



Job Description: Head of School – Nurture Pathway

Job Title: Head of School Nurture

Reports to: Headteacher

Line Management: Nurture Pathway Teachers

Salary: £56,082.00 - £65,010.00 per annum

Location: Serenity School Old Palace Croydon, CR0 1AX

About Serenity School Old Palace, Croydon

Serenity School Croydon is part of Serenity Education Group and provides specialist education for pupils with a range of special educational needs and disabilities, including Autism Spectrum Disorder, Severe Learning Difficulties, Moderate Learning Difficulties, Global Learning Delay, Speech, Language and Communication Needs, complex communication needs and associated social, emotional and behavioural needs.

All pupils have identified SEND needs and require highly personalised, carefully sequenced and well-adapted provision. Many pupils have complex communication profiles, including pupils who are pre-verbal, non-verbal or minimally verbal.

The school has a large and growing cohort and provides education through two key pathways: Nurture and Semi-Formal. The Nurture Pathway supports pupils working at the earliest developmental learning stages, including pupils with significant barriers to communication, engagement, regulation, independence and readiness for learning.

Our vision is excellence from enrolment to graduation. This means that every aspect of our work, from curriculum planning and classroom delivery to communication, independence, regulation, safeguarding, personal development and preparation for adulthood, must be purposeful, well led and focused on securing the best possible outcomes for pupils.

Our values are Inclusion, Independence and Self-Worth. These values shape how we work with pupils, families, staff, local authorities and each other.

Purpose of the Role

The Head of School – Nurture Pathway will provide strong day-to-day and strategic leadership for the Nurture provision at Serenity School Croydon.

The role is focused on ensuring that pupils with SLD, GLD, complex learning needs, Autism, complex communication profiles and early developmental learning profiles receive high-quality, structured, ambitious and developmentally appropriate provision.

The postholder will lead specialist curriculum implementation, including the effective use of the EQUALS Curriculum where appropriate, communication-focused provision, classroom practice, staff development, pupil progress, safeguarding culture and the quality of pupils' daily experience.

The Head of School will work closely with the Headteacher / Executive Headteacher and the wider leadership team to ensure the school operates with clarity, consistency and high expectations. The postholder will be expected to lead visibly, model excellent practice, support and challenge staff, and ensure that improvement actions lead to measurable impact.

This is a practical, visible and hands-on leadership role. The successful candidate must be credible in specialist SEND classrooms, able to evaluate the quality of provision accurately, and skilled in turning evidence into precise improvement actions.

Key Responsibilities

1. Leadership of the Nurture Pathway

The Head of School will:

- Provide strong, visible and consistent leadership of the Nurture Pathway.
- Lead the day-to-day quality, organisation and effectiveness of Nurture provision for a large cohort of pupils.
- Ensure Nurture provision is purposeful, structured, ambitious and developmentally appropriate.
- Establish clear expectations for teaching, communication, regulation, routines, transitions and pupil engagement.
- Support staff to understand what strong Nurture provision looks like and how to deliver it.
- Ensure pupils are placed appropriately within the Nurture Pathway and that their provision matches their learning, communication, sensory and regulation profiles.
- Work closely with leaders responsible for the Semi-Formal Pathway to ensure clear transition, progression and consistency across pathways.
- Ensure Nurture provision is rooted in specialist pedagogy, not generic care, supervision or activity-based provision.
- Contribute to whole-school leadership, improvement planning and operational decision-making.
- Lead with clarity, warmth, consistency and professional authority.

2. Specialist curriculum leadership and implementation

The Head of School will:

- Lead the implementation and ongoing development of the Nurture curriculum.
- Ensure curriculum planning is developmentally appropriate, ambitious and carefully adapted for pupils with SLD, GLD, complex learning needs, Autism and complex communication profiles.
- Lead the effective implementation of the EQUALS Curriculum where appropriate, ensuring that curriculum delivery is purposeful, developmentally appropriate and matched to pupils' communication, cognition, regulation and independence needs.
- Ensure the Nurture curriculum supports:
 - Expressive and receptive communication.
 - Social communication and interaction.
 - Engagement and participation.
 - Emotional regulation and co-regulation.
 - Independence and functional life skills.
 - Attention, focus and readiness to learn.

