



Castle Tower School

Horticulture Policy 2025

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 to Gardening in Castle Tower School

The Garden Policy in Castle Tower School seeks to enhance the overall well-being of students through gardening activities that promote physical, emotional, and social health. This policy is to provide a structured and supportive environment for students with special needs to engage in gardening activities. The policy aims to foster a sense of responsibility, teamwork, and environmental awareness, while promoting sensory, motor, and cognitive skills. By engaging students with special needs in

meaningful gardening tasks, we aim to foster a connection to nature, improve mental and physical health, and support the development of life skills, while ensuring a positive and inclusive learning environment.

This policy applies to all gardening activities and related initiatives within the school grounds, including gardening lessons, recreational gardening time, and involvement with community-based gardening projects.

Aims of the Area of Learning

- **Skill Development:** Enhance sensory, fine and gross motor skills, and cognitive development through hands-on gardening activities. Gardening provides students with opportunities to build self-confidence, independence, and responsibility through hands-on gardening tasks and promoting life skills. Gardening helps build a sense of empathy, as students care for plants and observe their growth. This practice nurtures responsibility, patience, and the understanding that growth takes time—values that can apply to personal growth as well. According to the **SEND Code of Practice (2015)**, students should be given opportunities to develop skills that support their future independence. Gardening tasks such as planting, weeding, and harvesting can build these life skills in a structured, meaningful way.
- **Learning Opportunities:** Provide students with the opportunity to learn about plant life cycles, nutrition (through growing food), and environmental sustainability (through growing plants, composting and recycling). Teaching students the importance of healthy living, including the nutritional benefits of growing food, proper gardening techniques, and a sustainable, environmentally friendly approach. There will be a variety of activities to complete throughout the academic year and suited to the changing seasons and pupil needs. The **Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice (2015)** requires schools to adopt a broad and balanced curriculum that meets the needs of all students, including SEN students.
- **Teamwork and Social Skills:** Encourage collaboration, teamwork, communication and positive social interactions, as students work together in the garden to achieve common goals and through developing roles and responsibilities. The **School Discipline (Special Educational Needs) Regulations 2010** requires schools to consider the behavioural needs of students with SEN. Gardening can be a tool to encourage focus, self-regulation, and positive behaviours in students with challenging needs.
- **Enhance Well-Being:** Promote physical and emotional well-being by encouraging students to connect with nature, engage in physical activity, and learn the calming effects of gardening developing emotional resilience, and cognitive growth. Connecting with nurture opportunities through the medium of gardening and just feeling better for being outside and in touch with nature. The **Children and Families Act 2014** emphasizes the importance of health and well-being for students with SEN.
- **Therapeutic Benefits:** Promote physical, emotional, and social well-being by engaging students in meaningful, therapeutic gardening tasks. Gardening can create a supportive environment that addresses emotional health, grief, and the development of emotional resilience. Gardening can be a therapeutic activity that helps students cope with difficult emotions, especially after challenging life events. It can provide a calm, quiet space for reflection, reducing stress, anxiety, and promoting emotional stability which promotes self-regulation. The **Children and Families Act 2014** and **SEND Code of Practice (2015)** emphasize

the need for schools to provide tailored support to students with sensory needs. Gardening offers a calming, sensory-rich environment conducive to therapeutic benefits.

- **Community Engagement:** Involve the wider community in gardening projects, fostering collaboration, enterprise opportunities and raising awareness about special needs education. The **Equality Act 2010** mandates that all students should have access to education in a way that promotes inclusion and equality. Gardening activities can be adapted to ensure that all students, including those with physical or sensory disabilities, can participate.

Learning and Teaching

Child centred approach - Gardening activities will include, but not limited to:

- **Planting Seeds and Seedlings:** Learning about plant growth, seasons, and ecosystems.
- **Garden Maintenance:** Watering, weeding, and caring for plants to build responsibility and attention to detail.
- **Sensory Gardens** Maintaining our sensory spaces where students can explore different textures, smells, and sounds.
- **Harvesting and Cooking:** Harvesting produce and using it in cooking or art projects.
- **Environmental Projects:** Composting, recycling, and discussions around sustainability and protecting the planet. This can link in with development or our Eco School's development.
- **Enterprise Opportunity** - KS4/KS5 CCEA Entry Level Qualifications Unit 21, Unit 22 and Unit 23 differentiated at Level 1, 2 and 3.

