a full-time basis, the NG is staffed by two adults who have received training in nurture, pupil progression is measure with the BP or the SDQ). The second model, the *new variant* model, was a modified version of the *classic*

model. The *new variant* model operated in accordance with the same core attachment principles (NG is staffed by two adults who have received training in nurture and pupil progress is measured by the BP or SDQ) but differed in terms of structural or organisational features (such as being located in a separate building or only being available to pupils 3-4 times a week). Cooper, Arnold and Boyd noted that the third 'aberrant' models of NG bore the name of NG but either did not conform to Boxall's original principles or, in fact, contravened, undermined or distorted these key principles. Cooper and Whitebread (2007) have outlined the three distinct NG models believed to be practised throughout the U.K (See table 2). Further details of these NGs will be described below.

Table 2 – NG models according to Cooper and Whitebread (2007)

Type of NG	Classic	New Variant	Aberrant
Structure	Full-time model	Part-time model	Part-time model
	Consists of 10-12 pupils	Consists of 10-12 pupils	Unknown
	Pupils spend half a day in mainstream class per week	Pupils spend 3 to 4 half days a week	Unknown
	Pupils spend three to four terms in NG.	Pupils spend three to four terms in NG.	Unknown
	Use of SDQ and Boxall Profile to measure social and emotional progression	Use of SDQ and Boxall Profile to measure social and emotional progression	No use of standardised measures
	Teacher and TA will have had training on attachment and how to run an effective NG by either the Nurture UK or an EP	Teacher and TA will have had training on attachment and how to run an effective NG by either the Nurture UK or an EP	Teacher or teaching assistant have had no prior training to NG
	Led by a teacher and a TA	Led by a teacher and a TA	Led by one TA

1.5.1 Classic Model

The *classic* model focuses on meeting the CYP's developmental needs, which in turn promotes educational progress (Nurture UK, 2019). Within the classic model a pupil attends for 4 ½ out of 5 days a week. The work within an NG is focused on supporting the pupils' social and emotional development through the use of circle time, emotional literacy and play-based activities. In addition, pupils also complete curriculum-based work differentiated to their individual needs (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007). According to Boxall (2002), children in a classic NG often operate at a social, emotional and behavioural level (using the correct nomenclature) much younger than their chronological age. It is assumed this is due to the poor emotional bonds formed between these children and their primary caregivers in a context of multiple trauma and adversities such as abuse, domestic violence and social exclusion (Boxall, 2002; Doyle et al., 2018 & Sloan et al., 2020). Due to these multiple adverse experiences the pupils are disadvantaged with regards to their social and emotional progression (Sempik, Ward & Darker, 2008).

The *classic* NG provides a holistic curriculum focusing primarily of on the social, emotional and behavioural factors which underpin a CYP's learning to compensate for the pupils' missed early nurturing experiences (Colley, 2009). The setting is a hybrid between the home and classroom and incorporates soft furnishings and a predictable routine with social activities, for example eating together with an emphasis on turn-taking and sharing. In addition, Boxall (2002) stressed the importance of the nurture snack, stating that the snack offers pupils the opportunity to witness positive social reciprocity, as the two adults (the teacher and the TA) within the NG are able to model positive social interactions, which in turn have a positive effect on the pupils' social developmental needs (Cooper & Tiknaz, 2007). The snack involves pupils sitting around a table, with the adults using positive social cues and interactions to model positive social behaviour. Pupils are asked if they would like juice or toast in which they have to reply 'yes please' and 'thank you'. As the pupils' time progresses within the NG they are then asked to distribute the snack and juice, therefore students are positively and appropriately interacting with one another. Cooper & Tiknaz (2007) commented that this positive sharing of food develops the pupils' social interactions. A huge emphasis within the NG is placed upon modelling social skills, as pupils within the *classic* NG are expected to adhere to expectations for respectful behaviour, so that these behaviours can be learned and understood (Seth-Smith et al., 2010). In addition, the two adults are trained to model adaptive behaviour where they can resolve their differences regarding small matters. In doing this, the adults are modelling skills which can be used in everyday conflict resolution. The modelling of these skills is essential to an NG setting, as

the pupils may not have witnessed these behaviours in their home environment (Seth-Smith et al., 2010).

The idea of the nurture room is that it sets out to provide a safe and caring atmosphere. For this reason, the nurture room tries to replicate certain features of the home environment and therefore would include furniture such as a sofa and facility for food (Colley, 2009). These furnishings support the children in feeling relaxed, as the hybrid nature of the home and classroom environment promotes feelings of security (Newman, Woodcock & Dunham, 2007).

Within the *classic* NG, pupils remain part of their mainstream class for registration. In addition pupils spend break and lunch with their original class. The aim of the NG is for pupils to return to their mainstream class on a full-time basis after three or four school terms but, where appropriate, this can take place after one or two terms (Boxall, 2002). Placement, target setting and monitoring of pupils are guided by information obtained from the BP or the SDQ.

The *classic* model is staffed by a teacher and a teaching assistant and is usually made up of 10-12 pupils with a range of SEMH needs (Bennathan & Boxall, 2013). An essential feature of the *classic* NG is that teaching professionals (both the teacher and teaching assistant) have training prior to their participation in relation to the concept and function of an NG. Additionally, the teaching professionals would have been trained in Attachment Theory by an Educational Psychologist or by Nurture UK (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007), as teachers who are trained in attachment have a clearer understanding of their pupils' SEMH needs. (Verschueren & Koomen, 2012). Sloan et al. (2020) commented that training of NG staff is an essential aspect of the NG, as it ensures that the group is running to its full potential and that all area of the pupils' development needs are being addressed and supported.

1.5.2 New Variant Model

Cooper and Whitebread (2007) noted that the *new variant* model of nurture is a part-time model based on the *classic* model but differs in its structure and organisational features. One key difference pertains to time spend in the NG. Compared to the fulltime *classic* model, pupils in the *new variant* model can spend between half a days per week to 4 days per week, thus indicating that there is wide variation within the structure of the *new variant* model.

A further difference between the *classic* and *new variant* model is that the *new variant* NG model may serve a cluster of schools, sometimes located in a special school or in an off-site unit. This means that the NG may not be located in the students' school. Despite the *new*

variant model of nurture being a part-time model, it is still expected that pupils will receive the nurture snack, emotional literacy sessions, sessions involving play and some differentiated curriculum-based learning. Research concerning the *new variant* and *classic* models suggest that they have the same short-term implications concerning pupil progress (Hughes & Schlosser, 2014).

1.5.3 Aberrant Models

The third identified form of NG is described as 'aberrant' models by Cooper and Whitebread (2007) and Cooper and Tiknaz (2007). It is unclear from where the punitive term 'aberrant' arose, however, Cooper and Whitebread (2007) seemed to be the first to use this term.

According to Cooper and Whitebread, the 'aberrant' models are run by one paraprofessional who has not received any training prior to running the group. The models are part-time, meaning that it can run from a 1 hour-long session to 4 days per week. Cooper and Whitebread noted that the models do not use standardised measures such as the BP or the SDQ to assess the CYP development. In addition Cooper and Whitebread stated that despite being called 'nurture groups' and their claim to be a variation on the concept, these groups undermine the key defining principles of the *classic* NG. This is achieved by staff who are not fully trained and by not monitoring the CYP with the use the BP or SDQ. Further critique of the 'aberrant' models concerns their lack of educational and/or developmental focus (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007).

The *classic* and *new variant* models are the only NG models which are supported by an evidence-base (Bani,2011; Binnie & Allen, 2008; Bishop & Swain, 2000; Colwell & O'Connor, 2003; Cooke, Yeomans, & Parkes, 2008; Cooper, Arnold & Boyd, 2001; Cubeddu & Mckay, 2017; Doyle, 2005; Scott & Lee, 2009; Seth et al. 2010; Syrnk, 2014 & Vincent, 2017). Whereas the 'aberrant' models are perceived as 'a potentially dangerous model promoting a distorted image of the original approach (p22) (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007).'

Cooper and Whitebread (2007) commented that the 'aberrant' NG model is only partially based on the *classic* and *new variant* models in terms of its purpose. Cooper and Tiknaz (2007) commented that the model presents an inaccurate understanding of the function of NGs and thus may not have the appropriate impact upon the children who attend.

There are shortcomings however to Cooper and Whitebread's critique of the 'aberrant' models of nurture. For instance, it is unknown as to which 'potentially dangerous' practices they are referring. Furthermore, it is not explained why a school would choose these types of models over the *classic* and *new variant*. In addition, Cooper and Whitebread's description

of the 'aberrant' NGs is very ambiguous, as it is unclear what features of the NG render it ineffective. Finally, they have not mentioned the programme of nurture the pupils would receive. Therefore, research into the content and delivery of these so called 'aberrant' models should be explored as there is not enough known about their practice.

1.6 Nurture Groups across the U.K

There are inconsistencies in the management of NGs across the home nations of the UK (Nurture UK, 2020). In Scotland, NGs are centrally managed and receive funding from the LA (Mackay, 2015). For this reason, NGs are required to follow strict criteria and are managed by a multi-disciplinary team, which includes the NG staff, the school SENCO and a member of the SLT, in order to provide a collaborative and expert approach to the NG (McKay, Reynolds & Kearney, 2010). In Northern Ireland, schools are either self-funded or can apply for funding from the DfE. However, the majority of schools within Northern Ireland are funded by the DfE (Sloan et al., 2020). Similar to Scotland, in receipt of funding, schools in Northern Ireland are asked to follow strict criteria regarding the NG programme and structure, meaning it is made essential that these schools follow the criteria of a classic or new variant NG model. Comparable to Scotland, these schools are also asked to form a multi-disciplinary team surrounding the NG with the exception of the inclusion of an EP. According to Nurture UK (2019), the majority of schools in Wales receive funding from the LA. Furthermore, schools have repeatedly used the Welsh Assembly Government's RAISE[3] (Raising Attainment and Individual Standards in Education) approach. Again, NGs are asked to follow a criteria in receipt of the funding. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have their own policies on nurture detailing how they should be managed and structured. England is the only nation in the U.K not to have its own distinct policy concerning nurture and NGs (Nurture UK, 2019).

In England, the majority of funding for NGs is derived from the school's own budget (Nurture UK, 2019). For this reason, schools are in control of how their NGs should be structured and managed. The drawbacks of NGs not being centrally managed are that the dissemination of the NG message and aim can become diluted or lost, meaning that may not be run to their full potential (Greany, 2015). However, Schools that are not adhering to a strict policy can adapt the NG flexibly to the perceived needs and ethos of their school. A lack of funding from English local governments and a lack of legislative policy for nurture may explain

---

[3] RAISE is a Welsh Assembly Government programme designed to support socially disadvantaged pupils in Wales. Schools were eligible for a RAISE(Raising Attainment and Individual Standards in Education) grant, if they have 50 or more learners of statutory school age, at least 20% of which were eligible for free school meals.

Cooper and Whitebread's (2007) assertion that different models of nurture are being practised.

As England has no national policy concerning Nurture, it receives the majority of its information from Nurture UK. Nurture UK runs as a registered charity which offers training and advice to schools when setting up NGs. Nurture UK also offers information as to how to manage and run an effective NG, with schools receiving the Marjorie Boxall Quality Mark Award for outstanding NGs. However to receive this accreditation, schools are asked to pay more than £400 (Nurture UK, 2019). The price of the accreditation and as well as other services (training) may discourage schools from seeking advice on how to run a 'quality' NG, which could further aggravate inconsistencies in schools.

1.7 Critics of NGs

Critics of NGs argue that the interventions are less about addressing an identified SEMH need and more about liberating a classroom of 'problem students' suggesting that educational providers find it difficult to provide for pupils displaying challenging behaviour (Slee, 2012). Addtionally, Slee (2012) commented that NGs are primarily motivated by the perceived negative impact upon school attainment in national assessment. In other words, schools place CYP in these groups in order to prevent a fall in their national attainment scores (Norwich, 2014). A key criticism of these arguments, however, is that these researchers do not specify as to which NG model they are referencing. Therefore their criticism could be understood as a sweeping statement that all NGs are designed to 'contain problem children', rather focusing on the benefits of a nurturing space; this statement contradicts previous research conducted concerning the benefits of NGs (Hughes & Scholsser, 2014). However a common theme highlighted here is researchers need to be more to explicit as to what type of NG model they are referencing.

In addition, critics may be confusing NGs with the exclusive nature of isolation rooms and booths, a restrictive intervention for pupils exhibiting challenging behaviour. This intervention has previously been challenged by critics as harmful to a pupil's mental health (Barker et al., 2010).

1.8 Summary of Chapter 1

Chapter 1 highlighted that research and legislative reports have identified NGs as an effective intervention for CYP with SEMH need, and that there are a range of models being practised across the U.K which differ in their structure. Furthermore, legislative reports have identified that CYP with SEMH difficulties would benefit from therapeutic support, however

they do not explicitly name strategies and interventions possibly causing ambiguity as to how these interventions should be operated. Additionally, there is great variation in the funding of NGs across the four nations, with the majority of NGs in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales being centrally funded by local governments, with these devolved governments having their own policies regarding the effective operation of NGs. Despite NGs being welcomed by the English government in reports conducted by Ofsted and the Timpson review, there is no legislative policy concerning how to operate a successful NG.

This study aimed to explore the structure and characteristics of NGs in a London Borough. By exploring the common features and characteristics, this study aimed to provide an insight as to how NGs are being practised in England.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Chapter 2 will provide an analysis of the relevant literature regarding NGs. This chapter will then explore the effectiveness and limitations of the varying structures of NGs.

2.1 Review of Literature

In order to evaluate research concerning which features add to a NGs effectiveness, the researcher carried out a review of the literature. The focus of this literature search was to evaluate evidence of an effective NG. A review of the literature using the search engine EBSCO Host and Psych Info with the search term 'nurture groups' was used. This term was chosen as the intervention being studied is only referred to by this name. The term generated a total of 148 results. Other sources of information, such as the reference lists of pertinent articles, relevant theses and journals were hand searched. After the use of the inclusion and exclusion criteria (see table 3), established prior to searching, 19 articles remained (See table 4 & 5). The systematic review in table 4 and 5 summarises the type of NG model investigated, the design of studies and the findings. The results from the systematic review revealed that NGs, both the *new variant* and the *classic* model, have a positive impact upon a CYP's SEMH and learning needs, with both quantitative and qualitative studies revealing that a CYP's behaviour improved after their involvement in an NG. The most reported benefits being reduced displays of 'challenging behaviour' and an improvement in the CYP's ability to self-regulate their emotions and reduce their anger (Binnie & Allen, 2008; Bishop & Swain 2000; Colwell & O'Connor, 2002; Cooper & Tiknaz, 2005; Cooper & Whitebread, 2007; Reynolds et al., 2009; Sanders, 2007; Scott & Lee, 2009; Seth-Smith et al., 2010). The systematic review revealed that there were no studies which examined the 'aberrant' NG model, this may be because the 'aberrant' NG can take many forms and is therefore difficult to analyse. In addition, the systematic review only includes peer reviewed articles, therefore the researcher is aware the review may be subject to publication bias[4], as unpublished papers and doctoral theses were not included in the review, resulting in a positive result bias. However, the number of studies shown in the systematic search indicate the effectiveness of the NG intervention.

---

[4] Publication bias is the phenomenon that significant results are more likely to be published and are published in journals with higher impact factors (Francis, 2012).

Table 3-Inclusion and exclusion criteria for Literature Review

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria	Rationale
1) Journal articles Peer-reviewed journal articles. NG intervention	Editorials, book reviews, unpublished work, newspaper articles	Journal articles are peer reviewed and through this process assessed for quality. Such studies are more likely to be of a robust and systematic research standard.
2) Published in the English Language in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.	Published outside of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.	Differences in policies, legislation and Educational provision in countries outside of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.
3)NG should be set in either ks1 or ks2	NG within secondary schools	Research based in primary school setting

Table 4 and 5 detail literature which has explored NGs in a primary school setting. Table 4 presents the findings of quantitative studies as well as which NG model and design was used. Table 5 presents the qualitative studies. The literature search explored which characteristics of nurture were most effective, thereby supporting the researcher in understanding which features of nurture were most effective and which can be easily achieved.

TABLE 4- Systematic Search of Quantitative studies

Authors and Year	Type of NG	Sample	Main variables & measures	Data analysis	Findings
Bani (2011)	Classic	N = 244 4 NGs 4–7-year-olds	Pupils responses to verbal and nonverbal praise	Types of praise which were allocated to categories Pupil's responses also put into categories	Verbal praise was used more consistently in the NG
Binnie and Allen (2008)	Classic	N = 36 6 NGs Mean age 7	BP SDQ	T-tests	BP* SDQ*
Colwell and O'Connor (2003)	Classic	NG pupils- N=28 Mainstream class pupils- N = 120 5-6 years olds 4 NGs and 4 mainstream classes in 4 different schools)	Researchers created 11 categories of teacher behaviour used to code observations. Later converted to self-esteem category scores.	Verbal statements assigned to categories	Researchers found that 87% of statements made by NG teachers heightened pupil's self-esteem.
Cooper, Arnold, and Boyd (2001)	Classic	N = 342, 216- NG pupils 108 - mainstream pupils 4-10 year olds	BP SDQ(t) Parent questionnaire (PQ)	Repeated measures analysis of variance for BP scores Chi square analyses for SDQ scores	SDQ (t) * BP* PQ: The majority of parents felt NG had a positive impact upon their children
Cooper and Whitebread (2007)	Classic	N = 546 N = 359 NG Pupil N= 190 mainstream class pupils 4-14 year olds	BP SDQ(t)	Statistical comparisons of mean improvements. Independent samples t-test. Chi-square analyses.	SDQ (t)* BP*

Cunningham, Hartwell & Kreppner (2019)	Part-time	N=16	Child role play measure (CRPM)(Dodge et al.,1985)	Within subjects repeated measures design	CRPM and TOPPS both indicating an improvement in pupils' social skills over
			Taxonomy of problematic social situations (TOPSS) (Dodge et al., 1985)	Thematic analysis	Time. However results were not significant. Pupil interviews suggested that pupils enjoyed attending the NGs and that NGs helped them to improve their social skills
Doyle (2005)	Classic	N=1 5 year old boy	BP	Case study design Analysis of BP	BP suggested improvements in pupil's Social and emotional needs
Gerrard (2005)	Not specified	N=241 17 schools 2 control schools Age not specified	BP SDQ(t)	Repeated measures analysis of variance for BP scores Chi square analyses for SDQ scores	Results from the BP suggested that 8 NG children did not statistically improve SDQ (t)* No significant improvements of SDQs of control group pupils.
Reynolds, MacKay, and Kearney (2009)	Classic	N = 221 32 schools 117 pupils attending NGs 106 attended matched primary schools 5-7 years olds	BP SDQ(t)	2x2 ANCOVA	BP* The SDQ(t) scores revealed that there was a positive trend but no significant scores
Sanders (2007)	Part-time	N = 29 Control group N=9	BP Pupil Assessment Forms	T-test used to compare BP pre and post scores	BP* Comparison between NG and

	Unclear for pilot project	4-6 year olds	Pupil Interviews Staff questionnaire Parent Interviews Observations		CG children's scores* Staff questionnaire- Majority of staff stated that NG pupils had progressed with regards to their learning.
Scott and Lee (2009)	Part-time	N = 25 4-10 year olds 4 schools	BP	Analysis and comparison of combined improvements of NG pupils compared to control group pupils	BP*
Seth et al. (2010)	Classic	NG pupils N = 41, Control Group N = 36 4–8-year-olds	BP SDQ(t)	Mixed-effects linear growth curve models for each outcome measure using a multi-level mixed-effects linear regression	SDQ (t) * BP *
Shaver and McClatchy (2013)	Classic	N=24 Staff- N=5 Pupils N=19	BP Student Questionnaire Teacher interview	mixed methods design- types of statistical design not stated	BP* Teacher interview- reported that NG children now have more confidence and are better able to build attachments.

Sloan et al. (2020)	Classic	Stage 1: N=529 CYP who had previously attended an NG	BP	Analysis and comparison of combined improvements of NG pupils compared to control group pupils	Stage 1: findings revealed that CYP who had previously attended NG had made large improvement in their social and emotional development
		Stage 2	SDQ(t)		
		N=384			
		30 NGs			
		14 matched schools with no NGs			Stage 2: NG pupils made gains progressed with regards to their SEMH skills.

The use of * showing statistically significant, SDQ (t): strengths and difficulties questionnaire teacher rated.

Table 5- Summary of Qualitative Studies

Authors and Year	Type of NG	Sample	Method	Data analysis	Findings
Bishop & Swain (2000)	Classic	N=12 1-Head teacher 1-deputy head teacher 2 -ex-NG staff 2-teachers 2-ex-NG pupils 2-parents 2-govenors	Semi-structured interviews with teaching staff, parents and pupils	Thematic analysis	All participants found NG to be effective
Griffiths, Stenner and Hicks (2014	Classic	N=8 NG pupils 1 school	Focus groups	Thematic analysis	Thematic analysis of the focus group revealed four themes 1.Relationships 2. Environmental factors 3.Self-regulation 4. Learning
Syrnyk (2014)	New variant model	Not specified	Student interviews Kinetic Family Drawing (KFD)	Analysis not specified	Findings revealed that pupils held a positive view of their NG
Vincent (2017)	Part time- new variant	Not reported	Teacher interview pupil interview parental interview	Thematic analysis	Qualitative Interviews suggested NG offered an effective way of supporting the SEMH needs skills of group of 'at-risk' pupils.

The majority of literature from table 4 and 5 agreed that the part-time model (*new variant*) and *classic* model are both beneficial to the emotional and learning needs of the CYP attending, and that both models have the same short-term impact. In other words, there seems to be no significant short-term differences concerning the impact of the *classic* and *new variant* NG models. Only one study indicated that a *classic* NG may have a longer term impact upon pupils who attended (Sloan et al., 2020). Therefore, the existing studies show that there has been no significant difference, albeit in the short term, in scores between the children who have participated in the NG on a full versus a part-time basis (Binnie & Allen, 2008; Cheney 2011; Cooper et al., 2001; Sanders, 2007 & Scott & Lee, 2009). In addition, the review supports the researcher in understanding which features of the NG structure add to its effectiveness, as some studies detailed which aspects of an NG they felt were essential to its success. These structures will be detailed in section 2.6.

Seventeen of the studies within the review state that they adhered to the *classic* and/or *new variant* NG model (Bani, 2011; Binnie & Allen 2008; Bishop & Swain, 2000; Colwell & O'Conner, 2003; Cooke, Yeomans, & Parkes, 2008; Cooper & Whitebread, 2007 Cubeddu & Mckay, 2017; Cunningham et al., 2019; Doyle, 2005; Griffiths et al., 2014; Reynolds et al., 2014;Scott & Lee, 2009; Seth et al*.,* 2010; Sloan et al., 2010;Shaver & McClatchy, 2013; Syrnk 2014; Vincent, 2017). However, there is ambiguity concerning which NG model is used in two studies (Gerrard, 2006 and Sanders, 2007) as Gerrard (2006) failed to mention which NG model he investigated. In addition, Sanders (2007) stated that the majority of NG pupils in pilot projects attended on a part-time basis, however it was unclear whether the NGs in the other two schools were also following a part-time model. Thus, studies are not explicitly stating what type of NG they are using, therefore there is ambiguity concerning how these models could be recreated and what aspects of the model are considered most effective. Hughes and Schlösser (2014), in their systematic review on the effectiveness of NGs, have criticised previous studies concerning NGs for a lack of clarity regarding how each NG model differs. Reynolds, MacKay and Kearney (2009) also noted that several studies concerning NGs have failed to clearly state the type of models being studied. This lack of consistency adds further variation to the research, impacting its effectiveness.

Ambiguity concerning the type of NG model being used is present within Gerrard's (2005) research. Gerrard assessed NGs in 17 schools, with no mention of whether the models applied were *new variant* or *classic* models. Significant improvements on the SDQ-t were reported for most of the children attending NGs, whereas control group children did not make progress on the SDQ-t. A limitation of this study is that there was no use of the BP, a key assessment tool used specifically with NGs (Boxall & Bethannan, 2002) making the findings difficult to compare to other studies, as they tend to use the BP as an assessment

tool. Moreover, there was an absence of information concerning the ages of NG children and data analysis. The lack of information regarding the age of the participants and the absence of standardised measures reduces the trustworthiness of this study. Nevertheless, the outcomes of the study demonstrated positive potential of NGs as an effective intervention.

An uncertainty concerning the criteria of part-time and *classic* NG models has been observed and noted by other researchers (Cooper, Arnold, and Boyd 2001). Cooper and Whitebread (2007) suggested that there are variations in the NG models applied and practised throughout the UK, not specifying the conditions or criteria of the models they are examining. Thus, both schools and researchers need to be more explicit in the precise model of NG they are using, as this will lead to more effective analysis of the practice through better empirical research. However, a reason for the literature's lack of clarity concerning NG models may be that they have not set out to study one particular type of NG and therefore have not been explicit about the details of each model.

 Additionally, the researcher's systematic search revealed that there is no evidence or studies to suggest that 'aberrant' NGs have an effective impact upon a CYP, with only Cooper and Whitebread (2007) making any reference to the group stating that,

> '*Aberrant NGs undermine or distort the key defining principles of the classic or new variant NG, stating that they lack an educational or developmental emphasis in favour of control and containment*'. (pp178)

 In other words, Cooper and Whitebread suggest that these groups are used for the containment and restraint of a CYP with SEMH needs. In addition, the researchers stated that theoretical and educational objectives of these NGs are not being fulfilled. To date there have been no studies to assess the effectiveness of an 'aberrant' NGs (Hughes & Scholsser, 2014). There is still ambiguity concerning the structure of 'aberrant' NGs, where the term 'aberrant' arose and the reason behind schools running these types of NGs.   A reason for researchers preferring not to study the 'aberrant' models may lie with the term 'aberrant' itself, which holds connotations of deferring from the norm. By attaching the punitive term 'aberrant' to these models, Cooper and Whitebread have made them unattractive in nature and therefore they immediately dismiss their effectiveness. As a result, we are unsure of what structures they are referring to or if they would have any effect upon the pupils who attended.

2.2 What features add to an NG's effectiveness?

The specificities and features of an effective NG have been highlighted by previous studies (Bennet, 2017; Cooper & Tiknaz, 2009; Gerrard, 2006; Sanders, 2007 & Scott & Lee, 2009). These are explored in the following sections.

2.2.1 Effective communication between staff members

Cooper and Tiknaz (2005), found that having two full-time members of staff (a teacher and a TA) who are fully trained in the principles of nurture, is an essential feature to the NG pupils' progression. In data produced from a case study design, Cooper and Tiknaz observed the ways in which a NG teacher and the TA responded to each other were essential to the social development of NG pupils, as staff made a conscious effort to engage in role-modelling and appropriate social communication. In their case study design, Cooper and Tiknaz found that one of the most noticeable influences within the most effective NG was that there was less hierarchy and more flexibility between the teacher and TA. Furthermore, Cooper and Tiknaz found that the empathetic nature of staff added to the success of the NG, as staff were perceived as warm and caring. This study indicated the importance of staff being fully trained in nurture, so that they are aware of the theoretical underpinning to NG practices. Accordingly, positive interpersonal skills of staff, as well as thorough training in NG principles, can enhance NG practices.

Bennathan (1997) noted that within an NG, opportunities for sharing, turn-taking, expressing opinion and discussion must be on offer and continuously modelled by the teacher and TA. Cooper and Whitebread (2007) stated that this modelling of appropriate communication creates an opportunity for students within the NG to learn social and empathetic skills.

As a CYP attending an NG remains part of their original class, effective communication across members of staff, such as their mainstream class teacher, was especially found to be crucial for NGs' success (Sanders, 2007). Sanders stated that if the communication did not work between the mainstream and NG teachers, school staff felt that the teachers were less able to assess pupils' academic attainment and that they knew the NG children less well. Further, poor communication between NG staff and mainstream staff left NG teachers isolated and resulted in a lack of clarity about who was responsible for which aspect of the pupils' education (Ofsted 2011, Sanders 2007). In addition, Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) noted that lack of effective communication between NG staff and mainstream staff is highlighted as an important factor that may, in some circumstances, inhibit educational progress of CYP within an NG. Therefore, the studies imply that the success of the NG can be enhanced with NG staff receiving training prior and working collaboratively with all school staff.

