



Castle Tower School

Communication and Literacy Policy

Date Ratified by Board of Governors	
Review Date	

Castle Tower welcomes pupils aged 3-19 who face a wide range of barriers to learning. Educational opportunities are provided within our Nursery, Primary, Secondary and Post 16 departments.

Our Vision

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

Everything we do is driven by our core values:

- Child-centred
- Nurturing
- Fun
- Team work
- Inclusive
- Independence

Our Ethos

Castle Tower strives to create a caring community in which every member feels valued, supported and happy. All staff work to maintain an ethos in which fairness, tolerance, compassion and forgiveness permeate all relationships within the school community. 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. The safety, welfare and development of everyone in our school community is of paramount importance to all staff and Governors.

At Castle Tower, there is continued development of the quality of the teaching and learning environment. Resources are used efficiently. Opportunities are created for learning in co-operative and interactive settings. Pupils are presented with challenging as well as stimulating teaching and learning opportunities. Staff at Castle Tower seek close working relationships with other providers and services throughout each stage of our pupil's education and through the transition stage to further education and life after school.

Introduction

This policy is for staff and governors of Castle Tower School.

Our Belief: Communication is central to successful education, defined as meaningful interactions to request, resist, choose, comment, and develop social relationships.

Our Vision: All pupils will establish expressive and receptive communication systems that are functional and appropriate to them.

Forms of Communication:

- Body language (facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, pointing)
- Makaton
- Vocalisations and Speech
- Objects of reference
- Body cues
- Visuals (photographs, True Object Based Icons (TOBIS), Communicate in Print symbols)
- Augmented and Alternative Communication devices (AAC)

Our Approach: Multimodal- we recognise and value all communication methods equally.

Communication underpins all curriculum areas, enabling learning and social relationship development. Pupils develop communication skills throughout the school day in both planned and spontaneous situations. We believe that effective communicators are effective listeners and observers.

Context

Our Purpose: Castle Tower School serves pupils with special educational needs in the North Eastern area of the Education Authority, providing education for ages 3 to 19 with various learning barriers.

Our Values: We celebrate individual talents and aim to improve quality of life by fostering confidence, tolerance, honesty, wellbeing, and curiosity. Our goal is to equip pupils with skills for independence, ambition and a hopeful future.

Our Commitment: Adhering to the D.E policy 'Every School A Good School' (DE, April 2009), we ensure a child-centred approach with high-quality teaching and effective leadership, maintaining close community links.

Our Learning Environment: Pupils learn in a safe, positive, and caring environment, with emphasis on individual needs through PLPs. They develop skills via appropriate educational pathways, supported by a broad, thematic curriculum and adaptable teaching strategies.

Our Ethos: Our nurturing ethos creates a safe, caring, and happy environment, helping pupils overcome learning barriers.

Student Involvement: We encourage pupils to participate in discussions and decisions affecting school life, promoting self-motivation and responsibility for their learning through various strategies.

Curriculum: The school aligns with the overarching aims and objectives of the N.I curriculum, particularly in the context of Environment and Society.

Aims

- To respect the individual's communication style, their ability and their right to communicate.
- To draw up specific, measurable, attainable, realistic communication targets that are regularly reviewed.

- To meet the communication potential of every pupil with respect of their cultural, religious or family views.
- To ensure, where possible, that pupils are provided with an appropriate and consistent communication environment.
- To facilitate the development of successful social communication.

Learning and Teaching

At Castle Tower we strive for a Total Communication environment, considering each pupil's needs. Many of our strategies are designed for learners who have Autism. It's crucial that the chosen methods are consistently used by all staff and carers to maximise communication effectiveness.

Key Points:

- **Child Centred Approach:** We focus on each pupil's unique communication needs.
- **Consistency:** Ensure all staff and carers consistently use the assessed communication methods.
- **Simplification:** If a pupil communicates better with photographs, they should always have access to them, and staff should know how to use them.
- **Progression:** Move pupils to the next communication stage after structured discussions and planning between SLT and school staff.

Our Approaches

- Intensive Interaction
- Object Cues and Objects of Reference (OOR)
- True Object Based Icons (TOBIS)
- Use of Photographs
- Use of Symbols
- Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
- Makaton
- Spoken Word
- Assistive Technology
- Social Communication Skills
- TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication Handicapped Children)
- Attention Autism

Further information on each strategy listed can be found in Appendix 1.

A Focus on Transitions

Transitions are important parts of a child's life and can be challenging for pupils and their families. We aim to help pupils and families prepare for moving from primary to secondary and beyond. Some pupils may have the same teacher for more than one consecutive school year to reduce the number of significant changes in their lives.

