



Educational Assistance Dog Policy

The value of pet 'therapy' is widely accepted as a powerful aid to stimulation and communication. Studies have shown that the presence of companion animals can improve well-being, lower anxiety and increase motivation simply by making the environment a happier, more enjoyable place to work for children and staff.

Academic research has shown that dogs working in the school environment can also:

- Improve academic achievement
- Increase literacy skills
- Calm challenging behaviours
- Increase social skills
- Increase confidence and self-esteem
- Teach responsibility and respect for life
- Improve attendance
- Increase motivation

Our school has considered introducing an Educational Assistance Dog for a little while and as of September 2020, Winnie will be joining the St Peter's family.

Rationale

Education - Children who might be too embarrassed read or lack confidence when reading aloud, often are less nervous about reading to a dog. Dogs provide a non-judgemental, embarrassment-free audience for reading, after all, dogs won't correct or interrupt them. Dogs are used to encourage struggling readers to practice spelling aloud. With the presence of a well-trained, calm dog students can find support and acceptance.

Dogs can be incredibly calm and are happy to have a 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-judgemental, which is especially crucial for struggling, emerging readers. The dogs also provide children with confidence as they make amazing listeners and provide a great sense of comfort and love. Research has proven that students who read to dogs show an increase in reading levels, word recognition and desire to read and write.

Social Development

Dogs in school 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. Dogs help communication and the empowerment of children. With a dog in school, students have the opportunity to learn how to care for the animal. This includes walking, feeding, watering and grooming. Researchers report that involving students in the daily care of classroom dogs is a positive experience, promoting routine and responsibility.

Attendance

Children with poor attendance are often put in positions of responsibility for the dog e.g. feeding, giving water or walking. The Educational Assistance Dog is then used as encouragement to be in school.

Behaviour

In an increasing number of 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 their classmates, peers and teachers may feel in certain situations. Behaviour problems in school interfere with learning so using a dog to promote positive behaviour could improve any such issues. Schools who are using dogs, have found that there are fewer disciplinary issues as well as increased pupil confidence, motivation and responsibility. Parents have reported that children are more interested in school where a dog is being used.

Rewards

Dogs are gentle and loving, but at the same time, full of fun and enjoyment for students. Students who have performed incredibly well during the week, have made progress in a certain subject or achieved targets set for them are rewarded with spending time during lunch or break to interact with their Educational Assistance Dog. Walking, grooming, playing and training are some of the responsibilities students will be allowed to undertake.

Safeguarding

Educational Assistance Dogs can work with children on a one-to-one basis and especially help those students who have been bullied, are grieving, are struggling at home or school and even those who are scared/phobic of dogs. Dogs bring much joy and support to all students and provide physical comfort with the children that they are spending time with. Students who struggle with social interaction can find a reassuring friend in a dog.

Risks

The school has carried out a risk assessment that examines the risks involved in having a Educational Assistance Dog. This assessment will be reviewed by key staff every term, it is a working document. This risk assessment has been authorised by the senior leadership team and school governors.

It is accepted that interacting with animals may not be appropriate for all children, but for most, has huge potential to provide many benefits. Any parent who does not want their child to interact with the Educational Assistance Dog is invited to email the school office or Miss Bartle to inform the school of their wishes.

Safety and Welfare Measures

- The Educational Assistance Dog will be owned by Miss Bartle and the wellbeing of the dog ultimately lies with her.
- Only the Educational Assistance Dog is allowed on the premises, with the exception of known therapy/assistance dogs or if the head teacher has given permission for another dog to visit.
- The Educational Assistance Dog is a Labradoodle. This breed is known for its sociable, playful temperament and its low/non-shed coat (more likely to be allergy friendly). Labradoodles are often used when working with children as are energetic when free, but soft and quiet when handled.
- The senior leadership team and the school governors have agreed that the Educational Assistance Dog will benefit the children and staff at our school. They have the right to refuse entry to the dog should this stop being the case.