2.2.2 Interactions between Teacher and child

Due to NGs strong links to attachment theory (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000), Billington (2012) argued that the attachments formed between the pupil and staff are central to the success of the NG. Billington noted that the relationship between the teaching professional and child is 'vital for the child's development'. In addition, other researchers have cited the relationship between NG staff and pupils as an essential for the pupils' social and emotional development. In a study conducted by Cooper and Whitebread (2007) it was hypothesised that the high level of individualised interaction between the NG staff and pupil was an essential aspect in creating a positive social and emotional progress in the pupil. Therefore, the practitioner-child relationship is frequently cited as crucial for the child's development, and success of the Nurture Group; (Bennathan & Boxall, 2013; Billington, 2012 & Cooper & Tiknaz 2005). In addition to positive interactions between the teacher and pupil, research (Sloan et al., 2020) has also suggested the beneficial use of a multi-disciplinary team in supporting the NG.

2.2.3 The use of a multi-disciplinary team

Sloan et al., (2020) noted that the use of a multi-disciplinary team is an effective tool when implementing an NG. Sloan et al noted that a 'steering group' or a multi-disciplinary team should be established within a school to oversee the running and management of the NG. Sloan et al., (2020) commented that the 'steering group' should consist of a head teacher, a SENCO, an NG teacher, an EP, a representative from social services and an Education Authority Support Officer. The use of a 'steering group' is now part of Northern Ireland's policy on how to implement an effective NG. Scottish policy on NGs also suggests and encourages the use of a multi-agency approach (a team around the NG consisting of a head-teacher, SENCO, NG teacher and parents) when implementing an NG. Only these two sources mention the use of a multi-disciplinary team surrounding the pupil, with Sloan et al. (2020) stating that the use of a team will ensure that the NG is being run to its full potential, due to the collaborative nature and high level of expertise and subject knowledge from each specific individual. The use of a multi-disciplinary team surrounding pupils with SEMH needs is not new British policy. In 2003 the 'Every Child Matters' agenda (DfE, 2003) created a significant policy, placing vulnerable pupils at the centre, forming a team around the pupil and family in the context of the community and school. Therefore staff became part of a 'multi-agency' team, with the pupil being exposed to a range of professionals and expertise which aimed to meet the needs of the pupil and their family. Previous research has indicated that the previous multi-agency approach is an effective method as it enables joint problem solving, an increased understanding of the pupils' needs and trust between agencies as well as increased knowledge of certain topics and issues (Abbott, Watson, & Townsley, 2005).

2.2.4 Effective referral and transitional processes

Sloan et al. (2020) noted that a detailed and structured referral process should be established to access any NG. By creating a detailed process which includes the SENCO, the classroom teacher, parents and the NG teacher, a robust and effective process is more likely to be engendered. The creation of a rigorous process will lessen the likelihood of the NG being misused (Colley, 2009). Similar to the referral process, the transition should also be carefully planned. Sloan et al. noted that this process should be approached in an open and phased way. Like the referral process, the transition process should also involve the NG teacher, the classroom teacher and the parents to ensure that there is an understanding of how and why the transition is taking place. Furthermore, ensuring there is an effective transitional process confirms that the sixth principle of nurture is being fulfilled (Lucas, 2006). Stronger and clear procedures ensure the NG is running effectively and transparently.

2.3 Whole-school impact

A whole-school impact is demonstrated in a case study design with one primary school conducted by Doyle (2003). Doyle described the beginning of an NG with 6 pupils after a primary school was placed in Special Measures after an OFSTED inspection. The inspection led to the school creating a social development curriculum and adopting whole-school 'nurturing' approaches. This was accomplished by the adaptation of the behaviour policy, changes in the classroom environment along with whole-school routines such assemblies and lunchtimes. Doyle stated that the school environment and ethos was much more positive, with both pupils and teachers stating that they felt happier in the school. A limitation of Doyle's study was the use of a case study design. Case studies can explore a phenomenon in a real-life situation and can offer can offer a rich and holistic detail of the subject (Stake, 2005), however they can be limited in terms of the validity and generalisability of reports. A further major limitation of this study is that it is unclear how Doyle assessed the change in the schools ethos, as she simply stated that she 'observed changes' indicating she used observations as her method. However, again it is unclear how she 'observed' the school.

A strength of this study is that it suggests that NGs can have an indirect impact upon a whole-school ethos, as the study suggested that the NG triggered a range of other supportive measures within the school, such as an adaption of the school's behaviour policy. Furthermore, the study implies that a successful NG is fully embraced by its mainstream provider. In other words, if the aim and purpose of the NG is fully incorporated into the schools ethos, the NG is more likely to be successful. Similarly, Cooper and Whitebread

(2007) noted that schools with NGs appear to support pupils with SEMH needs more effectively than schools without. NGs impacting a whole-school ethos can also be observed in other studies (Binne & Allen, 2008; Colwell & O'Conner, 2003; Cooper, 2001 & Sloan et al., 2020).

In addition to having an impact upon a whole-school ethos, the systematic search also revealed that NGs can have a long-term impact upon pupils with a SEMH need. (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007; Sloan et al., 2020).

2.4 Longitudinal Research

In one of the first larger-scale evaluations conducted by Sloan et al. (2020) in Northern Ireland on the effectiveness of NG provisions in improving outcomes of CYP, Sloan et al. (2019) found that NGs had a significant and long-term impact upon on the social and emotional development of CYP. The analysis involved two stages, the first phase involved data from 529 pupils who had previously attended an NG. The data was measured using the BP and found that pupils demonstrated significant improvements with regards to the overall developmental strand scale and similarly large reductions in the diagnostic profile. Additionally, the researchers found that these levels of improvement occurred for all groups of CYP, regardless of their age, gender or involvement from other services. Interestingly, the review also found some evidence that pupils who attended the NG on a full-time basis (a *classic* NG) made more progress than those who attended part-time. This is a significant finding as it implies that attending a *classic* NG will have a larger longer term effect than attending a part-time (*new variant*) NG. In other words, the most recent research concerning NGs has inferred that there are longer term benefits if a pupil attends a *classic* NG in comparison to *new variant* (part-time) NG. Sloan et al. (2020) noted however more research should be given to this finding, as it was a surprising outcome.

The second phase of the evaluation used a non-random control group design, involving a sample size of 384 pupils aged 5-6 from 30 NGs, with 14 matched schools with no NG. Similar to the first phase, the second phase found that NG pupils progressed in relation to their social and emotional skills. In addition, the researchers found no change in the pupils attending the matched control group schools. Remarkably, the researchers concluded that NGs were a cost effective intervention as they have the potential to result in a significant financial saving to society, by preventing the cumulative additional costs to public services and the voluntary sector associated with anti-social behaviour and conduct problems. An important feature of this project was that all schools received their funding from the DfE, therefore all schools were asked to adhere to either a *classic* or *new variant* NG model. Thus, the success of this project was largely due to the context of the study, as all schools

who received funding would have been more prepared to support the NG. This study was not without its limitations, as the BP was rated by teachers, therefore leaving it open to bias. In addition, the study used a non-randomised control group, making it susceptible to selection bias.

A further example of a longitudinal research was conducted by Cooper and Whitebread (2007). The researchers assessed the effectiveness of NGs with 546 pupils across 34 schools with an average age of 6 years. The study took place over a two year period and covered children from eleven different English local authorities. Pupils were assessed using pre and post data after two years using the BP and the SDQ. The results on the BP and SDQ demonstrated that overall there was a greater improvement in the SEMH functioning for pupils who had places in NGs. In addition, Cooper and Whitebread found the impact of NGs to be universal, as the study found better outcomes for mainstream pupils with a label of SEMH in schools with NGs attached, compared to schools who did not have an attached NG. The researchers argued that their data,

> *"Points to the strong possibility that the presence of an effective NG adds value to the work that schools do with the wider population of children with SEBD"* (p187).

Thus, the researchers suggest that the presence of a *classic* and *new variant* NG within a school supported the school in adopting a nurturing ethos or environment. In addition, Cooper and Whitebread found that schools who had a *classic* or *new variant* NG in operation for over two years had a greater level of improvement in comparison to schools with new NG, implying that the effectiveness of NG improve over time. Cooper and Whitebread imply that this is due to trained staff becoming more skilled and competent in their nurturing approach.

Cooper and Whitebread (2007) recognised the implications and complexities of their hypothesis. For instance, there may be unmeasured antecedent conditions at play such as receiving extra funding to support pupils with a SEMH need, or mainstream classroom practices were influenced indirectly by communication between NG and mainstream staff.

The longitudinal research concerning NGs have emphasised that NGs can have a long-term impact upon the pupils who attend. Furthermore, Sloan et al., (2020) indicated that the model of nurture (*classic* model) can have a more profound, longer-term effect in comparison to the *new-variant* (part-time) models. This significant finding suggests that longer-term benefits can be achieved if a pupil attends a *classic* NG.

2.5 Voice of the Pupil

A review of the literature revealed that some studies (Cooper, Arnold & Boyd, 2007; Griffiths et al., 2014 & Sanders, 2007) have sought to access the perspective of the pupils. Todd (2003a) wrote that pupil participation in research is particularly important as it can enhance support for pupils with SEN. Todd advocates that when pupils are part of the decision-making process, they can provide appropriate information about their skills and abilities and offer their views about possible interventions, enhancing the likelihood of successful outcomes. NG are based around the support and inclusion of CYP, thus it is essential to gain their perception in order to investigate how the intervention could be improved and adapted.

Within some studies in the systematic search, it was difficult to differentiate between the views of the different stakeholders (i.e. pupils, NG staff and parents). One reason for this may be the difficulty ascertaining the pupil perspective, as pupils often to not want to be disloyal to their teacher. In addition, pupils may tell the researcher answers they think they would like to hear. For example, Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2007) found in their study pupils often provided guarded answers when comparing their NG to the mainstream classroom. Cooper, Arnold and Boyd however do not mention how they were aware pupils were providing 'guarded answers', therefore we are unsure if this is a valid observation. Cooper, Arnold and Boyd did comment however that the pupils were able to discuss aspects of their NG which they enjoyed, such as the interpersonal relationships, opportunities for free play and the calmer environment. These insights can support researchers in identifying which elements of the NG are important to pupils.

Similarly, Sanders (2007) also acknowledged a difficulty in obtaining the pupil perspective within her research. Stating difficulties with the child's willingness to engage and accessing the pupils' views reliably. However, Sanders found that after the implementation of NGs, pupils reported increased positive ratings of their whole-school experience. Although this research contributed to NG effectiveness, it is unclear which feature and structures pupils preferred within the NG, therefore the specificities of what the pupils enjoyed is unclear.

In order to capture the voice of the child with pupils attending a *classic* NG, Griffiths et al. (2014) used a focus group. The focus groups comprised of eight pupils aged between seven and eleven and was analysed using thematic analysis. Comparable to the previous researchers, the prominent theme identified was that pupils seemed to value their relationship with the NG staff, stating that they felt a sense of belonging to their NG 'family'. In addition, the pupils identified the importance of the NG snack and the importance of two adults to support their cognitive and emotional learning. This study further emphasises that

the relationship between NG staff and pupils is a key element for the success of the NG, as pupils are able to form multiple positive attachments to NG staff. Furthermore this research addresses the importance of two adults being present within the NG setting to support the emotional well-being and social reciprocity of the pupils by modelling positive behaviour and social norms. A major limitation of this study was that it was carried out with one single NG setting, thereby reducing the generalisability of the results, as numerous NG settings would have strengthened the findings. However the study feeds into the broader body of literature for which features add to the success of an NG.

The review revealed that a pupil perspective concerning the characteristics of NGs is limited. The researcher is aware of the difficulties in obtaining the pupil voice such as; pupil willingness to engage, accessing the pupils views reliably and the possibility of response bias. However as an NG is aimed at supporting the social and emotional needs of pupils, it is argued that gaining a pupil perspective on which characteristics pupils prefer, provides an essential insight into the features of an effective NG.

2.6 Summary of literature review

Overall, this review provides evidence that NGs are an effective intervention in improving the social and emotional needs of CYP with SEMH needs. The review indicated that the presence of an NG can have a positive effect upon a whole-school ethos and atmosphere. In addition, the review revealed that features such as positive communication between NG staff, good interpersonal skills and the presence of a multi-disciplinary team will add to an NG's success.

A noteworthy finding within the review was that there did not appear to be any significant differences between the *new variant* or *classic* NGs in terms of short term effectiveness. However, Sloan et al. (2020) found that there seemed to be long-term implications for pupils who attended a full-time NG (classic) as opposed to the part-time NG. In addition, there seems to be no mention of 'aberrant' NGs and if they are being practised throughout the U.K. Furthermore there is a paucity of research examining the child's voice within all NG models and limited research concerning the pupil perspective on NG processes.

2.7 Rationale for Current Study

Previous researchers have noted that several studies have failed to clearly state which type of NG model they are studying; this lack of consistency adds further discrepancies to research concerning the effective characteristics of NGs (Reynolds, McKay & Kearney, 2009). Therefore, there appears to be a lack of research exploring the different structures of NGs. The researcher's exploration of literature revealed a disparity between NG models. The reference to 'aberrant' models implies that they are being practised

throughout the UK, however it is given no attention in research and is viewed negatively by most studies (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007). In addition, the researcher was aware that policies concerning nurture differed across the UK (particularly in England).The researcher sought to explore the practice of NGs in England in a London Borough and aimed to compare these to the received orthodoxy surrounding accepted forms of NGs. Having a greater understanding of the varying structures will shed a light on how NGs are currently being practised in England. In addition, an exploration will highlight various restrictions and strengths of NG principles within schools, identifying which aspects of NG are easily achieved and which are more difficult.

2.8 Research Questions

RQ1- What are the common features and characteristics of NGs in a London Borough?

RQ2- What are staffs' perceptions regarding the strengths and limitations of their NG?

RQ3- What are pupils' perceptions of their NGs?

Chapter 3-Methodology

3.1 Overview of chapter

This chapter describes the epistemological perspective and methodological approach adopted for this study. It also provides a detailed analysis of ethical considerations, recruitment, participant selection and data analysis.

3.2 Context of Research

The research was carried out in an Outer London Borough where the EP was working as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP). Within this borough, 10,261 people are listed as living in an area within the 10% most deprived in the UK. The context of this research fits with previous research on nurture, as pupils with a label of SEMH are more likely to be from socially deprived areas (Boxall & Bennathan, 2002). 15% of the pupils within the borough have special educational needs, in comparison to an Outer London average of 13.6%. Furthermore, 3% of pupils have an Education Health and Care Plan or a Statement of Special Educational Needs, compared to 2.8% in the national population. In addition, 66% of pupil are eligible for free school meals; this is much higher than the average in England (55%).

The London borough has an extremely diverse population; 50.7% of population come from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups and 49.3 % of the population are white (79.75% in England).

3.3 Theoretical perspective

The current study aligns itself with Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model (2007) in design, meaning that the theoretical underpinning has a basis in social constructivism to explore the characteristics and features of NGs through the perspectives of staff and pupils (See figure 2). In other words, it assumes a child's development is best understood by examining the context of influential environmental factors. Ericksson, Ghazinour and Hammarstrom (2018) describe Bronfenbrenner's most recent theory, the Process–Person–Context–Time model (PPCT) as the most appropriate model for research exploring mental health, thus Bronfenbrenner's most recent model (the bioecological mode), was chosen for this study.
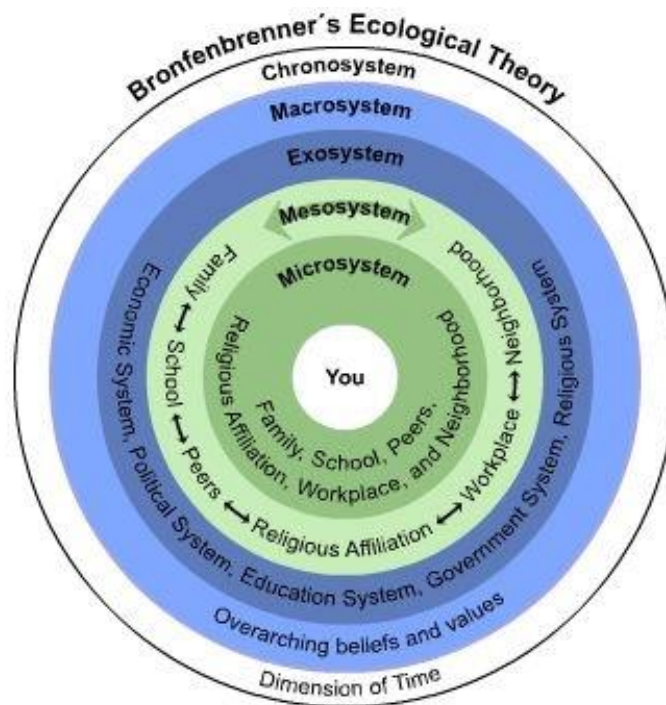
Figure 2- Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model

With regards to the current research, individual perspectives were explained through the participants' experiences of the NG process. The characteristics of these experiences are often the result of the interacting systems operating around the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 2006). The theoretical underpinning of NGs is based on a CYP's experiences in their home life and wider community, the NG fuses the setting of home and school to provide 'an educational bridge' (Cooper & Tiknaz, 2007) to full-time mainstream educations. Again, this strongly echoes with the bioecological model which suggests that individuals are influenced by various levels of their environment. Tudge et al. (2009) claimed that caution should be taken when applying Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development, citing the rarity with which it is used appropriately. Tudge et al. (2009) noted that researchers must be explicit when explaining the theoretical underpinnings of their research.

The researcher adopted a social constructionist position. Social Constructionism asserts that the world is socially constructed through meaning given by individuals and groups of people, who in turn, create culture and social norms (Fox, Martin & Green, 2007). Research involving qualitative methods, using broad and general questioning, can be used to understand and explore the socially constructed realities of the participants. The position is best suited to this research, as it intends to explore the participants' thoughts and experiences of their NG through the use of semi-structured interviews and qualitative observations. By exploring the participants' experiences the researcher was able to understand the social constructs surrounding NGs in an outer London borough.

Creswell (2013) commented that shared meaning is socially constructed and can hold different associations and meanings for different individuals and groups. This stance is particularly relevant when exploring the participants' understanding of nurture and of the NG processes, as the nurture process can be interpreted in a number of ways. As discussed in chapter 1, Nurture UK (2019) have provided a framework outlining best practise in the structure and management of an NG. However, according to Cooper and Whitebread (2007), not all schools are adhering to these guidelines and are changing the structure of the NG. The researcher must then then take a practical approach (Robson, 2011) in their understanding of what makes an effective NG, using their knowledge of key research outlined in chapter 2.

3.4 Research Design

A qualitative framework using semi-structured interviews and qualitative observations was used for this research. According to Lune and Berg (2016), qualitative researchers are most interested in how individuals arrange and make sense of their surroundings. For this reason, the design complemented the researcher's epistemological stance. The design was separated into two phases. The first phase involved using a multiple case study design to collect the data. Creswell (2013) comments that a case study method,

> *"explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information… and reports a case description and case themes"* (Creswell, 2013, p. 97).

In other words, a case study's design analyses individuals, groups, events and policies. A multiple case study however allows the researcher to explore similarities and differences between cases (Yin, 2003a). Baxter and Jack (2008) noted that using a multiple case study designs provides more possibilities of producing more in-depth and robust results. Within the current study, each case consisted of the NG, the adult participants, the pupil participants and the qualitative observation of the NG.

This design compliments a social constructivist perspective as it explores perceptions of situations and events. The approach of this design ensured that contextual and systemic factors were also considered (Bronfenbrenner, 2007) by gaining the perspectives of all individuals within the NG process such as the pupil, the SENCO, the NG teacher and TA.

The second phase involved analysing the data using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was chosen, due to the vast amount of common similarities and differences observed in the data in the first phase.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was gained by the Departmental Ethics Committee at the Department of Psychology and Human Development at the Institute of Education, University College London. In addition, this research was carried out according with the ethical guidelines specified by the BPS (BPS, 2006).

3.5.1 Informed Consent

Informed consent was collected at the beginning and end of each interview and the participants were told they had the right to withdraw from the interview at any time. In addition, participants were reminded that they do not have to answer every question.

3.5.2 Confidentiality in reporting

Throughout the research all participants' names were changed to ensure anonymity. Confidentiality was thoroughly discussed with each participant. Additionally, pupil participants were informed that unless there was an issue concerning their safety, staff and parents were not be told about the specifics of their interview. Any information which could identify a participant was omitted from this study.

3.5.3 Member Checking

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the results, the researcher included a member checking process. This process involved summarising the participants' responses once the interview process was over to ensure the authenticity of the interview. The researcher took notes throughout each interview and reviewed the participant's answers. All participants were content that the researcher had effectively recorded their perspective. This process of member checking was used with both pupil and adult participants.

3.6 Sample

The final sample consisted of 19 participants across 8 NGs; 6 pupils, 5 SENCOs, 7 NG TA's and 1 NG teachers. In addition, 8 of the NGs were qualitatively observed. Terry and Braun (2011a) commented that a sample size between 15 and 30 participants is a common trend and sufficient size in research which aims to identify patterns in data. A criterion sampling technique was applied by the researcher, meaning that sampling involved selecting cases that met some predetermined criterion (Patton, 2001, p. 238). The applied criteria for pupil participation specified: pupils were to be in KS2 and were to have been in the NG for more than one term. Previous researchers (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007), have stated that older pupils (pupils in KS2) and pupils who had experienced one term are more able provide a detailed account of their experience of an NG. In addition, Ondrusek et al. (1998), noted it is better ethical practice to use children who are above the age of 9 in research finding that

children who were over 9 years of age demonstrated that they understood key elements of consent such as the right to withdraw, whereas younger children did not. Therefore older children have the capacity to understand the ethical considerations surrounding a study.

With regards to the criteria applied to adult participants, participants had to be involved in the NG for over one term. In addition, SENCOs were specifically sought due their responsibility of organising SEN strategies and interventions.

3.6.1 Recruitment of Participants

SENCOs from 14 schools which contain an NG were contacted and asked to participate in the research. Eight SENCOs responded and identified teachers and TAs for the study. Gaining pupil participants was slightly more challenging, with only 3 SENCOs allowing pupil participation.

Once pupils were identified, their parents were given an information sheet and consent form (Appendix C). Adult participants (NG teachers and SENCOs) were similarly given information sheets and consent forms (Appendix A). Before the interviews took place, NG staff were also asked if the researcher could visit their NG for 1.5 hours to qualitatively observe their NG.

3.6.2 Adult Participants

Schools known to the LA, who had previously identified their use of a NG were asked to take part in the study. Nine SENCOs were asked to take part in the study, however only 5 SENCOs consented. These SENCOs came from Schools 1,2,3,5 and 6 (See table 5). All SENCOs were involved in their NGs' implementation. Four of the five SENCOs were female. None of the SENCOs had received any training in nurture. Problems emerged when trying to capture the voice of the NG teacher, as the NGs were predominantly run and managed by TAs. One NG teacher was invited to take part and consented to take part. The NG teacher was female and had received training from Nurture U.K. This teacher was involved in the NGs' implementation.

Nine NG TAs were invited to take part in the research, however only 7 consented. All participants were female. Two of the TA participants had not received any training concerning nurture, the remaining TA participants had received training from Nurture UK. All of the NG staff, apart from the TA from School 7, had been teaching in the NG for over a year (See table 6). Originally, the researcher had planned to involve the senior leadership team in addition to SENCOs and NG staff, as they would have been able to shed light on the decision making in the school around resourcing of the NG and their decision to use a NG, however due to constraints of time the recruitment of SLT was not attained.

Table 6- Adult participant and School details

School	F.S.M Band	Adult Participants	Years in Operation
School 1	Medium	TA 1, SENCO 1	4
School 2	High	Teacher 2, SENCO 2	2
School 3	High	TA 3, SENCO 3	3
School 4	Medium	TA 4	3
School 5	Medium	TA 5, SENCO 5	1
School 6	High	TA 6, SENCO 6	3
School 7	Medium	TA 7	Under a year
School 8	High	TA 8	1

Notes: F.S.M; Free school meals

3.6.3 Pupil Participants

This study included 6 pupils (5 males and 1 female) aged between 9 years 2 months to 11 years 5 months. Six pupils from 3 from three NGs (School 2, 3 & 8) (See table 7) were selected by their school SENCOs. According to each school SENCO, all pupils had been placed in the NG due to their underlying social and emotional needs. In addition, all pupil participants in Schools 2 and 3 had previously exhibited challenging behaviour, therefore their placement in the NG was due to an inability to cope in the mainstream classroom. Individual differences of the pupils are presented in Table 6. The gender imbalance within this research (84% male) reflects trends of challenging behaviour across the UK, as boys are more likely than girls to exhibit challenging behaviour (McClintock et al., 2003).

Table 7- Pupil Participant details

Pupil	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Reason for NG placement	Duration of NG access	School
Pupil 1	9.2	M	W.B.	S/E	1 A	8
Pupil 2	10.1	F	A.C.	S/E	1 A	8
Pupil 3	11.3	M	W.B.	S/E & C.B.	4 A	2
Pupil 4	11.4	M	W.B.	S/E & C.B.	4 A	2
Pupil 5	10.6	M	A.C.	S/E & C.B.	4 A	2
Pupil 6	11.5	M	W.B.	S/E & C.B.	3 A	3

Notes: W.B: White British; A.C.: Afro-Caribbean; S/E; social/emotional; C.B: Challenging behaviour; A: afternoons a week; M: male; F: female

3.7 Development of Research Tools

3.7.1 Observation Framework

The researcher developed a qualitative observation framework (See Appendix I). The framework was developed from the criteria of an effective NG set out by the Welsh Handbook for Nurture (2010) and Nurture UK (2019). This was to ensure that the researcher could explore all aspects of each NG. This framework was mainly used in the observations of the NGs, however the researcher also referred to this framework when creating the interview schedule for NG staff and SENCOs. By using the observation framework, the researcher intended to gain an understanding of the structure of the NG and how lessons were planned and executed. In addition, the researcher wanted to examine how NG staff interacted with their pupils and with one another. In other words, the researcher intended to explore themes regarding the lesson content and relationships established within each NG.

3.7.2 Pupil Interview Schedule

As discussed in Chapter 2, Todd (2003a) argued that eliciting the perspectives of pupils can strengthen the outcomes of pupil interventions. Therefore, gaining the voice of the pupils is an essential element when carrying out research which involves CYP. Gray and Wlison (2004) commented, however, that researchers should be mindful when drawing out the voice of the CYP, as issues often arise when gaining pupils' trust, asking appropriate questions and avoiding responder bias (Stormark et al., 2008) . Armstrong (1995) found that

when CYP were asked for their viewpoints and perspective, they were often confused with the questions and would fail to respond.

3.7.2.1 Collecting the Pupil Voice

In order to develop an interview schedule and to effectively elicit the pupils' voice, the researcher was aware that a rapport had to first be developed with the pupil before the interview could take place, to ensure that questions could be answered with confidence and that the pupil felt secure within the researcher's presence. Morrow (2008) noted that researchers should aim to create interesting and fun rapport building activities to attract the pupils' attention and to ensure that a trusting relationship has been built. Alderson and Morrow (2004) noted that games and getting to know you questions are appropriate tools to use with pupils as they create a calm atmosphere. For this reason, the researcher sought out board games which required little cognitive ability to create less stress for the pupil. The researcher acquired played board games such as 'Pop up Pirate' and 'Dobble' (see Appendix M). In addition, 'getting to know you' questions were also organised. All questions, as well as the information sheet and consent form were worded with child-friendly language to avoid confusion or ambiguity for the pupils (see appendix B). The researcher also developed the use of a 'purple card'. This card could be used by pupils who wanted to omit from a question or if they wanted the interview to end. The design of the card was to ensure that pupils could non-verbally indicate that they felt uncomfortable.

Other strategies and activities to elicit the pupil's voice were considered by the researcher, such as Moran's (2001) 'Drawing of the Ideal School[5]', (or in this case, drawing of the ideal NG). Due to the use of the rapport building games and child friendly language within the interview schedule, a secure environment had been created for the pupils to speak freely and confidently about their NG and therefore other resources were not needed.