Information Transfer: Communication skills information is transferred between classes and educational settings, often during August Baker days. This includes sharing Communication Profiles, Annual Review reports, PLPs and written notes.

We use Social Stories, visual aids liaise with parents, SLT and MDT team to identify effective ways to assist the individual.

Planning and Assessment

Teachers will refer to the Statutory Requirements on the NI Curriculum when writing their 6 weekly planners. They will use the Q-Skills and Levels of Progression to inform their planning.

We believe that teacher monitoring and assessment of pupil's communication skills is an essential part of our practise. We use a range of statutory and non-statutory assessments across the Key Stages to inform our planning and to help identify what methods of communication work best for each individual learner.

Speech and Language Therapists will use their own assessments and will produce a yearly report for each child in their care.

Roles and Responsibilities

Role of the Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs)

SLTs work closely with school staff to ensure successful communication development for all pupils. Therapy and training are delivered using the Universal, Targeted, and Specialist model.

Aims:

- Maximise pupils' communication skills within their abilities.
- Promote an optimal environment for developing speech, language, and communication.
- Set individual/group targets with teachers.
- Develop and create resources with class teams.
- Introduce, develop, and maintain augmentative and alternative communication systems.
- Provide advice, information, and training for staff, parents, and carers.
- Monitor quality and provide effective support.
- Assess pupils as needed.
- Plan and deliver appropriate therapy (group/individual).
- Develop policies for specific therapy areas.
- Liaise with and refer to other professionals.
- Contribute to Annual Reviews and Transition Plans.

Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT)

A holistic approach is taken to provide greater access to the curriculum for pupils with a range of needs. The MDT can advise and integrate programmes to assist teachers with pupils who need further support.

Role of Staff	MDT Members		Teaching
	SLTs	Occupational Therapists (OT)	
	Physiotherapists (PT)	Paediatric Dietician	
	Paediatrician	School Nursing Team	
	Music Therapists	Art Therapists	
	Teacher of the Deaf	Teacher of the Visually Impaired	
	Educational Psychologists (EPs)	Child and Adolescent Mental Health – Learning Disabilities (CAMHS-LD) team, including Psychiatrist and Clinical Psychologist	

- **Communication Profiles:** Write profiles for pupils with SLT support, detailing effective communication strategies tailored to each child's needs and abilities.
- **Environment:** Create a supportive environment that matches the communication styles of individual pupils and groups.
- **Practice and Programmes:** Apply practices and activities from group SLT sessions, as well as individual recommendations.

Role of Coordinator

- **Action Plan:** Write and submit an Action Plan detailing areas of development for the coming year.
- **Policy Updates:** Monitor and review policy within agreed period.
- **Liaise with Senior Leadership:** Discuss action plan, policy and what resources or funding may be required.

Role of Principal and Senior Leadership Team

- **Leadership:** Ensure staff are aware of and comply with policy once it is agreed.
- **Training:** Provide training where required, such as Makaton.
- **Funding:** Discuss and funding requests with Coordinator.

Policy into Practice

To ensure the communication policy is effectively implemented, we undertake the following actions:

- **Staff Training:** Conduct regular training sessions for staff.
- **Staff Liaison:** Hold regular meetings between SLT and school staff, as well as MDT/SLT meetings.
- **Monitoring:** Regularly monitor the use of the policy.

- **Parent Liaison:** Engage with parents during bi-annual Parent Interviews (remote or in person).
- **Annual Reviews:** Provide yearly reports on pupils' communication skills to share progress with professionals and parents.
- **Home Visits:** Conduct home visits.
- **Parent Groups:** Organise groups for parents.
- **Seesaw:** Use Seesaw to video good practices, promoting consistency between school and home.
- **CPD:** Stay updated on communication developments through continuous professional development.

Literacy

Rationale

- We aim to provide a supportive environment for functional language development. Literacy is a life-long skill for pupils of all levels.

Principles

- We aim to maximize the literacy skills for all pupils at every ability level and additional need.
- We believe literacy is central to the curriculum and every teacher has a responsibility to deliver literacy to their pupils.
- Communication and literacy skills are involved in all areas of learning.

Aims

- Maintain and improve literacy standards.
- Develop functional literacy skills essential for life after school.
- Identify and support pupils experiencing difficulties.
- Remove barriers to learning by considering pupil's additional needs and using supporting equipment and resources.
- Enable pupils to communicate effectively in spoken and written language, in a variety of contexts.
- Provide opportunities for reading and engaging with texts for enjoyment and learning.
- Develop thinking and problem-solving skills.

Self-esteem

We want to:

- Create a positive learning environment.
- Encourage collaboration between pupils.
- Build reflection and empathy skills when listening.

- Generate fun and exciting learning experiences.
- Provide opportunities for self-assessment.

