Independent Impact Evaluation Report

Brighter Futures: Nurture Outreach Service

November 2015

Introduction

This report provides an impact evaluation of the Brighter Futures Nurture Outreach Service. Brighter Futures was commissioned by the School Forum to run a pilot nurture service from September 2014 to April 2016, based upon consultation with primary heads and a range of professionals. This service was commissioned in response to reports indicating an increasing number of children with complex social, emotional and behavioural needs in mainstream schools within Bath and North East Somerset, particularly in Reception aged children. This trend is reflected nationally (CYP, 2015). The service also resonates with the new SEN/D reforms (DfE, 2013) in addressing children with social, emotional and mental health difficulties (SEMH) and addresses Ofsted's new Common Inspection Framework in relation to pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. The Project also addresses key government policy which seeks to narrow the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils (DfE, 2014).

Interventions informed by research on attachment needs and trauma are increasingly being recognised as significant in helping to support children with SEMH (Parker et al, 2016). Attachment issues and trauma affect children's relationships with peers, teachers and support staff. Securely attached children are more likely to attain higher academic grades, have greater emotional regulation, social competence, willingness to take on challenges and have lower levels of ADHD and delinquency (Bergin and Bergin, 2009). It has been suggested that 'schools may be the optimum sites for buffering the impact of stress, building resilience and enhancing individual capacities for learning' (Nagel, 2009). There has been increasing recognition of the need to address such issues on a national level from a range of major national organisations such as the Department for Education and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE).

Aims of the Nurture Outreach Service

1. To increase the capacity of schools to meet the needs of children with complex behaviour and emotional difficulties by developing staff skills and confidence in using the Nurture approach.

2. To offer those schools who are receiving children with complex behaviour and emotional difficulties to have a better understanding of the needs of these vulnerable children so they are supported in their mainstream school wherever possible.

Description of the Service

Brighter Futures is a non-profit social enterprise based at Three Ways School consisting of a team of 30+ highly skilled, specialist, multi-disciplinary practitioners including: educational psychologists, specialist teachers, occupational therapists, early years practitioners, Thrive trainers, theraplay specialists and play therapists, all of whom are specialists in nurturing approaches, trauma informed practice and attachment difficulties. An integral part of the Service is to develop the Thrive Approach which is a whole school programme that supports the emotional and social development of all children, in addition to targeted support for the most vulnerable learners. Thrive is a dynamic, developmental approach to working with children and young people that helps teachers and adults to interpret their behaviour and address their emotional needs. The Thrive Approach offers practical, effective tools and techniques that work, built around a web-based assessment and action planning tool, underpinned by a programme of training and mentoring support.

All cases are allocated a named Nurture specialist and are supervised by the Senior Educational Psychologist. The focus of the service is to support school staff to meet the needs of the children rather than providing 1:1 outside support with the child, thus empowering staff to support their pupils and building capacity of school staff.

Approaches used by the Nurture Outreach team:

- Whole school approach - Building the capacity of school staff through training, modelling nurture environments, nurture strategies and targeted interventions
- Classroom approach – providing consultancy and coaching for staff in nurture approaches, introducing the Thrive approach to assess, plan, do and review the impact of nurture interventions
- Providing consultancy and coaching for teaching assistants who are deployed to support children in a 1:1 or small group capacity
- Supporting staff to manage and engage learners during play times
- Integrating support from Early Years and Primary with other agencies (e.g. CAMHS, social care, paediatricians, speech and language therapists, neurologists) to support collaborative working
- Supervision for staff
- Modelling nurture strategies for use with groups of children e.g. 'sunshine circles'
- Providing training and ongoing CPD for school staff e.g. on Nurture, Attachment and Thrive Approaches.

Profile of children referred to the Nurture Outreach Service

Typical experiences of children referred for Nurture Outreach intervention include multiple parenting (e.g. foster care); multiple house moves (e.g. refugee and safe houses); children whose parent have experienced complex diagnosed mental health needs, complex substance use issues,

incarceration/police involvement; children who have experienced and been witness to domestic violence. At pre-intervention all the children in the study had very low concentration and application to task thresholds, inability to work alongside peers and poor capacity to interact with adults which included poor listening and verbal skills, as well as challenging behaviour and emotional needs.

Summary of impact

- The findings are demonstrably positive. All the progress data demonstrates there is a significant difference pre and post intervention with improvements in attendance, behaviour, academic attainment and social/emotional progress.

- The case study and questionnaire data reveal that schools have an increased capacity to support children with complex needs, staff have increased their skills and confidence in working with children with challenging behaviour and emotional needs, there is increased parental engagement and the focus children have improved their behaviour, confidence and self-esteem, social and emotional skills, peer and adult relationships and are more able to focus on their academic progress.

- There was a 100 % agreement that schools had received high quality advice and support from NOS and 100 % of staff agreed that they had increased confidence and understanding of how to meet the needs of vulnerable children.

- It was also highly apparent that the staff wished the service to continue as the following quotes demonstrate: '*NOS has been fantastic: it has made a real difference to our children's experience of mainstream school*' and another who wrote '*Continue to offer the service please!*'.

Findings of Impact Evaluation

Findings are drawn from the following data sources: Tracking Records (n= 20) of behaviour, academic progress, attendance, social and emotional progress, communication, Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (n=20), Staff Questionnaire (n=27) and 8 Case Studies (of children aged 4-11).