3.7.3 Adult Interview schedule

As mentioned above, when developing the interview schedule, the researcher referred to her framework to create an interview schedule which encompassed questions which referred to an effective NG structure. The adult interview schedule was designed to elicit the participants view on various processed and structures within their NG, questions regarding the structure of the NG were asked in the first part of the interview. The second half of the interview focused on the participant's experiences of the NG. Separating the

---

[5] A technique based on personal construct psychology which can be used to elicit a CYP voice, thoughts and emotions (Moran, 2011).

interview schedule into two sections meant that the researcher could gain an overall understanding of the NG. The interview schedule was piloted with an NG teacher.

3.7.3 Pilot Interview

A pilot interview exploring RQ1 and RQ2 was sought from an NG teacher in a different borough. Response from this pilot led to improvements on the wording of the interview schedule and the inclusion of further prompts to ensure answers from participants included rich and focused answers. After piloting the interview schedule, the researcher added questions regarding the adult participants' thoughts on why their school had chosen to run a NG and what improvements could be made to their NG. In addition, questions regarding the whole-school's approach to nurture was added. The inclusion of these questions ensured RQ2 could be answered fully.

3.8 Procedure

The first phase of the research involved data collected via recorded semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were selected for the qualitative data collection, as they allowed insight into the participants' perceptions concerning the strengths and limitations of their NGs as well allowing exploration of the characteristics of each NG. Robson (2011) commented that semi-structured interviews allows participants to make sense of their experiences. Moreover, semi-structured questions allowed the participants to be flexible in their responses, whilst also allowing the participants to reveal insights the researcher had not previously considered (Robson, 2011). Interview schedules for SENCOs, NG staff and pupils were separately designed (See Appendix D, E & F) once the aims of the research had been developed (Brede, Remington, Kenny, Warren & Pellicano, 2016). All interview schedules included an introduction, warm up questions, main content and a debrief (Gillham, 2005). Care was taken to link the interview questions to the research questions.

For pupil interviews, a date and time was agreed between the researcher, the pupil's teacher, the pupil's parent and the pupil. Before the interview started, the pupil was reminded of rationale of the study and written and verbal consent were obtained. Pupils were also told they could stop the interview at any time.

3.8.1 Conducting Interviews

When adult participants were interviewed, a time and date was agreed between the researcher and participant via email. Once the date and time was agreed, a room was booked in the adult participants' school. Prior to the interview, a consent form was completed and participants were asked to read the information sheet detailing the rationale of the study. At the start of the interview, adult participants were reminded again of the rationale of the study and their consent was asked a second time. Adult participants were told they could

stop the interview at any time. Interviews with NG staff and SENCOs focused on the characteristics of their NG, as well as reasons for their NGs formation. In addition, NG staff and SENCOs were asked to identify the perceived strengths and limitations of their NGs.

Pupils were interviewed after the adult participants. All pupils were interviewed in a separate room. The pupils were also asked if they would like to have another adult present in order to feel more at ease. However none of pupils asked to have this request fulfilled. Pupils were also given a purple card to hold up if they did not want to answer a question. Again, pupils did not hold up the purple card during the interview. The interview questions were recorded by researcher's encrypted mobile device. The researcher was aware that using a recorded device may have influenced or impacted on all participants' responses. However, none of the participants made a comment on the recording device during the interview. The researcher was able to type up interviews verbatim, a process which later supported the use of thematic analysis (Robson, 2002; Willig, 2008).

3.8.2 Transcribing Interviews

The lengths of the interviews for pupils ranged from 10 minutes to 15 minutes and averaged a total of 12 minutes. For adult participants, the length of interviews ranged from 25 minutes to 50 minutes and averaged a total of 35 minutes.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The disparity in timings was typically a result of more or less full answers from the participants.

3.9 Observations

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, qualitative observations of eight NGs took place after the interviews had been completed. The observations were arranged via email with the school SENCO and involved the researcher sitting at the back of each NGs room where she acted in an unobtrusive manner.

The qualitative observations further conceptualised the interviews as they provided a deeper insight into the NGs' structure and processes, examining interactions such as staff using positive language, tone and gestures and the use of emotional literacy activities. In addition, the researcher examined how staff interacted with one another and if staff were modelling positive social behaviour and how staff were choosing to praise their pupils. The researcher also analysed the materials and resources staff used to support and scaffold their pupils. Merten (2005) commented that observations are an extremely useful tool as they allow the researcher to have direct contact with the setting therefore adding another dimension to the research. This use of observations fits with the epistemological position, as the researcher is

constructing their social understanding of the NG based upon previous evidence and research of an effective NG.

The qualitative observations lasted 1.5 hours, as the researcher was able to observe multiple transitions and interactions within this timeframe across units of learning. In addition, the qualitative observations supported a triangulation of the data. Hageman (2008) commented that triangulation of data can strengthen the research, creating a richer and fuller picture of the phenomena being studied. Silverman (2015) commented that triangulation of data becomes a way of capturing multiple 'truths' related to a topic.

An observation framework was developed by the researcher using the criteria of an effective NG from the Welsh Handbook on Nurture (2010) and from Nurture UK (2019) (see Appendix J). The framework explored how staff interacted with pupils, taking note of verbal and non-verbal cues. This framework/criteria was used throughout the 1.5 hour observation. The observations were qualitative in nature, with the researcher referring to the framework to support her understanding of an effective NG. The researcher took on the role of the observer throughout the observation, acting in an unobtrusive manner with the participants during the observation. However, as a stance of 'participant as observer' was adopted, the researcher was a member of the NG being studied, insofar as she was present in the room, with pupils sometimes interacting with her. However the researcher did not proactively partake in the delivery of the NG session. The researcher was aware of the limitations of acting as an observer, as NG staff may have altered their practice in order to present themselves positively. Merriam (1998) however suggested that the process of how the researcher affects the observation should not be questioned, stating that it is how the researcher accounts for these affects. This implies, the researcher actively reflected upon each observation. As common characteristics and processes were observed in each NG, the researcher believed that her presence had little influence upon the results. Before the observations took place, the researcher hoped she would gain an insight into the purpose structure and aim of each NG.

3.10 Data Collection

Data from the qualitative observations and adult interviews were combined to provide a boarder picture of the NGs characteristics and processes. This data was used to support answers to RQ1- (What are the common features and characteristics of NGs in a London Borough?) and RQ2 (What are staff perceptions regarding the strengths and of their NG?) Data from the pupils' interviews was analysed separately and was used to answer RQ3 (What are pupils' perceptions of their NG?)

Data from the qualitative observations were gathered after the interviews had taken place with adult and pupil participants. The observations were used by the researcher to further contextualise the data collected from semi-structured interviews (see pen portraits- Appendix K & L).

3.11 Applying Thematic Analysis

A thematic analysis was chosen by researcher to analyse the interview data due to the collective similarities and differences observed in phase 1. In addition, thematic analysis was chosen as another form of analysis lay outside of the scope of the research. The use of thematic analysis complemented the researcher's epistemological position (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a method for identifying themes and patterns across a data set. A benefit to using thematic analysis is that it recognises key features of a data set whilst providing useful and sometimes surprising insights which relate to the research questions. Through this method, both differences and similarities from the data can be found. The flexibility of thematic analysis can also be beneficial, as it allows the researcher to use a variation of approaches to analyse the data (Braun and Clarke 2006).

A well-known and replicable model of thematic analysis is provided by Braun & Clarke (2006). An inductive approach of thematic analysis was used meaning that no pre-determined theory was used to analyse the data. Therefore identified themes were strongly linked to the data (Patton, 2014). The data was analysed without a pre-developed coding frame (See figure 3).


```
Phase 1: Familiarisation with the data
        ↓
Phase 2: Creation of initial codes and
         creation of categories
        ↓
Phase 3: Searching for themes
        ↓
Phase 4: Reviewing themes
        ↓
Phase 5: Defining and naming themes
        ↓
Phase 6: Producing the report
```
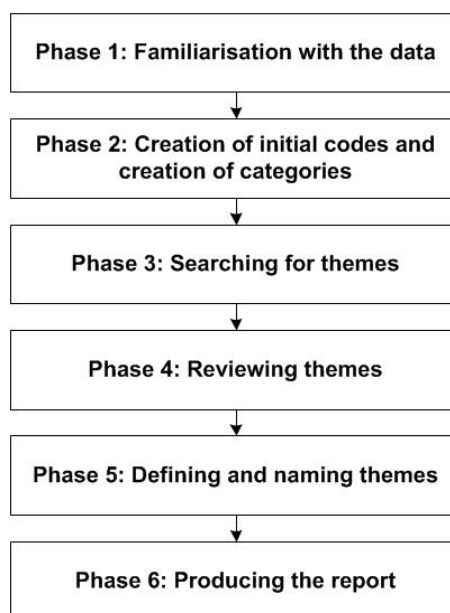
Figure 3- Braun and Clarke's phases of thematic analysis

First the researcher became familiar with the data by listening to the audio recordings and transcribing the interviews. The second phase involved reading the transcripts and creating initial codes for items within the data set by hand (Appendix G). Third, the codes were studied and reviewed several times by the researcher, the researcher then identified patterns within the research and sorted the codes into potential themes (see Appendix H). To ensure credibility of analysis, the researcher discussed initial codes and themes with the two other TEPs completing the same doctoral course (Miles & Huberman 1994). In addition, the researcher also discussed codes and themes with two research supervisors, further exposing the transcripts to differing viewpoints, with agreed adjustments being made such as reviewing initial codes of the data. Yardley (2008) noted that researchers must be aware that they will inevitably influence the research process, due to some form of researcher bias. Thus the use of two TEPs and two researchers can support the trustworthiness of the data. The use of an inter-coder strengthened and enhanced the credibility of the findings and encouraged to the researchers to apply reflexivity upon initial codes and themes. Furthermore, the researcher was aware that her own thoughts and beliefs may influence her data set and her interpretation of the findings (Creswell et al., 2011). In order to minimise researcher bias, specific ways the study could be influenced were considered prior to the study, such as knowledge of the school and systems which operate within the borough (Yardley, 2008). However, the researcher felt that this knowledge also supported her in developing an accurate interpretation of the data, as the researcher understood the varying structures and systems within the LA.

In the fourth phase of the analysis, the researcher combined participant groups such as the NG TAs, the NG teacher and the school SENCOs, this was due to the consistency of themes across the data set, meaning that data from adult participants was grouped together to answer RQ1 and RQ2 . Pupil participants were analysed and grouped separately to answer RQ3. The themes were later reviewed.

 The fifth phase involved themes being finalised, with the researcher completing her thematic maps, at this point the researcher had revised her themes in order to enhance clarity concerning of her content. In the final phase, the researcher was able to write a report outlining the results of her analysis and discuss the themes in relation to her research questions (Chapters 4 &5).

The findings of the thematic analysis and qualitative observations are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 4- Findings

Chapter 4 details the results from the qualitative observations and semi-structured interviews with both adult and pupil participants. The observations are detailed first in order to add context to the thematic analysis.

4.1 Qualitative Observational Data

Table 8 details a condensed version of the qualitative observations. A more detailed version can be found appendix J& K.

Table 8- Qualitative observations of NGs

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
Type of NG	PT 2/3 A week	PT 4/5 A Week	PT 3/4 A Week	PT 1/ A Week	PT 1 A or M week	PT 1 A or M Week	PT 2 A Week	PT 1 A or M Week
Sofa Kitchen Toys Table Chairs	Sofa Toys Table Chairs	Sofa Kitchen Toys Table Chairs	Table Chairs	Sofa Kitchen Toys Table Chairs	Sofa Kitchen Toys Table Chairs	Sofa Toys Table Chairs	Sofa Kitchen Toys Table Chairs	Table Chairs
Staffing	2 TAS	Teacher and TA	1 TA	2 TAs	2TAs	1TA	2TAs	1TA
Training	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Use of BP	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
NG snack	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
NG Content	EL and CBL	EL and CBL	CBL	EL	EL	EL	EL	EL

S; School; PT: part time; A: afternoon; M: morning; EL: emotional literacy; CBL: curriculum based learning

The qualitative data from table 6 indicated that all schools were following a part-time NG model. According to Cooper and Whitebread's (2007) models of NG, one would fall into the *new variant* category and the remaining would fall under the 'aberrant' model category, as they were solely managed by TAs. The frequency of each NG differed, ranging from 45 minutes a week to five 2.5 hours sessions a week. Seven out of the eight schools had

teaching assistants managing and operating the NG, with only one NG being managed by an NG teacher. In addition, two of the NGs were solely supported by one TA. The remainder of the schools were supported by two TAs. Each NG had its own room, however each NG was furnished in a different way. Three NGs had kitchens, these NGs also had tables and chairs, as well as soft furnishing such as a sofa and beanbags. Two NGs had no soft furnishings, however they did contain table and chairs for the pupils. The remainder of the NGs contained a sofa and toys for the pupils to play with. Therefore, only six out of the eight NGs adhered to the guidelines provided by Nurture UK (2019) concerning how a nurture room should be furnished.

The practices of the NG again differed according to the school. Only two of the NGs (School 1 and 2) supported both the emotional and learning needs of their pupils, as pupils would experience differentiated curriculum-based activities and would be supported through emotional literacy materials. One NG solely supported the learning needs of their pupils through differentiated learning tasks. The remainder of the NGs solely supported the emotional and social needs of the pupils through the use of play-based activities and emotional literacy materials. All NGs contained fewer than 10 pupils. The practice of the NG snack was only qualitatively observed in five NGs, with the remaining not partaking in the practice. The observations also revealed that the adults interacted positively with the pupils, pupils were continuously praised when they had completed work or when they had reacted in a socially acceptable manner (e.g. saying please and thank you, raising their hand to ask a question). Positive social interactions were observed in each of the eight NGs. Positive interactions between staff were only observed in four of the schools (schools who had two members of staff within the NG). Within these school Adults spoke in a polite manner to each other and modelled positive social cues. This was not witnessed in the schools where there was only one NG lead.

4.2 Example of Case studies

Examples of the three case studies are presented below. The outlined NG cases are presented due to their distinct structures and processes, which in turn, support understanding of the thematic analysis. More detailed versions of all of the case studies will be presented in the Appendix K and in the pen portraits in Appendix L.

School 1

School 1 is a part-time NG, operated by TAs and available for Years 1 and 2 and therefore falls under the 'aberrant' category. Year 2 access the NG three afternoons a week and Year

1 access the NG 2 days a week. Two groups of ten pupils accessed the NG. The NG has been available for four years and is located within a room in the school building. All pupils within the NG remain part of their mainstream class and take lunch with their mainstream class. The NG is led by two TAs who have had training provided by Nurture UK, with 1 TA taking on the role of NG lead. The NG lead plans the lessons and assess the pupils' progress using the BP. The room is spacious with a sofa and an area for learning which consists of a circular table and chairs. The explicit focus of the NG is to support the pupils' SEMH needs and the secondary focus is to support the learning needs of the pupils. Pupils complete differentiated curriculum-based work for the first hour of the session. In the second hour, pupils complete work based upon emotional literacy. After the emotional literacy work, such as completing worksheets on how to support their anger, pupils are given 15 minutes to play. In the final 15 minutes, the children receive a nurture snack around the table. Adults within this NG continuously modelled positive social cues and interacted in a nurturing and positive manner to the pupils.

School 3

School 3 is a part-time NG available for years 3 and 4. The pupils attended the NG 4/5 times a week for 2 hours. Two groups of 6 pupils attend the NG. The NG has been in operation for three years and is located within a room in the school building. All pupils within the NG remain part of their mainstream class and take lunch with their mainstream class. The NG is run by one TA who has not received any training. The room is small and has no kitchen, sofa and only very few toys. The NG room does have a desk and chairs for the pupils to complete their work. The emphasis of the NG is placed upon learning. As pupils complete differentiated tasks based on the literacy and numeracy lessons from their mainstream class. Within the NG, the pupils receive a differentiated input from the NG TA. Within the majority of the lesson, pupils are asked to complete differentiated work. As there was only one member of staff, the modelling of positive social interactions between adults was not observed. However, this member of staff was very friendly and nurturing towards the pupils.

School 4

School 4 is a part-time NG available to year 2-6. Four groups of five pupils attended the NG for 45 minutes, 1 day a week. The NG is led by two TAs who have received training from Nurture UK. The room located in a portable classroom next to the main school building. The room consists of a kitchen, a learning area (table and chairs) and a sofa. The explicit focus of the NG is to support the pupils' SEMH needs. Each 45-minute session is based around work which focuses on emotional literacy where pupils would complete work and play games

where they would discuss their feelings and emotions. At the end of each session, the pupils sit around the table and have a nurture snack.

The outlined cases show the variation between each NG, as each group adopted a different nurturing approach through their physical layout and frequency. In addition, the NGs differed in their core aim and content. However the three cases presented showed similarities insofar as each group had its own dedicated nurture room. In addition, all pupils within each NG received individualised and positive attention. A further similarity was that each group was managed by a TA. However School 3 had only one TA supporting. Therefore the modelling of positive social interactions between was not observed in School 3.

In addition to qualitative observations, characteristic and processes and perceptions of the NGs were explored through the use of semi-structured interviews with both adult and pupil participants. RQ1 and RQ2 will be answered with information from the adult interviews. RQ3 will be answered using information from pupil interviews

RQ1: What are the common features and characteristics of NGs in a London Borough?
This R.Q aimed to explore the structure and characteristics of common NG processes and features. This R.Q is informed by data from the qualitative observations as well as data from the semi-structured interviews from NG staff and SENCOs.

4.2 Theme 1: Function of NG
Adult participants were asked about the aim of their NG and its main purpose within the school environment. Each identified NG adopted a distinct, individualised function and subsequent aim, varying from the original conceptualisation of the classic NG model or from criteria set out by Nurture UK (2019). The majority of schools however, who solely used the NG to support the emotional needs of their pupils offered no curriculum-based learning support at all. Figure 4 shows the different aims of each NG.
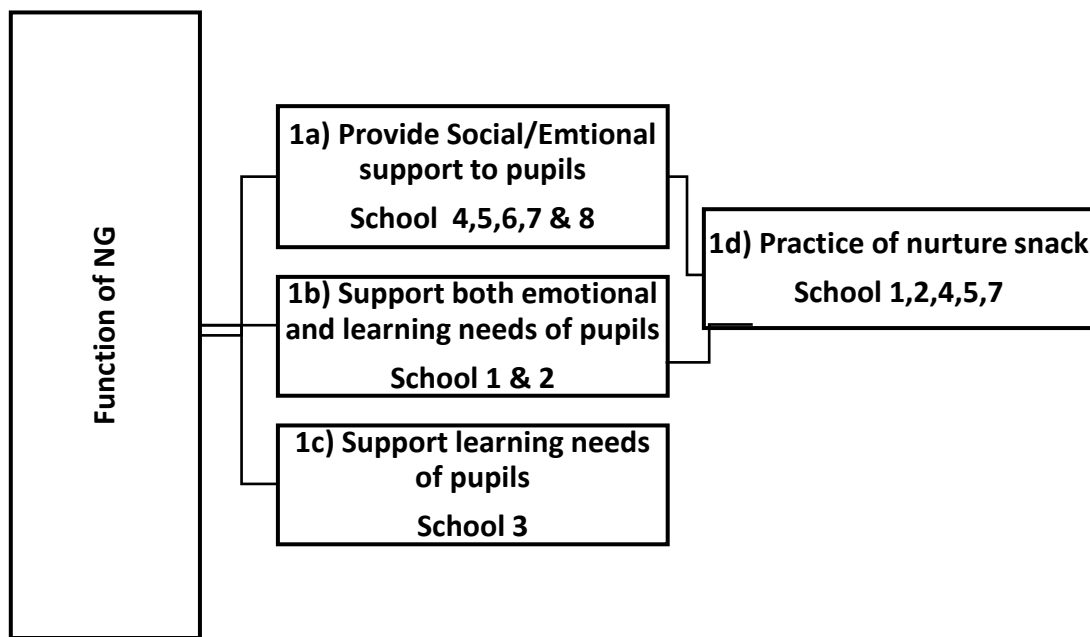
Figure 4. Theme 1 – Function of NG

Figure 4 shows the range of answers regarding the function of each NG. Within theme 1, three subthemes emerged; Subtheme 1a – providing social/emotional support, subtheme 1b – support both emotional and learning needs of pupils and subtheme 1c – supporting the learning needs of pupils. Each subthemes are explored in turn. 1a indicates NGs who solely provided social and emotional support to their pupils, 1b reveals NGs who supported both the learning and emotional needs of their pupils and 1c shows an NG who solely provided differentiated learning support to their pupils. Each school is identified under each box.

Subtheme 1a) Provide Social/Emotional support to pupils.

Five NGs were categorised into this subtheme (School 4, 5, 6, 7, & 8). All adult participants from these schools discussed how their NGs' main intention was to provide a secure environment for their pupils, where they could feel safe and protected. By initially providing this physical environment, the NG was then able to offer emotional and social support. This view is captured by TA6, who commented that a safe environment for the pupils was initially created, after which their social and emotional needs were identified through the BP.

> *"Providing a safe place is the fundamental purpose of what we do. Then we identify their difficulties, we do that with the BP" (*TA6).

SENCO 5 noted that their NG's main function was to provide emotional support as well as a physical environment of security to the pupils.

> *"When we put together the idea of the nurture room, it was to help children with the issues they've going on in their lives, which are ongoing over a long period. It was a response to be there for them, a safe place" (SENCO 5).*

The second subtheme which emerged from the data arguably expanded on this concept and was related to supporting emotional and learning needs of pupils. Only two of the eight schools (school 1 and 2) reported to support both the emotional and social needs of their pupils. These were the schools who most adhered to the guidelines set out by Nurture UK (2019).

Subtheme 1b) Support both emotional and learning needs of pupils

In School 1 and 2 participants noted that the NG had a dual purpose, as it supported the academic learning and emotional needs of their pupils. TA1 stated:

> *"The NG is there to help them learn, but it's also there to help them learn about their emotions, their mental health and their well-being. To help them understand that they have rights and to be open" (TA1).*

Schools 1 and 2 were able to support the overall needs of their pupils, as the NG supported both the learning needs and the SEMH needs of the pupil. An interesting finding regarding how NGs supported the emotional needs of their pupils concerned the activity involving the nurture snack.

Emergent theme 1

Adult participants reported that they were able to support their pupils' emotional needs through the use of the nurture snack. The nurture snack was viewed as a calming activity where pupils could feel relaxed. This is illustrated as Teacher 2 stated:

> *"The pupils can sometimes be quite volatile, we would give them the snack and sit with them, it tends to calm the situation," (Teacher 2).*

In addition, TA 5 commentated,

> *"We feed the pupils toast and juice when they come into the room, so it can be quite relaxing" (TA5).*

Participants noted that the nurture snack seemed to instigate feelings of comfort and calm, easing tensions and stress within the room. Three schools however did not feature the nurture snack (School 3, 6 & 8). This is evident with SENCO 3 commenting:

> *"We have breakfast club anyway so we don't have to feed them. Because that is a big part of nurture and I get that. But we do other things"* SENCO 3.

Subtheme 1c) Support academic learning needs of pupils

School 3 was the only school to solely support the learning needs of their pupils. As TA3 stated:

> *"I operate the NG, we use it for the pupils to access English and maths at their level."* (TA3).

Additionally, SENCO 3 discussed how her NG was being used to support the academic and learning needs of her pupils. She noted that she was aware that her NG was not adhering to the *classic* NG principles and reflected on how she would like to change the NGs main function and aim:

> *"Having the NG, I think, going forward, because ours is all about learning. It's not the traditional group. I think it's something we will have to revisit"* (SENCO 3).

The examined subthemes of theme 1 support two NG models (*new variant* and 'aberrant'); none of the NGs examined adhered to the classic NG model, with all NGs practising a part-time NG model. The second theme which emerged from the interview data concerned the differing reasons for establishing an NG.

4.4 Theme 2: Reason for NGs establishment

When adult participants were asked to explain why their school had implemented an NG, four distinct sub-themes emerged. Figure 5 details the adult participants' perceptions regarding the reasons for their NGs establishment.
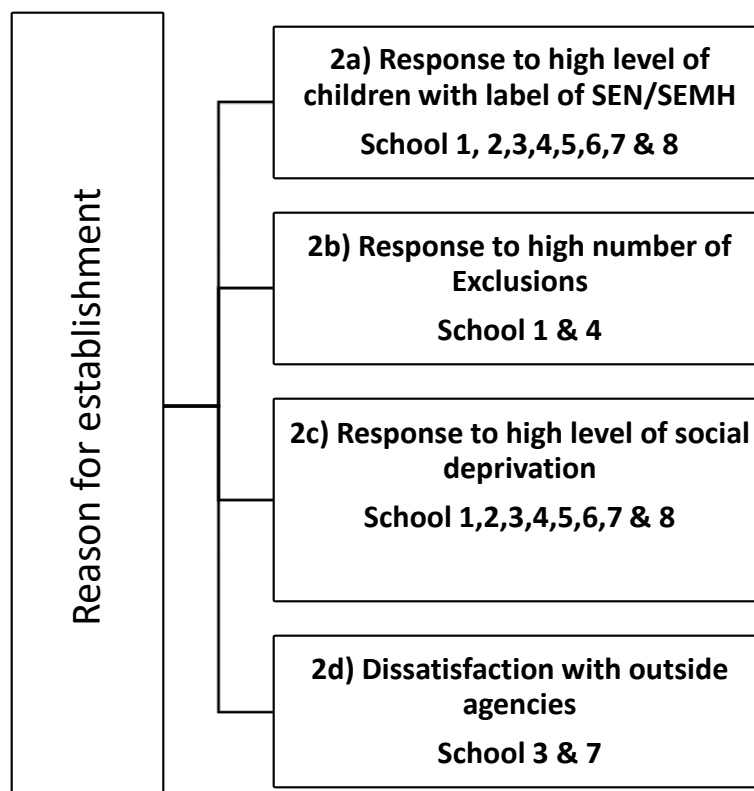
Figure 5 Theme 2– Reason for NGs establishment

Figure 5 illustrates the answers regarding why schools had chosen to establish an NG. From theme 2, four subthemes emerged; subtheme 2a – response to high level of children with label of SEN/SEMH, subtheme 2b – response to high number of exclusions, subtheme 2c – response to high level of social deprivation and subtheme 2d – dissatisfaction with outside agencies. Each Subtheme will be explored below.

Subtheme 2a) Response to high level of children with label of SEN/SEMH-Containment of emotional needs

Adult participants from all schools stated that their NG was created in response to the considerable number of pupils with a SEN/SEMH need and thus the need for a NG was to contain and support these emotional needs within the school environment. Additionally, all adult participants from each school noted that the NGs establishment was a direct impact of the high number of pupils exhibiting challenging behaviour due to a perceived underlying social and emotional need. This theme is illustrated by SENCO 3's statement:

"*Well it was a response to the behaviour of a certain cohort who were struggling in the mainstream classroom at the time. We knew they had SEMH issues/concerns*" (SENCO 1).

68

Additionally, SENCO 4 commented:

"*For quite a number of years, we noticed that we had a great deal of children from vulnerable families presenting with more and more emotional difficulties. Due to some form of special needs that they had or some form of trauma*" (SENCO 4).

The data from subtheme A indicates that NGs were formed in response to the considerable numbers of pupils presenting with a SEMH difficulty.

Subtheme 2b) Response to high number of Exclusions

The second subtheme indicates that schools formed their NG due to an excessive number of pupils being excluded. SENCO 1, SENCO 2 and teacher 1 stated that their schools previously had a high number of fixed term exclusions. Therefore, the NG was partly created as an intervention to respond to the excessive number of pupil exclusions.

SENCO 1 commented:

"*We have previously had quite high exclusion rates. So the response was that the LA gave us a nurture classroom*" (SENCO 1).

In addition, SENCO 2 describes how her school reactively created their NG through research of alternative interventions and strategies for pupils exhibiting challenging behaviour:

"We started the nurturing provision in September 2018. Lots of children were getting excluded and the exclusions were having absolutely no impact. We looked at the research in terms of those children and that is when we put our nurturing provision in place" (SENCO 2).

Subtheme 2c) Response to high level of social deprivation

All adult participants identified the need for an NG in a socially deprived area, as they were aware of the adverse effects poverty can have upon their pupils. When responding to a question concerning the establishment of their NG, TA 8 commented:

"In this area we have a lot of poverty, alcohol issues and housing issues. We also have parents in prison and mental health issues. We have it and we have to deal with it" (TA8).

In a similar response, SENCO 1 noted:

"This is an area of social deprivation. Therefore, we have a lot of need in our school" (SENCO 1).