Role of the Teacher

- To use a well-resourced environment and create purposeful opportunities for pupils to develop literacy skills.
- Model good language and a positive attitude towards learning literacy skills.
- Observe and assess literacy development in their pupils.

Talking and Listening

- Develop oral communication skills through interaction with pupils and model good practise when talking to staff.
- Create a secure and stimulating classroom environment where pupils talk in structured and informal settings.
- Plan for and provide varied opportunities for pupils to talk in pairs, groups, such as drama and role-play activities.
- Use effective questioning to extend pupil's thinking.
- Provide pupils opportunities to develop their Talking and Listening skills in all other areas outside of the classroom and in the wider community. This might include visits to the local café or shops.

Reading

- We want all pupils to have functional reading skills to navigate life and support their independence. Some non-speaking pupils will read symbols or words to understand the world and others around them.
- We want pupils to enjoy a wide variety of texts.
- Teachers will provide structured opportunities for reading and the books are suited to the pupils' individual needs.
- We will maintain well-stocked libraries and provide diverse reading materials.
- We use a range of ICT resources such as Whiteboard, ipads and recording devices to enhance functional literacy skills.

Teaching Approaches

- Daily reading for each child at their own level.
- Reading records kept with pupil as they move onto different classes.
- Improving phonological awareness by following a phonics programme.
- Modelled, Shared and Guided Reading where applicable.
- Library visits.
- Reading fiction and non-fiction materials to practice information gathering, forming opinions, predicting etc.
- Effective questioning from the teacher throughout the book to assess understanding.

Writing

- Develop effective, purposeful and functional writing experiences.
- Provide resources and opportunities for writing which cater to all pupil's individual needs. This ranges from mark making to writing activities- pupils will use whatever resources are suitable for their literacy level. This might include sensory trays, pencil grips, adapted seating etc.
- Pupils should be familiar using digital devices and keyboards to provide functional learning.

Spelling

- We use Primary Educational Scheme Books 1 to 7, with differentiated spelling grids matched to pupils' individual spelling ages.

Parental Involvement

- It is important to have a partnership between home and school to help support literacy skills. Parents are informed about progress throughout the year and are involved in the target setting process.

Cross-curricular Approach & Connected Learning

- We embed literacy skills into other areas of the curriculum with careful planning to ensure connected learning across subjects.

Marking, Feedback and Evaluation

- When marking we provide positive initial responses followed by guidance for improvement. Use a range of strategies such as verbal praise, stickers, certificates, and commendations to raise pupil morale.

- Teachers evaluate their planners to help inform future planning and target the skills and knowledge that should be prioritised.

Assessment

- Assessment should track pupil progress and inform future planning. We use a range of formal and informal assessments, and these vary between the key stages. We evaluate pupil progress using both qualitative data such as observations, photographs and completed pieces of work, as well as quantitative data from standardised tests.
- Not all pupils are working at a level where standardised tests provide useful feedback. Will use conduct observational assessments and use assessments that are tailored to the pupil's ability level and needs.
- We report progress to parents annually and set literacy targets where suitable in our biannual PLPs.

ICT

- We appreciate that writing will not be a functional skill for some of our pupils when they leave school. We aim to provide opportunities for pupils to use digital devices and keyboards to become comfortable using them. This will help pupils to use mobile phones for sending texts or searching for information online as they get older and eventually leave school.

Resources

- Well-stocked class libraries, listening games, Chromebooks, photographs, iPads, video cameras, Clevertouch screens, computer programs, language games, big books, reading materials, and textbooks.

APPENDIX 1 – INFORMATION ON COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Intensive Interaction

A practical approach for interacting with people who have learning difficulties and struggle with communication or socialising. It helps both the person with learning difficulties and their communication partner to relate better and enjoy each other's company, enhancing their communication abilities.

Process:

- **Partner:** The carer, support worker, teacher, or SLT focuses on becoming a better communication partner.
- **Development:** This approach supports the person with learning difficulties in developing confidence and competence as a communicator.
- **Enjoyment:** Intensive Interaction is designed to be a fun and engaging process.
- **Guidance:** The communication partner uses knowledge of how communication typically develops in young pupils, applying it sensitively and respectfully to individuals of any age.

Object Cues and Objects of Reference (OOR)

Using objects as a means of communication. Objects are part of a total communication system and should be used alongside other methods like signing and speech.

Purpose:

- **Understanding:** Helps pupils understand concepts and make choices.
- **Anticipation and Memory:** Aids in anticipating events and remembering familiar routines.
- **Bridging:** Bridges to other forms of communication.

True Object Based Icons (TOBIS)

TOBIS are photographs of familiar items cut into the shape of the object. Teachers consider pupils' visual needs when making TOBIS- they are large enough for pupils to easily recognise the object.

