



# Mitchell House School

## Board of Governors Annual Report 2024-2025

The Principal and Governors of Mitchell House School are pleased to present this report as a summary of the life of the school during the school year 2024-2025.

### The Board of Governors

Chairperson	Mr William Haughan	EA Representative
Vice Chairperson	Mrs Diane Eakin	DENI Representative
	Mrs Clair Whiteside	EA Representative
	Mrs Lois Totton	DENI Representative
	Mr Bill Manwaring/ Mr Graham Hawthorne	Parent Representative
	Mr Jonny Collins	Parent Representative
	Miss Deborah Graham	Teacher Representative
	Mrs Alison Montgomery	Co-oped Representative
	Miss Miriam Donnan	Secretary

Reconstitution occurred during the 2024-2025 school year. We thanked Mr Manwaring for his contribution to the Governors and welcomed Mr Hawthorne as the new Parent Representative.

## Mitchell House School Staff

### Senior Leadership Team

Principal	Miss M Donnan
Vice Principal	Mr Iain Shanks
Senior Leader	Miss Graham
Head of Primary	Mrs L Boyd
Head of Post Primary	Mrs N Milligan

### Middle Leadership Team

Safeguarding & Preventive Curriculum	Mrs P Collins
Learning Support Co-ordinator	Miss C McIlwaine
Literacy Co-ordinator	Miss E Watterson
Numeracy Co-ordinator	Vacant Post

### Assistant Teachers

Miss K Aspinall  
Mrs L Boyd  
Mrs A Cardwell (temporary)  
Mrs P Collins  
Ms E Coote  
Miss D Graham  
Mr D Kennedy (Secondment)  
Mrs G Magowan  
Mrs C Martin  
Mrs N Milligan (4 days)  
Mrs M Murphy (4 days)  
Mrs S Murphy (4.5 days part-time temporary)  
Miss C McCay  
Miss C McIlwaine (3 days part-time)  
Miss Z Ryan (3 days part-time permanent)  
Mr T Stevenson  
Mrs A Thompson  
Mr J Thompson  
Miss E Watterson  
Miss A Wright

### Classroom assistants

Miss E Algar  
Miss E Ballentine  
Miss P Bell  
Miss E Black (temporary)  
Mrs J Bright  
Mrs H Brownlee/Miss A McKenna (job share)  
Miss V Chazzara-Gillispie  
Mrs R Cooper/Miss S Henderson (job share)  
Miss R Corrie (3 days)  
Mrs C Donaghy  
Miss L Dillon  
Mrs B Dowery (3 days, temporary)  
Miss G Fitzpatrick (temporary)

Mrs D Fox (resigned June 25)  
Miss R Forsythe (temporary)  
Ms W Halliday  
Miss K Kernohan  
Miss R Laurie (part time)  
Mr P Martin  
Mrs D Moffett  
Miss A Miskimmin (part-time)  
Mrs J McCartney  
Miss E McClurg  
Miss Z McGrath  
Ms C O'Connor (temporary)  
Miss D Orr  
Mrs E Peterson/Mr J Collins (temporary)  
Mrs S Perrott  
Mrs A Shields (part time)  
Mrs M Stewart/Mrs A Boyd (job share)  
Ms L Thompson  
Mrs K Thompson/Miss S Dunwoody (job share)  
Mrs R Wade (maternity leave)  
Mrs K Wallace  
Mrs L Walsh (3 days)  
Mrs C Walker  
Mrs S Wilgar

General Assistants

Vacancy (4 days per week)  
Mrs Z Blair (Career Break from April 25)  
Miss R Ballentine (temporary)  
Ms J Flynn  
Ms D Hamilton (3 days per week, temporary)  
Miss J Halliday  
Miss L Loney (4 days per week, temporary)  
Miss D MacMahon (1 day per week)

Senior Clerical Officer

Mrs A Miller/Mrs G Elliott (job share)

