

## School Dog Policy



### **St. Mary's RC Primary School**

#### **Mission Statement**

- We will always open our doors wide in welcome.
- We will always love and care for each other as Jesus taught us.
- We will always place the Word of God at the heart of our School.
- We will always worship God our Father.
- We will always be witnesses to Jesus Christ by following in his footsteps.

Written by: Mrs Wolstenholme

Date written: September 2024

Approved by governors on: October 2024

Policy will be reviewed: Every three years or sooner if necessary

## **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?**

Yes 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. A thorough risk assessment has been carried out and this is included in this document (see appendix 3).

Dogs are not allowed anywhere on the school site at any time unless specifically authorised by the Head Teacher. This includes drop off and collection times. This policy outlines measures put in place to allow the school dog to be present. The dog will be owned by Mrs Wolstenholme.

- The Governors have the right to refuse entry to the dog.
- Only the school 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 Head Teacher has been informed beforehand.
  - The dog is a cockapoo, chosen because it is an intelligent breed that will respond well to training and which is known to be good with children, which is hypoallergenic and is very sociable and friendly. Mrs Wolstenholme, Head teacher has produced a risk assessment and this will be reviewed annually.
- Staff, visitors and children known to have allergic reactions to dogs must not go near the dog. All visitors will be informed on arrival that there is a dog in school.
  - If the dog is ill they will not be allowed into school.
- The dog will 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.
  - Children must never be left alone with the dog and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times.
    - Children should be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dog. Children should remain calm around the dog. Children should not put their face near a dog and should always approach it standing up.
    - Children should never go near or disturb the dog that is sleeping or eating.
  - Children must not be allowed to play roughly with the dog. 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.
  - Dogs express their feelings through their body language. Growling or bearing 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 they should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment.
- Children should not eat close to the dog.
  - Children should be careful to stroke the dog on their body, chest, back and not by their face or top of head.

- Children should always wash their hands after handling a dog.
- Any dog foul should be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately.
- Parents will be consulted on allowing their pupils access to the dog.
- The office will know the whereabouts of the dog and which staff are supervising at all times.
  - The dog will be included in the fire evacuation procedure under the supervision of Mrs Wolstenholme.

### **Actions**

If someone reports having an issue with the dog, this information must be passed to the Head Teacher or a Deputy as soon as possible. All concerns will be responded to by the Head teacher.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

The Governing Body has a responsibility to ensure that the school has a written policy for dogs in School.

The Head teacher is responsible for implementing this policy.

Teachers, staff, pupils, parents and visitors are required to abide by this policy.

The curriculum will support learning about dogs and how best to behave around our dog.

This will include highlighting that not all dogs are well trained and that caution must be used around unknown dogs outside school.

### **Appendix 1. Reasons to have a dog in school**

In summary, academic research has shown that dogs working and helping in the school environment can achieve the following: -

- 1) Improve academic achievement
- 2) Increase literacy skills
- 3) Calming behaviours
- 4) Increase social skills and self-esteem
- 5) Increase confidence
- 6) Teach responsibility and respect to all life
- 7) Help prevent truancy
- 8) Motivate children who are often less attentive.

The following information has been taken from a range of sources to provide further detail about the benefits of having a dog in school:

**Behaviour:** In some schools, dogs are making a difference in the behaviour of pupils. 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.

**Attendance:** Case study: 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.

**Education:** Reading programmes with dogs are doing wonders for some students. Children who might be embarrassed to read aloud to the class or even adults are likely to be less scared to read to a dog. “It might be less stressful for a child to read aloud to a dog than to a teacher or a peer. 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 student read to them or join a group of children in the library whilst they are having a book reading session. 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 students they mix with.

**Social Development:** Dogs in school 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 older students build self-esteem; learn about positive and negative reinforcement, responsibility, and boundaries. Older students use dogs to help communicate, teach kindness, and empower students.

With a dog in school, students have the opportunity to learn how to care for the animal. This includes walking and grooming. Researchers report that involving students in the daily care of classroom dogs is a positive experience, promoting their own daily care. The students 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 students. Those students who have performed incredibly well during the week or those who have made progress in a certain subject, or those who have achieved tasks set for them, will be rewarded with spending time during lunch or break to interact with these dogs. Walking, grooming, playing and training are some of the responsibilities students will be allowed to undertake. It has been proved that working and playing with a dog improves children’s social skills and self-esteem.

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

## **Appendix 2 School Dog Frequently Asked Questions**

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

A: The legal owner of the dog will be Mrs Wolstenholme; she will bear the costs associated with owning the dog; the school budget will support insurance and staff training costs 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?

A: The dog will be kept in the office area. The office is separate from the classrooms / playground area to ensure it only comes into contact with children who are happy to have contact, under strict supervision. The dog will also have a space to spend time in classrooms and other learning areas where children can interact safely. 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 and a reputable dog behaviourist.

Q: Who is responsible for training?

A: Mrs Wolstenholme will be the legal owner of the dog and as a result, will be responsible for its training.

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 in the grounds. Only staff members will clear this away appropriately leaving no trace on the ground, cleaning the area with disinfectant if needed. Our policy of no dogs in the playground is still applicable as we are unable to put effective control measures in place that guarantee temperament and safety when children come into unsupervised contact with unknown dogs.

Q: How will the dog's welfare be considered?

A: The dog will be walked regularly and given free time outside. She will also be used as a behaviour reward. The dog will be kept in the admin area/HT office 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 unlimited 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, 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 breed of dog is known for minimal moulting, he is given a high quality food and regularly groomed to reduce any possibility of allergens.

Q: My child is frightened of dogs; how will you manage this?

A: Access to the dog is carefully managed and supervised and children do not need to have close contact with it if they do not wish to. 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.

### **Appendix 3 Risk Assessment**

A separate risk assessment is in place for the school dog. This can be found on our school website and a paper copy can also be requested from the school office.