Castle Tower School

Topic Based Learning 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.

Topic-Based Learning Policy

Introduction

This policy outlines the principles, values, and practices that underpin the teaching and learning of The World Around Us through a topic-based approach at Castle Tower School. Topic-based learning is a cross-curricular, thematic approach that connects different subject areas through meaningful and engaging themes. This area of learning encourages pupils to investigate the natural and human made world, develop a sense of place and time, and understand how things work. It promotes inquiry-based learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving, enabling children to make connections between past, present, and future, and between local and global contexts.

At Castle Tower, topic-based learning is a key strategy in delivering a broad and balanced curriculum that meets the diverse needs of our learners. It encourages pupils to make connections between subjects, apply their knowledge in real-world contexts, and develop transferable skills. This approach also supports collaborative teaching, flexible planning, and inclusive learning experiences that are tailored to individual strengths and interests.

Vision and Rationale

At Castle Tower, we believe that learning should be:
- Relevant to pupils' lives, interests, and experiences, helping them see the value and purpose of their education.
- Integrated across subjects to promote holistic understanding and encourage connections between different areas of knowledge.
- Active and engaging, fostering curiosity, exploration, and a love of learning through hands-on, meaningful experiences.

Topic-based learning supports our commitment to developing independent, reflective learners who are equipped with the skills, confidence, and resilience to thrive in a rapidly changing world. It aligns with our school's ethos of inclusion, creativity, and high expectations, and provides a flexible framework that allows for both structure and innovation in teaching and learning.

Curriculum Design

- Topics are carefully selected to ensure breadth and balance of the national curriculum objectives while allowing flexibility to incorporate pupil interests and current events.
- Each topic includes clearly defined learning intentions, success criteria, and links to Geography, History, Science and Technology to ensure coherence and depth.
- Curriculum Overviews are used to ensure progression in knowledge, skills, and understanding across year groups and key stages.
- Topics are reviewed annually to maintain relevance, challenge, and alignment with school

priorities and pupil needs.
- Thematic planning allows for differentiation, enrichment, and the integration of key skills such as literacy, numeracy, and digital competence.

Planning and Delivery

- The curriculum is organised on a topic basis wherein the contributary subjects are integrated into the yearly programme of topics followed throughout the school.

- Teachers plan collaboratively within and across departments to ensure consistency, continuity, and shared ownership of the curriculum.

Planning includes:
  - Key questions to guide enquiry and stimulate critical thinking.
  - Cross-curricular links to reinforce learning across subjects.
  - Differentiated activities to meet the needs of all learners.
  - Opportunities for pupil voice and choice, encouraging autonomy and engagement.
- Lessons are designed to be inclusive, creative, and responsive to pupil needs, incorporating a variety of teaching methods and learning styles.

-Planning is supported by long-term overviews, medium-term plans, and weekly lesson plans, all of which are regularly reviewed, evaluated and adapted.

- The emphasis is on an integrated approach with linkages between Science, Geography, History, outdoor classroom and other curriculum areas.

Teaching Strategies

- A wide range of pedagogical approaches are used to support topic-based learning, including:
  - Inquiry-based learning to promote questioning, investigation, and discovery.
  - Project-based learning to encourage collaboration, problem-solving, and real-world application.
  - Role play and drama to develop empathy, communication, and imagination.
  - Outdoor and experiential learning to enhance engagement and contextual understanding.
- Pupils are encouraged to take ownership of their learning by asking questions, exploring ideas, and presenting their findings in creative and meaningful ways.
- Teachers use scaffolding, modelling, and feedback to support skill development and deepen understanding.

Assessment and Feedback

- Assessment is ongoing, formative, and embedded within the learning process, with clear success criteria shared with pupils.
- Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their learning through journals, portfolios, presentations, and peer/self-assessment.
- Summative assessments are used to evaluate the outcomes of each topic and inform future planning.

- Feedback is timely, specific, and constructive, supporting pupil progress and celebrating achievement.
- Photographic evidence and annotated work are used to document learning journeys and demonstrate progress, particularly for pupils with additional needs through the use of Evidence for Learning.

Inclusion and Equity
- All pupils have access to topic-based learning, with adaptations made to ensure accessibility and engagement at each learner's level of ability.
- Topics are chosen and delivered in ways that reflect and celebrate diverse cultures, histories, and perspectives.
- Resources and activities are selected to promote equity, representation, and cultural awareness.
- Teachers use inclusive strategies such as visual supports, sensory activities, and assistive technology to remove barriers to learning and participation.

Professional Development
- Opportunities for professional learning include:
  - Internal and external training sessions
  - Peer observations and coaching
  - Collaborative planning and reflection
- Best practice is shared through team meetings, learning walks, and digital platforms.
- Staff are encouraged to contribute to and access shared digital resources via Microsoft Teams to support consistency and innovation.

Monitoring and Evaluation
- Senior leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning through:
  - Lesson observations to evaluate instructional strategies and pupil engagement.
  - Planning scrutiny to ensure alignment with curriculum objectives and school priorities.
  - Pupil voice to gather feedback on learning experiences and inform improvements.
  - Work sampling to assess standards, progression, and consistency.
- The impact of topic-based learning is evaluated through pupil outcomes, engagement levels, and feedback from staff, pupils, and parents.
- Findings are used to inform school development planning and continuous improvement.

Review
This policy will be reviewed annually by the Head of Secondary Curriculum in collaboration with the topic-based learning team. The review process will consider feedback from all stakeholders and reflect any changes in curriculum guidance, school priorities, or pupil needs.