



THE OUTDOORS SCHOOL

Therapy Dog Policy

Introduction

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.

Is there a risk in bringing a dog into a school environment?

Of course there is, though there are a variety of accidents which can happen within the school environment which far exceed the number of injuries or incidents caused by a dog. Therefore, it is just another risk that needs to be managed.

School Policy

- The Headteacher has agreed that the school can have a PAT dog (Pets as Therapy) and attend planned lessons/sessions in the woods.
- Staff have been informed, through a staff briefing, that the school will be using a PAT dog.
- The Health & Safety officer has produced a risk assessment and this will be reviewed annually.
- PAT registered dogs are the only dogs permitted in school.
- Staff, visitors and students known to have allergic reactions to dogs must not go near the dog.
- If the dog is ill he will not be allowed into school.
- The dog will be kept on a lead when moving around the forest and will be under the full control and supervision of an adult at all times.
- Learners will never be left alone with the dog and there will be appropriate adult supervision at all times when the dog is present with learners.
- Only authorised people may feed the dog.
- Learners should always wash their hands after touching the dog.
- Learners should be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dog. Learners should remain calm around the dog and ask permission before stroking the dog. Learners should not put their face near the dog and should always approach it standing up.
- Students should never go near or disturb the dog that is sleeping.
- Students will not be allowed to play too roughly with the dog.
- If the dog is surrounded by a large number of learners, the adult in charge of the dog must ensure that s/he monitors the situation.
- Dogs express their feelings through their body language. 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. If the dog is displaying any of these warning signs he will be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment.
- Children should not feed, or eat close to the dogs.

- Any dog foul will be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately.

Legislation

- The primary applicable legislation is the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Animal Welfare Act 2006

Parents Bringing dogs into school grounds

- Parents who bring their dog into the school grounds, while walking their children to or from school, should keep their dog on a lead at all times. The adult must always have control of the dog – children must never be left alone with or in charge of the dog.

Dog owner walking or exercising their dog(s) in school grounds

The forest is private property and should not be used for the purposes of exercising dogs.

Roles and Responsibilities

- The Directors have a responsibility to ensure that the school has a written policy for dogs in School.
- The Headteacher is responsible for implementing this policy. The Headteacher may delegate this responsibility to a Deputy Head.
- Staff are required to abide by this policy.
- The Health and Safety Officer is responsible for providing information, advice and guidance as and when required.

Reasons to have a dog in school

Understanding feelings and emotions can be a problem in all schools with students anxious about school. Research shows that dogs are making a difference in helping learners make sense of their feelings. Researchers report that students can identify with animals, and with empathy for the dog, can better understand how peers may feel. It has also been proven that violent behaviour declines as does general aggression when a dog is present.

Anxiety of attending school is great within some learners. Having a loyal dog waiting for the learners when they arrive and allowing them some time to walk, groom or cuddle the dogs helps the learners to share their anxieties and improve their attendance. The dog can also visit the learner at home and become a clear link between home and school.

Behaviour difficulties occur in school and these can interfere with learning. Dogs are used to promote positive behaviour in learners and open up conversations about why we behave in certain ways and the impact that this has and how we could make changes.

Reading programmes with dogs are doing wonders for some students. Children who might be embarrassed to read aloud to † adults are likely to be less scared to read to a dog. 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," students find social support and peer interaction.

Dogs are incredibly calm and happy to have learners read to them or join a group of learners for story time. 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 students who read to dogs show an increase in reading levels, word recognition, a higher desire to read and write, and an increase in intra and interpersonal skills among the learners they mix with.

Social Development: Dogs offer an opportunity for improving social development. They are especially useful for teaching students social skills and responsibility. Specifically, schools are using dogs to help learners to build self-esteem; learn about positive and negative reinforcement, responsibility, and boundaries. Older learners use dogs to help communicate, teach kindness, and empower students. With a dog in the forest, learners have the opportunity to learn how to care for the animal. This includes walking and grooming. Researchers report that involving learners in the daily care of school dogs is a positive experience, promoting their own daily care. The learners 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 loving, but at the same time full of fun and enjoyment for the learners. Those learners who have performed incredibly well during the week or those who have made progress in a certain area, or those who have achieved tasks set for them, can be rewarded with spending time with the dog. Walking, grooming, playing and training are some of the responsibilities learners will be allowed to undertake. It has been proved that working and playing with a dog improves children's social skills and self-esteem.

Therapy Dogs can work with students on a one-one basis and will especially help those learners 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 learners they meet and are happy to provide plenty of hugs to the learners they are spending time with. Learners who struggle with social interaction can find a reassuring friend in a dog.

The wider community: Dogs can be a great way for to help students to interact with members of the wider community. For example, students may take the dog to visit other schools, hospitals or care homes and help others to benefit from this therapeutic support