WELLBEING DOG POLICY

Updated by	Sarah Barnard
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Statutory Policy	No
On school website	Yes

1. Aim

This policy is designed to set out to advise pupils, parents, staff and visitors of the reasons for having a school dog, and the rules and responsibilities to ensure the safety of pupils, staff, visitors and the school dog.

2. Introduction

Many schools now have wellbeing or therapy dogs, working within the school, to support children's social, emotional and academic development. Having a wellbeing dog in school also gives children the opportunity to increase their understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills through contact with a calm and well-trained dog. In addition to these benefits, children take great enjoyment from interaction with a dog.

3. Legislation and guidance

This policy complies with latest guidance from the government regarding pets and animals in school which can be found in Chapter 8: Preventing and controlling infections - pets and animal contact - GOV.UK - Updated June 2024. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-protection-in-schools-and-other-childcare-facilities/preventing-and-controlling-infections#safe-management-of-the-environment

4. 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.

The dog will be owned by a member of staff. They will be chosen for their mild temperament and thorough training. The owner of the dog will remain responsible for care for the dog outside of school including regular visits to the vets, inoculations and insurance.

The Chair of Governors, and the Head Teacher 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 have been informed in writing that a dog will be in school.

At the start of each academic year there will be lessons around the school dog

In the event of an emergency evacuation the adult responsible for the dog, will accompany it to the fire evacuation point.

Staff, visitors and children known to have allergic reactions to dogs must remain at a manageable distance.
Parents are requested to inform the school of any medical allergies on admission.
If the dog is unwell, it will not be allowed into school.

Children will be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dog. Children 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. Children should not to put their face near a dog and should always approach it standing up. Children should never go near or disturb the dog that is sleeping or eating. Children must not be allowed to play too roughly with the dog.

If the dog is surrounded by a large number of children, 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 behaviours, i.e. excessive panting, tail between legs, ears down, it will be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment.

Children should not eat close to the dog.

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

5. Benefits of a school dog

Many schools now have dogs and other pets as part of their enrichment provision. Schools that have a dog have listed some of the benefits they have seen:

- dogs can help children develop empathy skills, encourage them to act respectfully and improve relationships between children
- reading to a dog can be beneficial for reluctant readers. There is less pressure and less perceived judgement when reading to a dog
- dogs can have a calming effect on children
- they can help children develop emotional literacy
- dogs can encourage children who are typically more withdrawn, to engage with and participate in school life
- they can help children to regulate their own behaviour
- dogs can reduce stress and improve wellbeing for both children and staff
- they can improve self-esteem for children

These experiences are backed by independent, evidence based research which shows that 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 interactions with a dog.

Research has found that having a therapy dog can 'enhance children's wellbeing in a variety of settings, including schools'.
https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/veterinary-science/articles/10.3389/fvets.2021.655104/full

There is also evidence that therapy dogs can 'reduce physiological symptoms of stress' by:

- lowering cortisol levels
- increasing children's positive emotions
- promoting engagement in learning activities
- encouraging positive attitudes toward learning
- reducing negative behaviours
- encouraging positive social behaviours

https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1173578.pdf

Reading to a dog has been shown in multiple studies to provide significant benefits in reading progress leading to:

- an improvement in reading accuracy
- improved oral reading fluency
- better comprehension
- more positive attitudes towards reading
- improved behaviours toward reading

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

6. Risk Assessment

Although there are risks in bringing animals into a school environment, this can be mitigated against with a robust risk assessment to ensure the safety of all pupils, parents, staff and visitors. (Appendix A - Risk Assessment).

7. Animal Welfare

To ensure that the school dog's best interests are met, time in school will be monitored and limited. The dog will have its own quiet space to relax and regular breaks. The dog will have access to water and appropriate exercise breaks throughout their time in school. The staff member responsible for the dog will abide by the Animal Welfare Act 2006, which places a duty on animal owners to ensure their animal's welfare needs are met.