The final subtheme in theme 2 explores how Schools created NGs due to an overall dissatisfaction with support from outside services.

Subtheme 2d) Dissatisfaction with external agencies

Schools expressed that their NGs creation was a response to the lack of support they received from external agencies. Therefore the NG was an immediate reaction and strategy to support the number of pupils with an SEMH need. Two SENCOs from School 3 and 6 expressed discontent with external services, perceiving a shortcoming in assistance from other agencies in terms of supporting pupils with SEMH needs, leading to a sense that their NGs were instrumental in supporting their pupils' current and immediate needs. This is illustrated as SENCO 5 commented:

"Access to outside agencies is complex and takes far too long and is not always satisfactory so we need to deal with the children's problems now" (SENCO 6).

Additionally, SENCO 3 noted:

"There was nothing outside that we could use to help us, so we decided to have something in-house. We set up the nurture for those children and then it evolved over time" (SENCO 3).

Theme 2 illustrates the range of reasons for schools developing their NG, with the most common due to the high number of pupils with SEN/SEMH need.

4.5 Theme 3: Referral Process

Theme 3 details the referral process within each schools' NG. This theme illustrates the variations between schools' referral processes. Each school adopted a very different referral process and therefore there was no universal procedure used. It was made clear that the referral process was dependent upon each individual school. In each school, the process was managed by the SENCOs and the choice to involve NG staff or parents again varied between each school. Figure 6 shows four distinct themes which arose from the semi-structured interviews.
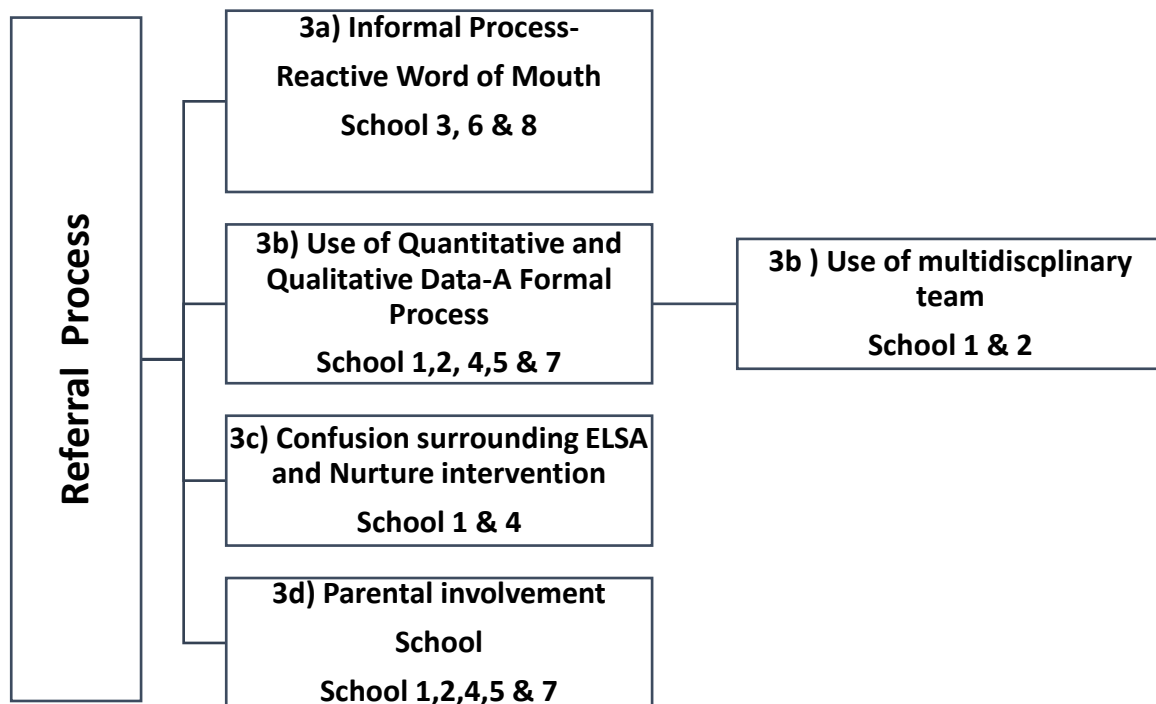
```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                   │  3a) Informal Process-         │
│                   │  Reactive Word of Mouth        │
│                   │  School 3, 6 & 8               │
│    Referral       ├────────────────────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────┐
│    Process        │  3b) Use of Quantitative and   │   │ 3b ) Use of      │
│                   │  Qualitative Data-A Formal     ├───┤ multidiscplinary │
│                   │  Process                       │   │ team             │
│                   │  School 1,2, 4,5 & 7           │   │ School 1 & 2     │
│                   ├────────────────────────────────┘   └──────────────────┘
│                   │  3c) Confusion surrounding ELSA │
│                   │  and Nurture intervention      │
│                   │  School 1 & 4                  │
│                   ├────────────────────────────────┐
│                   │  3d) Parental involvement      │
│                   │  School                        │
│                   │  School 1,2,4,5 & 7            │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
```

Figure 6- Theme 3 – Referral Process

Figure 6 illustrates the answers regarding the referral process of each NG. Four subthemes emerged; subtheme 3a – an informal process, subtheme 3b – a formal process, subtheme 3c – confusion surrounding ELSA and nurture and subtheme 3d – parental involvement.

Schools that fall under Subtheme 3a displayed an informal referral process, based on word of mouth from staff within the school setting. Subtheme 3b encompasses Schools in which pupils were referred through a more formal process, through the use of qualitative and quantitative data. Subtheme 3c indicates schools who stated that that there was an uncertainty if pupils should be referred to an NG or to another SEMH intervention (ELSA) and subtheme 3d discusses the specificities of involving parents within the referral process. All four subthemes are discussed in detail below.

Subtheme 3a) Informal – Reactive Word of Mouth

SENCO 1 and SENCO 6 commented that pupils would be anecdotally referred through conversations with concerned teachers and parents. It seemed that this informal process could occur in any school setting and at any time. This process appeared reactive, rather than proactively identifying pupils based on an objective criteria, as participants implied that they immediately responded to staff or parental concerns.
This approach is illustrated with SENCO 1 commenting:

> *"Teachers come to us and say, 'I'm worried about so and so can he attend. Parents*
> *sometimes would say, 'something has happened at home can Jimmy attend for a*

while'. I mean we get it from everywhere. Children who are on the radar. Everyone is very alert" (SENCO 1).

Similar to SENCO 1, SENCO 6 commented on her school's informal referral process stating:

"It's very ad hoc. It can come through any way" (SENCO 6).

Subtheme 3b) Use of Quantitative and Qualitative Data-A Formal Process

In Schools 1,2,4,5, and 7 participants discussed a detailed referral process, where pupils with a suspected SEN were highlighted by the classroom teacher. These participants explained how a meeting would be organised to discuss the pupils' needs based on the pupils' emotional and social profile. Within this more formal referral process, participants discussed how they would assess the pupils using the BP.
This process is illustrated by TA1:

"We have a meeting. Myself, [classroom teacher] and the SENCO. We see the children that have the needs. We work out which would be best for them and then do Boxalls" (TA1).

Emergent theme- Use of multi-disciplinary team

Two schools (School 1 & 2) discussed the use of a multi-disciplinary team within their referral process. This is illustrated as SENCO 2 discussed the use of a multi-disciplinary meeting where a 'nurture' referral form is given to teachers.

"Every Wednesday we have a multi-agency meeting with inclusion of our DSL, our deputy head for pastoral support. We also have an Attendance Officer. We have a list of children who we look at on a weekly basis. Often these are children we know very well. We have a nurturing referral form and a wellbeing referral form that teachers will complete and that is given to the pastoral deputy" (SENCO 2).

School 1 and 2 adhered the closest to the guidelines set out by Nurture U.K (2019). When discussing the referral process, some participants discussed how they would decide which intervention would be most appropriate for each identified pupil.

Subtheme 3c) Confusion surrounding ELSA and Nurture

There seemed to be ambiguity surrounding which interventions would be most appropriate for the identified pupils, as TA 4 stated she felt an ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant) should be placed with pupils presenting with more complex needs, whilst TA 1 from stated that the pupils with complex needs should be placed in the NG. Thus, there appeared to be lack of consistency concerning which interventions were most appropriate.

This is illustrated with TA 3 stating that pupils with more complex needs would be better placed with an ELSA.

> *"We look at the needs of each child. We decide if it is ELSA or nurture. If the needs are a bit more complex they would go to the ELSA." TA 4*

Contrastingly, TA 1 stated that the pupils with the more complex needs should be placed in the NG.

> *"We think that those children who have more needs should go to Nurture." TA 1*

Findings in this theme implied that there is an uncertainty concerning the core aim and purpose of a NGs function. The fourth subtheme within theme 3 considers the schools choice to involve parents within the referral process.

Subtheme 3d) Parental involvement

Not all schools involved parents in the referral process of the NG, therefore the level of parental involvement differed within each school, to the degree that School 6 and School 8 elected not to involve parents whatsoever, claiming that they felt parents would not agree with their NGs' aim of supporting their child's social and emotional needs.

The decision not to obtain parental consent for the NG is illustrated by SENCO 6:

> *"We made a conscious decision not to involve the parents. Because the children that we would like to have the NG. Those parents would probably say no" (SENCO 6).*

In addition, TA 6 Stated:

> *"We don't want to tell parents that we are nurturing their children I think they would take offense and wouldn't let them come" (TA6.)*

The remaining schools choose to involve parents in the referral process, however how schools involved parents varied. For instance, in School 3, parents were informally notified of their child attending the NG in the playground, when they collected their children from school.

> *"Yes parents' permission is asked. They are asked by the SENCO in the playground and then every morning I will stand in the playground open for parents to grab me!" TA 3*

Other Schools (Schools 1,2,4,5 and 7) had more formal processes of involving parents. TA 4 from School 4 described how a session was organised for the parents, where the aim and function of the NG were explained.

> *"We invite the parents into the nurture room and then we discuss what we do, we then have leaflet, which we designed for the parents which details the aim of the nurture room" (TA4).*

The findings from subtheme D indicates that there is range in how parents are involved in the referral process, from no involvement at all to being formally invited to the NG. In contrast to the referral process, theme 4 depicts how pupils are transitioned back into their mainstream class.

4.6 Theme 4: Transition Process

Participants discussed how pupils who had once been involved with the NG would be transitioned back into the mainstream class. Figure 7 shows two strands of transition reported in the interviews.
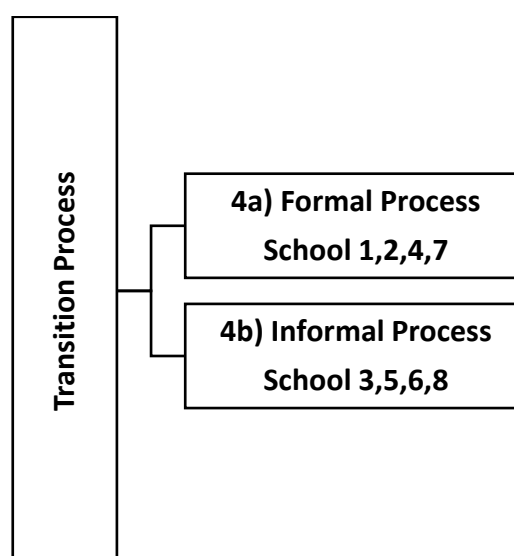
Figure 7- Theme 4- Transition process from NG to mainstream class

Figure 7 shows the answers regarding the transition process of each NG. Two subthemes emerged. Subtheme 4a – indicates transitional processes which were based on formal procedures. Subtheme 4b – indicates transitional processes based on informal procedures. Both subthemes are discussed in detail below.

Subtheme 4a) Formal Process

Schools 1, 2, 3 and 4 had formal practices for transitioning pupils back into the mainstream class. These practices included informing parents of the decision process and slowly reducing access.

School 2's formal process is illustrated as Teacher 2 commented:

> *"I first email the teachers, I let them know that we are transitioning. We then would do one day/afternoon a week in the classroom and then we slowly up it" (Teacher 2).*

Similar to School 2, SENCO 1 from School 1 discussed how they arrange a program of gradual transition into the mainstream class. SENCO 1 stated that parents are informed of the transition and time within the NG is gradually reduced.

> *"The pupils are told that they are to return, we inform the parents and invite them in for meetings. Pupils are also informed, we make a big deal of them returning to the classroom. We gradually reduce the timetable and then we have celebration on the pupils last day of nurture" (SENCO 1).*

Subtheme 4b) Informal Process

NGs where pupils attended less frequently (School 3, 6 & 8) had more informal practices for transitioning the pupils back into the mainstream classroom. Participants gave vague and inexplicit answers concerning their NGs' transitional process. This theme is illustrated when SENCO 6 was queried about her school's procedures, stating that the process relied upon her own sense and judgement of how well the pupils would cope.

> *"They stay in the NG for as long as they need. There is no hard or fast rule. If they need it for the year they get it for the year. If you go you can come back" (SENCO 6).*

Additionally, TA 6 commented:

> *"As long as they need. I mean generally we do what we feel is best" (TA6).*

Participants from School 3 noted that the NG ended for the pupils as the school year ended, as the pupils would not receive the NG following year due their age.

> *"We only have the NG for years 3 and 4, so when then enter year 5 they no longer have the NG" (TA3).*

The findings revealed that similar to referral process, the transition process differed in each school, with schools applying their own method and approach to the transition process. Similar to the referral and transitional procedures, schools also applied formal and informal practices within regards as to how they measured pupil progress.

4.7 Theme 5: Measurement of Progress

This theme reveals how pupils were assessed in the NG. Figure 8 illustrates the two measurements of pupil progress.
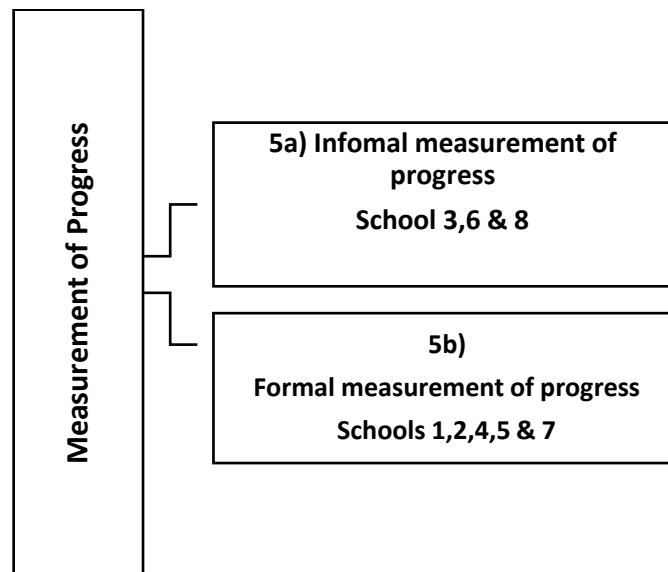
Figure 8- Theme 5 Measurement of pupil progress

The assessment of pupil progress within the NGs again differed in each school. From theme 5, two subthemes emerged; subtheme 5a indicates schools who used informal procedures when assessing pupil progress, such an anecdotal conversations between school staff and through the use of informal observations. Subtheme 5b includes schools who used more formal processes to assess pupil progress, using quantitative and qualitative measures such as the BP.

Subtheme 5a) Informal Measurement of Progress

The use of an informal observation is illustrated as TA 6 commented:

> *"We don't use the BP but through observations and teacher observations, I would generally tend to see progress" (TA6).*

The use of anecdotal conversations to report pupil progress is illustrated as TA 8 noted:

> *"Teachers would generally comment in the staff room that [pupil's name] was doing much better" (TA8).*

The use of more formal practices involving measurement of progress is depicted below in subtheme 5b.

Subtheme 5b) Formal Measurement of Progress

The formal use of the BP as a measurement of the pupils' progression, is demonstrated as TA 1 discussed how the BP is used to obtain targets for the pupils.

> *"We decide the targets through the Boxalls and we have it until the children achieve it. We talk about the children's' targets regularly and they are also on the wall. (TA shows pupils' portfolio of targets" (TA1).*

In addition, TA 7 also commented that pupil progress was assessed using the BP,

> *"We track the pupils' progress using the Boxall profile" (TA7).*

4. 8 Theme 6: Staffing

A common theme which occurred from the semi-structured interviews was that seven out of the eight NGs were run and operated by TAs. Figure 9 details the theme, subtheme and emergent theme.

```
┌──────────┐      ┌─────────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐
│          │      │ 6a) Managed by TAs  │      │ 6a)i Disparities │
│ Staffing ├──────┤ School 1,3,4,5,6,7&8 ├──────┤ in training      │
│          │      │                     │      │                  │
└──────────┘      └─────────────────────┘      └──────────────────┘
```
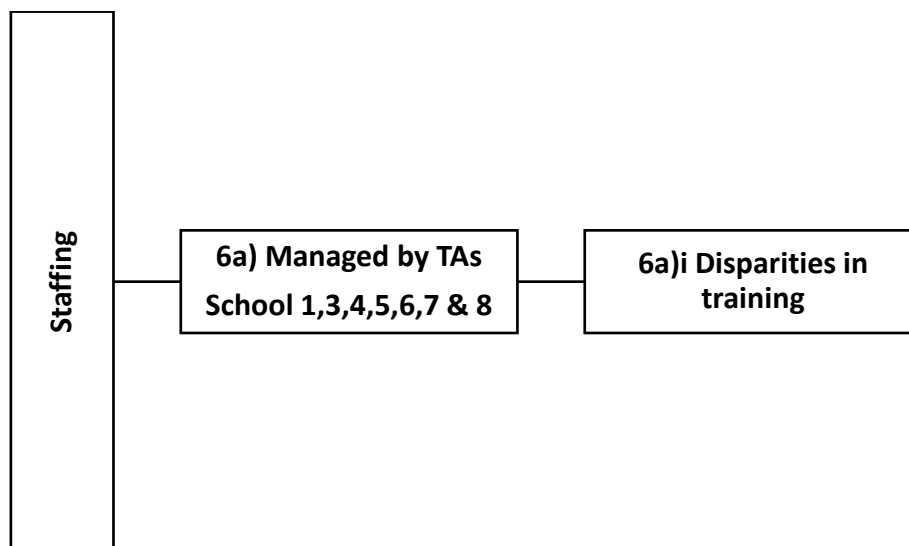
Figure 9- Theme 6 Staffing

Figure 9 depicts theme 6. The subtheme shows that the majority of NGs were operated and managed by teaching assistants. The emergent theme depicts conversations concerning what training the TAs had received.

Subtheme 6a) Operated and run by TAs

The majority of NGs were operated and run by TAs, as seven out of the eight NGs were managed by TAs. These TAs were in charge of planning nurture lessons, as well as

assessing pupil progress. This subtheme is illustrated in the introduction of the participants' interview. This is illustrated as TA6 commented:

> *"My name is [name] I am a learning support assistant at [name of primary school] and I manage our schools NG" (TA3).*

Additionally, TA7 noted:

> *"My name is [name], I am teaching assistant and the NG lead in [name of primary school]" (TA1).*

Emergent Theme: Disparities in Training

In Schools 3 and 5, the TAs managing and running the NGs had not received training prior to their NG role. This is illustrated as TA3 commented that she had not received any NG training, however she felt that her previous experience as a 1:1 support for a pupil was sufficient:

> *"I haven't had NG training, but I was a 1:1 support for 15 years." TA3*

Interestingly, none of the SENCOs interviewed had received any training. This is demonstrated with SENCO 1 stating:

> "I haven't. But the two teachers that run the NG have. They have done the accredited training through the Nurture UK." SENCO 1

4.9 Summary of RQ1

The above data from RQ1 reveals that all NGs differed in some form or approach from the guidelines set out by Nurture UK (2019). A common characteristic of the eight NGs from semi-structured interviews was that majority were run and operated by TAs. In addition, all NGs had their own version of referral and transitional processes. The content and delivery of the nurture programme also contrasted within each school. With only two schools supporting the pupils learning and SEMH needs. Thus the results reveal that NGs are being operated very differently in each school. These results indicate that there is a lack of consistency concerning the management and operation of NGs, implying that schools may be limiting the NGs desired impact.

RQ2 explored NG staff perceptions regarding the perceived strengths and limitations of their NG. Data presented is relative to the perceived strengths and limitations.

4.10 RQ2- What are staff's perceptions regarding the strengths and limitations of their NG?

NG staff were asked their thoughts regarding their NG setting. RQ2 provides insights into what processes and characteristics NG staff and SENCOs perceived as fundamental for an effective NG. In addition, participants discussed features which influenced and limited their NG.

4.11 Theme 6: The Role of the TA

All adult participants were asked why staff within the NG had been selected to run and manage the NG. An emerging theme which ensued was the pivotal role the TA played in the running and organisation of the NG (Figure 10), as mentioned above seven out of the eight schools qualitatively observed NGs were run and operated solely by TAs.
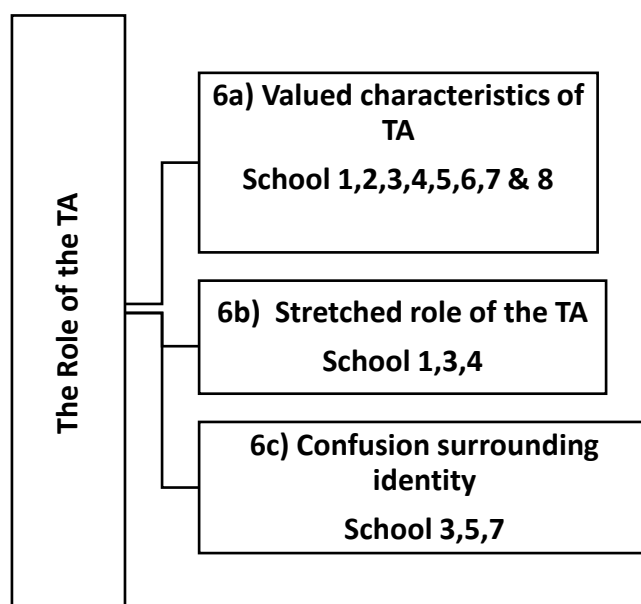
Figure 10- Theme 10 – The role of the TA

Figure 10 demonstrates the perceptions regarding the role of the TA, three subthemes emerged; subtheme 6a – valued characteristics of the TA, subtheme 6b – the stretched role of the TA and subtheme and subtheme 6c – confusion surrounding identity. Each subtheme will be explored below.

Subtheme 6a) Valued characteristics of TA

This theme reveals that TAs were chosen for the NG lead role due to the demonstrable characteristics, qualities and skills they possessed. All adult participants who had received NG training commented that they were chosen prior to their training. In other words, staff were chosen due to an instinctive understanding of their pupil's needs, as well

as having a great deal of empathy and compassion for the pupils. This is illustrated as SENCO 1 stated:

> *"Why did we choose them? We choose them because of the skills they had with children. You could see they had the skills, the understanding and the interest. I needed TAs who could support children across the school. The both showed really good skills with children. They were understanding and empathetic with children"* *(SENCO1).*

In addition, TA 4 stated:

> *"I think we both have an ability to be present with children, which is why we were chosen. We're empathetic people" (TA4).*

In addition, to NG staff being chosen due to their qualities and skills, a few TAs noted that they felt overextended by their NG role.

Subtheme 6b) Stretched Role of the TA

TAs expressed that they often struggled with their NG role, as they were unable to fully pursue and explore their role due to other competing demands and responsibilities. Three TA's (TA4, TA1 & TA3) expressed that they felt stretched and overextended with their workload, as they were often being used for many different roles in addition to running NGs. Often these tasks and responsibilities seemed to take the TA away from their NG lead role.

This is evident with TA 4 stating:

> *"I mean we are here as often as we can. We get called away for many different things and I understand, we are the ones that have the training and the skills. We are always used for PPA cover. The negative is that if someone if off, we are called to cover. And then we can't do our groups. There are times where we are called to do other things and we can't manage our own groups or interventions. It's just one of those things" (TA4).*

Additionally TA 1 commented:

> *"We would like to do more afternoons but it's really difficulty, to fit everything in as we are already been asked to do other things such as stay and play and ELSA" (TA1).*

TA 3 expressed how she struggled with her workload and felt overwhelmed with her NG role. TA 3 commented that the stress of the role prompted her to consider leaving.

> *"There were many times when I thought that I couldn't do this, and I was really tearing my hair out. I nearly quit a couple of times. It was a frustrating role" (TA3).*

In addition to feeling hard-pressed, TAs also noted that they felt uncertain of their NG role.

Subtheme 6c) Confusion surrounding the shifting Identity of the TA

An unexpected theme which extended from the previous theme, was that TAs felt confused about their role and identity within in the school. In other words, the TAs had been asked to run and support the NG, however they were often unable to fulfil this role due to further demands which were placed upon them. In addition, TAs expressed that they were unaware of how the NG should be operated, due to a lack of training and a lack of communication from SLT, causing TAs to feel uncertain about their NG role.

Three TAs (TA7, TA3 & TA5) commented that they felt unsure of their NG role. This theme is contextualised by TA 7, who commented that she felt confused as to how the NG should be operated, this was due to a lack of communication between the SENCO and TA:

> *"We didn't know how the senior leadership wanted the nurture group to be run. We weren't sure if it was going to be curriculum based or if we were just going to acting like mum and dad to them. We weren't sure how they wanted it to be run.*
>
> *It was a bit like we were asked to go on the training...and the nurture was our baby-that type of thing. And I think because the SENCO hadn't completed the training, they hadn't realised what was involved. It was a big commitment that we were asked to do"* (TA7).

In addition, TA 3 stated how previously she felt unsure of how to respond when teachers asked her to carry out tasks unrelated to her NG, however due to SENCO prompting, she developed the confidence to refuse additional tasks from the teachers.

> *"I have been told that I am allowed to say no to them now. Before I had always thought, 'Do what the teachers tell you'. But because I run a very tight timetable. If they come to me in the afternoon and ask something, I can say no. No one had ever said to me that I could say no! I would just say yes and then fit it in this and fit in that"* (TA3).

TA 6 commented on how the role of the TA within education has evolved and changed, resulting in TAs becoming confused about their position and purpose.

> *"You know, years ago when you were a TA, it wasn't that difficult. You put the paint pots out and photocopied. Now it's a professional qualification. It's asked by many schools to have some form of a qualification. But it's always changing, at one point it was 'get rid of the TAs,' then we were brought back and then it was, 'don't take the*

children for an intervention outside, all children must be kept in the classroom'. I think
TAs face of confusion about their role" (TA6).

This theme echoes themes found in RQ1, concerning SENCOs receiving no training regarding nurture and NGs being operated and managed by solely TAs. As the TAs expressed that they felt a lack of direction and guidance concerning the NGs implementation and structure.

4.12 Theme 7: Barriers to NG implementation and limitations of NG

In the interviews, adult participants were explicitly asked if they felt there were any limitations to their NG. In addition, participants were asked if they faced any barriers when creating and implementing their NG. Figure 11 illustrates the 4 barriers and limitations identified by participants.
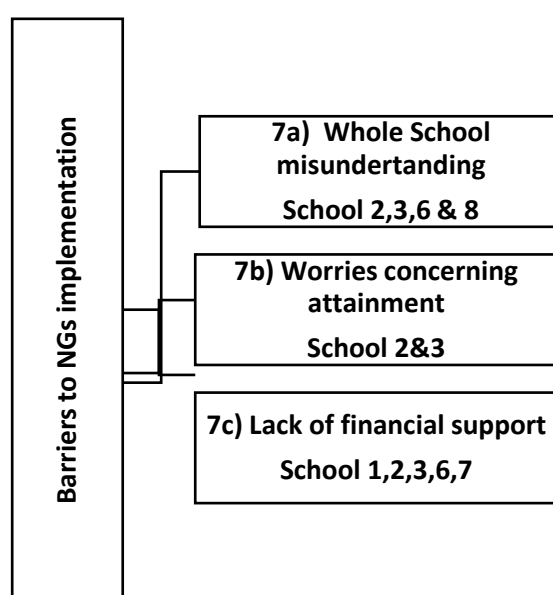
Figure 11- Barriers to NGs implementation and limitations of NG

Figure 11 shows four key issues surrounding the implementation of the NG and the identified limitations of each NG. Subtheme 7a – whole -school misunderstanding: an identified barrier by adult participants to the NGs implementation. Subtheme 7b – worries concerning attainment: this was identified as a limitation by participants. Finally, subtheme 7c – lack of financial support: this subtheme was identified as a limitation and barrier by adult participants.