- Sensory regulation and purposeful participation.
- Personal development, safety and self-awareness.
- Early cognition, exploration and problem-solving.
- Play, interaction and early developmental learning where appropriate.
- Ensure curriculum planning reflects clear developmental progression.
- Ensure learning is broken down into meaningful steps without reducing ambition.
- Ensure schemes of learning and classroom planning are consistently implemented.
- Support teachers to translate curriculum intent into high-quality classroom practice.
- Ensure the curriculum links meaningfully to EHCP outcomes, communication needs, independence and preparation for adulthood.
- Work with the Headteacher and relevant leaders to ensure appropriate alignment between Nurture and Semi-Formal curriculum pathways.

3. Early developmental learning

The Head of School will:

- Ensure provision is designed around how pupils at early developmental learning stages learn best.
- Lead staff understanding of early cognition, exploration, communication, anticipation, interaction, play, regulation and engagement.
- Ensure learning opportunities are intentional, meaningful and linked to pupils' developmental profiles.
- Support staff to use routines, repetition, modelling, interaction, sensory experiences and communication opportunities to build learning over time.
- Ensure staff understand the difference between activity completion and genuine developmental progress.
- Support staff to identify and evidence small-step progress in communication, engagement, regulation, independence and early problem-solving.
- Ensure pupils are given opportunities to practise and generalise skills across contexts, routines and relationships.
- Ensure staff understand that progress for pupils with SLD, GLD and complex learning needs may be demonstrated through small steps, increased consistency, generalisation of skills, improved communication, increased independence, greater tolerance, purposeful engagement and participation across routines and contexts.

4. Communication-focused provision, PECS and AAC

The Head of School will:

- Ensure communication development is central to all Nurture provision.
- Lead the consistent implementation of effective communication approaches, including:
 - Total Communication.
 - PECS.
 - AAC systems.
 - Visual communication systems.
 - Objects of reference.
 - Communication boards and symbol systems.
 - Intensive Interaction where appropriate.
 - Structured communication environments.
 - Explicit communication teaching.
- Ensure communication approaches are used intentionally as part of teaching, routines, transitions, personal care, choices and social interaction.

- Support staff to understand how pupils communicate through behaviour, movement, gesture, vocalisation, visuals, objects, symbols, words, actions, assistive technology and communication devices.
- Ensure classrooms are communication-rich environments that promote interaction, choice, anticipation, participation and independence.
- Monitor whether PECS, AAC, visual supports and other communication systems are being used consistently and effectively across the school day.
- Support staff to manage, maintain and implement pupils' individual communication systems effectively.
- Work collaboratively with therapists, SENCOs and external professionals where appropriate.
- Ensure communication approaches are personalised, purposeful and embedded into pupils' daily provision.

5. Teaching, learning and classroom practice

The Head of School will:

- Evaluate and improve specialist teaching quality across Nurture provision through:
 - Lesson visits.
 - Learning walks.
 - Engagement observations.
 - Communication observations.
 - Learning evidence reviews.
 - Planning reviews.
 - Pupil progress reviews.
 - Staff coaching and feedback.
- Establish clear expectations for effective Nurture teaching, including:
 - Structured teaching approaches.
 - Predictable routines.
 - Visual supports.
 - Clear communication modelling.
 - Intentional adult interaction.
 - Appropriate scaffolding.
 - Regulation-informed practice.
 - Sensory-aware provision.
 - Effective use of teaching assistants.
 - Purposeful engagement and participation.
 - High-quality play, exploration and early developmental teaching where appropriate.
- Support staff to understand how pupils with SLD, GLD, complex needs and early developmental profiles learn.
- Support staff to recognise the difference between care, activity and learning.
- Coach teachers and support staff so that provision leads to meaningful communication, engagement, independence and progress.
- Challenge weak or inconsistent practice professionally and ensure follow-up leads to improvement.
- Model, where appropriate, high-quality adult interaction, communication strategies and structured learning approaches.