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/animal-welfare#:~:text=The%20Animal%20Welfare%20Act%202006,for%20a%20suitable%20diet

The responsible staff member will also ensure that the dog has recommended treatments and immunisations, is regularly groomed (including claws trimmed) and checked for signs of infection.

8. Safety

The school dog will be a mature, fully trained dog and will be supervised by a responsible member of staff at all times when in contact with children.

9. Hygiene

Contact with animals can pose a risk of infection including gastro-intestinal infection, fungal infections and parasites. Anyone who has touched the dog should wash their hands, or use hand sanitiser, after contact. The dog will be toileted in a space away from the children's play areas and all waste disposed of appropriately.

10. Allergies

All parents will be advised that a dog is in school and any child with a medical allergy to dogs will be recorded and an individual risk assessment will be carried out as appropriate and plans and adjustments put in place accordingly. The risk assessment will be provided to parents.

This policy has taken into account the guidance on dogs in school from Anaphylaxis UK which can be found here: https://www.anaphylaxis.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Dogs-in-School-allergy-guidance-final-copy-PDF.pdf?x87757 and here https://www.anaphylaxis.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Animals-2021-v5.pdf?x21162

This includes:

- Set days and times when the dog will be present.
- A set area where the dog is based (including its bed).
- Keeping windows open whenever possible
- Cleaning rooms regularly
- Maintaining good hand hygiene for everyone interacting with the dog, especially the owner (handler) to minimise cross contamination onto other surfaces after stroking the dog
- Maintaining dog free areas – the dog will not enter classrooms, the school hall or lunch hall.

11. Parental Consent

Children will not be allowed close contact with the school dog unless parental consent has been received. This consent must be in writing via the google form found here:
Paper copies are also available from the school office.
Consent can be withdrawn at any time, by contacting the school office.

Appendix A
Risk Assessment

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. The team at Riverside have been considering obtaining a dog as a school wellbeing pet for some time and the decision was made in July 2024 to go ahead with the project.

The rationale behind this decision was as follows:

- For the school to have a pet that was able to live as naturally as conditions would allow.
- For the animal to be properly cared for outside of the school day.
- To have a pet that the children could interact with and also be of benefit to the children's social, emotional and educational development.

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 who does not want their child to interact with the dog is invited to write to the school to confirm their wishes.

There are no diseases associated with the dog as her owner will be responsible for vaccinations and completing regular health checks and necessary treatment. The dog will also be insured.

The risk assessment below is a working document and will be checked annually by key staff and the governing body.

Hazards	Who is at risk?	Current Control Measures
Basic standards for dogs in the school.		Dogs involved in active sessions in schools must: a) Be a minimum of 12 months of age b) Not bark, mouth, jump up at, or paw people c) Be adaptable to new environments and unexpected stimuli, such as new smells, objects, and sudden noises d) Be socially confident, enjoy human interaction, and be relaxed and calm in the company of children, even when there is a level of noise and erratic behaviour around e) Be comfortable with appropriate physical interaction e.g. grooming, and not respond unduly negatively to unexpected lively behaviour from children f) Be comfortable engaging with children that may have physical/learning disabilities, and around mechanical aids e.g. wheelchairs, where relevant g) Exhibit no guarding of resources e.g. food/toys or avoidance behaviour h) Take treats gently when offered and not snatch toys from hands