Subtheme 7a) Whole-School Misunderstanding of NG role and function

No schools within the study implemented a whole-school teaching of the purpose and role of the NG, resulting in adult participants commenting that classroom teachers were often uninformed as to the NGs' aim. Participants from School 2, 3, 6 and 8 felt that classroom

teachers were unaware of the NGs central function and purpose, with some classroom teachers using the NG as a punitive measure, therefore undermining the function of the NG and undermining the role the NG TA. This is illustrated with TA8 stating:

> *"Sometimes the teachers would bring the children down for their behaviour, and we have had to remind the teachers that the NG is not to be used as a punishment. We are here to support the children emotional needs." TA8*

In addition, SENCO 2 commented:

> *"We really had to educate staff on the NG, as some were misusing it. We had to emphasise that if a child has a bad day they are not to be sent to the NG. As they are not in there as a punishment" (SENCO 2).*

Participants also discussed how some classroom teachers opposed and disliked the use of the NG. This is evidenced by SENCO 6 who stated that some classroom teachers disapproved of the NG:

> *"We still have one or two teachers who are quite resistant. That's not going to change. They just don't understand what nurture is" (SENCO 5).*

Additionally, SENCO 6 added that due to certain classroom teachers' resistance, a selection of pupils within in the school were unable to access the NG.

> *"It's a barrier for those children to come to the group. There is one particular class that we are thinking of. We don't get access to that class" (SENCO 6).*

In addition, to classroom teachers using the NG incorrectly, participants noted that teachers feared sending their pupils to the NG, due to a concern that their pupils would miss out on curriculum-based learning.

Subtheme 7b) Worries concerning attainment

Participants from School 2 and 3 commented that classroom teachers felt hesitant about the NG due to an insecurity that the pupils would be missing out on schoolwork. This is illustrated as Teacher 2 noted:

> *"The teachers were concerned about the work. I said to the teachers, 'you can send work. I am not promising that it's going to get done and I'm going to approach the work differently. We focus on the emotional needs first. We are trying to get the children to love their learning again. To engage in their learning" (Teacher 2).*

Additionally SENCO 3 commented:

> "*Another thing, is that teachers used to complain that we were taking the children out of the class and that they were missing work. I think because there is so much push for standards and for children to make progress that I think the teachers forget about the social and emotional needs and time isn't given to that*" (SENCO 3).

Just as worries concerning attainment acted both a barrier and limitation to the NG, a lack of financial support for the NG was reported to act as both a barrier and limitation.

Subtheme 7c) Lack of Financial Support

Participants from schools 1, 2, 3 and 6 discussed how money was a concern in the creation and implementation of their NG and also in the running of their NG.

When SENCO 5 was asked about any concerns she may have with her NG, she replied:

> "*Money definitely is… We don't have the budget*" (SENCO 5).

Additionally, TA 5 discussed how she relied on donations of toys to support her NG.

> "*I mean we don't have a lot of money. People have had to donate things. We have it from all over. Teachers. Even parents*" (TA5).

When SENCO 1 was asked how she would improve her NG, she replied that that she would like to expand the group. When the researcher asked why she had not previously expanded her NG, she noted that she was unable to due to financial constraints.

> "*Budgeting really. We can't afford it. Also, the two NG staff also run other interventions in the school and we would have to lose them.*" (SENCO 1).

In contrast to schools who stated that financial difficulties limited the operation of their NG, participants from Schools 4, 5 and 7 commented that that did not feel any financial strain in the implementation and running of their NG. For instance, when the SENCO from school 5 was asked if he had any worries concerning the NG he replied no. In addition, SENCO 5 commented that their NG was funded by the LA and that they received a large grant to build the NG.

> "*The local authority gave us quite a large sum of money to build the NG*".
>
> "**Do you mind me asking how much you received?**"
>
> "*£20,000*" (SENCO 5)."

4.13 Theme 8: Perceived Strengths of the NG

All adult participants spoke highly of their NG, stating that they felt their NGs were having a positive impact upon their pupils' social and emotional needs. Figure 12 identifies participants' perceived strengths of their NG.

```
Perceived Strengths of the NG
    │
    ├── 8a) Progression in pupils social ──┬── 8a)i Reduction in school exclusion
    │       and emtional needs             │        School 1,2 & 5
    │       School 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8         │
    │                                      └── 8a)ii Better engagement in
    │                                               learning
    │                                               School 1,2,3,4,5,6 & 8
    └── 8b) NG viewed positively by all pupils
            School 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,
```
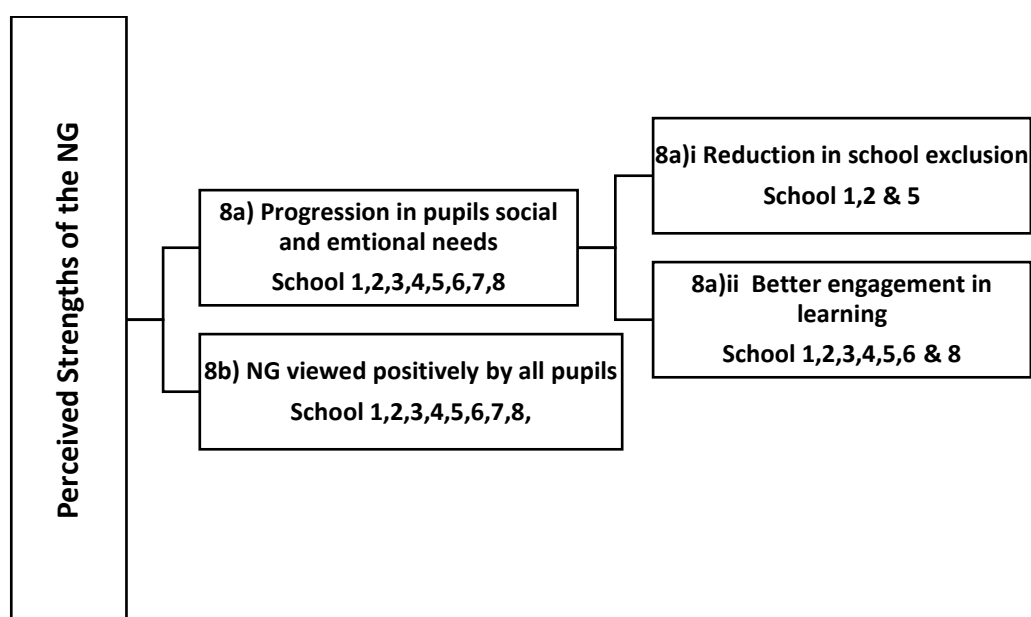
Figure 12- Theme 8- Perceived Strengths of NG

Figure 12 presents theme 8 regarding the participants' perceived strengths of their NG. Two subthemes emerged; subtheme 8a indicated that participants felt that NG pupils had progressed with regards to their social and emotional needs. Two emergent themes arose from this subtheme: 8a)i indicated that there had been a reduction in school exclusions and 8a)ii indicated that pupils were more able to engage with their learning. Subtheme 8b indicates the second subtheme: NGs viewed positively by all pupils. Each subtheme will be explored below.

Subtheme 8a) Progression in pupils' social and emotional needs.

All adult participants felt that the NG had a positive impact upon their pupils' social and emotional needs. Participants who used the BP reported that pupils had progressed with regards to the quantitative data. However participants also reported progress anecdotally and informally. An example of pupil progress using quantitative data is illustrated below, as TA commented of the scores from the BP.

"Yes we have seen progression, as the BP scores have improved" (TA1).

In addition, SENCO 1 commented on pupil progress subjectively and anecdotally. When asked if the pupils attending the NG had progressed, she stated that the majority of pupils were able to engage more appropriately in the classroom, as well as maintain meaningful relationships with their peers, indicators that their mental health had improved.

"Definitely,

"Well we have anecdotal evidence from the teachers. Just also to see that they are playing with their friends better and more appropriately, they are more confident, they are able to join in with classroom activities better" (SENCO 1).

School 8 did not use any quantitative measures to record pupil progress and thus had to rely on informal subjective information. This is illustrated as TA 8 reported:

"Well I think the children seem more confident, more sure of themselves. They seem secure and in class they are able to access the learning more" (TA8).

The interviews revealed that pupil progress had been observed within all of the NGs, however the method of recording progress was dependent on the school, as some schools used informal measurements of progress. In addition, to reporting pupil progress, participants also stated that the NG was viewed positively by pupils.

Subtheme 8b) NG viewed positively by pupils

All adult participants stated that their NGs were viewed positively by all pupils who attended the NGs and by some pupils outside of the NG. Additionally, all TA participants stated that NGs were often viewed as a sanctuary in the school by both NG pupils and by pupils outside of the NG. In addition, participants noted that the NG was viewed by the whole-school as an environment where the pupils could discuss their emotions safely and freely. This theme is demonstrated as TA 4 noted that pupils will often come to the NG for support when they have any problems or issues.

"Children come here if they're feeling upset or if something has happened, they wouldn't necessarily be one of the children in the group" (TA4).

In addition, TA 1 commented:

"We have had many pupils come and ask if they can attend the NG, as they think it looks like great fun" (TA1).

4.14 Summary of RQ2

The data from RQ2 suggests that TAs were often selected for the NG role due to their positive personable and empathetic characteristics. However, TAs reported that they often felt overwhelmed by their NG role, due to the workload aligned with the NG and a lack

of direction from the SLT on how the NG should be structured and operated. Adult participants also felt that financial restrictions and a whole-school misunderstanding of the NGs function acted as a barrier and limitation to the NGs operation. However, adult participants commented that their NGs was viewed positively by pupils within the whole-school, and that pupils had progressed with regards to their social and emotional needs since attending the NG.

Information provided by the adult participants supported the researcher in understanding the common characteristics of each NG. As a NG is an intervention based around the pupil, it was essential to gain the voice of the pupil to understand their perspective concerning NG process.

4.15 RQ3- What are pupils' perceptions of their NG?

RQ3 explored pupils' thoughts regarding their NG. Gathering the voice of the pupil was fundamental in understanding pupil perspectives on the features of their NGs. Six Pupils from three different NGs were interviewed. Three pupils attended School 2's NG. In addition, 1 pupil from School 3 was interviewed, as well as 2 pupils from School 8 (Table 9 presents the pupils and their correspondent schools). A thematic map detailing pupil perceptions is displayed in figure 12.

Table 9- Pupil and corresponding School

Pupil	Age	Gender	School
Pupil 1	9.2	M	8
Pupil 2	10.1	F	8
Pupil 3	11.3	M	2
Pupil 4	11.4	M	2
Pupil 5	10.6	M	2
Pupil 6	11.5	M	3

M: male; F: female
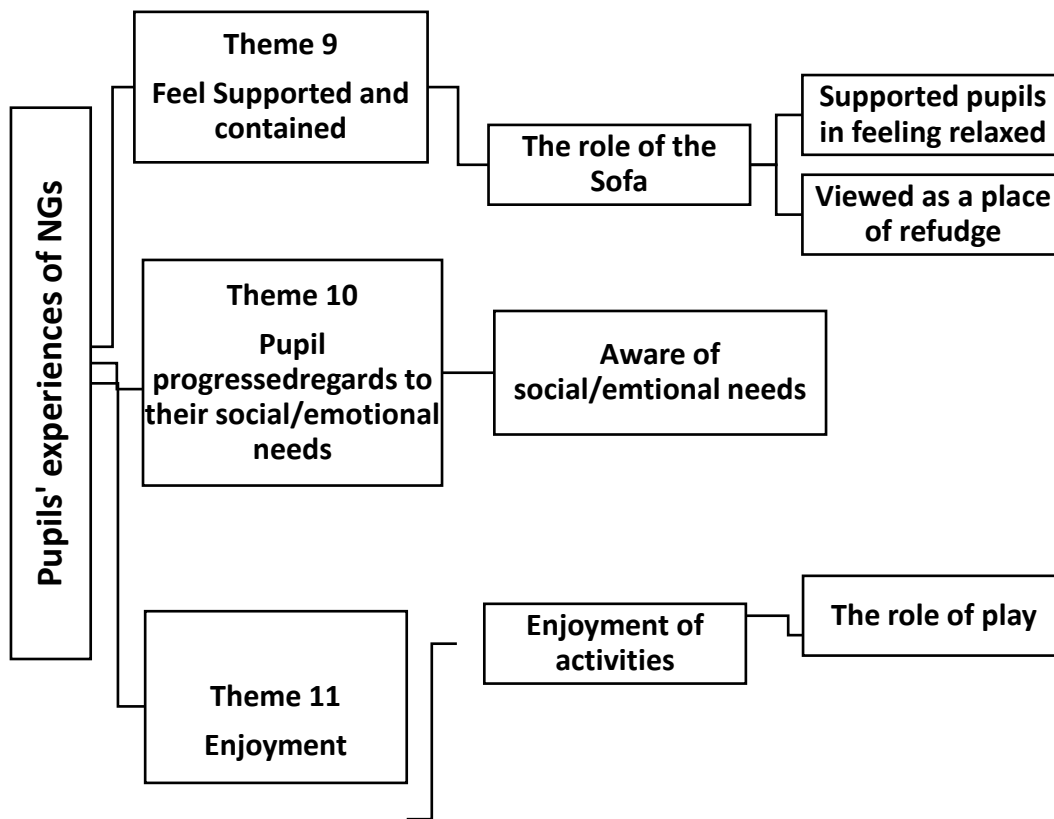
Figure 13. Thematic map for RQ3

The thematic map details the pupils' responses concerning their thoughts on their NG. Three themes emerged. The first theme (theme 9), indicates that pupils liked the NG as they felt supported and contained. From this theme a subtheme emerged regarding the role of the sofa. Theme 10 indicates that pupils felt they had improved with regards to their social and emotional needs; a subtheme which emerged from this suggested that pupils had become more aware of the social/emotional needs. The third and final theme indicated that pupils enjoyed attending the NG. The subtheme to emerge from this theme indicated that pupils enjoyed the work and activities within the NG. The emergent theme (the role of play) indicated that pupils enjoyed the play aspect of the NG.

4.16 Theme 9: Pupils feel supported

All pupils spoke highly of their NG, stating that the NG supported them emotionally.

Pupil 4 from School 2 stated he liked attending the NG as he felt it supported him with his learning and with his social and emotional needs.

> *"Because in nurture, they help you with your learning. They help you get sustainable and on your feet" (Pupil 4).*

Furthermore, Pupil 3 from School 2 commented:

"It [the NG] helps me with my anger" (Pupil 3).

In addition to pupils stating that they felt supported. Pupils in school 2, which contained a sofa, commented on the value of the sofa.

Subtheme 1: The Role of the Sofa

Two pupils from School 2 commented that the sofa was viewed as a source of comfort and created a sense of calm.

Pupil 5 commented that he enjoyed attending the NG because of the sofa, Pupil 5 later remarked that the sofa supported him in feeling calm:

> *"This is the best nurture group. Because of the sofa."*
> *"You have to come here to feel calm, so you sit on the sofa" (Pupil 5).*

In addition, Pupil 4 was asked what he like about the NG. Pupil 4 commented that he enjoyed the sofa. When Pupil 4 was asked why, he responded that the sofa supported him in feeling less upset.

> "I like the sofa"
>
> **"Why do you like the sofa?"**
>
> "Because there is a sofa I get less angry" (Pupil 4).

In addition to pupils reporting that the NG had supported their needs, they also commented that the NG had enabled them to develop and progress with regards to their SEMH needs.

4.17 Theme 10: Improved with regards their social/emotional needs

Pupil 1, 3, 4 and 5 all commented that the since attending the NG they have become less anxious and angry.

Pupil 1 from NG 8 noted that the NG supported her confidence levels.

> *"Well before I wasn't very good at working in groups. But now I work in groups without being so shy"* (Pupil 1).

Pupil 3 from school 2 commented that before attending the NG, he was unable to remain in the classroom due to his underlying needs. Pupil 3 noted that that the NG supported his emotional needs allowing him to access the mainstream classroom:

> *"I was walking out of class. But nurture has really helped me to stay in class" (Pupil 3).*

Additionally, Pupil 3 commented that if he was unable to attend the NG, he felt that he would be unable to manage his behaviour and that he would have been excluded.

"If you were unable to attend NG, what would your behaviour be like in class?

(Shocked look) "I would be excluded.

"You'd be excluded? Why is that?"

"I think I would just take it out on everyone."

"So has the NG helped you?"

(Laughs) "Yeah, everyone is safer now as I'm less angry. (Pupil 3)"

Theme 10 indicates that since attending the NG, pupils indicated they had improved with regards to their social and emotional needs, due to the strategies taught concerning emotional regulation, such as the Zones of Regulation[6]. In addition pupils stated that the emotional literacy materials, such as worksheets discussing anxiety and what it feels like to be anxious, had also supported them. As well as pupils feeling they had progressed, pupils also reported that they were more conscious of their emotional and social behaviour.

4.18 Theme 11: Pupils aware of their emotional needs.

Pupil 1,3,4,5 and 6 all commented that they understood the reasons as to why they were accessing the NG. They were aware that they had social/emotional difficulties and knew they could be supported in the NG.

Pupil 1 from NG 8 stated that she was asked to join the NG due to issues that were impacting her home life:

"Loads of different children went there for problems that happened at home. So they could help. That's why I was there" (Pupil 1).

Additionally, Pupil 4 from School 2 stated that pupils are placed in the NG if they are exhibiting poor behaviour in the mainstream classroom:

"Well we are not really asked. We get put in it if we are struggling to behave" (Pupil 4).

Pupil 3 commented that he was placed in the NG to receive support with his behaviour:

"I needed help with my behaviour" (Pupil 3).

Additionally, Pupil 3 added that he was also placed in the NG due to his underlying social/emotional needs:

---

[6] Zones of Regulation- A strategy used in schools to support the emotional needs of pupils. The Zones of Regulation is a framework that uses four colours to support pupils identify their feelings and provides strategies to support emotional regulation.

"I come to nurture because I have needs"

"What are those needs?"

"They are listening, obeying, getting angry" (Pupil 3).

An interesting subject to emerge from data was that pupils from School 2 linked the NG to their previous challenging behaviour. These pupils commented that the NG supported children who displayed poor behaviour. However, they did not mention or allude that the NG was stigmatised towards pupils who behaved badly, suggesting that the NG had a positive identity. In addition, the results of theme 10 revealed that pupils had become more consciously aware of their SEMH needs and behaviour.

4.19 Theme 12: Enjoyment

All pupils from each NG stated that they enjoyed attending the group. Therefore all pupils had positive impressions of their NGs.

Pupil 1 from school 8 noted:

"It's really good and really fun" (Pupil 1).

Additionally, pupil 5 from NG 2 also stated that his NG was 'fun'**.**

"Why do you like coming to your NG?"

"Because it's fun" (Pupil 5).

Interestingly, Pupil 6 from School 3, an NG which solely support the learning needs of pupils, also stated that he enjoyed attending the NG in comparison to his mainstream classroom. This is illustrated with Pupil 6 stating:

"I really enjoy attending the group, it's fun."

And why is the group fun?

"It's fun because I like the work that we do there" (Pupil 6).

Subtheme 1: Pupils enjoyed activities in the NG

Pupils stated that the work and activities they accessed in the NG were enjoyable and manageable. Pupil 2 noted:

"We would get a sheet. It would be like 'fun' work, it wouldn't be work you would get in class, it would be fun learning. It would be colouring in and things about you. It was just a lovely group to attend, because the children there were respectful and they weren't making fun of other people" (Pupil 2).

An emergent theme which arose from the interviews was that pupils enjoyed the role of play in the NG. All pupils from School 2 commented that they enjoyed 'playing', with each pupil commenting on a different form of play, such as role-playing or playing with toys. This theme is illustrated with Pupil 3, when asked what he enjoyed most about nurture, Pupil 3 responded:

"We get to play games"

"And what sort of games do you get to play?"

"We get to play with fake food."

"Fake food?"

"Yea, we can pretend to order a Nandos in here" (Pupil 2).

In addition, when Pupil 4 was asked what he enjoyed about the NG, he replied.

"We get to play board games like silly moo and we get to play with marbles and playdoh" (Pupil 4).

The data from RQ3 indicates that pupils enjoyed their NG and felt that it had supported them in progressing with regards their well-being and SEMH needs. In addition, the pupils had become more conscious of their social and emotional difficulties. Furthermore, the interviews revealed that pupils valued the role of the sofa as well as having the capacity to play.

4.20 Summary of chapter 4

Chapter 4 presented the findings from the qualitative observations and semi-structured interviews from adult and pupil participants. If categorised into models of nurture (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007), only one NG would adhere to the *new variant* model as it was managed and run by a teacher. The remaining NGs do not meet the criteria, as they were solely managed by TAs. The results indicated that all NGs varied in their management and organisation, with NGs using differing referral and transitional processes. In addition, the majority of NGs are managed and run by TAs who felt overwhelmed by amount of work involved in the running of the NG. Furthermore, TAs felt that they lacked direction regarding the management of the NG. TAs also reported that they felt that their NG was misused and undermined by their colleagues who misunderstood the NGs function and aim.

Pupil participants commented they enjoyed attending the NG and felt they had progressed with regards to their social and emotional needs. In addition pupils commented that the felt the sofa and the role of play was an important characteristic within the NG setting.

Chapter 5- Discussion

This chapter presents the research questions by discussing key findings in relation to previous literature and the findings presented in chapter 4.

5.1 Research Question 1
What are the common features and characteristics of NGs in a London Borough?

This study aimed to explore the characteristics and processes of NGs in a London Borough. The examination and exploration of eight NGs and the use of semi-structured interviews of adult and pupil participants supported an understanding concerning the management of NGs across England. A key characteristic which arose from research, was that each school differed in the running and structure of their NG. Despite some schools running similar NGs, only one adhered to the guidelines and criteria provided by Nurture UK (Nurture UK, 2019). In addition, only one of these schools adhered to the evidence-based research criteria of an effective NG (Bishop & Swain, 2000; Cooper & Whitebread, 2007 & Sloan et al., 2020). Furthermore, the majority of the NGs were operated and managed by TAs, as only one school was managed by a NG teacher. As only one School was operating a NG which adhered to an evidence-base, by definition the remaining NGs would fall under the *aberrant* NG category, however the anecdotal evidence from the semi-structured interviews suggest that these NGs still had a positive effect upon the pupils who attended, this may be due to the nurturing and positive attention pupils received from the TAs.

The results of the thematic analysis revealed that the aim and core purpose of each NG differed (theme 1), with only two of the NGs (School 1 & 2) aiming to support the emotional as well as the learning needs of the pupils. The majority of schools solely focused on trying to support the emotional/social needs of the pupils and one school (School 3) solely supported the learning needs. In a survey conducted by Ofsted (2011), exploring the role and impact of NGs, Ofsted found that the best practice of NGs supported both the emotional and learning needs of the pupils. Disparity between the purpose and aims of each NG implies that schools are unaware of the NGs identity of supporting the overall needs of vulnerable CYP with an identified SEMH need. In other words, there is disconnect between the excepted orthodoxy as presented in chapter 2 and the reality of practice in a London Borough.

Subtheme 2a revealed that NGs were created due to the high numbers of pupils in their schools with a potential SEMH label. Additionally, adult participants noted that these high numbers were normally due to the high levels of social deprivation within the surrounding community. This subtheme is connected to the NGs original creation, as NGs were established in certain primary schools in response to high exclusion rates in socially and

economically deprived areas in London (Boxall, 2002. Additionally, Sloan et al. (2020) noted that NGs supported the SEMH needs of pupils in substantially deprived areas in NI. Sloan et al. stated that NGs were a 'cost-effective' intervention with long term implications as their study suggested that NGs reduced the rate of antisocial behaviour and crime. The finding of NGs being implemented to support the need of SEMH pupils in economically deprived areas, fits with the context of this research, a London Borough with a statistically higher than average number of pupils with an identified SEN/SEMH need. Furthermore, this finding fits with the theoretical perspective of the research, as NGs were established due to the environment surrounding the pupils, e.g. the pupils' home environment (microsystem), the pupil's community (mesosystem) and the current political climate of austerity[7] (Hanley, Winter & Burrell, 2020) (exosystem).

A further subtheme (subtheme 2d) to emerge was that schools created the NG due to a dissatisfaction with the support from outside agencies – such as social services and other therapeutic services – due to a lack of responsiveness or sustained support. Therefore, the NG was their own interpretation of a reactive therapeutic response to support their pupils' mental health needs; this could explain the discordance in the running of the NGs, as some NGs may have been set up quickly to hastily respond the SEMH needs of their pupils. Guidelines from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE, 2008) recommended that primary schools should implement comprehensive programmes to develop children's social and emotional well-being, including both universal approaches (aimed at all pupils) and targeted approaches (aimed at pupils who experience difficulty or those at risk). However, schools may feel more strained when supporting CYP with a SEMH need due to the cuts made since 2010, known as austerity (Feigenbarm & Iqani, 2015). According to Unison, funding from LAs for education has been cut by 8% since 2010, thereby limiting school budgets. In addition, cuts to agencies such as social services and early help are seeing a growing caseload, with shrinking funding, making it more difficult for agencies to work effectively (De Agostini et al., 2014). This could possibly explain the discrepancies between the schools NGs, as schools may have felt strained supporting the NG due to a lack of financial support.

The findings also revealed there are further disparities between how each school operated their nurture referral process (theme 3). Results from the interviews revealed that schools who adhered more to the criteria set out by Nurture UK (2019), had a more detailed and

---

[7] The United Kingdom, entered into a period of austerity following the 2010 election of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition Government. This led to reductions in state spending and the shrinking of the welfare state including reductions to Local Authority budgets (impacting upon social care, education, children's centres, libraries, and some health services), and significant changes to the tax and benefits system.

systematic approach to the referral process. These more detailed approaches involved the use of multi-disciplinary meetings between staff within school and use of a pre and post design with the BP to observe progress with the pupils. Schools with weaker referral processes usually based their referral on subjective 'word of mouth' data. In other words, they were referred through informal conversations with staff. The Schools who deviated most from the guidelines set out by the Nurture UK (2019) were School 3 and 6 as they took no baseline data to support the selection of the pupils and instead the success of their NG was based on anecdotal evidence, such as informal observations with no well-defined criteria. Research from Sloan et al. (2020) stated that a steering group (a multi-disciplinary team) should be set up to monitor and review the NG as part of its ongoing monitoring responsibility. This team would be made up of the NG staff, a member of senior leadership team, the designated safeguarding lead and an EP. Sloan et al. (2020) noted that the group should meet termly to discuss the NG itself and as well the progression of the pupils. The researchers implied that this will ensure that the NG guidelines are followed and that the agreed criteria are met. Only two of the schools (Schools 1 & 2) had some form of a 'steering group' where pupil progress and the NG were discussed. Sloan et al. (2020) noted that this steering group must also involve an EP, so that a member of the group has a level of expertise in SEMH difficulties and would be able to offer impartial and subjective support and advice to the school. Both Schools 1 and 2 did not include an EP in their multi-disciplinary team and so were missing a level of expertise in their groups.

Similar to the referral process, findings concerning the schools' transition procedures revealed further disparities between the schools' practices (theme 4). Comparable to theme 3, Schools who adhered closer to the guidelines (Nurture UK, 2019) had more formal practices in place, such as transitioning pupils if progress had been observed against the BP. In addition, a gradual transition plan involving parents was created. Informal processes involved the adult participants subjectively deciding when the intervention should end, for example if they made subjective progress through anecdotal observations, or even if simply the pupil moved up a year group. The inconsistencies in the referral and transitional process suggest an uncertainty concerning the common practice of how pupils should be referred and transitioned. These findings suggest there should be explicit details of effective referral and transitional procedures.

The research also revealed a further disparity between how schools used the BP. Again, Schools that adhered more to the guidelines (Nurture UK, 2019) used the BP in the referral stage of the NG process, using the BP to create a baseline data for the pupil in question. Sloan et al. (2020) commented that the BP must be used in order to devise an individual intervention programme for each pupil. Additionally, the same study found that careful

analysis of the BP supported focused interventions to narrow the gap between the pupil's personal stage of development on assessment and the standardised normal pattern of development. Two of the schools (School 3 & 6) did not use the BP and were unable to identify social/emotional targets they had set for the pupils, and thus were unable to produce data to support the pupils' progress. In addition, School 5 only used the BP to identify pupils with social/emotional needs. It did not use the information to create an individual plan for their pupils, instead the interventions were based upon group play and thus the pupils' individual emotional needs may not have been sufficiently targeted.

