



Castle Tower School

Learning and Teaching 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 to Learning and Teaching in Castle Tower School

Teaching in Castle Tower School involves a collaborative approach with teachers, assistants and other professional staff working together to provide our pupils with opportunities to explore, investigate, interact, engage, and develop through interactive, practical, and fun activities designed to meet their individual needs.

Definition of Learning

Learning is the process of developing, demonstrating, and applying independently new and transferable skills, knowledge and understanding in a variety of contexts for life-long learning.

Definition of Teaching

Teaching is the process of attending to people's needs, experiences, and feelings, and intervening so that they learn things, and go beyond the given.

We are determined to teach children how to "learn-to-learn" to become independent learners and develop skills for life-long learning. We believe children learn better when they are:

- Engaged through excellent teaching;
- Provided with challenges to show them what they can do;
- Supported in their learning journey;
- Happy, safe, and secure within the school and class environment;
- Provided with opportunities to practice and revisit learning at their pace;
- Involved in their learning process; and
- Developing in areas which support their home life and their future activities.

Our school provides a broad and balanced curriculum tailored to suit our pupils needs and abilities. We ensure that all the learning is of high quality which is planned and managed so that every child is supported and challenged. We believe in developing a strong partnership with parents/ carers to ensure that learning outside of our school thrives.

Our Principles of Learning and Teaching

- Ensure every pupil succeeds: provide an inclusive education within a culture of high expectations. Ability is not fixed.
- Build on what pupils already know: structure and pace teaching so that children know what is to be learnt, how and why.
- Make learning vivid and real: develop understanding through enquiry, creativity, e-learning, and problem solving.
- Make learning an enjoyable and challenging experience: stimulate learning through matching teaching techniques and strategies to a range of learning styles.
- Promote assessment for learning: make pupils partners in their learning
- Enrich the learning experience: build learning skills across the curriculum.

Learning Styles

In Castle Tower teachers must have the ability to think on their feet and often think outside of the box to allow the curriculum to be accessible to our pupils. We encourage active learning and encourage pupils to have maximum time doing practical, hands-on tasks and cater for all learning styles. Our teaching approaches should engage all the senses.

We recognise our pupils learn in a range of diverse ways and recognise the need to develop strategies that encourage all pupils to learn in ways which best suit them. We have established our pupils learn best through practical and multisensory learning methods.

When do our pupils learn best?

They are learning best when we:

- Know our pupils and their needs;
- Understand our pupils' interests and what will engage them;
- Use engaging, active learning methods;
- Encourage pupils to participate in their learning
- Provide opportunities for success;
- Understand and focus on our pupils' strengths;
- Create sensible and realistic goals for their learning;
- Ensure the mental, physical, medical, and social needs are being met;
- Be creative in the learning opportunities we provide.

What opportunities do we provide to our pupils?

We provide opportunities to learn through:

- Providing opportunities for Independent, pair, group, and whole class work;
- Practical and multisensory work;
- Using of technology within our classrooms;
- Providing opportunities for exploration, enquiry, research and finding out;
- Thematic Planning to link learning;
- Investigating and problem-solving activities;
- Using our local area and community for trips to bring the world to life;
- Drama, Role-Play, Music, and Creative activities;
- Providing opportunities for physical development throughout our school day.

How do we ensure effective learning?

We ensure effective learning through:

- Thorough preparation and planning;
- The use of technology to enhance the curriculum and extend learning;

- Engaging lessons and activities;
- Carefully structured activities matched to pupils needs and abilities;
- Providing an appropriate environment for the needs of the pupils;
- A positive atmosphere where pupils are supported to take risks with their learning;
- Opportunities to reflect and review learning where appropriate;
- Opportunities for continued professional development to support staff in meeting pupils needs.

Cross-Curricular Links

Our school uses the thematic approach to learning within our Foundation, Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2, and Key Stage 3 departments. This aims to provide opportunities to learning across the Northern Ireland Curriculum where connected learning is appropriate and meets the needs of the pupils.

At Key Stage 4 and 5, pupils learning is connected through the pathway options and courses available to them.

Our Learning Community

We encourage the use of our School Community to help provide real life learning and teaching experiences to our pupils so that they can be effective contributors to society and be able to build life-long skills which will support them when they leave the world of education. Our school community not only involves people within the school but also people and business within our local areas which provide real life learning situations for our pupils.

Assessment for Learning

Assessment for Learning is at the heart of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. This is where pupils are provided with opportunities to take ownership over their learning by being informed about what they are learning and how they will succeed in their learning. This helps our pupils to become self-motivated, have a sense of purpose in school and be able to take responsibility for their learning. Within Castle Tower School, we tailor the Assessment for Learning approach to meet the needs of the pupils within our classrooms and use it within our PLP's to help support our pupil learning experiences. Assessment for Learning can be seen through our approaches to schedules and workstations, our activity folders or work boxes.

