

Having a school dog

Policy and Rationale

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Introduction

Children can benefit educationally and emotionally, increase their understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills through contact with a suitable calm dog. In addition to these benefits, children take great enjoyment from interaction with animals. By having a dog we want to encourage those children specifically who are vulnerable, or those who are less confident socially or academically, by having a friendly audience to listen to them, whether that is through reading to, or just spending time with a dog. The dogs are well cared for and responsibly owned by a staff member.

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

- The dogs will be owned by Mrs Attewell and Mrs Goodwin
- Vet costs will be paid by the owners, with the exception of non-essential vet costs required by the school
- The breeds are chosen for their mild temperament.
- The headteacher and Governors have agreed that the dogs will bring many benefits to Cunningham Hill Junior school
- The vast majority of pupils are very keen to have a small dog on site. Where there are any concerns or fears expressed by individuals, a care plan will be put in place
- The risk assessment will be reviewed annually
- When visitors and pupils arrive at school they will be advised of the presence of a dog

Day to Day Management

The dogs will:

- Not be allowed in school if unwell
- Be carried or kept on a lead when moving between classrooms or when on a walk
- Be under the full control and supervision of an adult at all times
- Be fully 'house' trained
- Have had all injections prior to joining Cunningham Hill
- Never be taken off site by pupils

Pupils will:

- NOT have sole responsibility for, or be left alone with the dogs
- Meet the dogs in a group of not more than three children
- Be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dogs every time they meet them:
 - Always remain calm around the dogs
 - Do not make sudden movements, do be gentle
 - Do not stare into the dogs' eyes (could be interpreted as a threat)
 - Do not put your face near the dogs
 - Always approach the dogs standing up
 - Do not disturb the dogs when they are eating or sleeping

- Do not eat close to the dogs and never feed the dogs from their own food
- Learn about how dogs express their feelings through their body language. Growling or baring of teeth indicates that a 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 should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment.
- Follow appropriate health and safety principles:

Health and Safety principles

Children will always wash their hands after handling the dog. Any dog 'mess' will be cleaned up immediately and disposed of appropriately by the dog's owner or an appropriate member of staff. Children must never attempt to do this.

Should a bite (even playfully) occur:

1. Parents will be contacted immediately
2. The wound will be cleaned and covered with a sterile, non-sticky dressing
3. The child/adult will be released for medical attention
4. All relevant staff will be informed
5. A full investigation into the circumstances will be led by the headteacher
6. The suitability of the dog will be reassessed by the governors.

Appendix 1

Reasons to have a dog in school – some anecdotes

Reading Programmes

Reading programmes with dogs are doing wonders for some pupils. 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 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, pupils find social support and peer interaction.

Dogs are incredibly calm and happy to have pupils 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-judgement, 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 making 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, work recognition, and desire to read and write and an increase in intrapersonal skills.

Attendance

Children with low attendance or punctuality can be encouraged to come in by timetabling 'dog time' first time in the morning, etc. Some schools are using dogs to improve behaviour problems by promoting positive behaviour in pupils.

Social Development

Dogs in school offer an opportunity for improving social development. They are especially useful for teaching pupils social skills and responsibility. Specifically, schools are using dogs to help older pupils build self-esteem, learn about positive and negative reinforcement, responsibility and boundaries.

With a dog in the classroom, pupils 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 school dogs is a positive experience, promoting their own daily care.

As a Reward

Dogs will be gentle and loving, but at the same time full of fun and enjoyment for the pupils. Those pupils who have performed/behaved incredibly well in a week or have made excellent progress, could be rewarded by spending some of lunchtime or break time with the dogs. Walking, grooming, playing and training are some of the responsibilities pupils will be allowed to undertake.

Support Dogs

Dogs can work with pupils on a one-to-one basis and will especially help those pupils who have been bullied, abused, bereaved, or are going through a particularly difficult time or even if they are scared of dogs. The dogs will bring much joy and support to all the pupils that interact with them. Pupils who struggle with social interaction can find a reassuring friend in a dog.