The report of preliminary findings is in the following parts:

Part A - Progress Data
Part B - Case Study thematic analysis
Part C - Evaluation of service

Part A: Progress Data

A total of 20 children participated in the study. All children were age 4 including 16 boys and 4 girls. 13 were FSM and 7 were not FSM. In total, 15 were white British, 4 were BME and 1 was white European.

Repeated measures t-tests were used to assess differences in pre- and post- intervention attendance, reading scores, strength and difficulties ratings, writing scores, maths scores, relationships, self-confidence, managing feelings, listening and attention, understanding and speaking scores using excel.

In the data sets that follow, results are correlated to nationally expected levels of progress in reading, writing, maths, relationships, self-confidence, managing feelings, listening and attention, understanding and speaking. The results show that there was a statistically significant improvement as a result of the interventions, helping to close the attainment gap. From baselines well below nationally expected levels for children entering school, over 50% of the cohort achieved nationally expected Early Learning Goals post intervention.   Had this project been able to collect follow-up data (Time 3 data), the trajectory suggests they would have reached or perhaps exceeded expected levels of progress. In a previous impact evaluation for Brighter Futures (Rose and McGuire-Snieckus, 2014), which adopted similar attachment-based intervention strategies for the targeted children (n-15), data was collected 3 months post-intervention and revealed the children had exceeded expected levels of progress.

In the tables below red lines indicate the nationally expected attainment levels for Early Years children and the blue lines represent the average outcomes for this cohort as a whole.

Attendance

There was a statistically significant increase in pre-intervention mean attendance (Mean = 84.43%) and post-intervention mean attendance (Mean = 92.29%), t = 2.53 (df = 19), $p < 0.05$. This difference is illustrated in Figure 1.
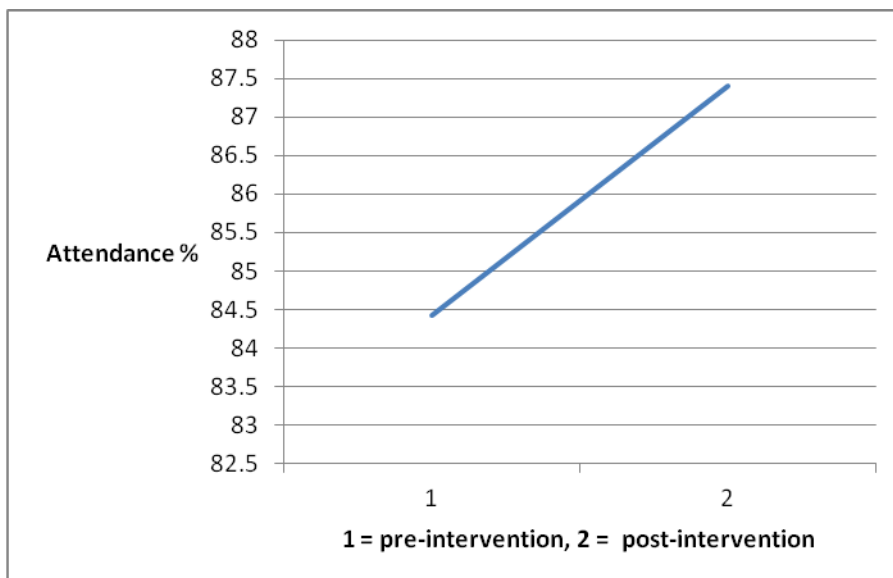
Figure 1. Mean difference in attendance. Note N = 20.

Strengths and difficulties questionnaire

There was a statistically significant reduction in pre-intervention mean scores on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Mean = 18.65) and mean post-intervention scores (Mean = 10.45), t = 9.34 (df = 19), $p < 0.05$. This difference is illustrated in Figure 2. A decrease denotes improvement i.e. reduction in difficulties relative to strengths.
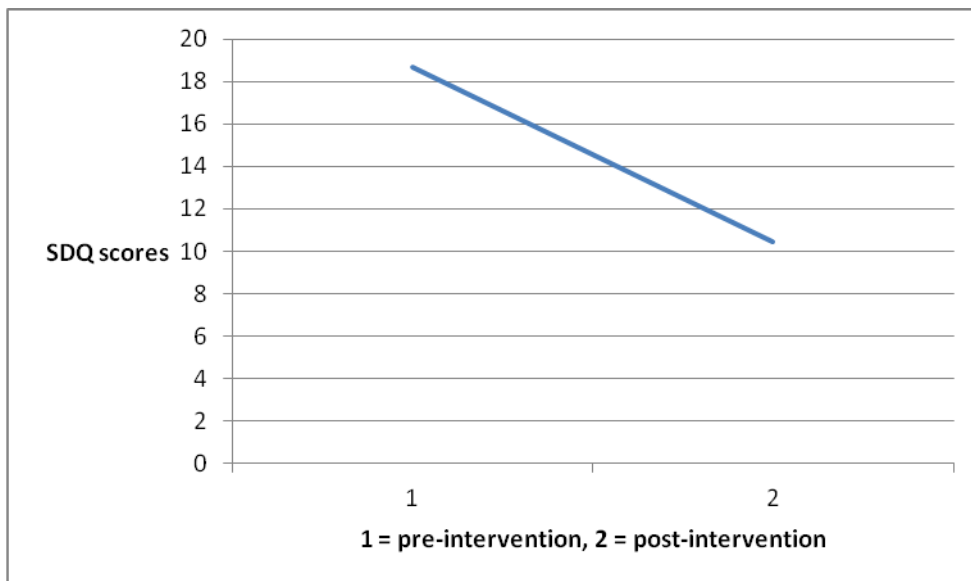

Figure 2. Mean difference in SDQ scores. Note N = 20.