Learning Environment

Castle Tower School is well equipped for its Outdoor Gardening Learning Environment. There is a shared Greenhouse and Polytunnel which is accessible by all pupils in Castle Tower School. There is also a Sensory Garden, a memorial garden, and a Fairy Garden Trail.

In Primary there are Mud gardens and an internal garden area.

In Secondary there are raised planters in KS3 and KS4 pupils' balconies to promote classes to grow their own flowers.

In the Whole School Team, there is a Gardening and Horticulture Folder which is populated with resources to support gardening in teacher's classroom.

There is a well-resourced garden store which has a range of gardening tools, and an inventory is listed in this Teams Horticulture and Gardening folder.

Links with the Community

- *Parents / Carers* - Encourage students' involvement in gardening at home or provide feedback on students' progress from school projects.
- *Enterprise opportunities with the community* through selling fruit, vegetables and flowers for gifts. Monies generated may also assist in maintaining the school garden through volunteering or donations. Links and projects can be forged through the Young Enterprise Programme, Castle Tower School Christmas Craft Sales / Summer Car Boot Events.
- *External Partners:* Local gardening organizations or volunteers may be invited to provide additional expertise through training opportunities, equipment, or resources.

Links with other subjects

By incorporating gardening into the curriculum, students gain practical, hands-on experience that bridges several subjects and provides an integrated learning opportunity. It helps develop a range of academic skills while fostering an appreciation for nature and sustainability.

Science

- Gardening directly relates to biology as it involves the study of plants, soil, ecosystems, and the life cycle of various organisms. Students can observe plant growth, pollination, and the impact of weather on plant health.
- Gardening helps students understand ecosystems, sustainability, and the environment. It teaches the importance of conservation, biodiversity, and the role of plants in the ecosystem.
- Gardening can be connected to chemistry by studying soil composition, pH levels, the effects of different fertilizers, and the chemical processes involved in photosynthesis.

Mathematics

- **Measurement:** Students can measure plant growth, distances between plants, and the amount of space needed for each plant. This helps develop skills in measurement, fractions, and geometry.
- **Statistics:** Gardening provides opportunities to collect data about plant growth, analyse trends, and create graphs or charts to compare variables (e.g., sunlight vs. growth rate).
- **Geometry:** Planning garden layouts involves spatial thinking, using shapes, symmetry, and proportions.

Geography

- **Climate & Weather:** Gardening teaches about the local climate, temperature, and weather patterns and how these factors affect plant growth. Students can study which plants are native to certain regions and why.
- **Sustainability:** It can also be linked to global geography, exploring issues like sustainable farming practices.

Art

- **Plant pot painting:** Students can paint or decorate plant pots with vibrant colours, patterns, or their favourite themes. This allows students to express themselves creatively.
- **Nature Prints:** Students can collect leaves, flowers, or other natural objects and use them to create prints. They can place the objects on paper, press them with a rolling pin or their hands, and use paint or ink to make impressions.
- **Leaf Rubbing:** Using crayons, pencils, or markers, students can place a piece of paper over a leaf and rub the surface to create a textured print of the leaf's shape. This is a simple way to teach students about different types of leaves and textures.
- **DIY Garden Decorations:** Students can create and decorate their own garden decorations such as wind chimes, garden flags, or birdhouses. These items can be made using simple materials like wood, fabric, or clay.
- **Painting Stones:** Students can collect smooth stones and paint them with designs, animals, or colourful patterns. These stones can then be used as decoration around the garden or as markers for different plants.
- **Observation and Drawing:** Students can sit in the garden and observe the plants, flowers, and trees, then create drawings or paintings of what they see. This could be done with various art supplies like pencils, markers, or watercolour paints.

- **Garden-Themed Collage with Magazines:** Students can search through magazines for images of plants, flowers, vegetables, and animals that are related to gardening, and cut them out to create a collage.
- **Nature Sculptures:** Using clay or air-drying modelling material, students can create sculptures of their favourite plants, animals, or garden-related objects like butterflies, snails, or flowers.
- **Creative Writing:** Students can write about their gardening experiences, create poems inspired by nature, or keep a gardening journal to document their observations.
- **Reading & Research:** Gardening provides opportunities to read instructions, plant care manuals, or books on environmental topics, enhancing literacy and comprehension skills.