Purpose: TOBIS help pupils transition from using Objects of Reference (OOR) to photographs, aiding in the development of their communication skills. Common TOBIS in school include:

- Drinks bottles
- Break items
- Toilet
- Fidget Tools, sensory equipment
- Movement equipment
- **Use of Photographs**

Photographs help learners develop symbolic understanding by linking visual representations to real objects or events.

- **Clarity:** Photos are trimmed to remove unnecessary background details.
- **Linking:** Photographs create connections between images and the real world.

Use of Symbols

As learners develop symbolic understanding, they grasp the abstract qualities of symbols related to objects and events.

- **Communicate In Print (CIP) Symbols:** Used throughout Castle Tower, both inside and outside the classroom.
- **Labelling:** Facilities in school are labelled with CIP visuals on their doors.
- **Consistency:** Use symbols of the same size to maximise effectiveness as pupils progress through school.
- **Support:** Symbols can be paired with written words to aid reading and pattern matching skills.

Pupils using symbols for expressive communication must always have access to their symbols to initiate interactions. Some pupils may find symbols too abstract. In such cases, their communication needs should be met through objects and photographs.

Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)

PECS is a form of augmentative and alternative communication where pupils exchange a photograph or picture symbol for a desired item. PECS is suitable for a wide variety of learners with communicative disorders and many pupils at Castle Tower use PECS to express themselves.

Identification: Pupils are identified by the SLT team in collaboration with the class teacher, as certain prerequisite skills are required.

PECS is highly structured with a defined hierarchy that must be followed for successful communication.

Strategies: PECS strategies used to support pupil wellbeing include:

- Individual timetables
- Reward cards
- Take a break
- Wait

Makaton

Makaton is a language programme that uses signs and symbols to aid communication- alongside speech, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, and body language.

Purpose: Designed to support spoken language, with signs and symbols used in spoken word order.

Benefits:

- **Simplification:** Simplifies language by signing only the keywords in a sentence.
- **Support:** Enhances receptive, expressive, and functional communication skills.

Makaton can be used routinely during activities such as Welcome Time and familiar group activities. At Castle Tower, we aim to use only Communication In Print (CIP) symbols for consistency.

Spoken Word

The use of speech is always encouraged, with clear speech and language models provided for pupils. Speech is made up of speech sounds, word meanings, sentence construction, and grammar.

Usage:

- **Verbal Pupils:** Many pupils use spoken word to communicate, though they may have difficulties with organisation, clarity, and fluency.
- **Non-verbal Pupils:** Some pupils are non-verbal but can mimic sounds and attach meaning to these sounds, integrating them into their other forms of communication.

We use concise and simple speech when speaking to pupils and allow processing time for better understanding.

Assistive Technology

Example Devices: iPads and tablets are used with supporting apps like GoTalkNow and Eyegaze.

This can provide pupils with a portable and convenient way to communicate both in and outside of school.

Benefits: Assistive technology helps build confidence and independence as pupils grow older and prepare to leave their familiar school environment.

Social Communication Skills

These include eye contact, non-verbal communication, turn-taking, personal space, voice volume, negotiating and resolving conflict. We believe this is essential for participation in society.

Approach: Identify the best communication methods for each learner, aiming to progress their skill set.

Focus: Functional communication, enabling pupils to express their wants, needs, and feelings appropriately in everyday situations. This may involve speech and other forms of communication.

Real Life Practice: Pupils practice their use of these skills in real-life situations, such as:

- Going into shops in local area and buying items
- Ordering food or drink in a café or our school canteen

- Trips into the community

Staff: We model positive and appropriate social communication in interactions with each other, pupils, and the wider community.

TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication Handicapped Children)

Staff at Castle Tower use many TEACCH strategies with pupils.

Key Concepts:

- **Finished:** Indicating task completion.
- **First and Then:** Sequencing activities.
- **Workstations:** Designated areas for tasks.
- **Visual Schedules:** Daily or individual timetables showing lessons for the morning, afternoon, day, or week, tailored to individual needs and abilities.
- **Visual Countdown Timers:** Helping manage time and transitions.

Schedules help reduce pupil anxiety and provide comfort through a familiar and safe daily routine. They can be made of objects, photos, or symbols, depending on pupil levels. Whole class visual schedules should use photographs unless all learners are at the symbol level.

Attention Autism

Attention Autism is an intervention model designed by Gina Davies, a Speech and Language Therapist.

Purpose: Develop natural and spontaneous communication through visually based and highly motivating activities. Sessions are brief, open and fun- aiming to provide an 'irresistible invitation to learn'.

This approach is used with learners to:

- Develop concentration.
- Improve joint attention.
- Support the increase of non-verbal and verbal communication through commenting.