Assessment for Learning is evident through:

- Photographs and videos of our pupils which we take daily to show their progress and successes;
- The Positive atmosphere within our classrooms using verbal praise, thumps up, high fives, reward programmes, choices boards, visual symbols to help pupils identify what they are succeeding in;
- Comments made on their work through our feedback and marking policies;
- Information provided to parents/carers on their success.

Learning Intentions and Success Criteria

At the heart of Assessment for Learning, is the idea for informing pupils about the learning outcomes of activities they are partaking in and the steps to success to meet these outcomes. Within Castle Tower School, we cater for a while range of pupils who may not be able to access the understanding of these outcomes and success criteria. The teachers and the staff within Castle Tower school understand the needs and abilities of our pupils and are best placed to make judgements on how to present this information to our pupils. This may be through:

- Using Visuals such as Communicate in Print Symbols, Visuals on the screen and so on;
- TEACCH Stations;
- Verbal Explanation;
- Discussion; or
- Written Intentions and Success Criteria.

Any strategies being used within the classroom will be carefully thought about by the staff and will be used as appropriate with the pupil at the centre of their considerations.

Roles and Responsibilities

Role of the Teacher

The Role of the Teacher within Learning and Teaching is to:

- Provide access to the NI Curriculum and the areas of learning within the Castle Tower School Curriculum Framework to all pupils;
- Ensure high standards of planning and preparation to meet the pupils needs;
- Use appropriate techniques to ensure structure throughout the school day;
- Develop a positive and active learning environment which is appropriate for the pupils within the classroom;
- Make assessment judgements based of the abilities and needs of the pupils and use these judgements to effectively plan classroom activities and PLP (Personal Learning Plan) targets;
- Ensure pupils achievements are recorded and evidence of the pupils achieving their targets is available;
- Mark pupil work in accordance with the schools "Feedback and Marking" Policy;
- Ensure appropriate progress is provided in pupils' work;
- Ensure parents/carers and pupils are involved in the learning process through the use of the seesaw app;
- Participate in CPD activities to enhance classroom practice and seek out support from other experts to meet the pupils needs;
- Inform their classroom assistants of the expectations of the activities, give them roles to participate in and ensure a collaborative working team is in place;
- Liaise with the Allied Health Professionals working within the school to ensure all aspects of pupil learning needs are being met and provided for within the classroom;
- Review the Castle Tower School Curriculum and provide feedback to the Senior

Leadership Team where appropriate;

- Ensure effective monitoring and evaluating is taking place within the classroom to ensure high quality experiences are being provided.

Role of the Classroom Assistants

The Role of the Classroom Assistants within Learning and Teaching is to:

- Support the class teacher to provide learning opportunities within the classroom;
- Support the pupils within their learning activities;
- Help promote a positive and engaging learning environment;
- Support the class teacher in developing ideas for classroom practice, making resources, setting up activities and making suggestions for learning activities;
- Supporting the assessment of the pupils learning and providing feedback to the teacher on activities being used;
- Provide opportunities for positive behaviour support through identifying the needs of the pupils.

Role of The Senior Leadership and Management Teams

The Role of the Senior Leadership and Management Teams are to:

- Ensure adequate time is provided to the teaching and classroom assistant staff for thoroughly planning and preparation;
- Provide opportunities for CPD which meets the needs of the staff and pupils within the school;
- Take part in classroom observations to ensure high quality learning and teaching opportunities are in place;
- Ensure effective monitoring and evaluation procedures are in place to ensure pupil learning activities are of a high standard;
- Provide the appropriate resources are in place for pupils and staff to access;
- Review classroom planning and provide feedback where appropriate.

Role of Board of Governors

- The Role of The Board of Governors is to:
- Ensure they are aware of the learning and teaching practices which are taking place throughout the school;
- Ensure the Senior Leadership and Management Teams are following the monitoring and evaluation procedures;

- Review and be aware of the CPD opportunities being put in place for staff;
- Ensure adequate financial and resourcing support is available for our pupils learning experiences.

Feedback and Marking Policy

Introduction

Feedback and Marking is an intrinsic part of Learning and Teaching, Planning and Assessment. It has the potential to be a powerful, manageable, and useful ongoing diagnostic record of pupil's achievement that feeds into future planning. It is also a highly effective medium for providing feedback to pupils about their progress. Responding to pupils' work through constructive comment acknowledges achievement, promotes positive attitudes and behaviour, and leads to an improvement in standards. Teachers follow an agreed system and consistent procedures in responding to pupils' work to give clear messages to them, parents/carers, and other staff about individual progress. Evidence of our response to pupil's work can be found recorded on worksheets, in workbooks, through our observation notes, through comments made on pictures we take but also many of our comments are through verbal responses and gestures as well such as a "high five," "thumbs up" and so on. We use our judgement as professionals in a constructive way when working with our pupils to take them forward. We believe that the most effective way of feedback and marking for all pupils is through dialogue.

Aims

The aims of feedback and marking are:

- Assist learning;
- Provide information for assessment;
- Encourage, motivate, support, and promote positive attitudes;
- Inform planning;
- Promote higher standards;
- Correct errors and clear up misunderstandings;
- Recognise achievement, presentation, and effort;
- Provide constructive feedback;
- Show pupils that we value their work;
- Allow pupils to reflect on their past performances and to set new targets together with the teacher.

