



St Mary's Cof E school
LEARNING WITH HOPE

School Dog Policy

Date reviewed	
Date Agreed	
Signed by Headteacher	
Date Policy to be Reviewed	

Rationale

There is an increasing body of research to support the benefit of a dog in school. In schools across the country, Reading Dogs are being used to help children develop fluency in reading and Therapy Dogs provide comfort and reassurance to children with anxiety and self-confidence issues.

Increasingly in schools, it is becoming recognised that children's emotional wellbeing is at the root of positive behaviour and success with socialising as well as in the classroom. A dog can support children who are anxious about school and could be the reason that they want to come in every morning. Children with trouble managing their behaviour could learn to care for the dog and the dog could be helpful in de-escalating anger. Reading dogs can help boost children's confidence and fluency.

Caring for an animal can help children to learn about responsibility and can help children to learn how to treat animals safely and with compassion. Dogs are great fun to have around and can bring a caring, family atmosphere to a school.

Appendix A sets out further reasons for why the school feels it will be beneficial to have a school dog.

Preparations for having a School Dog

Having a dog in school is a big step and the arrangement needs to work for all groups in our school community. School leaders have taken advice from schools who currently have a school dog, Dogs' Trust and Pets as Therapy, who have provided guidance about the necessary risk assessments and insurance that we will need to put in place, as well as practical guidance, such as allocating a dog toilet area well away from anywhere the children will access.

In order to ensure that the dog would be beneficial to the children's learning and wellbeing and not be a distraction, we will plan when and where the children will interact with the dog.

If any child is allergic to dog hair we make sure that they don't come into contact with the dog (or have restricted contact) if parents request it. (One of the school dogs, 'Whiskey' is a poodle who is hypoallergenic due to his non-shedding coat.)

If a child has a phobia of dogs we will keep the dog away from them, or we can offer opportunities for the child to be slowly introduced to the dog, to reduce their fear.

Parents are invited to contact the Headteacher if either of these cases apply, so that we can make the necessary arrangements.

Only the school dog is allowed on the premises. All other dogs must not come on site unless they are a known therapy or assistance dog and the Headteacher has been informed beforehand.

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The dogs will be owned by (Mr King and Mrs Spry). The dogs are an English Cocker Spaniel (Hugo) and a Westie-Poo (Whiskey): both chosen for their very mild temperaments and their abilities to socially interact with children. Both members of staff will be responsible for ensuring their pets have regular visits to the vets for injections and inoculations.

The Chair of Governors and the Head Teacher have both agreed that the school can have a dog.

Staff have been informed, through staff briefings, that the school will have a dog/s. Parents have been informed by letter that a dog will be in school. At the start of each academic year there will be lessons around the school dog and parents will be given an opportunity to speak to the head with regards to the school dog. St Mary's has produced a risk assessment, and this will be reviewed annually.

In the event of an emergency evacuation the adult supporting the dog/s will accompany her to the Fire Evacuation point.

Staff, visitors and students known to have allergic reactions to dogs must remain at a manageable distance. Parents will be asked to inform the school of any known allergies to dogs.

The dog will normally be kept on a lead and harness, until it is fully trained, when moving between classrooms or on a walk. They will be under the supervision of an adult when moving around the school.

There may be occasions when the dog is working off lead, but this will only happen in an enclosed space and under the control of an adult. Before removing the lead, all present will be consulted.

Students will never be left alone with the dog and there will be appropriate adult supervision at all times when the dog is present with students.

Students should be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dog. Students should remain calm around the dog. They should not make sudden movements and must never stare into a dog's eyes as this could be threatening for the dog. Students should not put their face near a dog and should always approach it standing up. Students should never go near or disturb the dog that is sleeping or eating. Students must not be allowed to play too roughly with the dog.

If the dog is surrounded by a large number of students, the dog could become nervous and agitated. Therefore, the adult in charge of the dog must ensure that s/he monitors the situation.

Dogs express their feelings through their body language. Growling or baring of teeth indicate that the dog is feeling angry or threatened. Flattened ears, tail lowered or between their legs, hiding behind their owner, whining or growling are signs that the dog is frightened or nervous.

If the dog is displaying any of these warning signs he should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment.

- Children should not feed or eat close to the dogs.
- Children should always wash their hands after handling a dog. As a school we will provide anti-bacterial gel.
- Any dog foul will be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately by an adult.

