

School Therapy Dog Policy

2021-22

1 Introduction

Research has shown many benefits to therapy and reading dogs in school settings. St. Wilfrids Academy has a school dog who works with our students to improve literacy and student behaviour and wellbeing. This policy is designed to set out to students, parents and visitors the reasons for having a school dog at St. Wilfrids Academy (Section 2 – The benefits of a school dog) and the rules and responsibilities to ensure the safety of students, staff, visitors and the school dog (Sections 3 and 4 – Principles and Code of Conduct). 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 students, staff and visitors (Appendix A - Risk Assessment).

2 The benefits of a school dog

School dogs have been proven to help develop students' reading skills, improve behaviour, attendance and academic confidence, as well as increasing student understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills. At St. Wilfrids Academy we have a school dog to support our staff team in bringing all of these benefits to our students. St. Wilfrids Academy school dog will be trained as a therapy dog and certified by Pets as Therapy, as well as being trained as a reading dog through his puppy training (see Section 4 – code of conduct).

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

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 he 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 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."

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

3 Principles

3.1 The Executive Principal and Head of Academy both agree to a school dog ("Basil") working in the Academy.

3.2 Only the school dog ("Basil") is allowed on the premises. All other dogs must not come on site unless they are a known therapy or assistance dog and the Head has approved their presence prior to the visit.

3.3 Basil is an Cocker Spaniel chosen because it is an intelligent breed that will respond well to training and which is known to be good with children, sheds little hair, and is very sociable and friendly.

3.4 Basil's legal owner is Mr Pittard. He 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 Mr Pittard, the legal owner of the school dog, has produced a risk assessment which has been approved by the Safeguarding Lead and this will be reviewed annually.

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

3.7 The Academy's liability insurance covers the school for risk related to a working dog on site. The Finance Manager has responsibility for ensuring this remains on the school's policy during Basil's time working at St. Wilfrids Academy.

3.8 Staff, parents and students will be informed in writing that a dog will be in school.

3.9 Parents can indicate that their child is not allowed to be present during dog therapy sessions by emailing info@stwilfridsacademy.org.uk or calling 01302 5632540 to inform the Head Teacher.

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

3.11 Basil will only have student therapy and reading sessions once certified as a therapy dog by Pets As Therapy (<https://petsastherapy.org/>).

3.12 Only staff trained to handle the dog in student sessions will have permission to do so.

4 Code of Conduct

4.1 Staff Responsibilities

4.1.1 Mr Pittard will know the whereabouts of the dog and which staff are supervising at all times.

4.1.2 If the dog is ill he will not be allowed into school. Mr Pittard has responsibility for ensuring appropriate alternative care for Basil if he is not able to be in the school on a given day.

4.1.3 Mr Pittard is responsible for ensuring Basil is trained and certified as a therapy dog by Pets As Therapy.

4.1.4 Basil 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 adult (see clause 3.12).

4.1.5 Basil will be kept in the Heads office when not interacting with students for therapy or reading sessions. Basil will only visit designated therapy or reading lessons and not be allowed in other areas of the school.

4.1.6 Staff, visitors and children known to have allergic reactions to dogs must not go near Basil. The receptionist keeps a list of all students and staff with a reported allergy to dogs (dander) and ensures that all trained handlers for Basil know who these students and staff are.

4.1.7 Staff leading therapy or reading sessions with Basil have a responsibility to ensure all staff, students or visitors present are happy for Basil to enter the room.

4.1.8 Students must never be left alone with Basil and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times.

4.1.9 Students will be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dog before any interaction during a therapy sessions or visit.

4.1.10 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 s/he monitors the situation. If the dog is displaying any warning signs such as growling or flattening of her ears, he should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment by the trained staff member handling her.

4.1.11 Any dog foul should be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately by the trained dog handling staff only.

4.1.12 St. Wilfrids Academy staff will maintain records and anecdotal evidence of the work and impact of the school dog to better inform research into the benefits of a school therapy / reading dog.

4.2 Student Responsibilities

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

4.2.2 Students should be careful to stroke Basil on her body, chest, back and not by her face or top of head.

4.2.3 Students are not allowed to approach Basil or disturb her whilst he is sleeping or eating.

4.2.4 Students are not be allowed to play roughly with the dog.

4.2.5 Students must wait until the school dog is sitting or lying down before touching or stroking him.

4.2.6 Students are not allowed to eat during sessions with Basil.

4.2.7 Students must always wash their hands after handling / stroking Basil.

4.2.8 Students understand that any deliberate violence or threatening behaviour towards Basil will result in a fixed term exclusion.

