



IN ASSOCIATION WITH NATURE PLAY IRELAND

“The children want to play outside all the time”

Nature Play Ireland explain how they worked with a Ballymena school to provide an inclusive outdoor play space to meet their pupils' needs



Castle Tower School provides a teaching and learning environment for over 325 pupils with special educational needs. Their abilities range between multiple and profound complex needs, severe to mild learning difficulties, and social and behavioural difficulties. The school community believes that it is their aim to prepare their pupils for life outside school and for independence after school, so the new building was designed to enhance the learning of life skills. The £20m building, which opened in September, is an incredible facility that will transform the education provided for the pupils.

An important part of the school design was to develop play facilities that could cater for the needs of each and every pupil. Not only across a range of moderate to complex needs, but also across the entire age spectrum (three to 19 years). And this is where Nature Play came in.

ENGAGING

Based on the clients' needs, three internal courtyards were designed as welcoming 'green hearts' for play, calming, and to simply enjoy a breeze at

the centre of the beautiful new school building. Each courtyard was themed differently by the teaching staff and the playspace designers: sand and water play to enhance teamworking, spur imagination and get little hands engaged with the earth; music play to get children moving or just listening; and a remembrance courtyard with the soothing sound of water falling through Virbela basins.

Outside, a number of different play spaces were created, including:

- Age-appropriate grouped play spaces close to the classrooms
- An 'active' space for children to 'break-out' in, with dynamic equipment such as a cableway, hexagonal swing and climbing wall
- A sensory garden with oak sleeper planters to grow their own plants and special equipment to stimulate the senses
- A special garden with a shelter for rainy days and play equipment which can accommodate wheelchairs.

SUCCESS

And the outdoor spaces have been a huge hit with pupils and staff alike, as some of

the school's teachers explain...

“Nature Play Ireland worked with the design team and staff for over two years to develop a scheme that is truly breath-taking. Their knowledge and understanding about the fundamentals of play-based learning is second to none. Each and every piece of equipment chosen has play value, something we found Nature Play prioritised in their design proposals throughout.”

“The children want to be outside all the time now because they have so much fun on the equipment.”

“Outside play is an absolutely essential part of school life at Castle Tower and playgrounds are an incredible learning space for our children so I felt it was really important that we picked the correct equipment. One visit to Dumfries House (Ayrshire) created by Nature Play was all it took for me to know that the Nature Play equipment was exactly what we needed for our new school. It has superb play value, is well built and looks great.”

To find out how Nature Play could help your school, get in touch via the website at www.natureplay.ie