



School Dog Policy

Hamsey Community Primary School

A kind, creative community where learning is an adventure.

Written by Matt Dean, February 2023

Chair of Governors	
Headteacher	Matt Dean
Approved Date (Next FGB)	
Review Date	February 2024

Rationale:

There is an increasing body of research to support the benefit of a dog in school. In schools across the country, Reading Dogs are being used to help children develop fluency in reading, and Therapy Dogs provide comfort and reassurance to children with anxiety and who may struggle with self-confidence. Children's emotional wellbeing is at the root of pro-social behaviour and success within all areas of school life. A dog can support children who are apprehensive about school and can be an incentive for them to want to come to school. In line with therapeutic thinking and Zones of Regulation, children can spend time with the dog, learning to care for the dog and the dog can be a way of supporting children to regulate (e.g. move from the yellow zone back to the green zone, or stimulate themselves out of the blue zone into the green zone). Reading dogs can help boost children's confidence and fluency. Caring for an animal can help children to learn about responsibility and can help children to learn how to treat animals safely and with compassion. Dogs are great fun to have around and can bring a caring, family atmosphere to a school.

Aims:

Our aims are detailed in the dog's job description (Appendix 1). By having a dog in school we would like to achieve the following:

- Improve academic achievement
- Boost literacy skills
- Provide support for calming behaviours and positive attachments
- Increase social skills and self-esteem
- Increase confidence
- Teach responsibility for and respect to animals
- Improve attendance for identified pupils
- Support wellbeing for both children and staff

Benefits:

Cognitive

Companionship with a dog can stimulate memory, problem solving and game playing. Dogs can provide a purposeful context and be a motivator for learning.

Behavioural

Un-social or anti-social behaviours can impact on learning. Dogs can help pupils to identify with others, provide a non-judgemental listening ear and develop empathy skills. A dog can provide a meaningful support for positive reinforcement of pro-social behaviours. Dogs are gentle and loving but at the same time full of fun and enjoyment for children. In time and once the dog is settled, the dog will be able to spend supervised time with children as an incentive for pro-social behaviours. Walking, grooming, reading with, playing with and training are some of the responsibilities children will be allowed to undertake, under supervision from the handler.

Social

A dog provides a positive, mutual topic for discussion, encourages responsibility, wellbeing and focused interaction with others. After experiencing unconditional love and trust from a dog we would expect to see enhanced relationships with peers and staff. Dogs in school offer an opportunity for improving social development. They are especially useful for teaching children social skills and responsibility. Specifically, schools are using dogs to help build self-esteem, learn about positive and negative reinforcement, teach kindness, responsibility, and boundaries. With a dog in school, children have the opportunity to learn how to care for the animal. Involving children in the care of school dog is a positive experience, promoting their own care. Children also learn about responsibility, caring, and sharing when helping each other take care of a dog at school.

Emotional

A school dog improves self-esteem, acceptance from others and lifts mood, often provoking laughter and fun. Dogs can teach compassion and respect for other living things as well as relieving anxiety. Children can learn how to express their feelings and enter into more trusting relationships. Children are encouraged to gently pat or talk to the dog to teach sensitive touch and to help them to be calm and this promotes and provides tactile stimulation.

Academic

Reading to dogs has been proven to help children develop their literacy skills and build confidence in reading. Children who might be embarrassed to read aloud to the class or adults are likely to be less scared to read to a dog. Dogs are used to encourage struggling readers to practise reading aloud. This activity can create a calming effect on the pupil, as the dog will listen to the pupil read with no judgement or criticism, providing the children with a sense of comfort and love. This in turn creates an environment where a child's enthusiasm for reading can grow, therefore developing the confidence to read aloud.

Attendance

It is hoped that a dog will provide a powerful motivation for attending school, particularly for those children identified as persistent absentees.

Overcoming Phobias

There are individuals who have dog phobias, or who may be nervous around dogs. A school dog and a careful de-sensitisation programme can help to reduce some of these fears.

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

This policy shows how we have thought carefully about school life with a pet dog and how, through careful management; there is a very low risk of harm.

Context:

- Mr Dean – Head of School, owns the dog.
- Veterinary costs, insurance and any additional costs will be paid by the owner (Mr Dean).
- The Leadership team and staff have agreed that a school dog would bring many benefits to Hamsey Community Primary School.
- Where there are any concerns or fears expressed by individuals, individual care plans will be set up.
- The School Dog Risk Assessment is reviewed annually.
- Visitors and pupils will be informed of the dog on arrival at reception.