Health and Nutrition

- **Healthy Eating:** Gardening encourages an understanding of where food comes from, and how growing one's own vegetables and fruits can lead to healthier eating habits.
- **Physical Education:** Gardening can be a form of physical activity, teaching students about movement, coordination, and the benefits of outdoor exercise.

Learning for Life and Work:

- **Responsibility and Self Care:** Students can be assigned specific gardening duties, such as watering plants, trimming leaves, or planting seeds. This task promotes responsibility and self-management as students must care for the plants regularly, developing skills in time management, responsibility, routine building and independence.
- **Teamwork and Collaboration:** Creating group gardening projects where students work together to execute a garden design/ planting pot. This helps foster cooperation and effective communication skills.
- **Vocational and Career Skills** For older students or those preparing for work, gardening can offer practical vocational experience. Tasks could include using tools, maintaining the garden, or creating garden-related products (e.g., herbal teas, plant-based products) that could be sold as part of a small business initiative.
- **Health and Well Being:** Gardening can be a therapeutic and calming activity that promotes mental well-being. Students can be encouraged to reflect on how spending time outdoors and engaging with nature affects their mood and stress levels. It can be a valuable activity for promoting mindfulness and relaxation.

ICT:

- **Gardening Journals Using Digital Tools:** Students can create and maintain digital gardening journals using apps like **Google Docs**, **Microsoft Word**, or **Seesaw**. They can document their gardening activities, plant growth progress, or take photos of their plants and upload them to the journal.
- **Plant Growth Tracking with Apps:** Use apps or software like **PlantSnap**, **PlantNet**, or **GrowIt!** to help students identify plants, track their growth over time, and note the conditions that affect their development (e.g., weather, watering schedule). Students can also use spreadsheets to track data and/ or create graphs.
- **Creating Educational Videos** – Students can make short videos documenting their gardening experiences, such as showing how to plant seeds or harvesting vegetables. They can use **iMovie**, **Windows Movie Maker**, or **Kinemaster** for editing. The video could be a tutorial, a garden tour, or a “day in the life” of their plants.

- **Virtual Field Trips to Gardens or Farms:** Use **Google Earth** to take students on a virtual field trip to famous gardens, farms, or botanical gardens around the world. This is a great way for students to explore different garden types and gardening practices without leaving the classroom.
- **Online Research for Gardening Tips** - Students can use the internet to research the best gardening practices, plant care guides, or ideas for sustainable gardening. Websites like **YouTube**, **Pinterest**, or **gardening blogs** can provide tutorials and inspiration.

Planning

- **Individual Needs:** Tailor activities to the specific needs of students (e.g. Sensory needs, motor skills, cognitive levels). Use adapted tools and scaffolding techniques to support participation.
- **Multisensory Approach:** Incorporate touch, sight, smell, sound, and taste, which are often beneficial for students with SEN, including those with autism, ADHD, or other developmental disabilities.
- **Cross-Curricular Links:** Plan activities that integrate other subjects (e.g., science, math, art, and life skills) to make the learning experience more holistic.
- **Structured and Flexible:** Keep a balance between structured activities (like planting, weeding) and flexible, student-driven activities (like exploring the garden or creating garden art).

Thematic planning units are to be developed in Key Stage areas and shared on the Teams; Whole School folder; Horticulture and Gardening. An overview of seasonal / monthly activities will also be found here to support teachers and provide ideas of thematic units.

Assessment

Assessing gardening tasks in a special needs school requires a flexible, individualized approach that accommodates diverse abilities and focuses on process-based learning as much as outcomes. By using observational assessments, skills-based checklists, individualized goals, portfolios, and self-reflection methods, educators can capture the full scope of students' growth, skills development, and engagement with gardening tasks. These assessments also help ensure that the program is both educational and therapeutic, fostering a love for nature while supporting holistic development.

Overview

Information needs to be developed in liaising with Key Stage Teachers to see what should be taught in each year group. When collated this will include a brief overview. Further detail will be included within an Appendix section.

Resources

A questionnaire has been sent out to staff to collate a list of all Gardening related resources that exist in Castle Tower School. In this questionnaire teachers have been asked what resources they would need to support them accessing gardening in their curriculum area.