Reading scores

There was a statistically significant increase in mean pre-intervention reading scores (Actual Mean = 4.55; Expected Mean = 9) and mean post-intervention reading scores (Actual Mean = 9.65, Expected Mean = 11), t = 10.05 (df = 19), $p < 0.05$. This difference is illustrated in Figure 3.
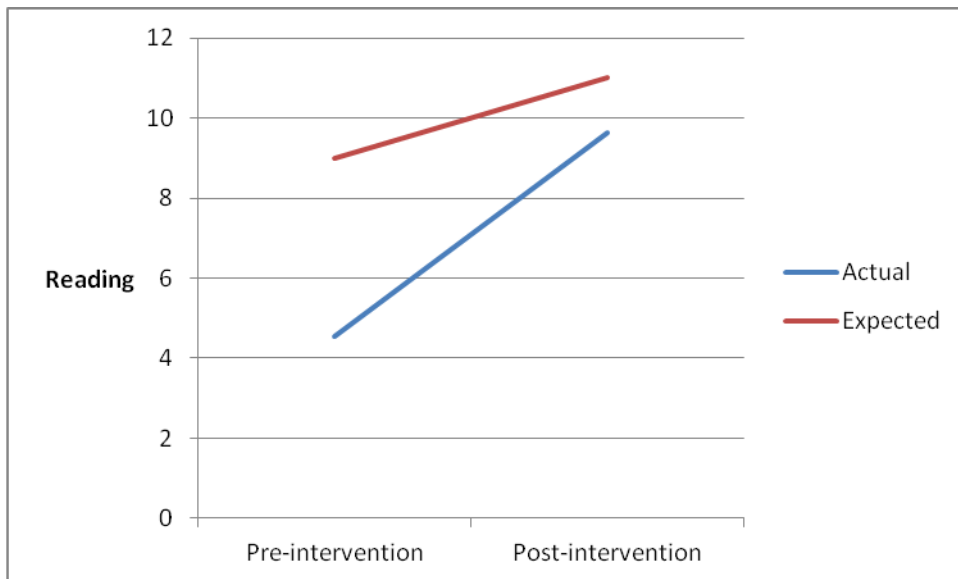
Figure 3. Mean difference in reading scores. Note N = 20

Writing scores

There was a statistically significant increase in pre-intervention mean scores on writing (Actual Mean = 4.8; Expected Mean = 9) and post-intervention mean scores on writing (Actual Mean = 9.6; Expected Mean = 11), t = 10.65 (df = 19), p < 0.05. This difference is illustrated in Figure 4.
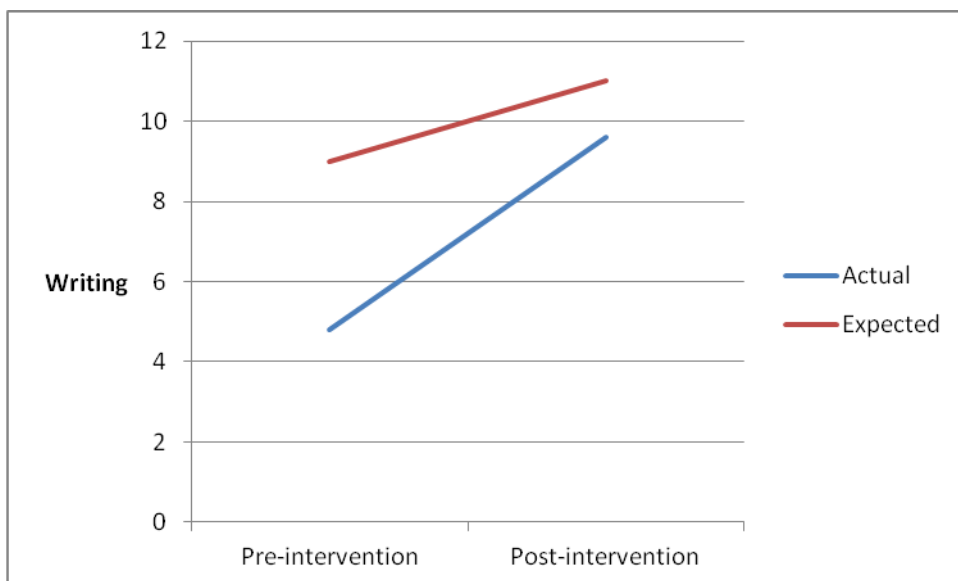

Figure 4. Mean difference in writing scores. Note N = 20.