The research also revealed that Schools were unaware and uninformed with regards to which social/emotional intervention would be most appropriate for pupils with a SEMH need. This is evident with TA4 stating that the ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant) was being used as an intervention for the pupils who had more complex needs, while other participants felt that the NG could best support these pupils. This uncertainty between the function of each intervention further emphasises a lack of a joined-up approach to the NGs aims. ELSA and nurture are similar as they are both interventions which support the emotional and social needs of the pupils. In addition, ELSA and nurture were both developed by EPs in response to the increased understanding of the effects of CYP's emotional well-being on their educational outcomes (Burton, 2008).The ELSA programme's main purpose however is to support pupils with the ability to effectively regulate their emotions and is not meant for pupils with complex social and mental health needs (Burton, 2008), whereas the NGs function is to support the more complex SEMH needs of pupils. Therefore, it could be argued that School 4 was misinterpreting the two interventions.

The semi-structured interviews also revealed that two of the schools did not involve parents/carers within the NG process, commenting that they feared parents would disagree with the intervention. A lack of parental involvement undermines the core principles of the NG, where communication between NG staff and parents/carers is essential to celebrate and discuss pupil progress (Bennathan & Boxall, 2013). The other six schools suggested that the involvement of parents was an essential practice as it supported positive relationships with the parents/carers, as they were often able to share positive progress and support the pupils at a more emotional level, as they would be more informed of home issues, therefore tailoring their intervention to support the specific emotional needs of the pupils. Again Schools 1 and 2 had more formal procedures of involving parents/carers; such as involving the parents in a parent's day and training parents on issues such as attachment. Sloan et al. (2020) stated that a working partnership with parents and carers is an important element of any nurture provision. Sloan et al. (2020) commented that NG teachers should be expected to provide parents/carers with opportunities to gain an understanding of how they

can help to support their child and reinforce the social and emotional development and learning at home. Sloan et al. (2020) noted that this joint partnership will enhance the social and emotional progress of the pupils ensuring long-term results. Additionally, the fundamental rule for any NG is that parental consent should be required for a child to attend. Therefore, two of the schools within the research were not adhering to a basic standard practice of nurture (Boxall, 2002).

A central theme within the research concerned the staffing of the NG (theme 6). Seven out of the eight NGs were run and fully operated by TAs. Guidelines for the operation of NGs explicitly state that they must be operated and led by a teacher, with a TA supporting (Sanders, 2007; Welsh Assembly Government, 2010; Ofsted, 2011 & Sloan et al., 2020). Within the TA led NGs, the TAs oversaw the planning and structuring of the NG. The research suggested that TAs had total control of how their NGs should be managed and structured. This is especially true in Schools 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8. Furthermore, TAs stated that once they had been on the training, their SLT expected them to set up and organise the NG with little help and support. Therefore, after TAs had been on the nurture course, they had become the 'experts' for the NG. On this basis, TAs were being asked to perform the role of a teacher without the support from SLT and without the educational accreditation. Thus, it could be argued that the most vulnerable pupils are being supported by those who are the least qualified, raising questions concerning the inequality of support these pupils are receiving. Furthermore, as the NG is a therapeutic intervention for pupils with SEMH needs, TAs do not have the qualification nor the training to support these needs. Despite, TAs attending nurture training, they attended this training as TAs and not teachers. In other words, they were taught to support the NG as TAs, for this reason they should not be given the responsibility of the SEMH and pedagogical teaching involved within the NG process.

The theme relates to research conducted by Blatchford et al. (DISS project- Deployment and Impact of Support Staff, 2013) who found that the majority of TAs spent most of their time working in a direct, but informal, instructional role with pupils in a small group or one-to-one basis (both inside and outside of the classroom). The researchers found that TA support was principally for pupils failing to make expected levels of progress, or those identified as having SEND. TAs hardly ever supported average or higher attaining pupils. Although this arrangement is often seen as beneficial for the pupils and the teacher – because the pupils in need receive more attention, while the teacher can concentrate on the rest of the class – the consequence of this arrangement is a 'separation' effect. Thus, the DISS project suggests that TAs have a limited or detrimental effect on pupil progress. Instruction delivered by TAs should be complementary, rather than exclusive to the pupil and therefore TAs should not be making any pedagogical decisions (Blatchford et al., 2013). It could be argued

that TAs might be better deployed to support the pupil development of non-curriculum skills, largely through exercises such as in the modelling of turn-based interaction and positive reciprocation of social skills. As described above, despite TAs having received training concerning the NG, their NG role was designed to assist the teacher in supporting the social and emotional development of the pupils. Their role was not to plan lessons, organise parent meetings or to assess pupil progress using the BP or the SDQ. TAs taking a central role within the NG undermines the aim of the NG as the pupils should receive individualised support from the trained professional. Finally, this is further undermined should there be only one adult in the room, be this a qualified teacher or a TA, as none of the benefits derived from two adults modelling positive behaviours would be possible without an adult foil.

Arguably, with both phenomena in mind – that TAs generally are spending more time with pupils with an SEND label, and that TAs are specifically being used to run and lead NGs – one can see the long-term negative impact upon NG pupils' emotional learning and curriculum based learning may be compounded.

A further difference which arose within the research was that not all NG staff had received training. This was the case in schools 3 and 4, where schools were operating an NG without the knowledge of nurture theory and practice. Nurture UK (2019) state that all staff must be trained nurture practitioners in order to operate an effective and successful NG. Sloan et al. (2020) noted that NG training is essential and fundamental to NG practice, as it ensures that the NGs are being run appropriately. In addition, training is crucial, as NG practitioners need to be aware of the psychological theories which underpin nurture, in addition to understanding how to effectively interact with pupils. Staff in school 3 and 4 had not received any training and this was reflected in the observed practices. The only nurture practice School 3 presented was having their own room and a class of fewer than 10 pupils. As a result, whilst School 3 had termed their group an NG, they were not following the majority of the guidelines set out by the Nurture UK (2019). Additionally, School 4 was not carrying out any emotional literacy work with the pupils, using only the nurture snack and play as a form of therapy. It could be argued that these schools were operating an NG in name only, but were using some form or element of nurturing principles within their interventions. Alternatively, a punitive argument could be that these groups were formed to offer respite support to the classroom teacher by alleviating the teacher the pressure of constantly dealing with the 'challenging' pupils.

An additional key feature which was not included in all schools involved the nurture snack. Boxall (2002) stated that home experiences such as a snack time are in place to support the pupils' developmental needs such as developing social reciprocity. In addition, Cooper and

Tiknaz (2007) found that snack time was an essential feature of an NG as it created a feeling of being cared for and feeling relaxed amongst the pupils. Cooper and Tiknaz stated that during snack time, it is essential that NG staff model positive social communication and social reciprocity, emphasising that these social norms are mimicked by the pupils. The necessity of the NG snack is emphasised by Griffiths et al. (2014) who also found that pupils valued the snack. Similar to subtheme 6b, this practice highlights the importance of two adults being present within the NG, so that positive social communication can be modelled.

Schools also differed in the timescales and frequency of their nurture programmes. Typically, research concerning NGs have focused on a programme where the pupils' attend full time or three to four times a week for 2.5 hours. All of the NGs within this research were part-time, with only four of the NGs supporting pupils' two or more times a week for 2.5 hours with the remainder supporting pupils once a week for an hour. The discrepancies in timescales further emphasises the inconsistencies between practices in England.

Cooper and Whitebread (2007) noted that NGs that largely deviate from the guidelines are known as an 'aberrant models'. Cooper and Whitebread commented that these models tend to be part-time, meaning that it can run from a single hour-long session to 4 days. As discussed in chapter 2, the researchers commented that despite these groups calling themselves 'nurture groups', their aims and features undermine the tenets of NG, by not having trained staff, by solely employing TAs and by not monitoring the CYP with the use the BP or a SDQ. In addition, Cooper and Whitebread (2007) stated that the 'aberrant' models lacks an educational and/or developmental focus. What is important to note however is that there is no evidence to suggest that a large variation from the NG model does not work, as previous research has not investigated the effect of these different NG models or the reason schools have chosen to move away from the guidelines provided by Nurture UK (2019). Schools 3, 6 and 8 were the schools who deviated most from the guidelines provided by Nurture UK. It is questionable as to whether these groups are justified in stating that they are using NG principles to support the SEMH needs of their pupils, when only a small effect can be observed in comparison to NGs which fully adhere to the guidelines. However, using some form of nurturing principles could still arguably be having a positive effect on the pupils' social/emotional needs, at least in relation to no NG at all.

An avenue for further investigation would be to carefully examine if these deviations from the NG model are having a positive effect upon the pupils' who attend. Furthermore, if NGs are not strictly adhering to the guidelines, and if they are undermining the key features of the NG should they be allowed to continue using the NG name

With respect to the evidence-based guidelines, School 2 operated a *new variant* NG and adhered to the parameters provided by Nurture UK. School 1 deviated slightly from the *new variant* NG, as their only missing criteria was that the NGs were operated and managed by TAs. Schools 4, 5 and 7 employed 'light' NGs, meaning that they deviated from the guidelines in the respect that the NGs solely supported the emotional needs of the pupils, rather than combining this emotional-based learning with curriculum-based learning. Lastly, Schools 3, 6 and 8 diverged the most from the guidelines, applying 'imitation' NG - NGs who had the best intentions but deviated too greatly to be considered an NG.

5.2 Research Question 2
What are staff's perceptions regarding the strengths and limitations of their NG?

Adult participants spoke about why staff within the NG had been selected, reporting that NG staff were chosen due the qualities and skills they possessed. The Welsh Government's handbook on Nurture (2010) stated that NG staff must be carefully chosen. A study of NGs conducted by Syrnk (2012) found that NG staff often demonstrated personable character traits, which tended to underpin their responses to the everyday challenges of the NG environment. Syrnk found that staff valued the role they had been given and often reported a sense of fulfilment in tackling the challenges the role presented, such as supporting the complex needs of pupils who presented with SEMH difficulties. Additionally, Syrnk found that staff tended to define their role according to their own personal qualities and described experiential learning as synonymous with the training process. In other words, staff would often comment that they were given the role due to their caring and empathetic personality characteristics. This study echoes the current research wherein staff identified their personal qualities with the role. It is important to note that this study found that there was no mention of a formal criteria when choosing staff for the NGs. It seemed that staff were chosen subjectively based on the SENCO's own perceptions of the individual staff member's personality.

Participants (TAs) expressed a feeling of overextension (subtheme 6b), as they were often deployed into other roles as well as their nurture role, often to support teaching and learning within the mainstream setting. Blatchford et al. (2012) commented that TAs tend to spend their time serving a 'wider pedagogical role'. In other words, they do not have a defined role remit. This was clearly demonstrated within the research, as nurture staff (TAs) commented that they felt confused by their role and that their time was often divided between competing initiatives, such as providing PPA cover or covering for an absent teacher. This practice of using TAs as PPA cover, or 'covering classes for absent teachers' is not supported by the National Union of Teachers (NUT) (NUT 2010), because they do not believe unqualified

individuals should teach whole classes. In other words, TAs do not have sufficient training to teach or cover a class. This resonates with the current research, as TAs who had received no nurture training were being asked to manage the NGs. TAs also expressed the perception that the role of NG lead was a demanding and stressful role. Blatchford et al. (2012) noted that TAs are not trained in pedagogy or in how to effectively support pupil with SEMH needs, and therefore are ill-equipped to manage the workload associated with running and organising a NG. Furthermore, TAs stated that teachers failed to understand the role of the NG and would mistreat the intervention. Blatchford et al. (2012) commented that the misuse of TAs is due to their status, as TAs feel uncomfortable and unable to confront classroom teachers. Thus the use of the TAs to run and operate the NG may lower the status of the intervention, whereas if the intervention was operated by a qualified teacher, the intervention would have more authority and weight.

Blatchford et al. (2008) commented that the growth of TAs taking on more responsibilities within schools is driven by costs. TAs tend to be cheaper than teaching professionals and therefore, in this respect, are more attractive, as they can prevent a rise in the overall cost of running a service, such as an NG. Hancock and Eyres (2004) stated that a TA's presence within the education system is valued as they provide a cheap and readily available source of labour. Put starkly, the salary of a TA is much less than that of a teacher. Therefore, schools facing pressures and with fewer resources may be tempted to deploy the TA instead of the teacher, allocating it fewer resources. This finding echoes a key theme in the research, as staff felt their NG could be improved with more funding. This may be part of the reason for TAs managing the NG, as they were the cheaper option given with a limited budget.

An important finding was that all NG staff were able to speak positively about their NG, stating that they felt the NGs had a positive effect upon pupils who attended. A key finding from staff interviews was that, despite the variation between each NG, all NG staff felt that pupils had progressed in relation to their social/emotional needs. This finding links to research conducted by Doyle (2003), who found that the application of nurturing principles within a school is equally important in the wider school environment and can be effectively applied to learning in many areas of school (Lucas, 1999). It could be argued that the application of being 'nurturing' as opposed to an NG can still have an impact wherever it takes place. Despite the difference between each NGs structure and practice, it seemed that pupils were still being given extra support and emotional attention. Through the qualitative observations, it was observed that all NG staff were kind and friendly to the pupils and in many ways acted as the pupils' attachment figure within the school environment. Colwell and O'Connor (2003) found that NG staffs' verbal and non-verbal communications tended to be

very positive and more likely to enhance the self-esteem of pupils. In contrast, the communications of the mainstream classroom teachers were found to be less likely to create an environment conducive to fostering positive self-esteem. In the 8 Schools qualitatively observed, NG staff were regularly using positive verbal and non-verbal communications. Therefore, NG staff, whether formally trained or not, may be aware on some level of the requirement to supporting the NG pupils through their 'nurturing' verbal and non-verbal communications.

A further perceived strength reported by NG staff was that they felt their NG was viewed positively by their pupils, as a place of safety and refuge. These perceived feelings of safety are associated with research conducted by Kourmoulaki (2013), who found that pupils often cited feelings of safety and security within the NG. In addition, the researchers found that these feelings of security were often due to the consistency and attention offered by the NG staff, who were often attuned to the pupils' needs, enabling a trusting relationship to develop. Thus, NG staff are viewed by the pupils as calm, caring and inclusive. Interestingly, despite the variation in NGs, all of the NG staff interviewed reported that pupils had positive feelings towards the NG.

A further theme which emerged was that NG staff commented that there had been an increase with engagement in learning and a reduction in fixed term exclusions since the implementation of the NGs. This theme relates to UK Government reports which suggest that NGs can be effective in reducing school exclusions and can improve pupil engagement with learning (Estyn, 2007; Ofsted, 2009; Ofsted, 2009; Timpson, 2019). A reduction in exclusions and better engagement in learning was reported by schools who adhered more to the evidence-based model of the NG; however it was also reported by the SENCO in School 5, a school where nurture was only offered once a week for 1 hour. This suggests that a small amount of nurture can still have a positive effect on pupils' engagement with learning. However, this reduction in school exclusions in School 5 may be due to a whole-school adoption of nurturing principles, as staff within the NG school spoke positively about teacher/pupil interactions and about the teaching staffs' attitude to the NG.

 The findings suggest that adopting some forms of nurturing principles can support the SEMH needs of pupils, as all pupils were receiving individualised empathetic support from the TAs. Throughout all qualitative observations, it was evident that all staff were empathetic and nurturing towards the pupils, as they regularly praised the pupils and spoke to them in a familiar, soft and warm tone. In addition, the NG staff were understanding of the pupils' behaviour and did not respond to 'poor behaviour' in an intimidating or aggressive fashion, but rather in a friendly and understanding tone. By doing this, staff within both the *new*

variant and 'aberrant' NGs were able to informally follow some of the principles of nurture (i.e. All behaviour is communication & the importance of nurture for the development of wellbeing).   Furthermore, a key aspect of the NG is pupils feeling supported from a key adult within the school. In this way, adopting a diluted form of the NG appears to support the pupil SEMH needs, as pupils feel supported and understood. This finding relates to studies concerning peer mentoring, an intervention which links a vulnerable pupil with a key adult, which found that if a pupil links with a key adult within an educational provision, they feel supported, thereby improving the pupils' SEMH needs and learning (Colling, Swanson & Watkins, 2014). Therefore, by applying a nurturing style, the TAs were supporting their pupils at a basic level. Thus these nurturing groups as opposed to the *classic* and *new variant* NGs may have been supporting the pupils' wellbeing, as TAs were attuned to their pupils needs.

Staff also discussed the various barriers to the effective functioning of their NGs implementation and operation (theme 7). A key theme which emerged related to issues concerning the whole-school understanding of the purpose and function of an NG. Participants remarked that classroom teachers were unaware of their NGs' central function and purpose, and often used the NG as a punitive measure. Using the NG punitively implies that the teachers were unaware of the NGs central function and aim. Binnie and Allen (2008) commented NGs should not stigmatise the pupils and should be part of a whole-school approach to support pupils with a SEMH label. Sloan et al. (2020) commented that whole-school support and understanding of an NG is fundamental to its function. Additionally, Sanders (2007) found that a whole-school approach to nurture will increase the positive outcomes of pupils attending.

A study conducted by Doyle (2003) found that, in order to enhance the success of the pupils within the NG, the whole-school needs to undertake a pastoral support role. Therefore, the responsibility for ensuring the NG's pupil success needed to be shared by the whole-school, not just the NG staff and the mainstream classroom teacher. This emphasis on whole-school responsibility is consistent with the Green Paper (2017), which recognises a whole-school approach is fundamental when supporting the mental health needs of CYP. Within the research, schools who reported non whole-school support were the schools who deviated most from the criteria set out by the Nurture UK (2010). These schools reported that they did not have the full support from classroom teachers and from their SLT and therefore felt the central aim and function of the NG was lost. Sloan et al. (2020) noted that for an NG to work effectively it must have the full backing from the SLT. In addition, Sloan et al. (2020) commented that all staff should be trained in nurturing practices, to ensure full understanding and to ensure that behaviour is addressed consistently across the school. This is consistent

with research carried out Sanders (2007) who found that whole-school support and understanding of the NGs led to staff feeling more empowered to support the needs of the pupils within the NG. Within the current research, none of the staff outside the NG had received any training, which may explain the reasons for staff being unaware of the NGs central aim and function.

A further limitation to the NG's effectiveness identified by staff, was a lack of financial support, as participants felt that their NG could be improved with a larger budget. Financial support for all but one of the NGs came from the Schools' own budget. As discussed in chapter 1, the majority of funding for the NGs in the devolved nations primarily comes from the DfE (Sloan et al., 2020) and the LAs (Mckay, Reynolds & Kearney, 2010). Therefore, it may be more difficult for Schools in England to finance an NG. However, it could be argued that Schools are prioritising this money elsewhere. West and Bailey (2013) noted that due to schools having greater ownership of their budget, importance may be placed on other school initiatives.

An important point to be made however, is that NGs in the devolved nations, following the receipt of financial support, are all asked to follow a specific guidance and criteria when creating and managing their NGs. This does not seem to be the case with the schools in the research. Although these schools have received training on how to manage and run an NG, they have adapted the NGs to their own perceived needs. A key question which arises is if the schools were to receive funding from the LA is whether they would they be more likely, or even required, to adhere strictly to the criteria set out by Nurture UK (Nurture UK, 2019).

The findings from RQ2 reveal that adult participants (TAs) sometimes felt overwhelmed by their NG role; this was linked to a whole-school misunderstanding of the NGs' aims, especially when combined with their existing workload. A surprising finding was that, despite the variation in NG practice, all adult participants either anecdotally or formally reported that their NG had supported their pupils' SEMH needs. These findings imply that using some forms of nurturing characteristics can support the SEMH needs of the pupils, as all pupils were receiving personalised positive attention. The findings also revealed that staff reported financial constraints as a barrier and limitation to their NG implementation, in addition to a lack of whole-school support.

5.3 Research Question 3
What are the pupils' perceptions of their NG?

All pupil participants stated they enjoyed attending the NG and described the activities and learning materials as 'fun'. Pupils from School 2 and 8 related the 'fun' aspect of the NG to the play-based activities and games within the NG classroom. This finding is

consistent with Shaver and McClatchy (2013) who similarly found that pupils enjoyed the play-based aspects of nurture. The importance of play-based activities is also cited by Syrnk (2014). Boxall (2002) noted that play is a fundamental aspect of the NG, because it can enable pupils to act out and thereby begin to understand aspects of their trauma or distress (Wood & Attafield, 2005).

An interesting outcome is that all pupils, regardless of the NG variant that they experienced, reported that they enjoyed attending the NG, despite the differences in structure and management. This enjoyment is could be related to the personal attention the pupils received, as all three NGs contained fewer than 10 pupils. In addition, pupils were given constant praise and encouragement. Furthermore, the pupils expressed the sentiment that they felt safe in the NG, as they felt the NG staff were more understanding and empathetic towards their behaviour. This was particularly true in School 2, as Pupil 3 stated that the staff within the NG understood his emotions and 'supported his anger'. The pupils' statement regarding the NG as a 'safe base' fulfils the theoretical basis of the NG, to create a safe and secure environment for the pupils, where their emotions can be expressed without judgement or severe consequences (Boxall, 2002). Furthermore, these statements imply that the pupils' felt they would have been unable to progress with regards to their SEMH in their mainstream classroom, as their teachers would have incapable of supporting their emotional needs.

Interestingly, Pupil 6 described the NG as fun, despite his NG's aim of solely supporting the learning needs of its pupils. Research conducted by Bani (2011) found that staff in NGs used a higher frequency of verbal praise relative to staff in mainstream settings. Indeed, Pupil 6's enjoyment may have derived from the increased amount of praise he received in the NG (which was qualitatively observed) in comparison to his mainstream setting, as well as possibly from the support he received with his learning. Bani (2010) noted that a higher frequency of verbal and non-verbal praise can enhance the self-efficacy and self-esteem of pupils which heightens their enjoyment of an activity.

The results also revealed that pupils felt safe within the NG environment, as pupils positively described the NG as a safe and secure setting. Pupils identified that the safe and calm environment was based upon the soft furnishings such as the sofa. These findings are consistent with Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001); Kourmoulaki (2013); and Griffiths, Stenner and Hicks (2014). Boxall (2002) noted that the soft furnishings within the NG have a symbolic meaning and support the pupils in feelings emotionally secure and also support the pupils with their social and emotional engagement. All pupils from School 2 commented that the sofa supported them in feeling relaxed and at ease. Similar findings were reported by

Pintilei (2009) and Kourmoulaki (2013) who found themes of having a safe base and safety/belonging, respectively. Is it important to note that three out of the eight schools did not have a sofa within their NG, despite it being cited as an important feature by the pupils.

Pupils were also aware that they had been placed in the NG to support their emotional needs. In addition, pupils stated that they had developed in relation to these needs. Thus, the pupils were aware that the NG had supported them in developing resiliency skills as well as interpersonal skills. This finding is consistent with research conducted Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001) and Griffiths, Stenner and Hicks (2014). In addition, pupils noted that had they not received support from the NG, they feared they wouldn't be able to cope in the mainstream classroom. This was especially true with pupil 3 who reported that without the NG support, he would have been excluded.

The findings from RQ3 suggest that pupils enjoyed attending the NG and felt that is supported them with their SEMH needs. In addition, pupils reported that they had had improved with regards to their emotional needs. Furthermore, the findings suggests the important role the sofa play in enabling the pupils to feel more relaxed and calm.

Chapter 6- Conclusion

Chapter 6 will provide an analysis of the strengths and limitations of the study. In addition, implications for further practice and research will also be discussed.

6.1 Strengths of Research

This study contributes to an understanding of how NGs are currently being run and managed in a London Borough. By exploring their common features and characteristics, the study further provides an insight into how NGs are being practised in England. Furthermore, this study demonstrates the common limitations and barriers experienced by schools in England when establishing an NG, an area which has previously not been explored.

Previous research relating to NGs has not explored their characteristics and processes, thus there is a gap in the research concerning which features and processes are currently being adhered to and which are not. Furthermore, the pupils' perspective concerning an NGs key features has previously not been captured or explored. Therefore, this study makes an original contribution into the study of nurture and NGs.

A further strength of this study was the use of qualitative observations in addition to semi-structured interviews of pupils and NG staff. The use of qualitative observations allowed for a greater and deeper understanding of the structure and organisation of the NGs, since the researcher was able to observe how NG staff interacted with the pupils as well as looking at the content and delivery of the programme.

6.2 Limitations
6.2.1 Generalisability

The study included only 6 pupil participants and 13 adult participants from eight NGs and took place in one London Borough. Therefore, caution is warranted regarding the generalisability of the findings. Nevertheless, the research argues that since significant differences were found in a relatively small area it could be expected that similar findings could be replicated across England.

6.2.2 Use of Qualitative findings

The research is only based upon qualitative data, limiting its effect. If the study were to be repeated, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data, this could improve the findings by ensuring that the limitations of one type of data are balanced by the strengths of another. Future research could use quantitative measures such as the BP or the SDQ to

measure the social and emotional development of the pupils within each NG, examining relative gains in pupils in variously structured groups.

6.2.3 Pupil Participants

Gaining the pupil perspective and pupil voice was an important feature of the research. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were used with six pupils. Lewis (2001) noted that there are limitations in including child participants in research, as children are more inclined to be guided by: the presence of an adult; features of the context; and types of questions (Lewis, 2001; 2002), therefore bringing the reliability and validity of findings into question. However, as the researcher is a TEP with previous experience and skills when working with CYP, the effect of this was limited as far as possible, with the researcher able to create a comfortable and calm environment for the pupils where honest answers were more likely be elicited appropriately.

A further limitation of using pupil participants is that the sample was selected by the NG staff, as staff may have been more inclined to choose pupils who they felt would have provided positive accounts of their experiences. Thus, an element of positive bias could be evident in the pupils' opinions.

6.2.4 Critique of approach to analysis

Previous researchers (Holloway & Todres, 2003) have criticisms regarding the use of thematic analysis, positing that it lacks a clear definition. They imply that the analysis stages are unclear and allow researchers to support preconceived themes. In order to ensure a careful analysis took place, Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-staged systematic framework was used (see figure 3) to identify repeating patterns and themes within the data. Furthermore, the use of four other inter-coders strengthened and enhanced the credibility of the findings and encouraged to the researcher to apply reflexivity upon initial codes and themes.

6.3 Research reflections

Originally, the researcher had intended to include the Head Teachers and classroom teachers' perspective regarding the implementation and running of their NGs. By doing so, the researcher would have gained a comprehensive understanding of the NGs ethos and culture within each school's environment.

6.4 Implications for future research

Future research may want to continue the researcher's current study across a number of (LEAs) to improve the generalisability of the findings. Furthermore, due to the evidence arising that all adult participants cited perceived strengths in their NGs, it would be beneficial to explore the impact of largely deviated NGs upon the pupils who attend. This research could involve the use of quantitative measures such as the BP and the SDQ to measure pre and post data of the pupils' social and emotional needs. In addition, future research could also compare the impact and progress of pupils who attend a largely deviated NG model against the classic and part time NG model.

Additionally, it would be interesting to compare the role and impact of nurture in education within in each British nation, querying whether government policies and approaches have a part to play in the long and short-term effects. A further avenue to explore could involve exploring the common characteristics and practices of NGs in a secondary school setting.

6.5 Implication for Schools

The research suggested that for an NG to reach its full potential and to reduce any limitations such as whole-school misunderstanding, all staff should be aware of the NGs function and aim to ensure that the NG will not be misrepresented or exploited. Furthermore, a whole-school understanding will ensure that behaviour management is consistent through the implementation of nurturing practice throughout the school.

Furthermore, NG needs to be supported and assisted by the senior leadership team, for this reason, SLTs should be fully trained in nurture practice to ensure they can assist appropriately. In addition, NG staff could be trained to support and work with parents so that behaviour in the NG can be mirrored in the home environment. This could be achieved by NG staff applying the Family Partnership Model (Davis and Meltzer, 2007) of working with parents.

When establishing an NG, schools need to have tighter referral and transitional processes to ensure the aim of the NG is not lost, thus stringent policies should be put in place. The principal aim of an NG is to support the SEMH needs of pupils (Bennathan & Boxall, 2013), therefore supporting the mental health needs of the pupils should be the priority, with learning needs of secondary importance.