There is an inventory that has been carried out to show the tools and resources that exist in the gardening shed. This inventory will be updated when the questionnaires have been returned and at the beginning and end of each academic year.

Roles and Responsibilities

The role of teachers in growing and fostering gardening programs in Castle Tower Schools is crucial to its success. In our special needs setting, the teacher's responsibilities go beyond simply guiding

students through gardening tasks, they also play a key role in creating an inclusive, accessible, and supportive learning environment. They serve as planners, instructors, safety monitors, social facilitators, and progress trackers. Their responsibilities extend beyond simply teaching gardening techniques—they also create a nurturing and inclusive environment where students can develop life skills, experience therapeutic benefits, and learn through hands-on engagement. Teachers must also be adaptive, responsive to each student's needs, and committed to fostering an educational space that encourages both academic growth and emotional well-being through gardening.

Monitoring and Evaluating

Teachers should regularly assess the overall effectiveness of the gardening program, considering students' engagement, skills development, and social interaction. Reflection on what worked well and what could be improved will help refine the program for future sessions.

Teachers should gather feedback from students, parents, and other school staff to continuously improve the gardening program. This feedback can highlight areas where adjustments may be needed to better meet students' needs.

Questionnaires will be sent out to provide an insight into good practice that exists and to identify areas in which staff could further be supported further. Pupil Voice will be collated through a questionnaire to see how they enjoy Gardening opportunities in Castle Tower School.

Horticulture opportunities and modules through CCEA Entry Level Qualifications have been developed and three new Units across three differentiated levels are now in place in Castle Tower School.

Health and Safety

Health and safety in horticulture programs within special needs schools are essential to ensuring that students can participate in gardening activities in a secure and supportive environment. By following appropriate safety protocols, providing accessible tools and materials, offering sensory accommodations, and ensuring continuous supervision, teachers and staff can create a safe and enjoyable gardening experience that maximizes learning and therapeutic benefits for all students.

Safe Gardening Tools and Equipment

- **Choosing Age-Appropriate Tools:** Use lightweight, ergonomically designed, and easy-to-handle tools to accommodate the physical abilities of all students. Tools should be small, sturdy, and safe to use, such as child-friendly hand trowels, watering cans, and garden gloves.
- **Sharp Tools and Equipment:** Ensure that any sharp tools (e.g., knives, shears) are stored securely and used only with supervision. Consider using safety scissors or garden tools that have protective shields or rounded edges for students who may have challenges with motor control.
- **Tool Use Training:** Teach students how to properly use tools in a safe and controlled way. This may involve demonstrating the correct grip, posture, and motions, particularly for students with motor impairments.
- **Adapted Tools:** For students with physical disabilities, consider using adapted tools such as larger handles, grips, or tools that can be used with one hand. Occupational therapy tools may also be helpful in allowing students to safely participate.

Safety

- **Non-Toxic Plants:** Ensure that all plants used in the garden are non-toxic and safe to handle, especially if students may be inclined to taste or touch plants.
- **Educational Component:** Teach students which plants are safe to touch, smell, and taste (if appropriate). Encourage them to identify plants by their names and characteristics. Provide visual aids or picture guides to help students recognize plants.
- **Labelling Plants:** Use clear, large, and colourful labels for plants to avoid confusion. These labels can include tactile elements like braille or large-print labels for students with visual impairments.

Allergy and Sensory Considerations

- **Allergen-Free Plants:** Be mindful of students who may have allergies to certain plants, pollens, or fragrances. Ensure that the chosen plants do not trigger allergic reactions such as sneezing, skin irritation, or asthma attacks.
- **Sensory Sensitivities:** Some students, especially those with autism or sensory processing disorders, may be sensitive to certain textures, smells, or sounds. Make sure the gardening environment is adaptable to their needs, offering sensory-friendly spaces or allowing students to take breaks if the environment becomes overwhelming.
- **Providing Sensory Breaks:** Designate a calm space where students can take breaks from the garden if the sensory input becomes too intense. This could include a quiet area with seating, soft lighting, or calming sensory tools.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- **Gardening Gloves:** Provide gloves for all students to prevent direct contact with soil, plants, or insects that could cause skin irritation or contamination. For students with tactile sensitivities, consider providing gloves made of different materials to ensure comfort.
- **Appropriate Footwear:** Encourage students to wear sturdy shoes to protect their feet from sharp objects, wet surfaces, and other potential hazards in the garden. Avoid sandals or open-toed shoes that could expose students to injury.
- **Sun Protection:** Ensure that students wear hats and sunscreen to protect themselves from prolonged exposure to the sun while gardening. Offer shaded areas or a portable canopy in areas with high sun exposure.