Maths scores

There was a statistically significant increase in pre-intervention mean scores in maths (Actual Mean = 5.05; Expected Mean = 9) and post-intervention mean scores in maths (Actual Mean = 9.75; Expected Mean = 11), t = 13.78 (df = 19), p < 0.05. This difference is illustrated in Figure 5.
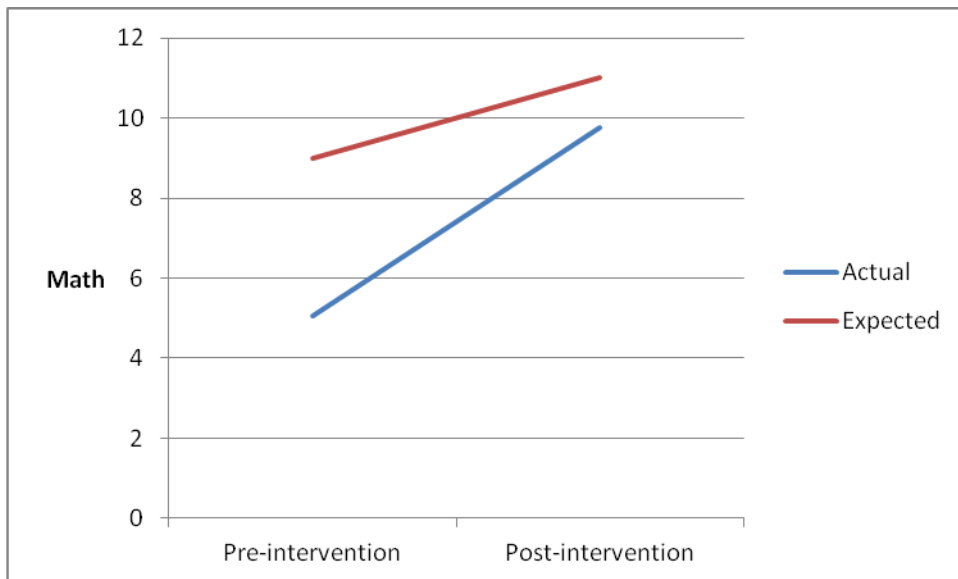
Figure 5. Mean difference in maths scores. Note N = 20.

Relationships

There was a statistically significant difference in pre-intervention mean scores in making relationships (Actual Mean = 4.4; Expected Mean = 9) and post-intervention mean scores in making relationships (Actual Mean = 9.34; Expected Mean = 11), t = 9.73 (df = 19), p < 0.05. This difference is illustrated in Figure 6.
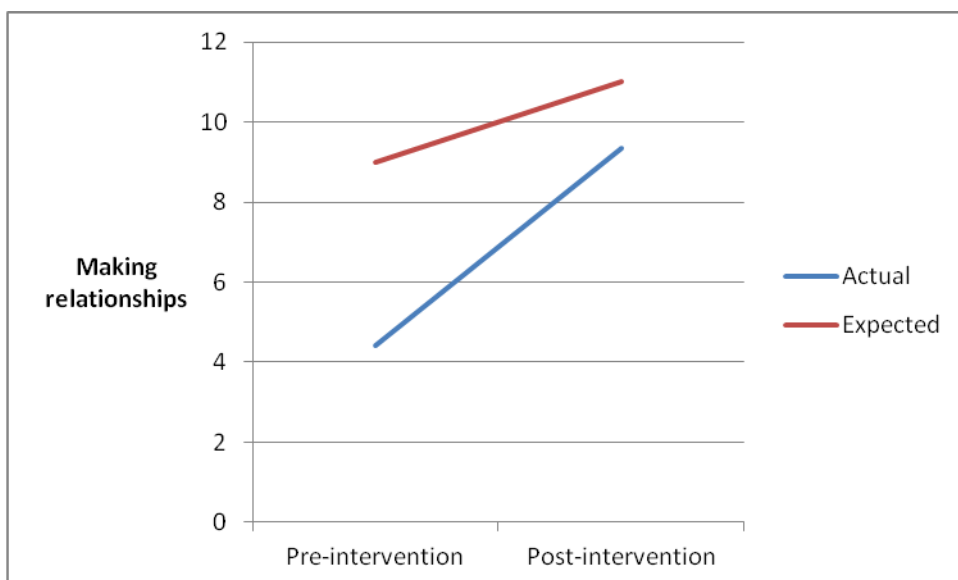

Figure 6. Mean difference in making relationship scores. Note N = 20

Self-confidence

There was a statistically significant difference in pre-intervention scores in self-confidence (Actual Mean = 5.1; Expected Mean = 9) and post-intervention mean scores in self-confidence (Actual Mean = 9.9; Expected Mean = 11), t = 0.79 (df = 19), p < 0.05. This difference is illustrated in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Mean difference in self-confidence. Note N = 20

Managing feelings

There was a statistically significant difference in pre-intervention mean scores in managing feelings (Actual Mean = 4.22; Expected Mean = 9) and post-intervention mean scores in managing feelings (Actual Mean = 9.53; Expected Mean = 11), t = 1.73 (df = 19), p < 0.05. This difference is illustrated in Figure 8.
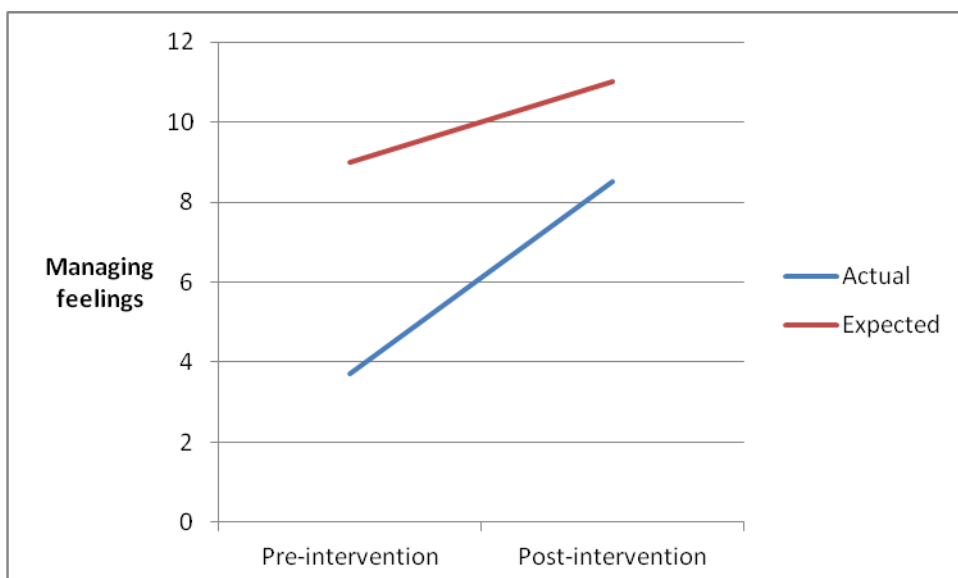
Figure 8. Mean difference in managing feelings scores. Note N = 20