6. Staff development, coaching and professional growth

The Head of School will:

- Develop the knowledge, confidence and consistency of teachers and support staff within the Nurture Pathway.
- Coach, model and support staff to improve specialist teaching and communication practice.
- Provide clear, precise and developmental feedback following lesson visits, learning walks, evidence reviews and classroom observations.
- Design and deliver professional development linked to the needs of pupils and staff.
- Ensure staff understand SLD, GLD, Autism, complex communication, early developmental learning, regulation and engagement.
- Support staff to implement PECS, AAC, Total Communication and visual supports consistently and confidently.
- Support teachers to plan purposeful learning that links to pupils' developmental profiles, EHCP outcomes and curriculum priorities.
- Support teaching assistants to understand their role in communication, engagement, prompting, scaffolding, regulation and independence.
- Build a strong culture of professional learning, reflection and improvement.
- Identify strong practice and use it to develop others.
- Address inconsistent or ineffective practice promptly and professionally.
- Ensure staff development leads to visible improvement in pupils' daily experience and progress.

7. Staff leadership, culture and accountability

The Head of School will:

- Lead, support and develop teachers and support staff within the Nurture Pathway.
- Establish a culture of high expectations, consistency, warmth and professional accountability.
- Ensure staff understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to teaching, communication, regulation, safeguarding and pupil progress.
- Support new staff induction and ensure staff are confident in specialist SEND approaches.
- Address inconsistency or underperformance promptly and professionally.
- Build a strong team culture focused on pupils' communication, independence, engagement and progress.
- Ensure staff work in a coordinated and consistent way around pupils with complex needs.
- Lead staff through change with clarity, resilience and consistency.

8. Engagement, regulation and readiness for learning

The Head of School will:

- Ensure provision supports pupils to develop engagement, emotional regulation and readiness for learning.
- Lead the implementation of effective co-regulation and self-regulation strategies.
- Ensure staff understand behaviour as communication.
- Support staff to use proactive strategies that reduce barriers to learning.
- Ensure pupils are supported to develop attention, anticipation, participation, choice-making and independence.
- Ensure learning environments are structured, predictable and purposeful.
- Support staff to evidence progress in engagement, regulation, communication and independence over time.
- Ensure regulation strategies are linked to learning and participation, not used in isolation from curriculum and teaching.

- Work with the wider leadership team to ensure behaviour, safeguarding and pastoral systems support effective learning.

9. Assessment, progress and evidence

The Head of School will:

- Ensure assessment systems for Nurture provision are meaningful, robust and appropriate to pupils' developmental levels.
- Support teachers to align assessment with curriculum progression, EHCP outcomes and individual communication profiles.
- Ensure staff can evidence:
 - Communication progress.
 - Engagement and participation.
 - Regulation and readiness for learning.
 - Independence and functional skills.
 - Early cognition and problem-solving.
 - Social interaction and personal development.
 - Play, exploration and early developmental progress where appropriate.
- Ensure evidence of progress includes more than data alone, drawing on:
 - Observations.
 - Learning evidence.
 - Communication evidence.
 - Pupil profiles.
 - EHCP-linked outcomes.
 - Staff assessment.
 - Pupil engagement and participation over time.
- Analyse progress evidence and translate findings into clear improvement priorities.
- Support staff to distinguish between attendance, participation, activity completion and genuine progress.
- Ensure staff understand how to capture meaningful evidence for pupils who may not produce written work.

10. Safeguarding, welfare and pupil experience

The Head of School will:

- Promote a strong safeguarding culture across the Nurture Pathway.
- Ensure pupils' dignity, safety, communication and welfare are central to all provision.
- Ensure staff understand pupils' individual needs, risks, communication profiles and support plans.
- Work with the safeguarding team to ensure concerns are identified, recorded and responded to appropriately.
- Ensure routines, transitions, personal care arrangements and learning environments are safe, respectful and well organised.
- Ensure pupils experience calm, consistent, purposeful and nurturing provision.
- Ensure families and professionals have confidence in the quality and safety of provision.

11. Quality assurance and improvement

The Head of School will:

- Implement a consistent quality assurance cycle across the Nurture Pathway.
- Produce clear, precise and evaluative reports for the Headteacher / Executive Headteacher.
- Identify strengths, weaknesses, risks and non-negotiables.
- Set clear actions with ownership, deadlines and impact measures.
- Follow up agreed actions and check whether improvement has been embedded.
- Maintain strong evidence for Ofsted, commissioning and internal accountability.
- Ensure quality assurance focuses on impact for pupils, not just completion of processes.
- Ensure leaders and staff can explain and evidence the rationale, quality and impact of Nurture provision.
- Use quality assurance findings to inform staff development, coaching and pathway improvement.