Clerical Officer

Mrs P Hull

Technician

Mr B Soley

**Ancillary staff**

Building Supervisor  
Cleaning Supervisor

Mr K Comfort  
Ms S Laverty

Cleaning Staff

Mrs A Lundy  
Ms J Ruffus (temporary)  
Mr N Stanislaw (resigned May 25)  
Vacancy  
Vacancy

## Health Trust Staff

School Nurse	Miss N McKee/various others
Physiotherapists	Mrs C Haighton Mrs A Wilson Mrs T Weston Mrs V Clarke Mrs K Johnston (Assistant)
Speech & Language Therapists	Mrs L Bloomer (3 days) Miss E McCory (4 days) Mrs S McCrory (Assistant)
Occupational Therapists	Mrs S Bryans Ms B Abernethy Ms E Baillie Ms S Bohan Ms E Kavanagh Mrs N Stringer (Assistant)

## Pupil Representatives 2024 – 2025

Head pupil	Courtney Gibson	
Deputy Head pupil	Shay Garrett	
Student Council representatives:	Courtney Gibson	Chairperson
	Shay Garrett	Deputy Chair
	Eimear McGrandles	Lions
	Hailey-May Hindes	Colts
	Ethan Rea	Jaguars
	Rebecca Morvayova	Falcons
	Tilly Hudson	Panthers
	Gemma McAllister	Sparrows

The Student Council of 2024 - 2025 had a productive and purposeful year. They started in September 2025 with our Student Council elections, successfully appointing six student council representatives and a further six 2<sup>nd</sup> representatives from each of our Post Primary classes and our P7 Sparrows class.

They enjoyed being part of the *The Conservation Volunteers Programme - Young Trees and Minds Project*, throughout the school year, which involved us being outdoors in the sensory garden together with our volunteer Hollie, who helped to nurture our tree nursery and learn about different native trees in Northern Ireland and how to care for our Nursery.

They worked together as a student council to plan, create and film our *Nurture* video with the aim of raising awareness and educating our pupils about what *Nurture* means in our school, this supported our school working towards being awarded our *Nurture* accreditation in June 2025.

They had a great day out as part of our Shared Education partnership with Ashfield Boys High School and St Joseph's Primary School attending Stormont Buildings for a guided tour and education workshop, where we all enjoyed learning about our Northern Ireland Assembly and how our representatives work together to represent the people of Northern Ireland just like our student council represent our pupils of Mitchell House School. We were very proud of how confidently our pupils communicated and voiced their ideas and represented our school that day.

## School Enrolment

The school accepts pupils with a physical disability and associated learning/sensory needs aged between 3 and 19 years old. Admission is by application to Education Authority Belfast region, 40 Academy Street, Belfast BT1 2NQ

Enrolment	June 2022	June 2023	June 2024	June 2025
Nursery	6	6	7	7
Primary	55	57	55	52
Post Primary	40	43	53	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>109</b>

## School Building and Environment

The governors remain acutely aware of the daily challenges faced by staff and pupils operating within a building that was not originally designed to function as a school. Key issues include limited storage capacity, a lack of appropriate breakout spaces, and classrooms that are often too small to comfortably accommodate modern teaching practices.

Pupils must regularly navigate between mobile classrooms, which presents additional difficulties during adverse weather conditions. The elevated nature of the site also poses accessibility challenges, with wheelchair users requiring frequent assistance to move up and down ramps. Governors continue to monitor these concerns closely and are committed to supporting efforts to improve the environment wherever possible. They are also conscious of the impact the environment has on staff wellbeing.

A capital works project is planned for the replacement of two mobile blocks. A significant amount of time has gone into the planning with the architect team in EA. The business case is to be presented to DE for funding approval before works can start.