Listening and attention

There was a statistically significant mean increase in pre-intervention scores in listening and attention (Actual Mean = 4.75; Expected Mean = 9) and post-intervention scores in listening and attention (Actual Mean = 9.4; Expected Mean = 11), t = 11.28 (df = 19), p < 0.05. This difference is illustrated in Figure 9.
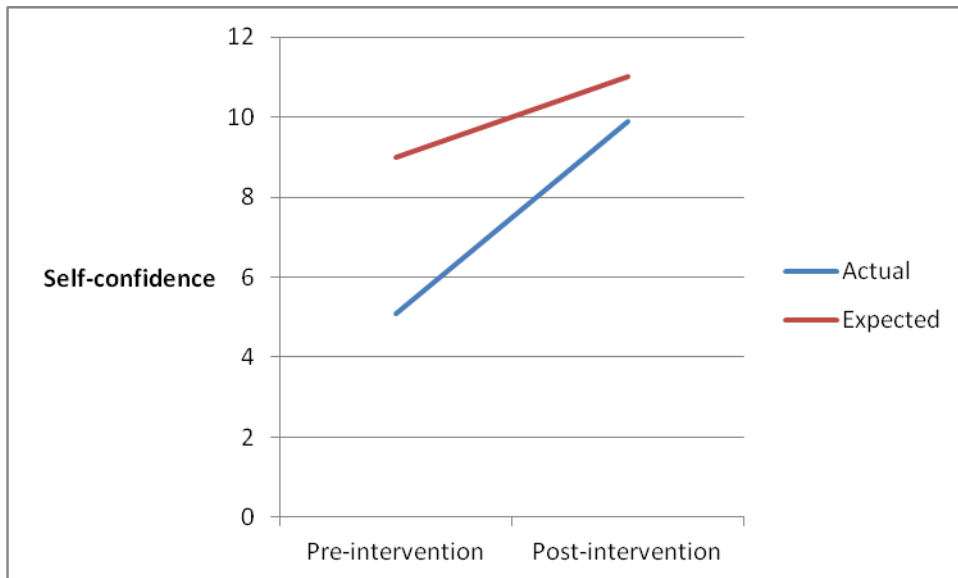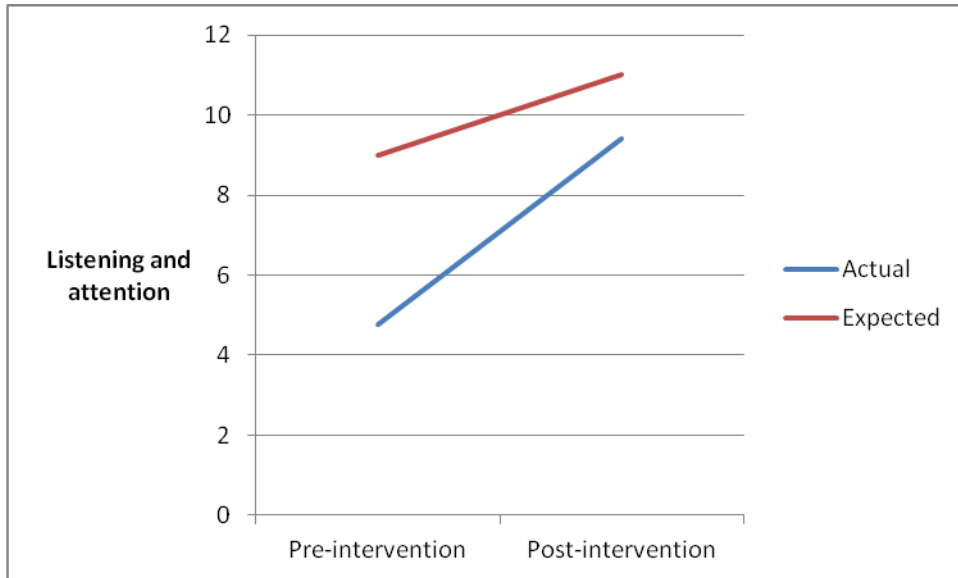

Figure 9. Mean difference in listening and attention. Note N = 20

Understanding

There was a statistically significant difference in pre-intervention scores on understanding (Actual Mean = 5; Expected Mean = 9) and post-intervention scores on understanding (Actual Mean = 10.15; Expected Mean = 11), t = 12.49 (df = 19), p < 0.05. This difference is illustrated in Figure 10.

Figure 10. Mean difference in understanding. Note N = 20

Speaking

There was a statistically significant difference in mean scores on speaking scores from pre-intervention (Actual Mean = 4.65; Expected Mean = 9) to post-intervention (Actual Mean = 9.5; Expected Mean = 11), t =13.04 (df = 19), $p < 0.05$. This difference is illustrated in Figure 11.

