



Parish CE Primary School

**School Dog Policy
2022-25**

Introduction

The value of pet 'therapy' is widely accepted as a powerful aid to stimulation and communication. Studies have shown that the presence of companion animals can improve the well-being of children and lower the rate of anxiety, simply by making the environment happier, more enjoyable and less forbidding.

Children can benefit educationally and emotionally, increase their understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills through contact with a dog. In addition to these benefits, children take great enjoyment from interaction with a dog.

It is accepted that interacting with animals is not appropriate for all children but for some it has the potential to provide many positive benefits.

Any parent/carer who does not want their child to interact with our school dog is invited to write to Mrs J Young and inform them of their wishes.

School Policy

Our School Dog: Maddie

Our dog will be owned by Mrs Nikki Roberts. Our dog is a cocker spaniel, chosen for its gentle, easy-going and affectionate yet lively nature. Cocker spaniels are good with children and tend to be non-aggressive towards people.

Mrs Roberts will be responsible for our dog's regular visits to the vet. Our dog will have all their vaccinations (including rabies) and will have regular health checks and all necessary treatment. A copy of our dog's health records will be updated and kept in school and our school dog will also be fully insured.

Appropriately trained staff will maintain records and anecdotal evidence of the work and impact of the school dog.

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

Staff have been informed, through staff briefing, that the school will have a dog.

Parents/carers 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/carers will be given an opportunity to speak to our Headteacher about any questions or concerns.

Compliance Education (Health and Safety/Competent Person) has produced a risk assessment and this will be reviewed annually and shared with the school community.

In the event of an emergency evacuation the adult supporting our dog will accompany them to the Fire Evacuation point.

All visitors will be informed about the dog and related protocols on arrival; office staff will relay visitor issues to the Head Teacher as soon as possible.

Staff, visitors and pupils/students known to have allergic reactions to dogs must remain at a manageable distance. Parents/carers are able to inform school of any allergies their child may have on admission to the school and as circumstances change throughout their time at school.

If the dog is unwell it will not be allowed into school.

The dog will normally be kept on a lead and harness until fully trained when moving between classrooms or on a walk and will be under the full control and supervision of an adult.

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 individuals present will be consulted.

Pupils/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 pupils/students.

Pupils/students should:

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

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

Dogs express their feelings through their body language. If the dog is displaying any of these warning signs they should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment.

- 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.

Children should not feed or eat close to the dog.

Children should always wash their hands after handling the dog. As a school we will provide anti-bacterial gel.

Any dog foul will be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately by an adult.

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.

Staff and pupils/students are required to abide by this policy.

The curriculum will support learning about dogs and how best to behave around our dog. This will include highlighting that not all dogs are well trained, and that caution must be used around unknown dogs outside school.

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

Policy written: Jan 2023

Policy to be reviewed : Jan 2024

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 pupils/students. In a controlled study, pupils/students were found to have fewer disciplinary referrals in schools with a dog than schools without. Pupils'/Students' behaviour improved toward teachers, and pupils/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.

Bullying can be a problem in all schools with pupils/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 pupils/students can identify with animals, and with empathy for the dog, can better understand how classmates may feel.

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 pupils/students social skills and responsibility. Specifically, with a dog in the classroom, pupils/students have the opportunity to learn how to care for the animal. This includes walking and grooming.

Researchers report that involving pupils/students in the daily care of classroom dogs is a positive experience, promoting their own daily care. The pupils/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 pupils/students. Those pupils/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 pupils/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 pupils/students on a one-to-one basis and will especially help those pupils/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 pupils/students they meet and are happy to provide plenty of hugs to the pupils/students they are spending time with. Pupils/students who struggle with social interaction can find a reassuring friend in a dog.

Reading

Reading programmes with dogs are doing wonders for some pupils/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, pupils/students find social support and peer interaction. Dogs are incredibly calm and happy to have pupils/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 pupils/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 pupils/students they mix with.

Mental Wellbeing

Lockdown has been tough for most of us. Whether it has been worries about the virus itself, lengthy homeschooling, not being able to spend time with loved ones, adapting to working from home, the list could go on almost endlessly; we all have our own stories on what has made the past year challenging.

Giving our dog a cuddle is proven to reduce stress levels. A study produced by Washington State University, found that petting an animal for ten minutes, reduces the amount of cortisol (stress hormone) in saliva.

Spending time with a dog is so beneficial, that interacting with them can produce a 300% increase in oxytocin (happy hormone) levels, which can play a part in stress reduction, lowering blood pressure and providing mental health benefits.