5 The School Dog – Basil



Appendix A – School Dog Risk Assessment

Hazard	At risk			Existing Control measures
	Students	Staff	Visitors	
Animal behaviour				
Staff, pupils or visitors could be injured if the school dog is not comfortable in a specific school environment and reacts badly, including bites or scratches	Medium	Medium	Medium	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 The dog will receive ongoing formal training, socialising and conditioning within the school environment 2 The dog will be certified by Pets As Therapy before commencing therapy and reading sessions 3 Pupils and parents are warned of the hazard before therapy sessions with the school dog and take part only with consent 4 Students are taught appropriate behaviour around the school dog, what to do to prevent over stimulating or upsetting the dog and how to remain calm around her 5 Students are closely supervised by an adult during dog therapy sessions 6 Students are never left with the dog unsupervised 7 The school dog will always be in the care of a responsible adult who will have received handling training 8 If the school dog exhibits any warning behaviours such growling or lowered ears he will be removed immediately from students 9 The school dog resides in the office of the Head and is not out in the school community outside of designated therapy, reading and reward sessions 10 The dog will always be on a lead when he is out of the Heads office. Signage will indicate that pupils are only allowed in this area with staff supervision. 11 In the event that a student, staff member or visitor is bitten or scratched (even if only a “play” bite) the School 1st Aider will inspect and assess the injury. The suitability of the school dog will then be reassessed by the Head.
Disease, Illness &				

Allergic Reactions				
<p>Staff, pupils or visitors could suffer ill health if they come into contact with animal faeces or urine or have an allergy to dogs</p>	Medium	Medium	Low	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 All immunisations are kept up to date in accordance with European Pet Passport scheme and Mr Pittard is responsible for keeping a register of this. 2 Flea treatment is carried out at monthly intervals. Worming treatment is carried out compliant with European Vet guidelines, at 3 monthly intervals 3 The dog will not go in the school dining hall at meal times; he will not be permitted into the food preparation area of the kitchen or the cooking room. 4 The Receptionist keeps at all times an up to date list of students with known allergic reactions and these students are not present during therapy, reading or reward sessions with the dog 5 The dog is taken regularly outside the school building for toilet facilities by a designated member of staff trained to handle the school dog. 6 All waste produced by the dog, whether accidental or routine, is handled and disposed of hygienically by designated staff members only. Contaminated items and surfaces are immediately waned and disinfected. 7 Pupils and adults are not allowed to eat around the school dog. 8 Pupils and adults must always wash their hands after handling the school dog. 9 Immediate medical assistance will be sought where an allergic reaction does not subside once the animal and afflicted person are kept apart.
Animal Phobias				
<p>Staff or students could suffer distress themselves or distress the school dog if they become scared or upset around the school dog</p>	Medium	Low	Low	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All Students are encouraged but never forced to take part in dog therapy reading sessions. 2. Where there are pupils with phobias, every effort is made to segregate the school dog from those with phobias – this may mean moving a student to another room until a therapy session is over. 3. Outside of therapy or reading sessions the school dog is kept in the Heads-office and enters and exits the building outside or break and lesson changeover periods.

				4. Therapy, reading and reward sessions will take place only in specific areas of the school (e.g. the library, Learning Support, Art terrace) where students can avoid contact with the dog if desired.
School emergency				
Evacuation (including drills). The dog could become distressed by the evacuation and behave in an unexpected way, e.g. become defensive or try to escape.	Medium	Medium	Low	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The school dog is accompanied by a trained adult at all times. In the event of an emergency evacuation, immediately proceed to the nearest fire exit and then the adult walks as far as possible from other people evacuating whilst maintaining a safe distance from the building. 2. Where possible, the school dog to be present for sounding of the alarms outside of school hours to observe their response. 3. If the dog manages to escape from an adult during the evacuation, the adult must still evacuate immediately and notify staff outside of the dog's absence.
Claim is made against school.				
A parent or visitor could make a claim against the school relating to the behaviour of the dog.	Low	High	Medium	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The school has public liability insurance which covers liability for a working therapy dog with certification. 2. The school dog will be assessed as a Pets As Therapy dog once her training and adolescence are completed prior to working in therapy sessions with students.

Appendix B: School Dog Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) – to publish to parents

Q Who is the legal owner of the dog and who pays for its costs?

A The legal owner of the dog will be Mr Pittard . He 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 both parents were seen and has been specifically chosen for its temperament.

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

A The dog will be kept in the Heads office area. The dog will only spend time in classrooms, the library and the rest of the school at specific planned sessions and therefore the dog will not be a distraction to students during core lessons. The 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 dog in school and sought advice from many sources, including other schools that successfully have a school dog.

Q Who is responsible for training?

A Mr Pittard will be the legal owner of the dog and as a result, will be responsible for his training. Appropriate professional training will be obtained and the dog will work towards being trained as a school dog in dog training classes with advice from the Pets As Therapy charity. The school will have the dog assessed and certified as a therapy dog by Pets As Therapy before he begins therapy and reading sessions.

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

A In the interest of health and hygiene our school dog will be toileted when taken out for short walks outside the school by staff members. The dog will not be allowed in the main playground at any time.

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 Heads office area. The office is separate from the classrooms / playground area which will ensure the school 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 the third floor terrace for short supervised interaction with students. Therefore a student 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 Heads office area with it's legal owner, Mr Pittard , 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, he will be given a high quality food and regularly groomed to reduce any possibility of allergens.

Appendix C: Advice on School Dogs

The Dogs Trust – School Dogs

<https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/help-advice/factheets-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>