Guidelines to interaction with the School Dog

There will always be a responsible adult in charge of the dog during interactions with children.

Children and adults are required to adhere to the following;

- Always approach the school dog calmly and slowly
- Never run up to the dog
- Offer the back of your hand for the dog to sniff when meeting the dog
- All interactions must remain calm with the authorised adult in control at all times
- Children must wash their hands before eating if they have been stroking the dog.

Frequently Asked Questions

What will the school dog do on a day-to-day basis?

Designated staff will take the dog to help with interventions (e.g. 1-1 sessions where the child is reluctant to come out of class).

The dog may visit different classes to listen to readers with a volunteer or help with particular projects, such as learning about caring for animals.

How do I know that my child will be safe around the dog?

A risk assessment and policy will be in place and will be available on the school website.

Children will only have contact with the dog when supervised by an adult.

When moving around the school, the dog will always be on the lead.

Will my child pick up infections from the dog?

The dog will be fully vaccinated, treated regularly for worms and fleas and will be kept away from the school if it is ill.

Children will be required to wash their hands before eating if they have been handling the dog.

There will be a dedicated dog toilet area away from areas that children access and no child will be asked to pick up dog mess.

What if my child is allergic to dogs or afraid of them?

Parents can request that their child has no contact, or restricted access to the dog in these situations. Please speak to the office if you have any concerns.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Governing Body has a responsibility to ensure that the school has a written policy for dogs in School.

The Headteacher is responsible for implementing this policy.

Teachers and staff and children are required to abide by this policy.

The Health and Safety Officer is responsible for providing information, advice and guidance as and when required.

Appendix A

Reasons to have a dog in school.

Behaviour

Behaviour problems occur in school and these can interfere with learning. Some schools are using dogs to improve behaviour problems by promoting positive behaviour in students. In a controlled study, students were found to have fewer disciplinary referrals in schools with a dog than schools without. Students' behaviour improved toward teachers, and students also showed more confidence and responsibility. Additionally, parents reported that children seemed more interested in school as a result of having a dog at school.

Attendance

Children can be encouraged back into school using caring for a dog as an incentive

Social Development

Dogs in school offer an opportunity for improving social development. They are especially useful for teaching students social skills and responsibility. Specifically, with a dog in the classroom, students have the opportunity to learn how to care for the animal. This includes walking and grooming. Researchers report that involving students in the daily care of classroom dogs is a positive experience, promoting their own daily care. The students also learn about responsibility, caring and sharing when helping each other take care of a dog at school.

As a reward

Dogs will be gentle and living, but at the same time full of fun and enjoyment for the students. Those students who have performed incredibly well during the week or those who have made progress in a certain subject, or those who have achieved tasks set for them, may be rewarded with spending time during lunch or break to interact with these dogs. Walking, grooming, playing and training are some of the responsibilities students will be allowed to undertake. It has been proved that working and playing with a dog improves children's social skills and self-esteem. Support Dogs can work with students on a one to one basis and will especially help those students who have been bullied abused, going through upsetting/difficult times or even scared/phobic of dogs. The dog will bring much joy and help to all the students they meet and are happy to provide plenty of hugs to the students they are spending time with. Students who struggle with social interaction can find a reassuring friend in a dog.

Reading

Reading programmes with dogs are doing wonders for some students. Children who might be embarrassed to read aloud to the class or even adults are likely to be less scared to read to a dog. "It might be less stressful for a child to read aloud to a dog than to a teacher or a peer. After all, a dog won't judge or correct you." Dogs are used to encourage struggling readers to practise reading aloud. With the presence of a "calm and well-trained dog," students find social support and peer interaction. Dogs are incredibly calm and happy to have students read to them or join a group of children in the library whilst they are having a book reading session. Dogs give unconditional acceptance, as they are non-judgmental, which is especially crucial to struggling, emerging readers. The dogs also provide confidence to children as they do not make fun of them when they read, but above all they make amazing listeners, providing the children with a sense of comfort and love. Research has proved that students who read to dogs show an increase in reading levels, word recognition, a higher desire to read and write, and an increase in interpersonal skills among the students they mix with. Bullying can be a problem in all schools with students anxious about school for fear of taunting and abuse. But in some schools dogs are making a difference in the fight against bullies. Researchers report that students can identify with animals, and with empathy for the dog, can better understand how classmates may feel. It was found that violent behaviour in participation students declined by 55%, and general aggression went down 62%

