



# Case Study: NEST at Boroughmuir High School: Youth Work Supporting Neurodivergent Young People

The NEST group was established in early 2025 through a partnership between Boroughmuir High School's Wellbeing Hub and a youth worker from Edinburgh Council's Youth and Children's Work Team within the Wider Achievement and Lifelong Learning Service. The group is grounded in the Salvesen Mindroom Centre NEST Toolkit, which provides a strengths-based framework for supporting neurodivergent young people across four key areas: Nurture, Emotions, Skills and Transitions.

Boroughmuir NEST offers a voluntary, youth work led space where neurodivergent young people can build relationships, develop confidence and co-design projects that matter to them. Sessions run every Tuesday lunchtime and are supported by the youth worker, the Wellbeing Hub, and a rotational team of 3–4 neurodivergent teachers, offering valued lived-experience role modelling.

Although attendance varies due to the voluntary nature of the youth work approach, a core group of around ten young people with mixed gender identities and who are neurodivergent attend each week. The group's voluntary nature has been key to its success: young people attend because they want to, not because they are sent. This foundation of choice builds trust, ownership and genuine engagement.



Parents and carers reported significant benefits for their children:

- All said their child learned new things about themselves or others and reported that they were participating in new activities
- Most parents said their children grew in confidence, developed new skills and enjoyed the group

# Approach

Youth work's combination of choice, trust and co-production has enabled NEST participants to thrive both personally and socially, while also influencing the wider school community.

NEST is underpinned by a youth work approach built around:

Voluntary participation - Young people choose to attend, creating ownership, trust and authentic engagement.

Relationships First - Youth workers build informal, trusted relationships that help young people feel heard, understood and safe.

Strengths-Based Development - Activities are shaped around interests and sensory needs, enabling young people to succeed on their own terms.

Young Person-led practice - Participants decide what matters, shape agendas, lead projects and influence change.

Identity-Affirming Environments - Neurodivergent staff provide relatable role models and help normalise diverse ways of thinking, communicating and engaging.

Rights-Based Approach - Enabling young people to be included, have a voice and participate meaningfully in decisions that affect them.

"Creating safe spaces for young people and working with partners to support this is crucial to our vision of inclusion. NEST is a wonderful example of this in action... The youth worker's relationship-focused approach complements teachers' expertise and helps create emotional and psychological safety for our young people."

-Headteacher



## Impact on School Culture and Partners

### Raising Understanding of Neurodiversity

NEST designed and delivered a whole-school assembly for Neurodiversity Celebration Week, taking responsibility for content creation, script development, slide design and public speaking. The presentation was later adapted for delivery across local feeder primary schools, strengthening early relationships and easing transitions for neurodivergent pupils.

### Influencing School Culture and Policy

The school consulted NEST directly on uniform reform. Young people shared lived-experience insights into sensory comfort, textures, zips and accessibility; ensuring policy changes are grounded in pupil voice.

### Designing Inclusive School Events

After identifying sensory challenges during Halloween celebrations, NEST proposed and began planning a Christmas Chill Cave, a quiet, calming space during the school party for any pupil who might need it. This reflects their leadership, problem-solving skills and commitment to whole-school inclusion.

# Impact on young people

Youth work's relationship-based, rights-focused approach has been central to NEST's impact. Young people consistently describe the group as safe, accepting and empowering.

## IMPROVED WELLBEING & CONFIDENCE

- More than half of the group reported increased confidence.
- Everyone in the group said they had fun and new positive experiences.

## SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Through youth-led assemblies, outreach visits and collaborative planning:

- More than half of the participating young people improved their communication skills.
- Half of the young people gained additional leadership skills.
- Half of the young people took build new decision-making skills.

## COMMUNITY & PEER SUPPORT

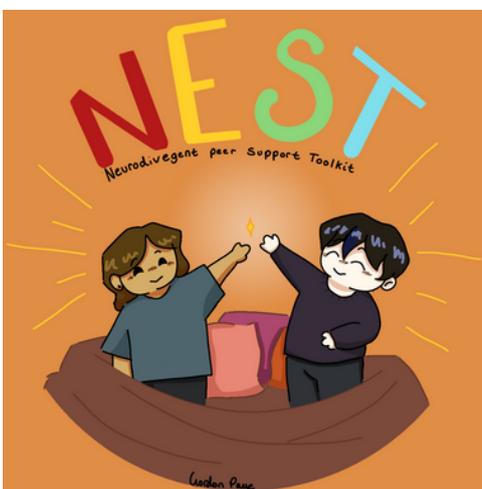
For many, NEST has become a vital relational space, something neurodivergent young people often struggle to access in traditional school environments.

The group's warm, pupil-led culture has also enabled new members to join without barriers, demonstrating inclusive peer support in action.

"People can understand me if I am myself."  
-Young person



"Love being with people who like me for me."  
-Young person



Logo designed by Young Person

"I learned how to put together a good assembly and that it's really fun hanging out with other people who are neurodivergent!"

-Young person



I enjoy the leadership and the community we have created."

-Young person

