



# School Dog Policy

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## Statement of intent

The Community Inclusive Trust supports the use of a therapy dog for the academic, social and emotional benefits of pupils. This policy is designed to set out to students, parents and visitors the reasons for having a school dog and the rules and responsibilities to ensure the safety of students, 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 students, staff and visitors.

### 1. 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 CIT we hope that school dogs will be a beneficial addition to the therapeutic offer, acting as an adjunct to the interventions already offered and promoting engagement for students who may have found it difficult to access therapies in the past.

#### 1.1 Animal assisted therapy can:

- Teach empathy and appropriate interpersonal skills;
- Help individuals develop social skills;
- Be soothing and support the development of rapport between the professional and pupil, and improve individual's skills to pick up social cues imperative to human relationships;
- Staff can process that information and use it to help pupils see how their behaviour affects others;
- Therapy dogs have been shown to support emotional regulation through the positive impact on the autonomic nervous system
- A recent report highlighted children working with therapy dogs experienced increased motivation for learning, resulting in improved outcomes;
- Therapy dogs are being used to support children with social and emotional learning needs, which in turn can assist with literacy development.

#### 1.2 Research into the effects of therapy dogs in schools is showing a range of benefits including:

- Increase in school attendance;
- Gains in confidence;  
<https://digitalcommons.nl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1032&context=diss>
- Decreases in learner anxiety behaviours resulting in improved learning outcomes, such as increases in reading and writing levels;  
<https://www.australiandoglover.com/2017/03/story-dogs-program-improves-literacy.html>
- Positive changes towards learning and improved motivation;  
[https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com.au/&httpsredir=1&article=1346&context=education\\_ETD\\_masters](https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com.au/&httpsredir=1&article=1346&context=education_ETD_masters) and:
- Enhanced relationships with peers and teachers due to experiencing trust and unconditional positive regard from a therapy dog. This in turn helps students learn how to express their feelings and enter into more trusting relationships.  
[https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1313&context=education\\_ETD\\_masters](https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1313&context=education_ETD_masters)

#### 1.3 Confidence benefits

“If children are partnered with a dog to read to, for example, the dog provides comfort, encourages positive social behaviour, enhances self-esteem, motivates speech and inspires children to have fun and enjoy the non-judgemental experience”

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

#### 1.4 SEN 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.”

Therapy Dogs Nationwide

#### 1.5 Mental Health Benefits

“There is emerging evidence to suggest that Animal Assisted Psychotherapy improves the efficacy of mental health treatments in self-selected adolescent populations via reductions in primary symptomatology, and via secondary factors that improve therapeutic processes and quality, such as engagement and retention”.

[Incorporating animal-assisted therapy in mental health treatments for adolescents: A systematic review of canine assisted psychotherapy | PLOS One](#) Melanie G. Jones, Simon M. Rice, Susan M. Cotton. 2019; 14(1), 2019.

#### 1.6 Behaviour benefits

“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%. 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.”

## 2. Roles and responsibilities

### 2.1 The owner is responsible for:

- It is important to remember that a school dog **does not** belong to a school; it belongs to an owner with whom it forms an important bond and lives as part of the family. The fact that the dog’s owner is a head teacher, teacher, or teaching assistant (for example) does not minimise their duties and responsibilities as the dog’s owner; there is still a legal and moral duty of care towards the animal at all times.
- Many dogs live for 12 -15 years; any owner getting a dog, whether as a pet or a school dog, must consider very carefully whether they can commit to caring for the dog for its entire life. In the case of a school dog, it is important to consider the implications of the owner changing jobs, when taking the dog to school/place of work in their new post might not be an option.
- It is vital for the owner to have alternative dog care plans in place **before** taking on the commitment of taking their dog into school, in case their dog proves unsuitable for the role of school dog. Dogs have different characters, and an individual dog may turn out to be temperamentally unsuitable for life in the stressful school environment. It is also possible for dogs to develop medical conditions that make

their attendance at school impossible or, over time, to become less tolerant of the noise and activity at school.