The research revealed that the best practice of a NG involves the use of a multidisciplinary team within the school to discuss and support the needs of the pupils within the NG. This team should meet every term. The formation of a multidisciplinary team should include the

head teacher, the classroom teacher, SENCO and NG staff to ensure consistent practice is taking place, as well as to discuss the appropriate referral and transition processes for the pupils. Sloan et al (2020) also show that these multidisciplinary teams should also include an EP from the Local Authority, to ensure that a level of expertise and subject knowledge is available to all stakeholders.

6.6 Implications for EP practice

EPs have previously been identified as well-placed to support educational providers with their SEMH pupils and in the developing of their nurturing approaches (Birch, 2016; Kearney et al., 2016; Roffey, 2016; Sanders, 2007). EPs could be involved with the development of NG policy to ensure good practice is taking place, as EPs can offer information regarding psychological theory and evidence-based research to shape the development of the NG. EPs could advise on the appropriate structure of the NG, as well the frequency upon which it should run and which pupils would most benefit from the group. In addition, they are in a position to enable contacts among NGs in neighbouring schools, ensuring greater consistency across LEAs. Furthermore, EP services should create their own policy concerning nurture, communicating this policy to educational provisions within the area. In addition, EP services could potentially communicate this policy to other LA's ensuring there is a consistent policy and practice of nurture.

EP could also take on the role of a 'critical friend' when supporting staff. This role would include the offer of supervision, as the EP could offer their knowledge of developmental psychology as well as advice regarding evidence-based research to support the NG staff. In addition, EPs could support NG staff reflect upon their practice and make sense of the challenging experiences within the NG.

EP could also be involved in the multidisciplinary team surrounding the pupils in the NG. This multidisciplinary team, which could meet every term, would discuss the current interventions that have been put in place. In addition, this team would discuss the pupils' readiness to transition as well as the school referral process. Again, EPs could offer their knowledge of psychology as well evidence-based research.

Additionally, EP could deliver whole-school training of nurture and attachment to ensure that there is a whole-school policy and understanding of the NG.

6.7 Implications for the researcher's own practice

As the researcher is a Trainee Educational Psychologist, the completion of this research has direct implications upon the researcher's own developing practice. The researcher is aware

she must now take a proactive role when working with schools who are creating interventions for pupils with SEMH difficulties, so that schools are aware of the relevant literature and evidence-base surrounding the intervention. In addition, the researcher will try and set up more multidisciplinary teams within her linking schools so that the pupils in questions can have a range of professionals supporting their mental health and well-being. Additionally, these multidisciplinary teams can ensure that best practice is taking place by all professionals within the team.

6.8 Conclusion

This study explored the characteristics and structures of NGs in a London Borough. The prominent finding of this research was that all schools differed in their approach to nurture and that only one school adhered fully to the guidelines and criteria of an effective NG as set out by Nurture UK (Nurture UK, 2019). The study also revealed that schools who most adhered to the criteria (Nurture UK, 2019) seemed to have a higher number of formal processes in place, with regards to the referral and transitional processes of the pupils. Schools who adhered least to the criteria appeared to have a lower number of formal processes and structures. A potential reason for the lack of consistency concerning the NGs structures and processes may be due to an absence of a national policy concerning NGs in England.

A conspicuous characteristic of the NGs was that all but one were operated by TAs. Interestingly, due to the majority being run and managed by TAs, according to Cooper and Whitebread (2007), these NGs wouldn't meet the criteria of a *classic* or *new variant* NG model. However, it seems rather punitive to place these NGs into third category (aberrant) as the anecdotal evidence from the semi-structured interviews from stakeholders revealed that these NGs still had a perceived positive impact upon the pupils who attended, despite the large variations between each.

These findings therefore suggest that adopting some form of nurturing principles can still have a perceived positive effect upon a pupils' social and emotional development. Consequently, these 'nurturing' groups, as opposed to Nurture Groups, were perceived by participants to have a positive impact upon pupil progress. However, a larger impact would be observed if the NGs adhered more strictly to the guidelines (Sloan et al., 2020). Thus the current study suggests that NGs in London are not be run to their full potential.

Although it is understandable that these Schools have adapted the intervention to their specific context – their perceived needs and limited resources – the evidence provided in

Chapter 2 and the findings presented in chapter 4 and 5, suggest clearly that, for an NG to be most effective, some principles should be maintained in all contexts such as:

- Having a teacher and a TA to support the pupils SEMH and learning needs,
- Involving parents within the NG process,
- Having full support from the whole-school and SLT,
- Using quantitative instruments to assess pupil progress
- Ensuring there are formal plans relating to referral and transitional processes.

References

Abbott, D., Watson, D., & Townsley, R. (2005). The proof of the pudding: what difference does multi-agency working make to families with disabled children with complex health care needs?. *Child & Family Social Work*, *10*(3), 229-238.

Alderson, P. and Morrow, V. (2004) *Ethics, Social Research and Consulting with Children and Young People*, London

Armstrong, D. (1995). *Power and partnership in education: Parents, children and special education needs*. Routledge.

Bani, M. (2011). The use and frequency of verbal and non-verbal praise in nurture groups. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, *16*(1), 47-67.

Barker J, Alldred P, Watts M, Dodman H. (2010) "Pupils or prisoners? Institutional geographies and internal exclusion in UK secondary schools." *Area 42* 378–386

Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The qualitative report*, *13*(4), 544-559.

Bellis, M. A., Lowey, H., Leckenby, N., Hughes, K., & Harrison, D. (2013). Adverse childhood experiences: retrospective study to determine their impact on adult health behaviours and health outcomes in a UK population. *Journal of public health*, *36*(1), 81-91.

Bennathan, M. (1997). Effective Intervention in Nurture Schools: What Nurture Groups Achieve. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, 3*, 23-29.

Bennathan, M., & Boxall, M. (2013). *Effective intervention in primary schools: Nurture groups*. DavidFulton Publishers.

Bennathan, M., Boxall, M., & Colley, D. (2010). *The Boxall Profile for Young People.* London: The Nurture Group Network.

Billington, T. (2012). *Separating, losing and excluding children: Narratives of difference*. Routledge.

Binnie, L., & Allen, K. (2008). Whole school support for vulnerable children: the evaluation of a part-time nurture group. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, 13*(3), 201-216.

Binnie, L.M., and K. Allen. 2008. "Whole School Support for Vulnerable Children: The Evaluation of a Part-time Nurture Group." *Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties* 13 (3): 201–216.

Bishop, A., & Swain, J. (2000). 'The Bread, the Jam and Some Coffee in the Morning': Perceptions of a Nurture Group. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, 5*(3), 18-24.

Bishop, S. (2008). *Running a nurture group.* Sage.

Broadhead, M., Chilton, R., & Stephens, V. (2011). Utilising the Boxall Profile within the Scallywags service for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. *British Journal of special education*, *38*(1), 19-27.

Bowlby, J. (1969). Attachment and loss v. 3 (Vol. 1). *Random House. Furman,*

Buhrmester, *D. (2009).* Methods and measures: The network of relationships inventory: Behavioral systems version*. International Journal of Behavioral Development*, *33*, 470-478.

Bowman-Perrott, L., Benz, M. R., Hsu, H. Y., Kwok, O. M., Eisterhold, L. A., & Zhang, D. (2013). Patterns and predictors of disciplinary exclusion over time: An analysis of the SEELS national data set. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, *21*(2), 83-96.

Boxall, M. (2002). *Nurture groups in school: Principles & practice*. Sage

Boxall, M., & Lucas, S. (2010). *Nurture Groups in Schools* (2 Ed.). London: Sage.

BPS (British Psychological Society) (2006) *Guidelines for Assessment of the PhD in Psychology and Related Disciplines, revised version.* Leicester: British Psychological Society.

BPS (2018, March 05) Child mental health green paper is a missed opportunity. The BPS. https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/child-mental-health-green-paper-missed-opportunity

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, *3*(2), 77-101.

Brede, J., Remington, A., Kenny, L., Warren, K., & Pellicano, E. (2016). Back to school: Paving the path to re-integration for autistic children previously excluded from education. *UCL London: Centre for Research in Autism and Education*.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Harvard university press.

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (2006). The bioecological model of human development. In R. M. Lerner & W. Damon (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 1. Theoretical models of human development (6th ed., pp. 793–828)*. Hoboken, NJ

Cole, T. (2015). *Mental health difficulties and children at risk of exclusion from schools in England: A review from an educational perspective of policy, practice and research, 1997 to 2015*. Oxford: University of Oxford.

Colley, D. (2009). Nurture groups in secondary schools. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, *14*(4), 291-300.

Collishaw, S., Maughan, B., Goodman, R., & Pickles, A. (2004). Time trends in adolescent mental health. *Journal of Child Psychology and psychiatry*, *45*(8), 1350-1362.

Colman, I., Murray, J., Abbott, R., Maughan, B., Kuh, D, Croudace, T. and Jones, P. (2009). Outcomes of conduct problems in adolescence: 40 year follow-up of national cohort. *British Medical Journal, 338.*

Colwell, J., and T. O'Connor. (2003). "Understanding Nurturing Practices: A Comparison of the Use of Strategies Likely to Enhance Self-esteem in Nurture Groups and Normal Classrooms." *British Journal of Special Education 30* (3): 119–124.

Cooper, P., & Tiknaz, Y. (2005). Progress and challenge in nurture groups: Evidence from three case studies. *British Journal of Special Education*, *32*(4), 211-222.

Cooper, P., & Tiknaz, Y. (2007). *Nurture Groups in school and at home: Connecting with children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties* (Vol. 1). Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Cooper, P., R. Arnold, and E. Boyd. (2001). "The Effectiveness of Nurture Groups: Preliminary Research Findings." *British Journal of Special Education 28* (4): 160–166

Cooper, P., and D. Whitebread. (2007). "The Effectiveness of Nurture Groups on Student Progress: Evidence from a National Research Study." *Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties* 12 (3): 171–190

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Steps in conducting a scholarly mixed methods study.* 3rd ed.). London: Sage

Creswell, J. W., Klassen, A. C., Plano Clark, V. L., & Smith, K. C. (2011). Best practices for mixed methods research in the health sciences. *Bethesda (Maryland): National Institutes of Health*, *2013*, 541-545.

Cunningham, L., K Hartwell, B., & Kreppner, J. (2019). Exploring the impact of Nurture Groups on children's social skills: a mixed-methods approach. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *35*(4), 368-383.

Davis, H. y Meltzer, L. (2007). *Working with Parents by Partnership.* London: Department for Education and Skills.

Davis, H., & Meltzer, L. (2007). Working with parents in partnership.

De Agostini, P., Hills, J., & Sutherland, H. (2014). Were we really all in it together? The distributional effects of the UK Coalition government's tax-benefit policy changes. *Social Policy in a cold climate Working Paper*, *10*.

Department for Education & Department of Health. (2014). *Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years, Ref: DFE-00205-2013*. London: DfE

Department for Education and Department of Health (2017). *Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision: a Green Paper*. Retrieved 151 from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uplo ads/attachment_data/file/664855/Transforming_children_and_young_peo ple_s_mental_health_provision.pdf

Department for Education & Department of Health. (2019). *The Timpson Review,* Ref: DFE-00205-2019. London: DfE

Department for Education and National Statistics. (2016). Schools, pupils, and their characteristics. Sfr, 10(2), 1–14. Retrieved from http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000878/index.shtml

Doyle, R. (2003). "Developing the Nurturing School: Spreading NG Principles and Practices into Mainstream Classrooms." *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties 8* (4): 253–267

Doyle, R. (2005). "'I hate you, please help me: A Case Study from a Classic Boxall Nurture Group."*Pastoral Care 23* (1): 3–11

Eriksson, M., Ghazinour, M., & Hammarström, A. (2018). Different uses of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory in public mental health research: what is their value for guiding public mental health policy and practice?. *Social Theory & Health*, *16*(4), 414-433.

Estyn. (2007). *The Report of the Chief Inspector for Schools*, Cardiff: Estyn.

Feigenbaum, A., & Iqani, M. (2015). Quality after the cuts? Higher education practitioners' accounts of systemic challenges to teaching quality in times of 'austerity'. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *39*(1), 46-66.

Fereday, J., & Muir-Cochrane, E. (2006). Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International journal of qualitative methods*, *5*(1), 80-92.

Fox, M., Martin, P. and Green, G. (2007) *Doing Practitioner Research*, London, Sage.

Francis, G. (2012). Publication bias and the failure of replication in experimental psychology. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review, 19*(6), 975-991.

Gerrard, B. (2005) "City of Glasgow Nurture Group Pilot Scheme Evaluation." *Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties 10* (4): 245–253

Gillham, B. (2005). *Research Interviewing: The range of techniques: A practical guide*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).

Goodman, R. (1997). The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire: a research note. *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry*, *38*(5), 581-586.

Gray, P., & Wilson, L. M. (2004). Gaining young people's perspectives. *Support for Learning*, *19*(4), 154-154.

Griffiths, R., Stenner, R., & Hicks, U. (2014). Hearing the unheard: Children's constructions of their Nurture Group experiences'. *Educational and Child Psychology*, *31*(1), 124-136.

Hall, C. L., Guo, B., Valentine, A. Z., Groom, M. J., Daley, D., Sayal, K., & Hollis, C. (2019). The validity of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) for children with ADHD symptoms. *PloS one*, *14*(6)

Hageman, A. M. (2008). A review of the strengths and weaknesses of archival, behavioral, and qualitative research methods: recognizing the potential benefits of triangulation. *Advances in Accounting Behavioral Research*, *11*, 1-30.

Harris, J. G., & Llorente, A. M. (2005). Cultural considerations in the use of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children—fourth edition (WISC-IV). In *WISC-IV clinical use and interpretation* (pp. 381-413). Academic Press.

Holloway, I., & Todres, L. (2003). The status of method: flexibility, consistency and coherence. *Qualitative research*, *3*(3), 345-357.

Hughes, N. K., & Schlösser, A. (2014). The effectiveness of nurture groups: a systematic review. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, *19*(4), 386-409.

Jones, S. M., & Bouffard, S. M. (2012). Social and emotional learning in schools: from programs to strategies: social policy report. *Society for Research in Child Development, 26*(4), 3–22.

Kennedy, E. K. (2015). The Revised SEND C ode of Pactice 0–25: effective practice in engaging children and young people in decision-making about interventions for social, emotional and mental health needs. *Support for Learning*, *30*(4), 364-380.

Lucas, S. (1999). The nurturing school: the impact of nurture group principles and practice on the whole school. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, *4*(3), 14-19.

Lune, H., & Berg, B. L. (2016). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Pearson Higher Ed.

MacKay, T., Reynolds, S., & Kearney, M. (2010). From attachment to attainment: The impact of nurture groups on academic achievement. *Educational and Child Psychology, 27*(3), 100.

McClintock, K., Hall, S., & Oliver, C. (2003). Risk markers associated with challenging behaviours in people with intellectual disabilities: a meta-analytic study. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, *47*(6), 405-416.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education. Revised and Expanded from" Case Study Research in Education."* Jossey-Bass Publishers

Mertens, D. M. (2014). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods.* Sage publications

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. sage.

Moran, H. (2010). Clinical observations of the differences between children on the autism spectrum and those with attachment problems: *The Coventry Grid. Good Autism Practice (GAP), 11*(2), 46-59.

Morrow, L. M. (2008). *Comprehension instruction: Research-based best practices*. Guilford Press.

Newman, M., Woodcock, A., & Dunham, P. (2006). 'Playtime in the borderlands': children's representations of school, gender and bullying through photographs and interviews. *Children's Geographies*, *4*(3), 289-302.

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (2008) *Depression in children and young people identification and management in primary, community and secondary care*, in *National Clinical Practice Guideline Number 28*2005, NICE: London.

Norwich, B. (2014). Changing policy and legislation and its effects on inclusive and special education: a perspective from England. *British Journal of Special Education*, *41*(4), 403-425.

Nurture UK (2019) *Nurture Groups: For all educational settings*. Available at http://www.nurtureuk.org/Nurture Groups: For all educational settings

O'Connor, T., and J. Colwell. (2002). "The Effectiveness and Rationale of the 'Nurture Group' Approach to Helping Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties Remain Within Mainstream Education." *British Journal of Special Education* 29 (2): 96–100

Office for National Statistics. (2017*). Permanent and fixed-period exclusions in England: 2015 to 2016.* Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/permanent-and-fixed-periodexclusions-in-england-2015-to-2016

ONS. (2015). Measuring National Wellbeing: Insights into children's mental health 159 and wellbeing. Retrieved from https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/article s/measuringnationalwellbeing/2015-10-20

Ofsted. (2008). *Good practice in re-engaging disaffected and reluctant students in secondary schools.* London, UK:

Ofsted. (2011). *Supporting children with challenging behaviour through a nurture group approach.* London, UK

Ondrusek, N., Abramovitch, R., Pencharz, P., & Koren, G. (1998). Empirical examination of the ability of children to consent to clinical research. *Journal of Medical Ethics*, *24*(3), 158-165.

O'Neill, L., Guenette, F., & Kitchenham, A. (2010). 'Am I safe here and do you like me?'Understanding complex trauma and attachment disruption in the classroom. *British journal of special education*, *37*(4), 190-197.

Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice.* Sage publications.

Price, K. (2012). Inside I'm Hurting: Practical Strategies for Supporting Children with Attachment Difficulties in Schools. *TEACH Journal of Christian Education*, *4*(1), 17.

Reiss, F. (2013). Socioeconomic inequalities and mental health problems in children and adolescents: a systematic review. *Social science & medicine*, *90*, 24-31.

Reynolds, S., T. MacKay, and M. Kearney. (2009). "Nurture Groups: A Large-Scale, Controlled Study of Effects on Development and Academic Attainment." *British Journal of Special Education* 36 (4): 204–212

Roffey, S. (2016). Building a case for whole-child, whole-school wellbeing in challenging contexts. *Educational & Child Psychology*, *33*(2), 30-42.

Robson, C. (2011). *Real world research: A resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers* (Vol. 2). Oxford: Blackwell.

Sanders, T. 2007. "Helping Children Thrive at School: The Effectiveness of Nurture Groups." *Educational Psychology in Practice* 23 (1): 45–61

Sempik, J., Ward, H., & Darker, I. (2008). Emotional and behavioural difficulties of children and young people at entry into care. *Clinical child psychology and psychiatry*, *13*(2), 221-233

Scott, K., and A. Lee. (2009). "Beyond the 'Classic' Nurture Group Model: An Evaluation of Part-Time and Cross-Age Nurture Groups in a Scottish Local Authority." *Support for Learning* 24 (1): 5–10

Seth-Smith, F., N. Levi, R. Pratt, P. Fonagy, and D. Jaffey. 2010. "Do Nurture Groups Improve the Social, Emotional and Behavioural Functioning of at Risk Children?" *Educational & Child Psychology* 27 (1): 21–34

Shaver, I., & McClatchy, K. (2013). Assessing Effectiveness of Nurture Groups in Northern Scotland. *Support for Learning, 28(3)*, 97–102.

Sheffield, E. L., & Morgan, G. (2016). The perceptions and experiences of young people with a BESD/SEMH classification. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *33*(1), 50-64.

Silverman, D. (2015). *Interpreting qualitative data*. Sage.

Slee, R. (2012). The labelling and categorisation of children with EBD: A cautionary consideration. In *The Routledge International companion to emotional and behavioural difficulties* (pp. 42-51). Routledge

Sloan, S., Winter, K., Connolly, P., & Gildea, A. (2020). The effectiveness of Nurture Groups in improving outcomes for young children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in primary schools: An evaluation of Nurture Group provision in Northern Ireland. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *108*, 104619.

Stanbridge, J., & Mercer, E. (2019). Mind your language: why the language used to describe children's SEMH needs matters. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1-21.

Storebø, O. J., Rasmussen, P. D., & Simonsen, E. (2016). Association between insecure attachment and ADHD: environmental mediating factors. Journal of Attention Disorders, 20(2), 187-196.

Stormark, K. M., Heiervang, E., Heimann, M., Lundervold, A., & Gillberg, C. (2008). Predicting nonresponse bias from teacher ratings of mental health problems in primary school children. *Journal of abnormal child psychology*, *36*(3), 411-419.

Syrnyk, C. (2014). Capturing the Nurture approach: experiences of young pupils with SEBD. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, *19*(2), 154-175.

Terry, G., & Braun, V. (2011). 'I'm committed to her and the family': positive accounts of vasectomy among New Zealand men. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, *29*(3), 276-291.

Todd, L. (2003a). Enabling pupil participation. *Special Children*: 22–25.

Tudge, J. R., Mokrova, I., Hatfield, B. E., & Karnik, R. B. (2009). Uses and misuses of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development. *Journal of family theory & review*, *1*(4), 198-210.

Verschueren, K., & Koomen, H. M. (2012). Teacher–child relationships from an attachment perspective. *Attachment & human development*, *14*(3), 205-211.

Welsh Assembly Government (2010) *Nurture Groups: A handbook for schools.* https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-12/nurture-groups-a-handbook-for-schools.pdf

Walsh, D., Bendel, N., Jones, R., & Hanlon, P. (2010). It's not 'just deprivation': why do equally deprived UK cities experience different health outcomes? *Public health*, *124*(9), 487-495.

Wickham, S., Whitehead, M., Taylor-Robinson, D., & Barr, B. (2017). The effect of a transition into poverty on child and maternal mental health: a longitudinal analysis of the UK Millennium Cohort Study. *The Lancet Public Health*, *2*(3), e141-e148.

Willig, C. (2003). Introducing qualitative research in psychology: adventures in theory and method. Buckingham: Open University Press

Willig, C. (2008). Introducing Qualitative Research. McGraw-Hill: Open University Press.

Wood, E., & Attfield, J. (2005). *Play, learning and the early childhood curriculum*. Sage.

Wolpert, M., Rowland, A., Drinkwater, J., & Maguire, P. (2001). Promoting User Involvement in Clinical Psychology Services for Children and Young People: How to hear the voice of the child. *London: British Psychological Society*.

Yardley, L. (2008). Demonstrating validity in qualitative psychology. *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods*, *2*, 235-251.

Participant Information Sheet for Teaching Professionals
An exploration of Nurture Groups in a London Borough

Department: Psychology and Human Development

Contact of Researcher: Nora Dwyer- n.dwyer.14@ucl.ac.uk

To whom it may concern,

I am second year Trainee Educational Psychologist student studying towards a doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology at the University College London Institute of Education.

I would like to invite you to take part in the following research concerning Nurture Groups (NG).

What is the purpose of this research?

Nurture Groups (NGs) are a targeted intervention for children with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulties within mainstream schools. Their purpose is to meet the developmental needs of children and to compensate for their missed nurturing experiences. This is achieved in the form of a highly structured, home-like teaching environment that is organised to replicate effective child rearing practice in the home (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007).

Past research on NGs has focused on the impact a NG can have upon a child or young person's (CYP) emotional and learning needs and therefore highlights the benefits and effectiveness of the 'conventional' NG group model, which follows a distinct set of rules (Reynolds, Kearney & MacKay,2009; Cooper & Whitbread 2009; Kourmoulaki 2013). It is hoped that this research will lead to a clearer understanding of how and why NGs are currently being managed in primary schools and which NG model they are using in their practice.

Why have I be chosen to take part?
Within this study, the researcher is investigating how primary and why primary schools have adapted the structure of the conventional NG model. Teaching professionals, both teachers and teaching assistants, who work within a NG will be interviewed. The participants will be asked questions concerning the structure of their NG and why they feel their school has adapted the conventional model.

Do I have to take part?
This research is voluntary, and you are not obliged to take part in this study and are free to withdraw at any time. Should you choose to withdraw from the research you may do so without disadvantage to your child and without any obligation to give a reason.

What will happen if I take part?
Teaching professionals will be asked to take part in an interview. The interview will be divided into two parts. The first part (Part A) will focus on the structure of NG. The second part (Part B) will examine the teaching professionals' perception of the adapted NG and their thoughts as to why they feel their school is using an adapted NG model. Part A of the interview should last 15 minutes, and Part B will last 30-45 minutes. There will be no break in-between.

Will I be recorded and how will the recorded media be used?
Data will be recorded via an encrypted mobile phone device. All responses will remain confidential and anonymous. All interviews will be typed and analysed for themes. The audio recording of your interview made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. No other use will

research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings

What are the benefits to taking part in this project?
Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will shape future research and practice of NG in primary schools.

What if something goes wrong?
Should something go wrong during the project and you wish to complain, please contact my research supervisor Dr Jessica Antonia Hayton (Jessica.hayton@ucl.ac.uk). If you feel this complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction please contact the Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee - ethics@ucl.ac.uk

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?
All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any ensuing reports or publications

Please note that confidentiality will be maintained as far as it is possible, unless during our conversation I hear anything which makes me worried that someone might be in danger of harm, I might have to inform relevant agencies of this.

What will happen to the results of the research project?
The results of this project will be presented in a presented within a PhD thesis. Electronic data will be kept for up to 10 years. Paper copies of data will be converted to electronic format and the originals disposed of using the UCL Confidential Waste disposal service. Additionally, you will be debriefed on the findings through a follow up meeting which will be arranged by myself, this will be done by either phone or through a face to face meeting. Additionally, you will be able to receive a copy of the complete report upon request.

Notice:
The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found in our 'general' privacy notice:

    For participants in research studies, click here

The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection legislation (GDPR and DPA 2018) is provided across both the 'local' and 'general' privacy notices.

UCL

Consent Sheet for Teaching Professionals

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

An exploration of Nurture Groups in a London Borough

Department: Psychology and Human Development
Contact of Researcher: Nora Dwyer- n.dwyer.14@ucl.ac.uk

Name and Contact Details of the UCL Data Protection Officer: data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organising the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

I confirm that I understand that by ticking/initialling each box below I am consenting to this element of the study. I understand that it will be assumed that unticked/initialled boxes means that I DO NOT consent to that part of the study. I understand that by not giving consent for any one element that I may be deemed ineligible for the study.

		Tick box
1.	I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet for the above study. I have had an opportunity to consider the information and what will be expected of me. I have also had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered to my satisfaction and would like to take part in an individual interview.	
2.	I consent to my participation in this study. I understand that according to data protection legislation, 'public task' will be the lawful basis for processing personal data.	
3.	I understand that all personal information will remain confidential and that all efforts will be made to ensure my participation cannot be identified.	
4.	I agree that anonymised research data may be used by others for future research. (No one will be able to identify your child when this data is shared.)	
5.	I understand that the information I have submitted will be published as a report and that I can receive a copy upon request.	
6.	I consent to the interview being audio recorded and understand that the recordings will be stored anonymously, using password-protected software and will be used for training, quality control, audit and specific research purposes.	
7.	I hereby confirm that I understand the inclusion criteria as detailed in the Information Sheet and explained to me by the researcher.	
8.	I am aware of who I should contact if I wish to lodge a complaint.	
9.	I would be happy for the data I provide to be archived as electronic data which will be kept for up to 10 years.	
10.	I understand that other authenticated researchers will have access to my anonymised data.	

An exploration into the characteristics and processes of Nurture Groups in an outer London Borough?'

Print Name:
Signed Name:

Appendix B

LONDON'S GLOBAL UNIVERSITY

≜UCL

My name is Nora and I am trying to find out about your thoughts on your nurture group. I was wondering if you could help me by agreeing to meet with me to answer some questions about some of the some of your favourite things about your nurture group.

If you agree to take part, I will meet you before the interview for you to ask any questions and for you to give your written permission to take part.

The interview will be recorded but no one else will listen to the recording or read my notes. What you say will be kept between us, as it is confidential. The only time that I would speak to someone else is if you tell me something that means that you or someone else is in danger. If you get upset about anything, I will stop your teacher (*name*) to help. Your teacher (name) will be in the (*name of nurture group*) at the time but they will not be listening to what you say.

When the research is finished, I will write a report and no use your name or any personal information so no one will know what you said. I will keep your recording and notes in a safe place. When I have finished with the recording and notes they will be destroyed.

ᴁUCL

If you want to take part in this research tick ✔ the boxes if you agree. An adult can help you.