During the year a number of maintenance issues were addressed including:

- Replacement of the roof in the 'old house' area of the school
- New storage container
- Replacement of the evacuation steps on two areas of the building
- Works on a newly identified asbestos site in the boiler house
- Installation of the Heatboss system across all classrooms
- Fallen trees as a result of storm damage
- Upgrade to the alarm system
- Upgrade to the CCTV system

## School Year

Staff training took place covering a range of topic areas including:

- Safeguarding
- Intensive Interaction
- Attention Autism
- Deprivation of Liberty
- Eating and Drinking
- Addressing Bullying in Schools
- Visual Impairment Awareness
- Attention and Listening
- First Aid
- Policy update
- Music Therapy
- Senior Leadership Training
- Team Teach
- Guide Dogs – CVI training

This year has been rich in opportunities that have supported the wellbeing and development of our pupils and staff. A highlight has been the introduction of Raia, our school assistance puppy in training, through our ongoing partnership with Assistance Dogs NI. Visits by Lexi and Gary prior to Raia's arrival were incredibly well received. Raia has quickly become a much-loved member of the school community. Feedback from both staff and pupils has been overwhelmingly positive, with her presence having a calming and joyful impact across the school. Our partnership with Wing It, Ballyhackamore, has been invaluable in supporting the ongoing costs of Raia as well as developing a partnership with their staff.

We were also delighted to welcome a film crew from UTV, who have been documenting Raia's journey from the day she was handed over to the school. Her progress will be featured in the upcoming series "Dogs with Jobs", due to air later in the year. This is a wonderful opportunity to showcase the positive impact of Assistance Dogs in special school settings and to highlight the unique role Raia is playing in supporting the wellbeing of our pupils and staff.

We were pleased to join with other schools in the EBALC Learning Community to participate in a series of training sessions on Addressing Bullying in Schools, delivered by the Education Authority. The programme culminated in a collaborative workshop involving pupil representatives from all participating schools, promoting shared learning and pupil voice.

Throughout the year, we welcomed a number of important visitors to the school, including Mr. Pengelly, Chief Executive of the Education Authority; Minister Givan, Education Minister; and the Minister for Health. These visits provided valuable opportunities to showcase the work of our school and advocate for the needs of our pupils.

We are pleased to have Forest School status, enabling our pupils to access outdoor learning experiences through the Forest School curriculum. In June 2024, we were also delighted to be awarded the Nurture UK Award, following an 18-month journey of developing and formalising our nurture provision. This award recognises the outstanding work already taking place in school

to support the emotional and social development of our pupils. We are one of 12 other schools in Northern Ireland to have achieved this award and the first Special School in Belfast. We look forward to celebrating this achievement with our school community in the new academic year.

A range of external organisations, including Cedar Foundation, Barnardo's, Aware, and Made for More, delivered targeted programmes to support pupil wellbeing and personal development. In partnership with Queen's University Belfast, we also hosted four medical students for a three-week placement in January. This annual programme allows students to gain valuable experience in a special school setting, working alongside therapy staff and completing a case study as part of their assessment.

Staff wellbeing has remained a priority, with a number of initiatives organised throughout the year. These included a wellbeing day in August featuring breakfast and a session of crazy golf, regular coffee mornings, birthday recognitions, and other thoughtful gestures to support morale and team spirit.

Pupil wellbeing was celebrated through a variety of activities, including class treat days at Christmas and in the summer, discos, themed treat breaks, and visits from entertainers such as Magic George, as well as fun sessions like cup stacking, Sportstopia and Make a Sound.

The Friends of Mitchell House continued to play a vital role in fundraising, organising events such as the Christmas Fair and Sponsored Walk. We are incredibly grateful to the Friends of Mitchell House for funding a Summer Scheme run by our dedicated staff team. This initiative provided pupils with a wide range of engaging activities during the summer break, including arts and crafts, sports, and sensory experiences tailored to meet individual needs. The scheme was a fantastic opportunity for pupils to continue socialising, learning, and having fun in a familiar and supportive environment, and it was very well received by both pupils and families.