Preparations for having a School Dog

Having a dog in school is a big step and the arrangement needs to work for all groups in our school community. School leaders have taken advice from schools that currently have a school dog, as well as Michelle Garvey – qualifications and accreditations here:

- Foundation Degree in Canine Behaviour and Training
- Association of Pet Dog Trainers (01170) Member and Assessor
- Animal Behaviour and Training Council Registered Animal Trainer
- Approved Agility Club Instructor
- Ian Dunbar 4 Day Conference
- Absolute Dogs Training Academy
- Chirag Patel Reactivity Talk
- School of Canine Science
- Various webinars and online training

Risk assessments and insurance are in place. In order to ensure that the dog will be beneficial to the children's learning and wellbeing, and not be a distraction, we will plan when and where the children will interact with the dog.

If any child is allergic to dogs, we make sure that they do not come into close contact with the dog if parents or carers request it. Likewise, if a child has a phobia of dogs we will keep the dog away from them, or we can offer opportunities for the child to be slowly introduced to the dog, to reduce their fear. Parents and carers are invited to contact the school if either of these cases applies, so that we can make the necessary arrangements.

Minnie

Our school dog is Minnie, who is also Mr Dean's family pet. Minnie is a Labradoodle and was born on 30th November 2021. Minnie had lots of early socialisation with children and other dogs at the home of her breeder along with Mr Dean's family and friends. Minnie is fully insured, which means she has public liability insurance. She has regular check-ups at the vet and has up to date vaccinations, flea and worming treatments. Whilst Minnie is calm, patient and friendly, her interactions with children will be supervised at all times.

Guidelines to interaction with the School Dog

Parents and carers are informed that there is a school dog and can request that their children do not have contact with the dog. There will always be a responsible adult in charge of the dog during interactions with children and this will be Mr Dean, to start with. This may change if she begins to work with other children and classes.

Children and adults are required to adhere to the following:

- Always approach Minnie calmly and slowly
- Never run up to her
- Offer the back of your hand for Minnie to sniff when meeting her
- All interactions must remain calm with the authorised adult in control at all times
- Children must wash their hands before eating and if they have been stroking Minnie

Frequently Asked Questions

What will the school dog do on a day-to-day basis?

The dog will be based in Mr Dean's office, but will be on the playground at some play and lunch times under strict supervision and only if it is deemed safe to do so. The dog will support children coming into school and helping to settle them into their learning. A member of school staff may take the dog in the afternoons to help with interventions (e.g. 1:1 or group sessions) when appropriate. In the future, the dog may visit different classes to listen to readers with a member of staff or help with particular projects, such as learning about caring for animals. The children may be involved in walking her at break and lunch times and assisting with her care needs.

How do I know that my child will be safe around the dog?

A risk assessment and policy are in place and available on the school website. These will both be reviewed annually by Mr Dean. The dog is covered by public liability insurance. Children will only have contact with the dog when supervised by an adult and with permission from their parents or carers.

Will my child pick up infections from the dog?

The dog will be fully vaccinated, treated regularly for worms and fleas, and will be kept away from the school if it is ill. Children will be required to wash their hands if they have been stroking her. The dog will go to the toilet away from the school site, and no child will be allowed to pick up dog mess.

What if my child is allergic to dogs or afraid of them?

Parents can request that their child has no contact, or restricted access to the dog in these situations. Please speak to Mr Dean to discuss any concerns.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The effectiveness of this policy will be regularly monitored by the Head of School.

Implementation and Review

This policy will be circulated to all staff and published on the school website for parent and carer information. This policy will be reviewed annually.

To be reviewed February 2024

Appendix 1

School Dog – Job Description

Minnie's main responsibilities include:

- To be committed to professional development and future training classes.
- To support wellbeing for children and adults by providing companionship, a listening ear, quality nurture time and to be non-judgemental at all times.
- To support attendance for identified children by providing motivation to come to school.
- To give children the opportunity to learn skills of responsibility and in caring for others.
- To promote high standards of reading by providing a listening ear and a purpose for reading, without judgement.
- To support children with pro-social behaviours and to encourage emotional literacy.
- To provide a purposeful context for learning (caring for animals and others, writing for purpose, animal-based projects).
- To work with identified children to provide companionship and nurture.

Appendix 2

Rules

All children at school are taught how to approach dogs and how to respond to unwanted behaviour. They are taught that they must ask if they wish to pet the dog and know how she is trained to greet people. This is an important life-lesson for the children.

1. Ignore the dog - speak to me first
2. Ask permission to approach
3. Four paws on the floor (everyone needs to be consistent with this)
4. Take turns (the children – not the dog...)
5. No barking (The dog – not the children...)
6. Let sleeping dogs lie (we recognise that a school can be a tiring experience for a dog, especially with their heightened sense of smell!)