



## *Family Links*

transforming schools and families

### **Maeve Duckmanton – Assistant Head Teacher John Watson School for Special Needs**

The Nurturing Programme totally reinforces everything that I do. It's really honed my skills. I have lots more ideas and strategies to support me in developing relationships with pupils and to help them understand their feelings and actions. I'm more skilled at talking about feelings and so are they. I was empathic before, but I'm much more so now because I know the real value of what comes back when you give that response.

I've really enjoyed the training and got so much from it. I feel it's made me a more effective communicator. I have found that empathy is a much better way of responding to people who are having a difficult time.

The parent feedback from the first group was really good. For one parent it's only her and her daughter, who has quite profound learning difficulties. It was hard for her. For instance, using the family reward chart was difficult because her daughter wouldn't ever be able to give her Mum a reward. But I believe that particular Mum had a boost to her self-esteem during the course and she said it was a really positive experience for her. One of the parents at the end of the Programme said "I've finally accepted my child as he is and actually I'm much happier now than I was before." That's huge!

I think that the Nurturing Programme is so well planned. You can clearly see where the progression comes from and when you're delivering it you can see that it's so well-written. Useful techniques include time out, choices and consequences, empathy and ignoring – as long as everybody is consistent. Consistency is the most important thing that needs to happen in schools, also that the Management Team understands how the Programme works and backs everything up. Ignoring is brilliant – in the right time and place. So much harder for a parent to do though I think, as a teacher I'm not as emotionally attached to the children. I can clearly see why it's left until the end of the Programme to introduce.

Before we had training in the Nurturing Programme at John Watson School, I was working with a student who wouldn't follow instructions and was showing extremely controlling behaviour. I was advised to give him lots of praise, which was exactly what none of us felt like doing! I persuaded my staff that we should all try to do it and at the end of three months he was compliant, he was joining in and the lovely person we hoped was in there was able to come out.

I think the biggest thing is the empathic response. Both with parents and with colleagues – it's amazing how supported people feel by receiving an empathic comment or gesture. They have really appreciated receiving that time just to listen. I would've given it anyway, except that I'm conscious that my use of empathy is stronger than it would've been naturally. I have a heightened awareness of it.