Objectives

Our objectives are to ensure feedback and marking:

- Is constructive;
- Is related to the pupils' achievements;
- Is related to specific targets set for the pupils within their PLP's or classroom plans;
- Is shared and made clear to the pupils in advance;

- Follows consistent practice throughout the school;
- Ensures that pupils know how well they are doing;
- Provides pupils with opportunities to assess their own work and that of others (peer and self-assessment);
- Is positive and constructive with appropriate praise given;
- Sets targets to ensure pupil motivation and involvement in progress;
- Encourages a dialogue between teacher and pupil.

Feedback and Marking Guidelines

Judgements should be made by the class staff team about what feedback and marking guidance is appropriate for the pupils within their classrooms. Our broad guidance for teachers and staff are to ensure:

- Work is marked, dated, and signed as quickly as possible;
- When using a pen to mark work care is always taken to preserve the integrity of pupils' work;
- Feedback includes verbal and written feedback where appropriate;
- Help codes should be used when marking to convey amount of adult help required during activity (see Appendix 1);
- Feedback and marking are constructive and can advise on areas for improvement;
- Feedback and marking can be done in the classroom with the pupil or a group;
- Self-Assessment can be used where appropriate – this could include 'smiley faces,' 'thumbs up thumbs down' and 'traffic light' system;
- Feedback and marking should be tailored to the pupils' needs and understanding.

Rewarding Work

In accordance with our Positive Behaviour Policy, teachers establish their own reward systems, appropriate to the pupils' age and needs in their class. These may be in the form of stamps, stickers, and certificates. Smiley faces etc. may also be used by individual teachers. The whole school awards system is also used to reward achievement e.g., pupil of week/month, school assemblies, prize day.

Planning and Assessment

Feedback and marking informs planning and provides information for assessment particularly for target setting within the PLP framework. The ability of the individual pupil and the effort they have put into a piece of work will always be considered when marking.

Time is given to pupils to reflect upon marking to ensure that they benefit from it. They are also given the opportunity to discuss (where appropriate to their learning needs) their work with the teacher.

Monitoring, Evaluating and Reviewing

A key aspect of the leadership/ senior leadership team's role, along with the subject coordinators, is to monitor, evaluate and review the effectiveness of our feedback and marking procedures throughout the school. This is achieved in a variety of ways including reviewing planning, looking at samples of work, discussions with staff and pupils, observing in lessons PRSD (Performance Review and Staff Development), sharing of good practice, and

providing appropriate and high-quality resources.

We are committed to ensuring that all staff develop and maintain their skills and can make professional decisions regarding assessment and marking. Staff are encouraged to identify areas in which they feel they may benefit from further training. Training needs may also be identified by the director of curriculum, curriculum leaders or subject coordinators. Training may be provided in several ways including in-school provision and attendance at courses.

Homework Policy

In Castle Tower, homework is only set at the request of a parent/carer. When this is requested, it is designed to complement the work being carried out within the classroom and learning environment to support skills being transferred into different areas of a pupil's life.

Safeguarding and Child protection

Safeguarding and child protection are fundamental to the ethos of Castle Tower School, ensuring that every pupil feels safe, valued, and supported. This commitment underpins all aspects of learning and teaching, creating an environment where children can thrive emotionally, socially, and academically. Staff are trained to identify and respond to concerns promptly, fostering trust and security within the school community. By prioritising the mental health, wellbeing and safety, Castle Tower enables pupils to engage fully in their education appropriate to their learning needs. This holistic approach strengthens relationships and promotes a culture of inclusion and care throughout the school.

Appendix 1

Feedback and Marking Policy Guidelines

Guidelines for the marking of work/giving feedback to pupils in Castle Tower School. Judgements should be made by the class staff team about what feedback and marking guidance is appropriate for the pupils within their classrooms.

Our broad guidance for teachers and staff is to ensure:

- Work is marked, dated, and signed as quickly as possible;
- Homework is marked as rigorously as class work; (If this has been requested by a parent/carer)
- When using a pen to mark work care is always taken to preserve the integrity of pupils' work;
- Feedback includes verbal and written feedback where appropriate;
- Help codes should be used when marking to convey amount of adult help required during activity
- Feedback and marking are constructive and can advise on areas for improvement;
- Feedback and marking can be done in the classroom with the pupil or a group;
- Self-Assessment can be used where appropriate – this could include 'smiley faces,' 'thumbs up thumbs down' and 'traffic light' system;
- Feedback and marking should be tailored to the pupils' needs and understanding.

Help Codes

When working with our pupils, support/help strategies may be needed. To ensure we are using the same terminology; staff should use the following codes when marking pupil work.

HOH	Hand under Hand
PP	Physical Prompt
VP	Verbal Prompt
GP	Gesture Prompt
WH	With Help – Detail the type of help given
I	Independent
NI	Not Interested