



Therapy Dogs in School

Policy Type	Non-Statutory Trust Policy
Author	Director of Operations
Approved By	Trust Board
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Description of changes	Version 1 – New policy

1. Introduction

Research has shown many benefits to therapy and reading dogs in school settings. SHINE Academies schools may have a school dog who works with our pupils to improve literacy and student behaviour and wellbeing.

This policy is designed to set out to pupils, parents and visitors the reasons for having a school dog at SHINE schools, and the rules and responsibilities to ensure the safety of pupils, staff, visitors and the school dog. Although there is a risk in bringing a dog into a school environment, this can be mitigated against with a robust risk assessment to ensure the safety of all pupils, staff and visitors.

2. The Benefits of a school dog

School therapy dogs have been proven to help develop pupils' reading skills, improve behaviour, attendance and academic confidence, as well as increasing pupil understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills.

2.1 Literacy benefits

"Reading to dogs has been proven to help children develop literacy skills and build confidence, through both the calming effect the dogs' presence has on children and the fact that the dog will listen to the children read without being judgemental or critical. This comforting environment helps to nurture children's enthusiasm for reading and provides them with the confidence needed to read aloud. When dogs are in a room of children trying to read, they become less stressed, less self-conscious and more confident because dogs are non-judgemental. If children are partnered with a dog to read to, the dog provides comfort, encourages positive social behaviour, enhances self-esteem, motivates speech and inspires children to have fun and enjoy the experience of reading."

- Bark & Read – The Kennel Club (<https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/barkandread>)

"Children who read to dogs are less likely to be embarrassed reading aloud and find the experience less stressful. Research has proved that children who read to dogs show an increase in reading levels, word recognition, and a higher desire to read and write."

- School Dog Policy – The White Horse Federation

(<https://www.ridgewayschool.com/downloads/default/TWHF-School-Dog-Policy-V2.pdf>)

2.2 Therapy benefits

"Therapy Dogs Nationwide have also shown to help with special needs and autistic children and adults by giving focus and providing a calming environment."

- School Dogs - Therapy Dogs Nationwide (<http://www.tdn.org.uk/schools/>)

2.3 Attendance & punctuality benefits

"Mandy was a student with poor attendance and truancy. Mandy was encouraged back into school using caring for River, a dog, as an incentive. By telling Mandy that "if she didn't come to school to care for him, he wouldn't get walks, water or love," Mandy came to school almost every day for the rest of the year, only missing two days."

- Case Study Hazel Oak School Dog Policy (<https://hazel-oak.co.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2018/02/School-Dog-Policy.pdf>)

2.4 Behaviour & rewards

“Researchers report that students 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 participating students declined by 55%, and general aggression went down 62%. 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.”

- Hazel Oak School Dog Policy (<https://hazel-oak.co.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2018/02/School-Dog-Policy.pdf>)

3. Principles

3.1 The Headteacher will propose to the Local Governing Board to introduce and maintain a therapy dog in school and the Local Governing Board will approve.

3.2 Only the school therapy 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 approved their presence prior to the visit.

3.3 The breed of the dog (insert breed here) has been chosen because it is an intelligent breed that will respond well to training. The breed is known to be good with children, sheds little hair, and is very sociable and friendly.

3.4 The dog owner has full responsibility for the welfare of the school dog and all expenses relating to pet insurance, food and other expenses and ensuring that the dog is vaccinated, wormed and flea treated.

3.5 A risk assessment will be written prior to a therapy dog being allowed in school (template at Appendix C of this policy), which will be approved by the Safeguarding and Health and Safety Leads. The risk assessment will be reviewed **annually, or when any material changes to the risk is known.**

3.6 The therapy dog will be included in the fire evacuation procedure under the supervision of the dog owner or other trained staff members.

3.7 The dog owner (insert name here) is responsible for ensuring that the dog is covered by adequate liability / business insurance in place. The cost of this insurance will be reimbursed by the school.

3.8 Staff, parents and pupils will be informed in writing that the therapy dog will be in school before they begin work.

3.9 Parents can indicate that their child is not allowed to be present during dog therapy sessions on the school’s data collection forms.

3.10 The presence of a therapy dog will be sign posted to visitors at the school reception and the school website. Reception staff will relay visitor issues to the Headteacher as soon as possible.

3.11 Only staff who have received the appropriate training will be responsible for handling the dog in pupil sessions or moving around school.

3.12 Pupils will have opportunity to complete activities with the therapy dog that link to their targets and activities. This may also include pupils talking about their worries with the school dog.