Our Annual Christmas Event, held at the Salvation Army Church, was a heart-warming evening that brought together pupils, families, staff, and the wider school community. Our School Formal in June was a joyful celebration for our senior pupils, supported by staff to ensure a memorable evening. Prize Day provided a fitting end to the year, recognising the achievements of our Post Primary pupils and offering a heartfelt farewell to our leavers, who will always remain part of the Mitchell House family.

We were also proud to see Miss Donnan represent the school at a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace in May—an honour that reflects the dedication and excellence of our school community.

## **School Development Plan**

Following on from a number of years of having an interim one-year action plan during the COVID years, we began the process of consulting with our stakeholders regarding our new School Development Plan. It will run from 2024 – 2027.

### **Safeguarding**

Safeguarding is a key priority at all times in Mitchell House School. We recognise how vulnerable our pupils can be and all staff are vigilant in watching for signs of abuse or neglect and listening to the pupils. We maintain clear procedures for receiving, recording and reporting disclosures. Mrs Collins is the Designated teacher. Miss Donnan and Mr Shanks are the Deputy Designated teachers. Mr Collins continues in the role of Designated Governor for Child protection. Staff received updated training in August 2024. The Safeguarding Team have met at least once a month throughout the year and Mrs Collins has met with Mr Collins (Safeguarding Governor).

Referrals were made to the appropriate services for family support when required.

### **Staff Development**

This year, the Education Authority provided funding to Special Schools to support the development of a new leadership structure. As a result, the Governors were pleased to appoint a number of new posts, establishing a Middle Leadership Team within the school. In addition every teacher holds an area of responsibility and is actively involved in action planning and developing their allocated area of the curriculum. Unfortunately, due to Action Short of Strike, Governors were unable to meet with individual teachers to review action plans this year. However, PRSD (Performance Review and Staff Development) was carried out, with the Senior Leadership Team reviewing the performance of all teachers across three key areas: Whole School Focus, Teaching and Learning, and Professional Development.

Staff continued to engage in professional collaboration through our involvement in local Area Learning Communities for Post Primary, Primary, and Special Schools. These cluster meetings provided valuable opportunities for teachers to share practice and ideas, using a blended approach of face-to-face and virtual sessions.

Our Shared Education Programme continued successfully this year, with pupils enjoying a range of activities organised in partnership with Ashfield Boys' High School and St Joseph's Primary School, Ballyhackamore. We also maintained our shared classes with Ashfield, enabling a number of our pupils to access subjects and qualifications not currently offered at Mitchell House. We were particularly pleased to re-establish our link with Bloomfield Collegiate, who accommodated one of our pupils to study a GCSE subject this year.

## Curriculum

Pupils are offered a full range of subjects in the Northern Ireland Curriculum. These may be adapted to suit the individual needs of the pupils.

<b>Foundation/Key stage 1 &amp; 2</b>	<b>Key stage 3</b>	<b>Key stage 4</b>
Language & Literacy	English	English
Mathematics and Numeracy	Mathematics	Mathematics
The Arts	PE Art & Design Music	P.E.
Physical Development and movement	Modern languages	Modern languages
The World Around Us (WAU)	History & Geography Science & Technology & Design	Environment and Society Science & Technology
Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU)	Learning for Life and Work	Learning for Life and Work
R.E.	RE	RE
	Home Economics	Home Economics
	ICT	ICT

While there are no statutory curriculum requirements for pupils Post-16, Mitchell House continues to provide a broad and meaningful educational experience. In addition to core subjects, pupils have access to a variety of Occupational Studies units, delivered both in school and through external providers. A range of Entry Level programmes is offered, and where appropriate, pupils are supported to undertake GCSE qualifications.

Leavers were given the opportunity to attend sampling days at a number of organisations including Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC), People First, Mencap, Job Club, and Edgumbe Day Centre. These experiences help pupils explore future pathways and prepare for life beyond school. Pupils also participated in work experience placements and STEM events, which were both enjoyable and enriching.