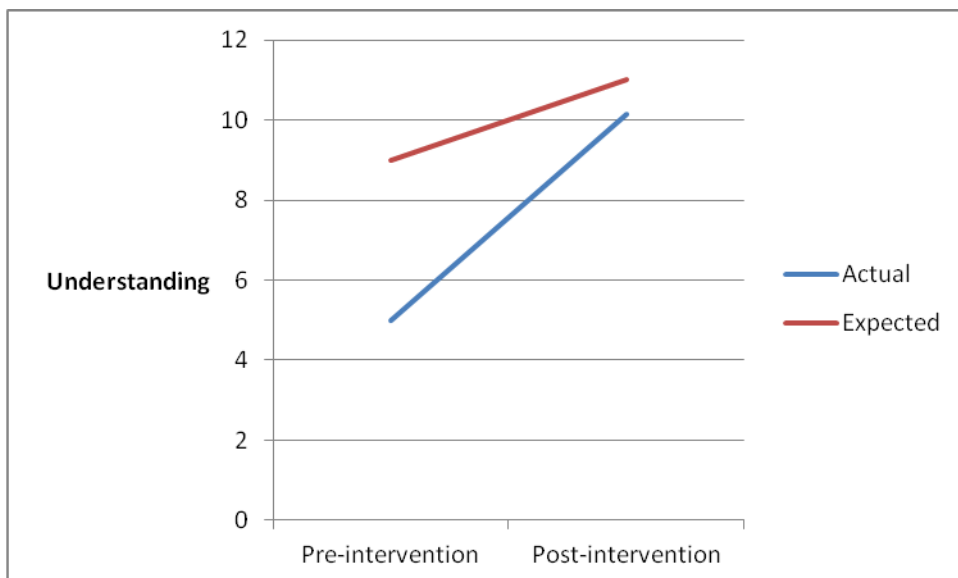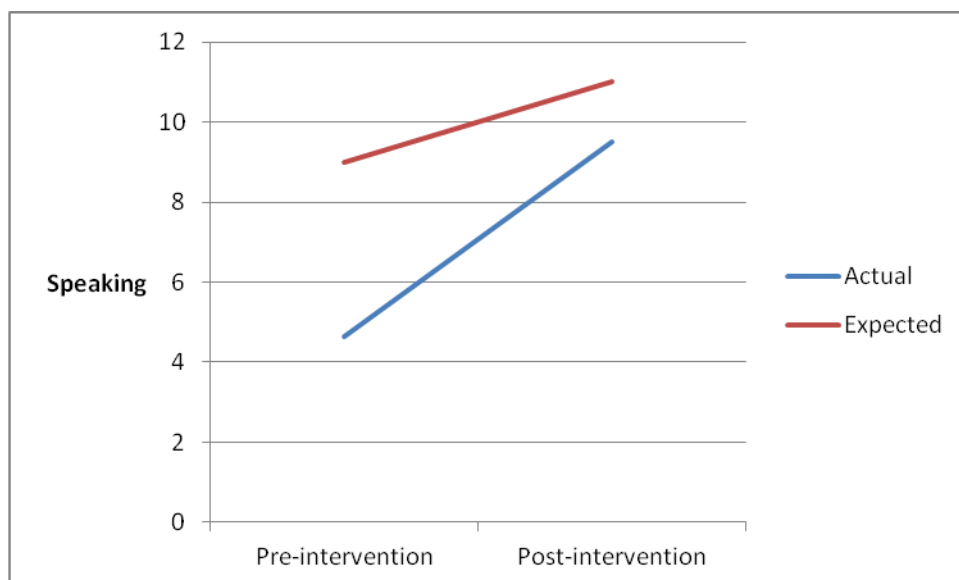Figure 11. Mean score difference on speaking. Note N = 20.

It should be noted that the percentage of students obtaining expected levels increased greatly from pre- to post-intervention (reading from 0% to 55%; writing from 0% to 55%, maths from 5% to 55%, making relationships from 0% to 50%, self-confidence from 0% to 60%, managing feelings from 0% to 45%, listening and attention from 0% to 50%, understanding from 0% to 65% and speaking from 0% to 60%) – thereby narrowing the gap between actual and achieved levels of attainment for this group with complex needs. As noted earlier in the report, had data been collected for a time period post-intervention (Time 3) it is likely that the expected levels would have been achieved or exceeded, as demonstrated in a similar evaluation undertaken of attachment-based interventions by Brighter Futures (Rose and McGuire-Snieckus, 2014). The percentage of pupils obtaining expected levels for each category for both pre-and post-intervention are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Percentage of pupils obtaining expected levels by category

	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention
Reading	0%	55%
Writing	0%	50%
Maths	5%	55%
Making relationships	0%	50%
Self-confidence	0%	60%
Managing feelings	0%	45%
Listening and attention	0%	50%
Understanding	0%	65%

Part B: Case Study thematic Analysis

The case study data from 8 children aged 4-11 were analysed using thematic analysis to ascertain impact of the Nurture Outreach Service (NOS) on the children and staff. The free text responses from the Staff Questionnaire were also analysed and incorporated. The following key findings emerged:

1. **Helped adults to interpret child's behaviour and address child's emotional needs**

All case studies highlighted the increased knowledge and confidence staff developed regarding understanding children's emotions and behaviours. Confidence grew in staff members' own abilities to put effective support strategies in place. Often, support began on a 1:1 basis and children were gradually encouraged to develop positive relationships with other adults, small groups of peers and whole class scenarios. This was led by the needs of the child. This finding is reflected in the following comments from staff:

'The HLTA and the headteacher comment that their understanding of the influence of disruptions in early relational experiences has changed significantly and as a result they are able to be empathic and clear about why certain behaviours occur and what they need to do to support them.'