- The owner will also need to ensure that alternative arrangements are in place for the care of the dog on occasions when the dog is unable to go into school; for example, if the dog is unwell or classroom temperatures rise above a comfortable level for the dog (dogs are not able to regulate their body temperature as effectively as humans.) The same is true if the dog becomes unwell whilst at school or needs to be removed from the school environment for any reason.
- For dog welfare and pupil safety it is imperative that any dog in a school environment be supervised **at all times**. As noted above, the school environment is likely to be stressful for the dog. The owner, who knows the dog best, must ensure that as soon as the dog is indicating that it needs to be removed from a situation this can be actioned.
- It is essential that the dog's owner is well-versed in canine communication and can quickly and easily identify the range of subtle signals that the dog is stressed or worried. A comprehensive understanding of dog behaviour and the canine ladder of aggression is critical to ensure both the dog's wellbeing and pupil safety. The owner will need to be very clear on when an intervention might be required, and how to safely and effectively intervene in those instances. It is worth noting that studies suggest that most dog owners are unable to identify a potentially unsafe situation between a child and dog beyond the very obvious scenarios, and many dog bites occur during benign interactions such as stroking, grooming, or reaching for the dog (*Arhant et al, 2016*). While these studies focus on dogs in the home environment, the implications for a dog in a school setting are clear.
- The responsibilities of the dog's owner must be recognised by their colleagues and the school's senior management, allowing them to prioritise the dog's needs during the school day. For example, a teacher responsible for a school dog may not be able to attend a lunchtime meeting because the dog needs an exercise / toilet / play break. Schools are very busy places and it is not acceptable for the dog's needs to be overlooked due to the many demands on staff time.
- The legal owner of the dog has full responsibility for its welfare and will pay all expenses relating to pet insurance, vaccinations, flea and worm treatment, food and maintenance costs
- The owner is responsible for ensuring the dog is trained to a sufficient standard that the dog does not display any negative behaviours (including those stated in section 4 of this policy) **The dog must pass the Pets as Therapy assessment before being allowed into school.**

## 2.2 The headteacher is responsible for:

- Producing a risk assessment which is reviewed annually.
- Ensuring the dog is included within fire evacuation procedure
- Ensuring the dog is covered by the school's Public Liability Insurance policy
- Informing Staff, parents and students in writing that a dog will be in school
- The presence of a school dog will made clear to visitors upon their arrival at the school reception

## 3. Code of conduct

- a) Pupils must never be left alone with the dog and there must be suitable adult supervision at all times.

- b) Pupils will be reminded of appropriate behaviour around the dog before and during any interaction.
- c) Should the dog show any warning signs such as ears back, growling then staff will immediately remove the dog from the situation.
- d) Any dog foul will be cleaned up immediately.
- e) Pupils will not be allowed to approach or disturb the dog whilst it is asleep.
- f) Pupils must wash their hands after stroking the dog.

#### 4. Unacceptable behaviours

4.1 Should the dog present any of the following behaviours, they will no longer be able to continue as a school dog (these are in line with PAT Dog deferral reasons):

- a) **Aggression** – this includes biting, snarling, growling, or being possessive of toys, food and people.
- b) **Jumping up** - Jumping up is not allowed because of the danger of causing injury by knocking somebody over. It also indicates that the dog is not under the owner's full control.
- c) **Pawing, or putting paws up** - Pawing can cause considerable injury, particularly to vulnerable people who have very thin skin and the slower and poorer rates of healing in older people increase the risk of infection.
- d) **Pulling on the lead** - This behaviour indicates that the dog is not under the owner's full control.
- e) **Reluctance/backing away when being fussed** - Such behaviours suggest a dog that is unwilling or unable to accept close or intense handling.
- f) **Vocalisations, such as barking or growling** - Barking can be indicative of anxiety or discomfort, or another unacceptable behaviour, for example, attention-seeking behaviour toward the owner.
- g) **Mouthing** - Mouthing is basically an inhibited bite and, as such, is an unacceptable behaviour due to the risk of injury to pupils.
- h) **Licking** - Licking is not accepted because it is considered a hygiene risk and may present a risk of infection to certain pupils. Licking can also be a sign of stress or anxiety that a dog displays when it is uncomfortable with a particular situation.
- i) **Taking food greedily** - Snatching food so that the handler can feel the dog's teeth is not accepted due to the possible risk of injury to the pupil if the dog is offered food whilst on a visit.

#### 5. Introduction of a dog

- a) Careful consideration must be given to the introduction of the dog. The dog must be closely monitored on its first visit and during new experiences. For example:
  - (i) it is important that only small groups are introduced at a time;
  - (ii) an area is set aside for the dog to rest;
  - (iii) if it is likely the owner is to be involved in a physical restraint, it is important to find out how the dog reacts to this in a controlled way.
- b) Should any of the behaviours in section 4 be displayed, the dog should be removed, and it should be assumed that the dog is not suitable to continue as a school dog.