3.13 The Headteacher oversees a non-negotiable timetable for the well-being dog.

4. Responsibilities

4.1 Staff Responsibilities

4.1.1 The dog owner will know the whereabouts of the therapy dog at all times.

4.1.2 If the therapy dog is ill, it will not be allowed into school. The dog owner has responsibility for ensuring appropriate alternative care if the dog is not able to be in the school on a given day.

4.1.3 The dog owner is responsible for ensuring the dog has received appropriate therapy dog training.

4.1.4 The therapy dog must be kept on a lead when moving between classrooms or on a walk and will be under the full control and supervision of a trained staff member (see clause 3.11).

4.1.5 The therapy dog will be kept in (XXX) when not interacting with pupils for therapy or reading sessions.

4.1.6 Staff, visitors and pupils known to have allergic reactions to dogs must be kept away.

4.1.7 Those members of staff who are trained to lead well-being or reading sessions will have a responsibility to ensure all staff, pupils or visitors present are happy for the school dog to enter the room.

4.1.8 Pupils must never be left alone with the therapy dog and there must be an adult who has received the appropriate training present at all times.

4.1.9 Pupils will be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the therapy dog before any interaction.

4.1.10 If the therapy dog is surrounded by a large number of pupils, they could become nervous and agitated. If any warning signs are displayed such as growling or flattening of ears, the therapy dog should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment by the adult trained in handling the therapy dog.

4.1.11 Any dog foul should be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately only by the adults who had received the appropriate training.

4.1.12 Referring to Therapy Dogs Nationwide, the therapy dog will be in active sessions lasting no longer than one hour. It has been agreed that the school dog will complete a max of two sessions per day.

4.2 Pupil Responsibilities

4.2.1 Pupils whose parents have withdrawn consent are not allowed to attend dog therapy sessions.

4.2.2 Pupils should be careful to stroke the therapy dog on their body, chest, back and not by his face or top of head.

4.2.3 Pupils are not allowed to approach the dog or disturb them whilst they are sleeping or eating.

4.2.4 Pupils are not allowed to play roughly with the therapy dog.

4.2.5 Pupils must wait until the therapy dog is sitting or lying down before touching or stroking them.

4.2.6 Pupils are not allowed to eat during sessions with the dog.

4.2.7 Pupils must always wash their hands after handling / stroking the dog.

4.2.8 Pupils must understand that any deliberate violence or threatening behaviour towards the therapy dog will result in a consequence in line with our behaviour policy.

5. Office Essentials

5.1 School dog file

- Postcard with microchip number
- Vets number
- Emergency contact number
- Dog first aid kit
- Spare collar and lead

5.2 Dog bag which accompanies Milo to include:

- Water bottle
- Water bowl
- Poo bags
- Hand sanitiser
- Dog treats
- Dog toy
- Door sign
- Disposable gloves

Appendix A – FAQ's for parents

Q Who pays for its costs?

A The legal owner of the dog will bear the costs associated with owning the dog; the school budget will support liability insurance and staff training costs only where appropriate.

Q Is the dog from a reputable breeder?

A Yes. The dog is from a home where parents were seen and has been specifically chosen for its temperament.

Q Will the dog be a distraction to pupils' learning?

A The therapy dog will be kept in the **XXX**. The therapy dog will only spend time in teaching spaces, the library and the **XXX** at specific planned sessions where pupils can interact safely outside of lesson times and therefore the dog will not be a distraction to pupils during lessons. The therapy dog will also attend meetings with staff to support further socialisation, following consultation with staff beforehand.

Q Has a risk assessment been undertaken?

A Yes, we have carefully considered having a therapy dog in school and sought advice from many sources, including other schools that successfully have a therapy dog.

Q Who is responsible for training?

A The dog owner will be the legal owner of the dog and as a result, will be responsible for his training. Appropriate training will be obtained.

Q How will the dog be toileted to ensure hygiene for all?

A In the interest of health and hygiene our therapy dog will be toileted when taken out for short walks outside the school by a member of staff. The dog will not be allowed in the main playground other than travelling to and from the school building.

Q What if my child is scared of dogs? Will they be forced to be in the same room as the dog?

A The dog will be kept in the **XXX**. This space is separate from the classrooms /playground area which will ensure the therapy dog only comes into contact with children who are happy to have contact and have parental permission for this, under strict supervision of a trained member of staff. The school dog will not be allowed into the main playground area and will only visit for short, supervised interaction with pupils. Therefore a pupil will not be forced to be in contact with dog at any time against their wishes. We hope to work closely with parents of children who are fearful of dogs to alleviate their fear and to teach them how to manage this.