'Greater understanding of trauma for all staff and lots of new strategies and techniques in our toolbox now.'

'Staff have more strategies to support behaviour management and have better understanding of the child's anxieties/frustration.'

2. **Staff have positive experiences of training and mentoring support**

Consistent and regular support from the NOS and colleagues within school was important in maintaining staff confidence. Training was met positively, especially as successes accrued throughout the year and could be shared by regular contact between professionals and parents. This finding is reflected in the following comments from staff:

'Very useful to have someone observing how things are and making suggestions.'

'Staff were supported to use an emotional vocabulary and were shown how to use 1:1 nurture activities.'

'The TA is now (due to the training and advice given by the Nurture Outreach Worker) a confident, skilled professional who will continue to support ….'

3. **Increased confidence in child's ability to work with 1:1, small groups and whole class**

The interventions were able to support children to increase their independence, trust and self-confidence within themselves and towards staff and peers. These changes mainly occurred over time and were incremental in nature. This was enabled by training staff had received, ensuring that children felt safe and secure before being able to risk experiencing more independent behaviours. This finding is reflected in the following comments from staff:

'Over the year FM has built a strong relationship with his 1:1 TA, the class TA and his class teacher. He will now go to them for help and support.'

'Child now engages more in whole class learning, his focus and attention has improved as well as his willingness to try new things.'

'Child now able to participate more fully in whole class and group sessions.'

4. Increased parental engagement

Developing the relationships between home and school was seen as particularly significant for some of the children, especially with regards to maintaining consistency across approaches. Providing parents with the support they needed to effect the necessary changes was important – the precursor to this was always developing a positive and supportive relationship between home and school which allowed honesty and transparency to lead the relationship. This finding is reflected in the following comments from staff:

'Support in meeting with parents to develop effective home/school strategies'

'Support and effective communication with B's mother so that consistent care is established and supported at home as well as at school.'

'As a result of consistent and open conversations for school, and as school's understanding of C's needs has developed, Mum has increased in her trust and openness with school…. Mum's trust in the school and in the Nurture Outreach Service has developed such that she has completed a 'Home' Thrive assessment.'

5. Positive impact of physiological/sensory support

The range of strategies offered is based upon the developmental needs of the child. The ability for children to learn to recognize their own needs and be allowed to act accordingly is key and can be seen within the initial need for physiological support. Case studies cite children learning to recognize overwhelming feelings and being able to control their response by taking themselves out of the situation. This may be seen as empowering for the child. This finding is reflected in the following comments from staff:

'Ideas for sensory play and managing emotions, frequency of visits very useful and helpful.'

'Sensory activities provided by NOS have benefitted the whole class.'

'A sensory approach would be useful so I developed a 6 week program using one of the senses a week that I modelled to the TA.'

6. Positive impact of relational support

TA and HLTA support for these children was significant on all counts. The relationships between the TAs/keyworkers/HLTAs and the child enabled trust, safety and security to develop and from there, further development could take place. Building up the confidence of key workers and support staff through effective training and offering practical and realistic strategies for them to

use and employ was a vital part of the process. This finding is reflected in the following comments from staff:

'J has developed positive relationships with staff and children. His SDQ scores indicate a positive increase in peer relationships.'

'D is showing that he trusts the adults in school and feels safe in school.'

'Lovely, trusted relationship with child and NOS worker.'

7. Positive impact of affective/cognitive support

The ability to identify emotions and put those feelings into words is a key outcome for later development and can be seen within the case studies. Facing new challenges that often involve change or transition are seen to be carefully monitored with support built in as and when required, allowing children to feel acceptable levels of apprehension within a calm and supportive framework. This enabled confidence in risk taking within the school learning environment and developed independence, and an increased sense of self-esteem for the children to progress their learning. This finding is reflected in the following comments from staff:

'J is able to make progress with his learning. His EYFA profile indicates 'good' progress in almost all areas.'

'Shown marked progress, particularly in respect to his re-engagement with learning and willingness to take academic risks to achieve outcomes of quality in which he has demonstrated pride.'

'D has a broadening emotional vocabulary which he regularly uses… he can mostly say what is causing his emotions.'

8. Increased capacity of school to meet the needs of children with complex social and emotional difficulties

The impact of these interventions means that schools feel more confident in dealing with children displaying SEMH (SEBD). There have been clear success stories and the lessons can be taken on and used with other children. What is also clear is the sense that working as a group to support a specific child has brought staff together and promoted a sense of collaboration and unity. It is especially significant that in many cases, the SLT has taken a significant role in promoting and adopting the Nurturing interventions which provides much needed flexibility within timetabling, school interventions and home/school relationships. This finding is reflected in the following comments from staff:

'School report confidence in working with pupils with SEBD presentation. School report understanding the reason for dysregulated behaviour.'

'We are now more confident in meeting the child's needs and his well-being has improved due to this.'

'Senior leaders at the school have been proactive in taking on new systems to support a child in need, reviewing safety daily.'

9. A demonstrated increase in child's self esteem, self confidence and social skills

The increase in self-confidence and social skills can be seen for the children within every case study. The importance of feeling a sense of belonging, inclusion and knowledge that the child is wanted and liked is a hallmark of all the case studies. The impact this has had in developing the children's confidence in peer relationships and adopting a secure place in their own world seems profound. This finding is reflected in the following comments from staff:

'Being able to participate in age-appropriate friendships and games during break times without direct adult support'

'Expresses motivation to be in school and class more, wanting to be treated as his peers are, and believing he is capable of the work expectations.'