Our Therapy Teams—including Physiotherapy, Speech and Language Therapy, and Occupational Therapy—continue to play a vital role in supporting pupils to access the curriculum. The Physiotherapy Team also facilitates Hydrotherapy sessions and Horse-riding through the Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA), offering therapeutic and confidence-building experiences.

### Community Links and Extra Curricular

Mitchell House maintains a wide range of community links that enhance the educational experience. We are grateful for the ongoing support of George Best City Airport, Tesco, and IKEA, as well as regular visits from Live Active NI, who deliver a variety of sporting activities both in and outside of school. We are also well supported by local churches including Knocknagoney, Belmont Presbyterian, and St Mark's, with clergy visiting regularly. Organisations such as Scripture Union and Crown Jesus Ministries also contribute to assemblies and lessons throughout the year.

We are especially thankful to Happy Days Children’s Charity, who continue to provide funding for outings and projects, and to the local Rotarians, whose generous support has enabled a number of pupil activities.

As part of our Entitlement Framework arrangements, pupils in our Enrichment Class attend Belfast Met on a weekly basis, further expanding their learning opportunities and preparing them for transition into adult services or further education.

### **Attendance 2024 – 2025**

<b>CLASS</b>	<b>% ATTENDANCE</b>
Ducklings	64%
Robins	87%
Toucans	85%
Swans	79%
Starlings	81%
Penguins	72%
Puffins	82%
Sparrows	87%
Lions	78%
Colts	76%
Jaguars	63%
Panthers	70%
Falcons	83%
<b>Total</b>	<b>79%</b>

## **Assessment and Accreditation**

Each pupil at end of Key Stage 1, 2 & 3 are levelled in the areas of Using Communication, Using Mathematics.

Key Stage 4 and Post 16 pupils achieved accreditation in March and June 2024.

### **GCSE**

One student attended Bloomfield Collegiate and completed her GCSE Biology and Chemistry Qualification. She achieved the following results:

Biology: A

Chemistry: B

### **Entry Level Qualifications**

All six of our leaving students completed a range of Entry Level Qualifications. A summary is below:

EL English – 6 students (five at level 2; one at level 1)

EL Maths – 6 students (one at level 3; four at level 2; one at level 1)

EL History – 4 students (all at level 2)

EL Life Skills – 6 students (four at level 3; two at level 2)

EL Extended Life skills – 3 students (one at level 3; two at level 2)

EL Science – 6 students (all at level 1)

### **Vocational Awards**

Some of our pupils also received a number of MHS certificates for Vocational units that they completed during the past couple of years. These units are designed by staff within MHS to help prepare our pupils for life beyond school.

## Charity 2024-2025

### Donations Received

Eammon Quinn	£220.00
Edna Harrison	£80.00
Rotary Club	£500.00
George Best Belfast City Airport	£100.00
NIVAC	£100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>£1,000.00</b>

### Donations Made

Marie Curie	£84.55
Asha Ireland	£168.64
NI Children's Hospice	£109.00
Jeans for Genes	£150.20
Made for More	£120.83
ADNI	£79.73
Jeans for Genes	£150.20
<b>Total</b>	<b>£863.15</b>

## Finance

### Article 60 Funds

Funds Allocated	£105,830
Amount Spent	£121,425
Overspend	£15,595

### Other earmarked funding for the financial year ending March 2025

Extended Schools* (enrichment programme for pupils)	£22,755
Entitlement Framework (partnerships with local schools and Colleges for classes/qualifications)	£5,980
Shared Education (partnership with mainstream schools to deliver engagement programmes)	£4,554
Special Education Needs Implementation	£15,000
Summer Restart (engagement with pupils following the summer break)	£5,000

*\*Note: We are the cluster lead for Extended Schools therefore a higher budget is given to provide materials/training for the cluster of schools.*

Chairperson's Signature: William Haugh Date: 15 September 2025