		i) Be easily identifiable as a dog performing a clear role in the school j) Achieve Kennel Club Silver Good Citizen Scheme. Or, if they do not hold accreditation, dogs should be expected to meet the standards laid out in this scheme.
Bites and scratches.	Pupils Staff Visitors	All dogs should meet the standards laid out in the Dog breed should be a naturally placid breed. Dogs will have a limited "workload", to avoid overstimulation. Dogs will not be approached or handled while eating, except for by their owner. Pupils will not play boisterous games with the dog, such as tug or play fighting. Dogs will always be supervised by their owner. Dogs will have sufficient break periods. Pupils and staff should not put their face near to the dog's face. Pupils will be reminded not to shout/scream at the dog, and to remain seated while in class with the dog. The dog will be removed from the school at the first signs of aggressive behaviour. The dog will be allowed to acclimate to the noises and smells of the school before working with pupils. Parents will be consulted to identify phobias, or pupils who have had negative experiences with dogs in the past. Insurers must be informed of dogs in the school.
Illness spread by dogs. Fleas, worms and Ticks.	Pupils Staff Visitors	Dogs will be up to date on all vaccinations, worming, flea and tick treatments. Dogs will be in good health and regularly attend check-ups with a qualified veterinarian. Waste products will be cleaned away promptly by the owner. The dog will not be allowed in to food preparation areas. Food will not be eaten in the room with the dog. The dog will be regularly groomed to prevent excess shedding. Parents will be consulted prior to allowing the dog in to the school. Pupils with allergies will not have contact with the dog, and the dog will not work in their classroom. Persons with a compromised immune system or other health vulnerability should not handle pet waste. Persons with open wounds should not participate in activities with the dog. Hands will be washed before and after handling the dog. Dogs are discouraged from licking.

Allergies	Pupils Staff Visitors	**Pupils with allergies requiring medication will have an individual risk assessment in place.** Pupils with allergies will not have contact with the dog, and the dog will not work in their classroom. The dog will not be allowed in to food preparation areas. Food will not be eaten in the room with the dog. The dog will be regularly groomed to prevent excess shedding. Parents will be consulted prior to allowing the dog in to the school. Hands will be washed before and after handling the dog.
Dog welfare		Dogs should be in good health to undertake the role they are required to do. Handlers must use only positive reward-based training methods and equipment. Dogs must travel confidently and comfortably in any mode of transport they are expected to use in the school day. Each active session with the dog must be no longer than one hour and dogs should work for no more than three active hours during a day. They should have access to a quiet, safe and comfortable place to rest for a proportionate break between sessions. During this time, only the dog's handler should be allowed access to the dog. Dogs must have access to fresh drinking water at all times. Dogs must be given the opportunity to toilet when required, in an appropriate place provided by the school. If a dog shows signs of stress, anxiety, discomfort or fatigue, they must be taken out of the situation and only brought back into the session if fully recovered and the issue causing the stress has been identified and addressed. Enough space must be provided in the working area for the dog to be able to move about comfortably and lay down. Dogs must be re-assessed regularly to confirm that they are in good health, both physically and emotionally and have the appropriate temperament to continue working. Ideally, this assessment should be conducted once a year, and no less than once every two years, or after a period of significant absence. The handler is responsible for ensuring that the dog is not put into any potential situations which may compromise the dog's health and wellbeing. Dogs must not be expected to mix with unfamiliar dogs. Dogs must only wear items of uniform designed for dogs, such as jackets, leads and bandanas. Fancy dress or clothing not appropriate for dogs are not permitted.

Appendix B
Reasons to have a dog in school

Behaviour
Challenging behaviour in school can interfere with learning. Some schools are using dogs to improve behaviour problems by promoting positive behaviour in children. In a controlled study, children were found to have fewer disciplinary referrals in schools with a dog than schools without. Children' behaviour improved toward teachers, and children 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 children social skills and responsibility. Specifically, with a dog in the classroom, children have the opportunity to learn how to care for the animal. This includes walking and grooming. Researchers report that involving children in the daily care of classroom dogs is a positive experience, promoting their own daily care. The children 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 children. Those children 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 children 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 children on a one to one basis and will especially help those children 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 children they meet and are happy to provide plenty of hugs to the children they are spending time with. Children who struggle with social interaction can find a reassuring friend in a dog.

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

Bullying
Bullying can be a problem in all schools but, in some schools, dogs are making a difference in the fight against bullies. Researchers report that children who 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 children declined by 55%, and general aggression went down 62%.
https://theweek.com/articles/481325/dogs-reduce-bullying-schools