'Wants to come to school. More confidence. More smiles. Will support others. Shows empathy when someone has hurt themselves.'

Part C: Evaluation of BF services

Staff completed a questionnaire on the impact of the NOS (n=27) from 18 schools (Head 2, Dep Head/SENCO 3, Class Teacher 15, TA 7). Descriptive statistics of staff self-report ratings of the service were analysed using Excel and data visualisation of the free text using Wordle.com.

Staff self-report

A summary staff questionnaire was disseminated to assess the impact of the service. In total, 27 members of staff participated. 100% strongly agreed or agreed that they have received high quality advice and support from NOS. 100% strongly agreed or agreed that they feel more confident in meeting the needs of the vulnerable child/children. 96% agreed or strongly agreed that the well-being of the targeted child (children) has improved. 89% agreed or strongly agreed that targeted child (children) has made progress with their learning. 96% agreed or strongly agreed that NOS support has helped staff to adapt learning and/or environment for vulnerable children. 100% agreed or strongly agreed that staff have increased understanding of how to meet the needs of children with attachment difficulty/trauma. These findings are illustrated in Figure 12.
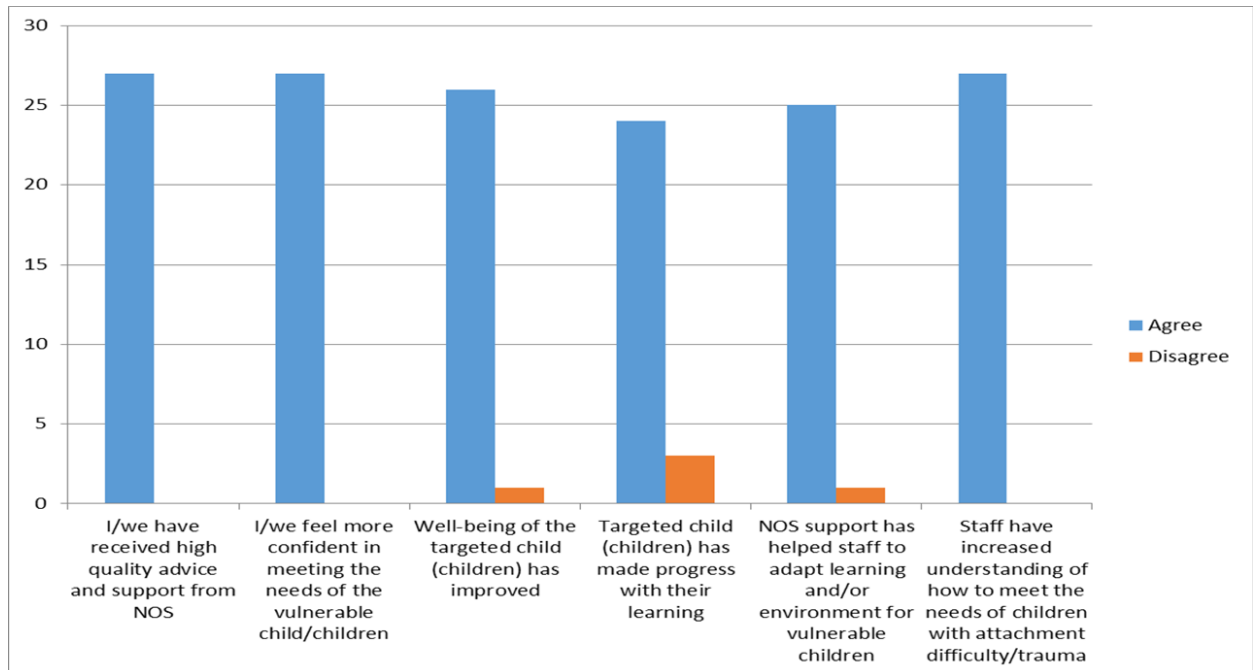
Figure 12. Summary of Staff Questionnaire on Impact of Interventions of Nurture Outreach Service. Note N = 27

Free text responses to comment on the two most positive outcomes were uploaded onto Wordle to visualise the most frequency cited words including 'support' (i.e. 'Staff have more strategies to support behaviour management and have better understanding of the child's anxieties/frustrations'), 'child' (i.e., 'Child now able to participate more fully in whole class and group sessions') and 'now' ('child able to now join in with peers and also able to regulate his emotions a lot better'). The free text responses are illustrated in Figure 13.

Figure 13. Data visualisation (word cloud) of free text responses to the two most positive outcomes. Note N = 27.

Free text responses to comment on suggestions for development or improvements in the Nurture Outreach Service were uploaded on Wordle to reveal the most frequently cited words which included 'NOS' (i.e., 'NOS has been fantastic – has made a real difference to our children's experience of mainstream school'), 'Child' ('Opportunities for a TA to observe NOS worker working with child'), and 'relevant' (i.e., 'Staff training to be planned before the child is in school – to equip all staff with relevant skills'). The frequency count of words in this free text response is illustrated in Figure 14.

Figure 14. Data visualisation (word cloud) of free text responses to suggestions for development. Note N = 27.

This analysis has not revealed any clear indications of how the service needs to improve. However, the following suggestions could be drawn from the questionnaires:

- Opportunities for a TA to observe NOS worker working with a child

- Start intervention in pre-school year

- Signpost to more training opportunities

- Train whole team

- More strategies

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