12. Collaboration with the Semi-Formal Pathway and wider school

The Head of School will:

- Work closely with leaders of the Semi-Formal Pathway to ensure consistency across the school.
- Support clear decision-making about pupil pathway placement.
- Ensure pupils have appropriate progression routes between Nurture and Semi-Formal provision where appropriate.
- Share strong practice across pathways.
- Contribute to whole-school improvement priorities.
- Work collaboratively with the Headteacher / Executive Headteacher, SENCO, safeguarding team, therapy staff, teachers, support staff and central leaders.
- Support the development of a coherent whole-school culture across both pathways.

Person Specification

Essential criteria

Candidates must have:

- Qualified Teacher Status or an equivalent recognised teaching qualification.
- Successful teaching experience with pupils with SLD, GLD, complex learning needs, complex communication needs or pupils working at early developmental stages.
- Leadership experience in a specialist SEND, complex needs, SLD, GLD, EYFS, Nurture, pre-formal or early developmental learning setting.
- Strong understanding of how pupils working at the earliest developmental stages learn and make progress.
- Experience supporting pupils who may be pre-verbal, non-verbal, minimally verbal or have complex communication profiles.
- Strong understanding of communication as central to learning, including approaches such as Total Communication, PECS, AAC, visual supports, objects of reference or communication boards.
- Evidence of being a strong specialist practitioner or leader of practice.
- Experience developing staff through coaching, modelling, training, feedback and professional challenge.
- The ability to support staff to improve classroom practice and build confidence in working with pupils with complex needs.

- The ability to lead staff, set clear expectations, address inconsistency and secure follow-through.
- Strong understanding of safeguarding, pupil welfare, regulation, engagement and safe specialist practice.
- High expectations and ambition for pupils with complex SEND.

Experience of general nurture, pastoral care, behaviour support, wellbeing or inclusion work alone will not meet the requirements of this role. However, candidates with strong relevant experience in SLD, GLD, complex needs, EYFS, early developmental learning or complex communication provision are encouraged to apply.

EYFS experience

Experience of practising and leading EYFS will be considered where candidates can demonstrate:

- Strong understanding of early developmental learning.
- Experience leading communication, interaction, engagement, play-based learning, regulation and readiness for learning.
- Evidence of working with pupils or children with complex learning needs, developmental delay, communication needs or significant barriers to learning.
- Ability to translate EYFS expertise into specialist SEND provision for pupils working at early developmental stages.

EYFS experience alone will not meet the requirements of this role unless it is directly relevant to SLD, GLD, complex learning needs or early developmental learning profiles.

Essential experience and knowledge

Candidates must demonstrate:

- Successful leadership experience in a specialist SEND school, special school, specialist provision, SLD provision, complex needs provision, EYFS provision or equivalent setting.
- Experience improving provision for pupils with SLD, GLD, Autism and complex learning needs.
- Experience leading or improving specialist curriculum implementation.
- Strong understanding of pre-formal, informal, developmental or Nurture curriculum approaches.
- Strong understanding of engagement, regulation, communication and readiness for learning.
- Strong understanding of early developmental learning, play-based learning and interaction where relevant to pupils' developmental profiles.
- Strong understanding of PECS, AAC, Total Communication or other structured communication approaches.
- Understanding of assessment systems appropriate for pupils working at early developmental levels.
- Ability to evidence progress for pupils who may not demonstrate progress through standard written work or age-related measures.
- Strong understanding of safeguarding, pupil welfare and safe specialist practice.
- Ability to lead teams and build a positive, consistent staff culture.
- Strong written communication skills, including evaluation reports and action plans.
- High expectations and ambition for pupils with complex SEND.

- Ability to operate credibly with senior leaders, teachers, support staff, families and external professionals.
- Ability to convert quality assurance findings into practical improvement actions.
- Ability to develop staff practice so that improvement is sustained and visible in classrooms.