Supervision and Staff Training

- **Constant Supervision:** Provide adequate staff supervision to always ensure the safety of students, especially during tasks that involve tools, chemicals, or potentially hazardous materials. Teachers and assistants should be proactive in monitoring students' activities and ensuring they follow safety guidelines.

- **Specialized Training:** All staff involved in gardening activities should be trained in first aid, CPR, and emergency procedures, particularly in a special needs setting where accidents can happen more easily due to students' various physical and cognitive challenges.
- **Behavioural Support:** For students who may exhibit challenging behaviours, such as aggression, self-injury, or lack of impulse control, additional support staff (e.g., behaviour specialists or teaching assistants) should be available to provide guidance and ensure safety during activities.

Safe Soil and Fertilizer Handling

- **Soil Safety:** Ensure that the soil used in the garden is free from contaminants, such as lead or harmful chemicals. Consider using raised garden beds with purchased soil or soil that has been tested for safety.
- **Non-Toxic Fertilizers:** When using fertilizers, opt for organic, non-toxic, or low-impact products that are safe for all students, including those with allergies or respiratory issues. Avoid using harmful pesticides or herbicides.
- **Proper Storage:** Store fertilizers, soil amendments, and other gardening chemicals safely in locked cabinets away from students. Ensure labels are clear, and follow all manufacturer instructions for safe use.

Physical Safety

- **Environmental Hazards:** Inspect the garden for environmental hazards such as uneven ground, broken paths, exposed roots, or standing water, which could pose a tripping or slipping risk. Make sure the space is well-maintained and accessible for all students, especially those with mobility impairments.
- **Clear Pathways:** Keep walkways clear and ensure they are wide enough for wheelchair access if needed. If using raised beds, ensure there are ramps or other accommodations to allow students with mobility challenges to participate.
- **Temperature Control:** Be mindful of the weather and temperature. During hot days, ensure students are hydrated and take frequent breaks in the shade. On cold days, ensure they are dressed warmly and can still safely engage in outdoor activities.

Emergency Procedures and First Aid

- **First Aid Kit:** Ensure that a first aid kit is readily available and fully stocked with the necessary supplies (e.g., bandages, antiseptic wipes, gloves, cold packs). All staff should be familiar with where the kit is stored and how to use it.
- **Injury Protocols:** Establish clear protocols for addressing common gardening injuries, such as cuts, scrapes, or insect stings. Be sure that all staff are trained in how to respond quickly and appropriately to minor injuries or medical emergencies.
- **Infection Prevention:** Remind students to wash their hands after gardening activities to avoid infection, particularly if they have come into contact with soil, tools, or plants. If students have cuts or open wounds, ensure they use gloves while gardening.

Engaging Students in Safety Education

- **Teaching Safety:** Include safety education as part of the gardening curriculum. Teach students about the importance of wearing gloves, handling tools carefully, and identifying safe plants. Use visuals, role-playing, or social stories to reinforce safety protocols.
- **Modelling Safe Practices:** Teachers and staff should model safe practices during gardening tasks. For example, show students how to use tools properly, when to take breaks, and how to communicate if they feel unsafe or uncomfortable.
- **Peer Support:** For students who need additional assistance, encourage peer support. Pair students up in a buddy system where they can help each other follow safety rules and ensure everyone is participating safely.

Inclusive Health and Safety Measures

- **Adapting for Disabilities:** Ensure that all students, regardless of their abilities, can engage in the gardening activities safely. This may include using adaptive tools for students with limited motor skills or providing sensory accommodations for students with autism or sensory processing disorders.
- **Personalized Support Plans:** For students with specific health conditions, such as asthma or allergies, create individualized safety plans that address their specific needs. This may include making accommodations for certain activities or ensuring medication is readily available.