

# Castle Tower School

## Board of Governors Report 2024–2025 Academic Year

### Introduction

The Governors of Castle Tower School, in conjunction with the Principal and Leadership team, are pleased to present this annual report as a summary of the life of the school for the academic year September 2024 – 2025. The continued development of the school is due to the dedication and hard work of all associated with the school as they strive to provide the best possible all-round education for the pupils in our care. This report is primarily for the parents and carers of children attending the school. The Principal, by appointment, would be pleased to clarify or discuss any query parents may have in relation to this report.

### Board of Governors

#### Responsibilities

The Board of Governors receives regular reports on all aspects of the life and work of the school and meets regularly to take decisions on staff appointments, financial management, curriculum, child protection, maintenance of buildings, and other issues that arise in running a successful school. Governors work in conjunction with the Principal and staff of Castle Tower School in fulfilling their responsibilities.

This year the Board approved the 2024/25 budget, ratified staffing appointments, and monitored progress against the School Development Plan.

#### Membership

- **Chairperson:** Mr Wilson Burns
- **Vice Chairperson:** Mr Francis Scullion
- **Education Authority Representatives:** Mr Wilson Burns, Mr Francis Scullion, Mr Matthew Armstrong
- **Department of Education Representatives:** Mrs Audrey Wales MBE, Mr Trevor Montgomery
- **Parent Representatives:** Mrs Clare Porter, Mrs Gillian Francy
- **Teacher Representative:** Mrs Tracy Douds

- **Secretary:** Mr Alick Ford

The Board operated in accordance with the EA Scheme for the Management of Controlled Schools.

---

### **School Overview**

- **Total Number of Pupils:** 384
- **Average whole-school attendance 2024/25:** 87%
- **Staffing:**
  - Principal: Mr Alick Ford (Acting)
  - Vice-Principals: Mrs Sandra Buchanan, Mr Chris Murphy (Acting)
  - FTE Teachers: 54.4
  - FTE Classroom Assistants: 126
  - Ancillary Staff: Building Supervisors (2 FT, 1 PT), Cleaners (20 FT), Clerical Staff (4 FT)

### **Vision, Mission & Ethos**

#### **Vision:**

To be a leading light in special education through educating, nurturing and inspiring all our school community.

#### **Mission:**

Castle Tower School is committed to creating a community which:

- Ensures everyone is safe and included
- Always learns
- Promotes independence and resilience
- Celebrates achievements
- Looks forward with hope to the future

**Core Values:** Child-centred, Nurturing, Fun, Teamwork, Inclusive, Independence

#### **Ethos:**

Castle Tower strives to create a caring community in which every member feels valued, supported and happy. High standards of respect, self-discipline, commitment and sensitivity are sought, and everyone is encouraged to set and achieve the highest personal, academic and social goals.

---

## Admissions

Admissions to Castle Tower School are managed by the Education Authority Northern Ireland (EA) through its Special Education Service. The school does not make decisions on admissions.

For further information or queries regarding admissions, please contact:  
Education Authority – Special Education Service

---

## Review of the Year

### Key Achievements and Developments

- Signed up to the *Being Well Doing Well* Programme with EA to promote health and wellbeing for staff, pupils, and the wider community.
- Evidence for Learning app selected for pupil observations; pilot agreed for next academic year with staff training before full rollout in February 2026.

### Community Engagement

This year, our ASPIRE Shared Education programmes were a success in both Nursery and Primary.

- **Shared Education in Nursery – ASPIRE Project:** In Nursery, pupils from Castle Tower and Ballymena Nursery enjoyed a range of activities designed to help them play, learn, and interact together, with parents joining selected events to strengthen family engagement and relationships.
- **Shared Education in Primary – ASPIRE Project:** In Primary, our partnership with Clough Primary School provided pupils with exciting opportunities through sporting and creative days, community projects such as making cards for local nursing homes, and fundraising for Antrim Hospital's pyjama drive. The programme concluded with a celebration morning attended by governors and parents, where pupils showcased their talents with a shared choir performance.
- **Makaton Choir:** Successfully set up in Primary department, collaborating with Clough PS for an end-of-year performance.
- **Getting Ready to Learn in Nursery:** Funding used to develop a lending library of sensory resources (weighted blankets, gym balls, switch toys) and educational videos for parents.