Desirable experience

It would be desirable for candidates to have:

- Experience working in a large specialist SEND school.
- Experience working with a large cohort of pupils with complex needs.
- Experience working across more than one pathway, including Nurture and Semi-Formal provision.
- Experience of using, leading or implementing the EQUALS Curriculum within a specialist SEND setting.
- Strong understanding of how the EQUALS Curriculum can support pupils working at early developmental stages, particularly in relation to communication, independence, engagement, problem-solving, physical wellbeing and preparation for adulthood.
- Specialist training in Autism, communication, AAC, PECS, Intensive Interaction, TEACCH, sensory regulation or related approaches.
- Experience supporting Ofsted inspection readiness.
- Experience delivering professional development to teachers and support staff.
- Experience supporting staff to evidence small-step progress and developmental outcomes.
- Experience of MAPP, EYFS, pre-formal or informal curriculum approaches.
- Experience supporting pupils with sensory processing needs and complex regulation profiles.

The person we are looking for

We recognise that experienced leaders in SLD, GLD, complex needs and early developmental learning are not easy to find. We are therefore looking for someone with the right specialist understanding, leadership potential, professional credibility and ability to develop others.

The successful candidate will not need to arrive knowing every Serenity system from day one. They will, however, need to be able to learn quickly, lead confidently, develop staff effectively and bring clarity to practice across a large Nurture pathway.

This role would suit a strong specialist SEND leader, an experienced SLD, GLD or complex needs practitioner ready for wider leadership, an EYFS leader with substantial experience of early developmental learning and complex needs, or an existing pathway leader who is ready to lead provision at scale.

Why join Serenity School Croydon?

This is a significant opportunity to take up a senior leadership role within a large and growing specialist SEND school.

The successful candidate will have the opportunity to shape and strengthen Nurture provision, develop staff, improve specialist practice and make a direct difference to the daily experience and long-term outcomes of pupils with SLD, GLD, complex learning needs and early developmental learning profiles.

We offer:

- A senior leadership role with genuine influence.
- A salary range of £65,000–£85,000, dependent on experience and impact.
- The opportunity to lead and shape the Nurture Pathway within a specialist SEND school.
- The opportunity to work within a school with both Nurture and Semi-Formal pathways.
- The opportunity to lead provision for a large cohort of pupils with SLD, GLD, complex learning needs and complex communication profiles.
- A visible leadership role with direct impact on pupils, staff and provision.
- The opportunity to develop teachers and support staff and build high-quality specialist practice across the pathway.
- A collaborative and ambitious school and group culture.
- High-quality professional development.
- A relocation allowance for an exceptional candidate who would need to relocate to take up the role.
- The opportunity to be part of a values-led organisation focused on Inclusion, Independence and Self-Worth.

What success will look like after two terms

By the end of two terms, the successful candidate will have:

- Established clear and consistent expectations across the Nurture Pathway.
- Strengthened the quality of specialist teaching and classroom practice.
- Improved staff confidence in supporting pupils with SLD, GLD, complex learning needs and early developmental learning profiles.
- Improved staff confidence in using PECS, AAC, Total Communication and visual communication approaches.
- Secured more consistent implementation of the EQUALS Curriculum where appropriate.
- Improved the quality of communication-focused provision across classrooms.
- Strengthened the evidence base for pupils' progress in communication, engagement, regulation, independence and early cognition.
- Improved the consistency of routines, transitions, classroom organisation and staff deployment.
- Supported clearer alignment between the Nurture and Semi-Formal pathways.
- Built a stronger culture of accountability, warmth, ambition and professional consistency.
- Developed staff practice so that improvements are visible in pupils' daily experience.

Selection process

Candidates may be asked to complete:

- A written school improvement task.
- A short presentation on improving Nurture provision at Serenity School Croydon.
- A lesson visit, engagement observation or learning evidence review task.
- A staff development or coaching task.
- A panel interview.
- A stakeholder discussion with senior leaders.

The selection process will test whether candidates can evaluate specialist provision accurately, understand how pupils with SLD, GLD and complex needs learn, give precise

feedback, develop staff practice, lead staff effectively, challenge appropriately, and identify the actions required to improve classroom practice and pupil outcomes.

Safeguarding Statement

Serenity Education Group is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people. All appointments are subject to safer recruitment checks, including an enhanced DBS check, references, identity checks, right to work checks, online checks and other pre-employment checks in line with statutory guidance.