1. I understand what the research is about and what I need to do.	
2. I understand that I can stop talking if I want to or hold up a purple card to stop.	
3. I understand that I do not have to answer any questions if I do not want to.	
4. I understand that my answers will be recorded.	
5. I understand that what I say will be kept private and only shared after it has had my name and any other details that could identify me taken out.	
6. The only time that Nora can tell anybody else my name or any details, is if I say something which means that me or someone else is getting hurt.	
7. I understand that I can change my mind about taking part at any time. It will not affect the way I am supported.	
8. I agree to take part in the research project	

Name of pupil:
Signature:

Appendix C

⬛ UCL

Participant Information Sheet for Parents

An exploration of the characteristics and processes of Nurture Groups in an outer London Borough
Department: Psychology and Human Development
Contact of Researcher: Nora Dwyer- n.dwyer.14@ucl.ac.uk

Dear parent/carer,

I am second year Trainee Educational Psychologist student studying towards a doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology at the University College London Institute of Education.

I would like to invite your child to take part in the following research concerning Nurture Groups (NG).

What is the projects purpose?

Nurture Groups (NGs) are a targeted intervention for children with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulties within mainstream schools. Their purpose is to meet the developmental needs of children and to compensate for their missed nurturing experiences. This is achieved in the form of a highly structured, home-like teaching environment that is organised to replicate effective child rearing practice in the home (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007).

Past research on NGs has focused on the impact a NG can have upon a child or young person's (CYP) emotional and learning needs and therefore highlights the benefits and effectiveness of the 'conventional' NG group model, which follows a distinct set of rules (Reynolds, Kearney & MacKay,2009; Cooper & Whitbread 2009; Kourmoulaki 2013). It is hoped that this research will lead to a clearer understanding of how and why NGs are currently being managed in primary schools and which NG model they are using in their practice.

Why has my child been chosen to take part?

Within this study, the researcher would like to explore the pupils' perception and experience of their NG. 10 students have been chosen to take part in the research. These students will be in KS2 and will have been part of a NG for one term.

Do I have to take part?

This research is voluntary, and your child is not obliged to take part in this study and is free to withdraw at any time. Should you choose to withdraw your child from the research you may do so without disadvantage to your child and without any obligation to give a reason.

What will happen if my child takes part?

Students will be asked to take part in one interview which will roughly last for 20-30 minutes. The interview will be conversational, in that there is series of key questions. Student participants will be asked semi-structured questions on their perception and experience of their NG.

Will my child be recorded and how will the recorded media be used?

Data will be recorded via an encrypted mobile phone device. All responses will remain confidential and anonymous. All interviews will be typed and analysed for themes. The audio video recordings of your child's interview made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There should be no disadvantages to you child taking part in this research. If student participants would like another adult in the room, so as to feel more at ease, then this request will be fulfilled. Students will be given a purple card to hold up if they do not want to answer a question. The researcher will acknowledge this and ask the student if they would like to move onto the next question or end the interview. No questions will be asked as to why they want to finish.

What are the benefits to taking part in this project?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will shape future research and practice of NG in primary schools.

What if something goes wrong?

Should something go wrong during the project and you wish to complain, please contact my research supervisor Dr Jessica Antonia Hayton (Jessica.hayton@ucl.ac.uk). If you feel this complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction please contact the Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee - ethics@ucl.ac.uk

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that we collect about your child during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any ensuing reports or publications

Please note that confidentiality will be maintained as far as it is possible, unless during our conversation I hear anything which makes me worried that someone might be in danger of harm, I might have to inform relevant agencies of this.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results of this project will be presented in a presented within a PhD thesis. Electronic data will be kept for up to 10 years. Paper copies of data will be converted to electronic format and the originals disposed of using the UCL Confidential Waste disposal service. Parents will receive a copy of the report upon request and students will receive a differentiated version of the report and will be debriefed through a follow up meeting. This meeting will be arranged by myself, the student, their teacher and their parent/carer in their educational provision.

Notice:

The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found in our 'general' privacy notice:

For participants in research studies, click here

The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection legislation (GDPR and DPA 2018) is provided across both the 'local' and 'general' privacy notices.

The lawful basis that will be used to process your personal data is 'Public task' for personal data.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk.

If you have any questions or you want to discuss this research further, then please contact me at the address below. If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research please email me.

Nora Dwyer
Trainee Educational psychologist
(n.dwyer.14@ucl.ac.uk)

References

Cooper, P., & Whitebread, D. (2007). The effectiveness of nurture groups on student progress: Evidence from a national research study. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, *12*(3), 171-190.

Reynolds, S., MacKay, T., & Kearney, M. (2009). RESEARCH SECTION: Nurture groups: a large-scale, controlled study of effects on development and academic attainment. *British Journal of Special Education*, *36*(4), 204-212.

Kourmoulaki, A. (2013). Nurture groups in a Scottish secondary school: Purpose, features, value and areas for development. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, *18*(1), 60-76.

^ÛUCL

Consent Sheet for Parents

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

An exploration of the characteristics and processes of Nurture Groups in an outer London Borough
Department: Psychology and Human Development
Contact of Researcher: Nora Dwyer- n.dwyer.14@ucl.ac.uk

Name and Contact Details of the UCL Data Protection Officer: data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organising the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

I confirm that I understand that by ticking/initialling each box below I am consenting to this element of the study. I understand that it will be assumed that unticked/initialled boxes means that I DO NOT consent to that part of the study. I understand that by not giving consent for any one element that I may be deemed ineligible for the study.

		Tick box
1.	I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet for the above study. I have had an opportunity to consider the information and what will be expected of me. I have also had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered to my satisfaction and would like my child to take part in an individual interview.	
2.	I consent to my child's participation in this study. I understand that according to data protection legislation, 'public task' will be the lawful basis for processing personal data.	
3.	I understand that all personal information will remain confidential and that all efforts will be made to ensure my child cannot be identified.	
4.	I agree that my child's anonymised research data may be used by others for future research. (No one will be able to identify your child when this data is shared.)	
5.	I understand that the information I have submitted will be published and upon request I can receive a copy of the report.	
6.	I consent to my child's interview being audio recorded and understand that the recordings will be stored anonymously, using password-protected software and will be used for training, quality control, audit and specific research purposes.	
7.	I hereby confirm that I understand the inclusion criteria as detailed in the Information Sheet and explained to me by the researcher.	
8.	I am aware of who I should contact if I wish to lodge a complaint.	
9.	I would be happy for the data my child provides to be archived as electronic data which will be kept for up to 10 years.	
10.	I understand that other authenticated researchers will have access to my child's anonymised data.	

I agree for my child _____ to participate in the project entitled 'An exploration of the characteristics and processes of Nurture Groups in an Outer London Borough?'

Print Name:
Signed Name:

Appendix D

Pupil Interview Schedule

Everything that we talk will be tape-recorded so that I can remember what you said, but no-one else will know what you have said to me, unless you tell me something that makes me worried about your safety, and then I will have to speak to someone else who cares about you.

I've got some sheets that I need you to sign, just to say that you know all about what we'll be talking about, and that you are happy to take part today. We can read all the sentences together, and if you agree, you just need to put a big tick in each box, and then write your name at the bottom.

Do you have anything you'd like to ask before we get started?

Opening questions

(Warm up games and activities to support relationship building, problem free talk, hobbies, and interests)

How are you doing today?

Could you tell me a bit about yourself… what are the kinds of things you like doing?

Questions Concerning NGs

I hear you attend an NG, what sort of things do you do in your NG?

Who is part of you NG?

Do you enjoy attending the NG?

What's the best things about attending the NG?

Why do you think you've been asked to be part of the NG?

In what ways do you think your NG could be improved?

Appendix E

Interview Schedule-SENCO

Thank you for agreeing to be involved with my research concerning the purpose and structure of NGs within primary schools. This interview will allow me to understand the structure of your NG and why you feel your school is running this type of NG.

Your responses to this will remain confidential and please let me know if you would like to stop at any point.

Is it okay if I record this interview today?

Could you please tell me your name and explain your role?

What were your reasons for forming an NG within your school?

What is your understanding of an NG?

Have you and your staff had any training with regards to nurture or attachment?

If so how did this affect your school ethos/climate?

How did you choose the staff involved in your NG?

What is the referral process for your NG?

What is the transitional process for your NG?

Do you think the CYP attending your NG have progressed with regards to their SEMH?

Why?

What are the strengths of your NG?

Why do you think that is?

Do you feel that there are any limitations to your NG?

Why?

How could you improve your NG?

How involved are parents with the NG?

Does the NG relate to your school ethos?

Probes

Could you tell me more about that?

Why do you feel that is?

You said………………. Why do you think this?

Appendix F

Interview schedule NG staff

Thank you for agreeing to be involved with my research concerning the purpose and structure of NGs. This interview will allow me explore the different processed and characteristics associated with your NG.

Your responses to this will remain confidential and please let me know if you would like to stop at any point.

Is it okay if I record this interview today?

Opening Questions- NGs Function

Can you start off by telling me your name and your role within the school?

Could you tell me a bit about your role and responsibilities with the NG?

Could you explain to me your understanding regarding the purpose of an NG?

What year group is your nurture provision available for?

Why do you think that is?

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

How many other staff members run the NG with you and what are their titles?

Did you receive training prior to running the NG? - Who provided that training?

Could you tell me more about your training?

Where is your NG group based?

Why is your NG based here?

Can you tell me how the room is set up?

How is information concerning the NG shared with staff?

How long do pupils stay in the NG?

How do pupil's transition back *into* the mainstream classroom?

Experience with NGs

Tell me about the nurture group your school is currently using?

Can you tell me about the relationship you have with the CYP in your NG?

How does the admission and referral process for your NG work?

Are there any ways you think your NG could be improved?

What are the strengths of your NG?

Where there any barriers when setting up your NG?

Why do you feel your school uses this particular NG?

Do you think the children within your NG have made any progress with regards to their behaviour/ school work?

-        Why do you think that is?

What factors, if any do you think supported your NG?

Who, if anyone, has supported you in this process?

What, if anything, do you think has hindered the use of an NG in your school?

Closing Question

Is there anything else that you think would be helpful for me to know about the nurture group your school has using?

List of Probes

"Could you tell me more about that."

"What led you to . . . "

"What eventually happened?"

"Looking back, what would you do differently now, if anything?"

"Why did you do that?"

"Can you think of another example of this?"

"Give me more detail about what you did, please."

"What exactly did you say?"

"I'd like to hear more."

"It sounds like you are saying….why do you feel that way?

"What would that look like?"

"What might make you respond [or do this] differently?"

"Have you always felt this way?"

Appendix G- Example of Interview Extract

Text	Initial Codes
My name is [name] I am a learning support assistant at [name of primary school] and I run the school NG	Participant works as a TA Used for differentiation
And you operate the nurture group? I operate the NG, we use it for the pupils to access english and maths at their level.	NG used to support pupil learning
Could you explain to me your understanding regarding the purpose of a nurture group? Well…Umm… Obviously these children come from very vulnerable backgrounds…Umm they struggle with certain concepts in English… and they are not going to be in the correct mindset to learn if they are confused or angry or sad… so if you can get them to understand their feelings and cope with their feelings they will be likely or more likely ready to learn. They will be in a better mind-set. They don't understand themselves, so how could they understand algebra.	Children experience underlying emotional issues Lack of a readiness for learning Lack of emotional awareness
And what is it you do in the NG to support these children? If you start off with the basics we talk about feelings quite a lot. You have to accept the consequences of actions… I don't you use the words good and bad in the room…	Discussion of pupils emotions Discussion of feelings Language is moderated
And why is that? I say it's about choices and consequences. It's more about the right choice and the wrong choice. Obviously we do maths and English. So in the morning there are lots of visuals. I adapt to their needs and help them cope with the English and maths lessons. We have lots of visual maths lessons… visuals in total and that makes them feel happy and if they're happy they are ready to learn.	Supporting children to understand their emotions. Discussion of emotions Differentiating and adapting lesson for children Differentiation
So it sounds like your saying that you differentiate the maths and English lessons to the needs of the individualised children so they can feel success? Yes we don't want to set the children up for a failure.	Support the pupils learning needs to they can experience success

What year group is your group for? Year 3&4. **No year 6?** No we tend to support them in class. There are not many schools that do provisions like we do. To have a year 6 come and then go to a senior school where they don't have it is huge.. so they have support in class....as they wouldn't have that in year 7... they don't have a room. **And what is the support the year 5&6 receive?** We have one to one adults, well one to a group. They have targets and they break lessons down further showing them how to do something in a different way. **So how long does your group run for each week?** All day.. every day.. **And how many children do you have accessing the NG?** 14 children in groups of...so they would do a morning and then the other half would do the afternoon.... And then that gets switched around... **So that would be groups of 7 or 6 children?** Yea. **So they are accessing the NG either every morning or afternoon?** Yea that would be it. The morning is maths and english and the afternoon will be PSHE, precision, all those little things. Things that would be 'hoisting' them up. Then we have the independent leaning that we set up in class... which is much more free flow. **So not an activity which would be anxiety provoking?** (Nods head).. yes **So just to clarify.. its 6 children (the ones observed) access nurture in the morning and then those children would go back to their mainstream class in the afternoon and then tomorrow they would be attending nurture in the afternoon for**	TA feels school is unique with intervention Nurture group only available for year 3&4 Worries that year 6 would come too attached TA feels that pupils received a lack of support in Secondary School Learning Support different for years five and six Nurture Group a part time Maths and English taught in morning, with 'learning interventions' being taught in the afternoon NG supports the children's learning Children within NG are performing at a much lower ability than their class. Supportive network of TA's

a PSHE lesson ect.. and then vice versa for the other group? Yes that's it. **But it's you that runs and supports the NG?** Yes that would just be me. **And prior to the NG did you have any training regarding nurture?** I haven't had NG training, but I was a 1:1 support for 15 years. I think Ms _____ and Ms _____saw the idea of a group room as a good idea. The first year it was run, the children were doing the same as they were doing in the classroom. And it didn't work… **Why didn't it work?** Because they were just doing exactly as they were doing in the class. **So there was no differentiation?** Well we weren't differentiating as much as we should have done. It was a huge learning curve of oh that's not working.. oh this isn't working….or that working lets do more of this and I think we have got it down to par now. **So what do you think works now?** So I think we run better activities. We have better visuals. We have the things that they need. I mean before I was doing choosing time as an activity because you know… brain break and all that…. But because the choosing the activity was playing….we needed to change that…. Then we had busy boxes….. which they think is a game but it is about learning.	TA has not been on the three-day training course. TA using experience of working with children with complex needs Original lack of understanding of purpose of NG Original NG didn't work due lack of differentiation Lack of differentiation Learning through time- trial and error Lack of direction for NG Learning through experience NG originally lacked an identity and was unsure of its original purpose NG has now improved from reflections of errors Has improved due to more differentiation of learning and TA adapting plans TA tries to personalise day for children TA tries to make the activities fun for children Emphasis on play at the end of the day

Appendix H

Example of Themes and Sub themes

Theme	Descriptions and quotes illustrative of theme	Subtheme	Description
NG establishment	The reasons NG staff decided to implement an NG within their school setting *"Well it was a response to the behaviour of a certain cohort who were struggling in the mainstream classroom at the time. We knew they had SEMH issues/concerns"* *"For quite a number of years, we noticed that we had a great deal of children from vulnerable families presenting with more and more emotional difficulties. Due to some form of special needs that they had or some form of trauma"* *"We have a lot of need within this school"*	Response to high number of pupils with a SEMH/SEN need	Creation of NG was a response to the high number of pupils presenting with a SEMH/SEN needs.
	"We have previously had quite high exclusion rates. So the response was that the LA gave us a nurture classroom" *"We started the nurturing provision in September 2018. Lots of children were getting excluded and the exclusions were having absolutely no impact. We looked at the research in terms of those children and that is when we put our nurturing provision in place"*	Response to high number of Exclusions	Implementation of NG was a reactive response to high number of fixed-term exclusion school had previously experienced.

	"In this area we have a lot of poverty, alcohol issues and housing issues. We also have parents in prison and mental health issues. We have it and we have to deal with it" *"This is an area of social deprivation. Therefore, we have a lot of need in our school"* *"This is a very deprived area."*	High number of social deprivation in surrounding area	All schools were based in areas with high levels of social deprivation.
	"Access to outside agencies is complex and takes far too long and is not always satisfactory so we need to deal with the children's problems now." *"There was nothing outside that we could use to help us, so we decided to have something in-house. We set up the nurture for those children and then it evolved over time."*	Dissatisfaction with outside agencies	Participants noted that their NG was a response due to a lack of support from outside services/agencies

Appendix I

Observation Framework

	Features and Resources	Comments
	The Nurture Group is based in a room within the school with a home-like area and an area set aside for formal learning. - Sofa - Carpet - Cushions - Kitchen - Toys - Table and chairs for learning	
	The NG consists of 9 -12 children at any one time	
	Staff provide opportunities to model positive relationships. - Positive language - Tone of voice - Positive facial expressions - Positive gestures	

	Activities in the nurture group include; - Emotional literacy sessions - News sharing - Nurture snack - Curriculum activities - Opportunities for CYP to celebrate their own progress - Opportunities for CYP to develop skills such as listening, sharing and turn-taking - Tidying up **Staff worked with student in a group** **Staffed worked student individually**	
	Nurture Group should be staffed at a minimum level of two people. Neither adult should be available to cover for absent staff within the school as the success of a Nurture Group depends on the continuity it provides for the children.	
	Portfolio of observations, checklists and assessments evidencing suitability for inclusion in the nurture group.	

	Within the Nurture Group there is a reference to the six principles of nurture[1] (E.G placed on wall)	
	The Nurture Group provision may be full time or part time over the period the child is accessing the provision.	
	The children are on the register of their mainstream class and they will join their class for appropriate activities/parts of the school day. [2]	
	The children will spend lunchtime and playtimes with other children in the school.	
	Children will normally attend for a period of three to four terms. There has also been planning for continuing assessment and gradual re-integration to mainstream class.	

[1] (The six principles of Nurture were originally devised by Eva Holmes, Principal Educational Psychologist in Enfield in the late 1980's)

[2] According to a handbook for schools- Welsh Government- CYP will attend mainstream class for lessons such as P.E, music and drama

	All school staff will have had training regarding the Nurture Group principles and the Nurture Group staff should ideally have attended training accredited by the National Nurture Group Network of from an Educational Psychologist.	
	Non-contact time should be available for the Nurture Group team to: - see parents - attend meetings concerning CYP - keep detailed assessment records - carry out in-class observations - meet outside agencies - liaise with the school's SENCO/Inclusion Coordinator and other staff	
	Children and young people within the NG are assessed using either the Boxall Profile or the Strengths and difficulties questionnaire	
	Promoting a whole school approach to nurture. All staff have been given the opportunity to see nurture room The Nurture Group is involved in a whole-school development plan. There is a school policy guidance on Nurture Groups	

Appendix J

Qualitative Observations

	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	School 5	School 6	School 7	School 8
- **Own Room** - **Sofa** - **Carpet** - **Cushions** - **Kitchen** - **Toys** - **Table and chairs for learning**	NG own large room Sofa Carpet Cushions Toys and table and chairs for learning No kitchen	School 2 has a whole corridor dedicated to nurture and therefore have three nurture groups in total. Sofa Kitchen Cushions Toys Table and chairs for learning	NG has very small room No sofa No carpet No kitchen Table and chairs for learning	NG has own large room Sofa Kitchen Carpet Cushions Toys and table and chairs for learning	NG has own large room Sofa Kitchen Carpet Cushions Toys and table and chairs for learning	NG has own large room Sofa Carpet Cushions Toys and table and chairs for learning	NG own room Sofa Carpet Cushions Toys and table and chairs for learning	NG own large room Table and chairs for learning
NG is staffed by a teacher and TA	Staffed by two TAs	The first NG is for KS1, the second is for pupils in lower	**Staffed by 1 TA**	**Staffed by 2 TAs**	**Staffed by 2 TAs**	**Staffed by one TA**	**Staffed by 2 TAs**	**Staffed by 1 TA**

Training?	Training provided by Nurture UK	KS2 and the third is for upper KS2. Each NG is run by two TAs and is overseen by a class teacher, who is the NG lead. Training provided by Nurture UK	TAs have received no training	Training provided by Nurture UK	TAs have received no training	Training provided by Nurture UK	TAs received training from the Nurture UK	TA received training from the Nurture UK.
The NG consists of 9 -12 children at any one time **How often do children attend?**	Year 2 access the NG three afternoon a week. Year 1 access the NG 2 days a week. Each group has 10 children each.	Each NG consists of 10 pupils. Pupils attend 4/5 afternoon/mornings a week	The NG is available for 12 children across years 3&4 who access the NG for 2 hours, 5 days a week.	NG is available to all year 2-6. 4 NGs with 5 pupils. Pupils attend for 45minutes for 1 day a week.	The NG is available to years 1-6. Groups of 6 children from KS1 attend the NG two times a week for 1.5 hours. KS2 pupils in groups of less than 8	The NG is available to years 4-6. There are 10 groups of 4 pupils who attend the NG for 1 hour.	The NG is available to years 4-6. 6 children attending twice a week for 2.5 hours	The NG is available to years 3-6. There are 3 groups of 10 pupils who access once a week.

					attend for 1 hour a week.			
Staff provide opportunities to model positive relationships. - **Positive language** - **Tone of voice** - **Positive gestures**	Positive language and tone of voice used throughout the 1.5 hour session.	Positive language and tone of voice used throughout the 1.5 hour session.	Positive language, gestures and voice used throughout the session.	Positive language, gestures and voice used throughout the session.	Positive language, gestures and voice used throughout the session.	Positive language, gestures and voice used throughout the session.	Positive language, gestures and voice used throughout the session.	Positive language, gestures and voice used throughout the session.
Activities in the nurture group include: - **Emotional literacy sessions** - **News sharing** - **Nurture snack** - **Curriculum activities** - **Opportunities for CYP**	Pupils complete differentiated curriculum-based work for the first hour of the session. In the second hour children complete work based upon emotional literacy.	Pupils complete curriculum-based work Pupils complete work based around emotional literacy. Pupils receive a nurture snack.	The emphasis of the NG is placed upon learning. Pupils complete differentiated curriculum-based work within each session.	Emphasis on emotional needs. Emotional literacy based activities. .	Emphasis on emotional needs. Pupils partake in play-based activities such as clay making and board games.	Emphasis on emotional needs. Pupils play a game for the first 10 minutes of the session where they discuss their feelings.	Emphasis on emotional needs. Session starts with pupils sharing their news.	Emphasis on emotional needs. Emotional literacy based activities Pupils complete material base on emotional literacy.

to celebrate their own progress (review of targets)	Pupils receive a nurture snack around the table. Pupils reviewed targets	Pupils reviewed targets			Pupils receive a nurture snack.	Pupils then play in the room for the rest of the session.	Pupils complete an art-based activity. Pupils receive a nurture snack around the table.	Complete circle time activities.
Portfolio of observations, checklists and assessments evidencing suitability for inclusion in the nurture group.	Targets for children visible placed on wall. Reviewed at the end of the session. TA has portfolio of pupils progression	Pupils have their own portfolio of work and targets. TA has assessment and checklist for each pupil. Pupils targets on wall.	No	No	No	No	Currently developing pupil targets	No
Within the Nurture Group there is a reference to the	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes

six principles of nurture[8] (E.G placed on wall)								
Pupil are on register of mainstream class	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pupils spend lunch and break with mainstream class	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pupils will normally attend for a period of three to four terms.	Pupils attend for two years.	Pupils attend for 3 to 4 terms.	Pupils attend for two years	Pupils attend for 1 year	Pupils attend for 1 year	Pupils attend for 1 year	Pupils have only been attending for 1.5 terms,	Pupils attend for 3 to 4 terms.
All school staff will have had training regarding the NG principles	No school staff have received training	No school staff have received training	No school staff have received training	No school staff have received training	No school staff have received training	No school staff have received training	No school staff have received training	No school staff have received training

---

[8] (The six principles of Nurture were originally devised by Eva Holmes, Principal Educational

Staff receive non-contact time To • **Meet parents** • **Liaise with SENcO**	TAs receive non-contact time for 2.5 hours a week TAs regularly meet with parents TAs regularly meet with SENCO and inclusion staff	TAs receive non-contact time for 2.5 hours a week TAs regularly meet with parent TAs regularly meet with SENCO and inclusion staff	TA receives 1 hour a week No contact with parents TA does not liaise with SENCO	TAs receive non-contact time for 2.5 hours a week TAs regularly meet with parent TAs regularly meet with SENCO and inclusion staff	TAs receive non-contact time for 2.5 hours a week TAs regularly meet with SENCO TA informally meets with parents (informal conversation afterschool).	TA receives non-contact time for 2.5 hours a week TAs regularly meet with SENCO No contact with parents	TA receives non-contact time for 2.5 hours a week TAs regularly meet with SENCO Will meet with parents	Unclear if TA receives non-contact time TAs regularly meet with SENCO
Use of BP or SDQ	Pupils assessed using the BP.	Pupils assessed using the BP	No use of BP	Pupils assessed using the BP	Pupils assessed using the BP.	No use of BP	Pupils assessed using the BP	Pupils assessed using the BP

Pen portraits of Qualitative Observation

School 1

This is a part-time NG available for years 1&2. Year 2 access the NG three afternoon a week. Year 1 access the NG 2 days a week. The NG is led by two TAs who have had training provided by Nurture UK. The room is spacious with a sofa and an area for learning which consists of a circular table and chairs. Children complete differentiated curriculum-based work for the first hour of the session. In the second hour children complete work based upon emotional literacy. In the final 15 minutes, the children receive a nurture snack around the table.

NG staff have received training.

School 2

School 2 has a whole corridor dedicated to nurture and therefore have three nurture groups in total. The space surrounding the classrooms contains a kitchen. Each nurture room has a whiteboard, a sofa and a learning area with desks and chairs. The first nurture group is for KS1, the second is for pupils in lower KS2 and the third is for upper KS2. Each NG is run by two TAs and is overseen by a class teacher, who is the NG lead.

All KS1 pupils attend on a full-time basis. KS2 pupils attend on a part-time, attending 4 or 5 afternoons a week. Children complete curriculum-based work and work based around emotional literacy. Children also receive a nurture snack. Pupils have a different break-time from their mainstream classroom peers.

NG staff have received training regarding nurture. Emphasis placed on pupil emotional well-being and learning.

School 3

This is a part-time NG and is operated by one TA. The emphasis of the NG is placed upon learning. The NG is available for 12 children across years 3&4 who access the NG for 2 hours, 5 days a week. The room is small and has no kitchen or sofa. Children complete differentiated curriculum-based work within each session.

TA has received no training regarding nurture.

School 4

School 4 is a part-time NG led by two TAs. 20 children access the group once a week for 45minutes. The room is a portable classroom located centrally on the school site.The nurture room consists of a kitchen, a learning area (table and chairs) and a sofa. Each 45-minute session is based around work which focuses on emotional literacy. At the end of each session, the pupils sit around the table and have a nurture snack.

TAs have received training from Nurture UK.

School 5

School 5 is a part-time NG where the emphasis is placed upon the children's well-being. The NG is located inside a portable classroom centrally on the school site, which has a kitchen, a living room area and a table and chairs. The NG is run by two TAs. The NG for years 1-6.

Groups of 6 children from KS1 attend the NG three times a week for 1.5 hours. KS2 pupils in groups of less than 8 attend for 1 hour a week. Within each NG session, pupils receive a nurture snack and their work varies from emotional literacy to an art-based task.

TAs have received no training concerning nurture.

School 6

This NG is led by one TA. The nurture room is quite large and consists of a ball pit, a sofa, toys and a table. NG is available for years 3-6. There are 10 groups of 4 children who attend the NG for 1 hour per week. The group is dedicated to the children's wellbeing. Children play a game for the first 10 minutes of the session where they discuss their feelings. Children then play in the room for the rest of the session.

School 7

School 7 is a part -time NG which has only been in operation for 1 term. The NG is run by 2 TAs. The NG was located in a small room and had 6 children attending twice a week. The room has a sofa, a kitchen area and a table and chairs. Within the two hour session, the pupils are asked to sit on the sofa and discuss their day, the pupils complete an art-based activity. The session finishes with the children receiving a nurture snack and playing with toys on the carpet.

TAs have received training form Nurture UK.

School 8

School 8 was a part-time NG run by 1 TA. The NG was located in a small room with the school builing. The room consists of with a table and chairs. Years 3-6 access for one hour. There are 3 groups of 10 pupils who access once a week. Within the hour session, pupils played games with the TA and completed emotional literacy work.

TA has received training from Nurture UK.

Appendix L

Examples of toys used with pupil participants