Q How will the dog's welfare be considered?

A The dog will be walked regularly and given free time outside. Parents will be able to give permission in advance to allow their child to be able to walk with a member of staff and the dog during that time. This will also be used as a behaviour reward. The dog will be kept in the XXX and will only have planned and supervised contact with children and visitors. The dog will be carefully trained over a period of time and will have appropriate access to food and water. We will work carefully to ensure the dog's welfare is always considered.

Q How will this be managed where children have allergies?

A Children will not need to touch the dog or be in the same room as the dog at any point which will relieve the possibility of allergic reactions. We already manage a number of allergies at school, and this will be no different for children and adults that are allergic to dogs. Individual needs will always be met, and we are happy to work with parents to put additional control measures in place for individual allergies. The school dog was specifically chosen for being a breed known for sociable dispositions and minimal moulting. It will be given a high-quality food and regularly groomed to reduce any possibility of allergens.

Appendix B Advice on School Dogs

The Dogs Trust – School Dogs

<https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/help-advice/factsheets-downloads/school%20dogs.pdf>

The Kennel Club – Bark and Read

<https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/barkandread>

BBC News – “Every school ‘needs dog as stress-buster’”

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-47655600>

Appendix C Risk Assessment Template for use of Therapy Dog

Name of School:

Assessor(s) (This should generally be the school's Health and Safety and Designated Safeguarding Leads):

Date:

Review Date:

Risk Management Statement

The school recognises that all risks cannot be reduced to nil, therefore this risk assessment prioritises the significant risks. Significant risks are those which pose risk of serious injury, chronic injury, disability or death, or risks that are overly common in interrupting our staff, pupils' and visitors' normal work. For all activities, the school staff will dynamically assess risks and put in place control measures and record as required, but always within agreed timescales. Concerns, changes in risk management practice or minor injuries that are seen by staff to be significant should be reported to the health and safety lead who has signed off this risk assessment.

This risk assessment should be read in conjunction with the SHINE Academies Health and Safety Policy, other relevant Risk benefit assessments (as appropriate.)

All staff trained in the handling of the therapy dog should have input into this risk assessment or at least be aware of it's contents.

Source of Hazard	Persons Affected / Potential Harm	Control measures in place	Risk rating after control measures applied High, Medium, Low	Further action required, by whom, timescale or reference to other assessments plus information
Over-excitedness of dog when interacting.	Child/staff knocked to ground			

	<p>Child/staff scratched by dog</p> <p>Child/staff bitten by dog</p>			
<p>Keeping safe when walking the dog</p> <p>Dog acting as a tripping hazard</p>	<p>Staff</p> <p>Pupils</p> <p>Visitors</p> <p>Volunteers</p> <p>Cuts / abrasions, muscular skeletal and other physical injuries</p>			
<p>Absconding dog</p>	<p>Staff</p> <p>Pupils</p> <p>Visitors</p> <p>Volunteers</p>			

	Cuts / abrasions, muscular skeletal and other physical injuries			
Dog hair causing allergies	Staff Pupils Visitors Volunteers Allergic reaction			
Dog carrying diseases	Staff Pupils Visitors Volunteers Disease / lack of infection control			
Financial cost of the dog's upkeep	Dog owner unable to afford ongoing costs of dog's day-to-day			

	upkeep or unforeseen medical bills			
Insurance and liability	School not adequately covered			
Fire alarm	Responsibility of the dog and removal from building. Burns			
Noise / barking	Pupils Staff Unwanted distraction / distress			
Dog Phobia	Pupils Staff Volunteers Distress/anxiety caused by being in close proximity to the dog			

Appendix D Template Letter to Parents

Dear Parents/Carers,

School Therapy Dog

We are delighted to inform you that we will be introducing a therapy dog into school. Studies have shown that the presence of companion animals can improve the well-being of children and lower anxiety levels, simply by making the environment happier and more enjoyable.

We have thoroughly investigated the benefits of school dogs by looking at research articles and visiting other primary schools where a school dog is already successfully in place.

A full risk assessment has been completed and is available on request. The dog has been trained and will be regularly monitored for health, obedience and temperament and there will always be a designated member of staff present during any interaction with pupils. Our school dog has been immunised and is a low shedding dog in order to minimise the chance of allergic reactions.

Details are as follows:

Name and breed of dog:

Name of dog owner:

Members of Staff trained to handle the dog:

If you do not wish your child to interact with the dog please advise us on your data collection forms. Please also advise us if your child has any known allergies to dogs.

Yours faithfully,

.