These activities promoted inclusion, diversity, and meaningful integration, while building strong partnerships between schools and families

### **Training and Curriculum linked to Year 2 of School Development Plan.**

- **Staff Training:**
  - Team Teach (26–29 August 2024)
  - Pupil Support Plans (30 September 2024)
  - 6 Bricks, Curiosity Approach, Attention Autism & Tacpac (16 October 2024)
- **External Training:**
  - Being Well Doing Well (EA) – 22 October 2024
  - Resilience Training (EA) – Jane Magee – 20 January 2025
  - Theraplay – Elaine Honeyford (EA) – 8 April 2025
- **Curriculum Developments:**
  - Primary – 5 Curriculum teams established to strengthen subject delivery.
  - Post-primary – topic-based approach introduced to meet changing pupil needs.
  - New sensory rooms in KS2, Post 16 and sensory exploration spaces created.
  - Post-16 Enterprise Programme and Café Nico developed to provide vocational experience.
  - Review of KS3/KS4 curriculum completed; Teams used for resource sharing.
- **Special Programs:**
  - Continued development of canine therapy programme.
  - Post-16 vocational pathways expanded with horticulture skills via Groundwork NI and Scullery O’Tullagh.

### **Student Achievements**

- KS4 boys’ football team success at interschool tournament.

- **Post-16 Ballee Campus:** Transition completed in Sept 2024, supporting ~70 students with life skills, vocational training, and accredited courses.

**Highlights:**

- School Formal at Galgorm Resort & Spa.
- Community projects (e.g., fairy houses for Riverwalk Community Group).
- Enterprise development: Castle Creations sold items at Fairhill Shopping Centre and hosted first Christmas Fair at Ballee Campus.
- Creative projects: *Anna and the Ninja* screened at Queen's Film Theatre; pupils represented school in London.
- Health & wellbeing: Weekly fitness sessions at Gladiator Gym.
- Music collaboration with St Louis Grammar School.
- Work experience growth with local businesses (Stephen's Catering, Galgorm Resort & Spa, Wrightbus).

**Student Outcomes:** LANTRA and CCEA Entry Level qualifications achieved; positive destinations include FE, supported employment, and community programs.

---

**Pastoral Care & Safeguarding**

- Castle Tower fully accessible for visitors with disabilities.
  - Additional staff trained in climbing wall, rebound therapy, and Team Teach.
  - Child Protection along with all pastoral care policies reviewed and updated; 3 new staff trained as Designated Teachers.
  - Strong links with allied health professionals and social services.
- 

**Community Links**

- Joined Ballymena South Neighbourhood Partnership with local primary schools.
- Shared Education links with Clough PS and Ballymena Nursery.
- Ballymena PB project participation with Radius Housing and other schools.
- Local businesses supported staff wellbeing event as part of *Being Well Doing Well*.

- Continued involvement in Ballymena Learning Together initiative (Principal, SENCO, Pastoral, Careers, Teaching & Learning groups).

### Special Events

- Sacrament of First Reconciliation completed; First Holy Communion and Confirmation upcoming.
- Celebration assemblies in Primary and Secondary departments.
- End-of-year celebrations for all departments, including parent coffee mornings.
- Participation in local events and competitions (e.g., Radius Housing project celebration, sports tournaments).

### Financial Summary

Summary of income and expenditure for the year.

Article 60 Delegated Budget April 2024 – March 2025:

	Allocation	Spend
(a) Pupil Allocation @ £455.24 per pupil as at DE Census date of October 2023	£172,992	£174,445
(b) Non-controllable costs for 2024/25 uplifted by 6.72% inflation (for natural gas only) which includes:- Electricity, Gas, Oil, Waste, Water.	£218,754	£281,485
Article 60 Total Allocation 2024/25	£396,956	£455,930

### Private School Funds:

The School's Private Funds were independently audited for the year ended 30 August 2024. Certificates are available on request.

Figures:

- Opening balance 1 Sept 2023: **£26,196.55**
- Income lodged: **£43,369.40**
- Expenditure: **£22,247.56**
- Bank fees: **£102.80**
- Closing balance 30 Aug 2024: **£47,215.59**

---

## **Plans for Next Year**

Castle Tower will enter Year 3 of the School Development Plan. Priorities for 2025–2026 include:

- Embedding new curriculum and assessment developments across all departments.
- Implementing and monitoring the use of safeguarding software.
- Further development of Post-16 provision at the Ballee Campus.
- Continuing with the *Being Well Doing Well* programme to support staff and pupil wellbeing.
- Ongoing staff training linked to pupil needs and curriculum innovation.
- Investment in sensory resources and play spaces to enhance learning environments.
- Strengthening community partnerships and enterprise opportunities for pupils.

## **Policies and Access**

Key policies (Child Protection, SEN, Complaints, Curriculum, Data Protection) are available on the school website or on request from the office.

This Annual Report is published on the school website for parents and is available for public inspection at the school.

## **Acknowledgements**

The Board of Governors wishes to thank all staff, pupils, and parents for their continued support.

---

## **Contact Information**

If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact the Principal at Castle Tower School.