- All staff, parents and children have been informed that a Educational Assistance Dog will be joining the school.
- All visitors will be informed upon arrival that there is an Educational Assistance Dog on the premises.
- Any staff, visitors or children with a dog allergy, do not need to interact with the Educational Assistance Dog.
- If the Educational Assistance Dog is unwell it will not be brought into school.
- The dog will be kept on a lead when moving between classrooms and will wear a harness during therapy/reading sessions so that it can be restrained easily if necessary.
- The Educational Assistance Dog will always be under the full control and supervision of an appropriate, knowledgeable adult.
- Children will never be left alone or unattended with the dog.
- Children will be aware of the 'Educational Assistance Dog rules'.
- Children will be educated as to appropriate behaviour around the Educational Assistance Dog. They will be told the importance of being calm and gentle around the dog and that the dog must always approach them etc.
- It will be highlighted to children that not all dogs are well trained and that caution must be used around unknown dogs outside of school.
- The dog will undergo formal training with Miss Bartle in attendance.
- The Educational Assistance Dog will not actively work for any more than three hours per school day.
- No staff member, child or visitor will disturb the dog during its rest periods, when it is sleeping or eating.
- The supervising adult will ensure that they understand the dog's body language and will take the dog for a rest if needed. They will be responsible for ensuring the dog does not become overwhelmed, nervous or agitated.
- If the dog were to show any un-friendly or negative behaviours, the supervising adult will immediately remove the dog from the situation or environment.
- No staff member, child or visitor will eat near to the Educational Assistance Dog.
- All staff, children and visitors should wash their hands after interacting with the Educational Assistance Dog.
- The Educational Assistance Dog will have a designated, outside toileting area and any mess will be cleared and disposed of immediately.
- Miss Bartle will know the whereabouts of the dog, as well as who is supervising, at all times.
- The Educational Assistance Dog will be included in the fire evacuation procedure under the supervision of Miss Bartle.
- A record log will be kept, including notes made and anecdotal evidence of the Educational Assistance Dog's impact.

Issues and Complaints

If anyone reports having an issue with the dog, this information must be passed directly to the head teacher or deputy as soon as possible. All concerns will be responded to by the head teacher.

Roles and Responsibilities

- The school governors have a responsibility to ensure that the school has a written policy and risk-assessment for having the dog in school.
- The head teacher is responsible for implementing the school policy and ensuring the risk assessment is followed.
- Miss Bartle is responsible for the care, training and monitoring of the Educational Assistance Dog.
- The teachers, staff, pupils, parents and visitors are required to abide by the school policy.
- The teachers will educate children about dogs, training and behaviour around the Educational Assistance Dog.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Who is the legal owner of the dog and who pays for its costs?

Miss Bartle is the legal owner of the dog. She looks after the dog outside of school hours and bears the costs associated with owning the dog. The school budget supports insurance only

2. Is the dog from a reputable breeder?

Yes, the dog is from a home where the mother was seen and documentation given about the father. The breeder owns two school/therapy dogs of her own and has given us much advice. The breeder helped with the selection of the dog and it was chosen specifically for its temperament.

3. Will the dog be a distraction?

¹No, the dog will be kept either in Miss Bartle's classroom or in the office area (depending on the time of day). The dog will be kept in a crate (den) in lesson times so that it cannot distract the children from their learning. Once the 'novelty' of the dog being in school has worn off, it will become part of normal school life. The children will only interact with the dog at appropriate, timetabled parts of the day. On a rota system, the dog will spend time in different classrooms, the library, the playground and on the field. The dog will also attend meetings with staff to support further socialisation, following consultation with staff beforehand.

4. Has a risk assessment been undertaken?

Yes, we have carefully considered introducing a dog to our school and sought advice from various sources. This risk assessment has been approved by senior staff and governors.

5. Who is responsible for training?

Miss Bartle will be responsible for its training, as legal owner of the dog. The dog will attend formal training for the first year of its life and when it reaches 9 months of age, we will begin to work with the Pets as Therapy charity.

6. Is having a dog in school unhygienic?

No, in the interest of health and hygiene, the dog will have a designated, outside 'toileting area' (in an area inaccessible to children) and no dog-mess will ever be left. Waste will be cleared immediately by Miss Bartle (or another member of staff) and this will be disposed of in the designated, labelled 'dog bin' by the 'toileting area'. This bin will be emptied, and the area disinfected by Miss Bartle at the end of every school day.

Waste disposal bags will always be carried when walking the dog around the school field and the same protocol will be followed.

After interacting with the dog, children will be told to wash their hands and the supervising adult will always carry hand sanitiser with them.

7. How will the dog's welfare be considered?

Miss Bartle and has a legal and moral duty of care towards the dog at all times – even in school. We have carefully considered guidance regarding Educational Assistance Dogs provided by Dogs Trust and other such organisations and have followed their advice where possible.

The process of introducing the dog will be gradual and the dog will never be in school when unwell.

The dog's training will be through positive techniques only.

The dog will be walked regularly and will be given free time outside (supervised by Miss Bartle). The dog will be given plenty of rest and must not be actively working for more than three hours during the school day. The dog will have its own crate (den) which is its 'safe space' and it will never be left alone.

The dog will have unlimited access to water and will be fed at regular intervals throughout the day.

The dog will always approach the children first and will be given a way out of any situation it is not comfortable with. We will work carefully to ensure that the dog's welfare is always considered and the dog will be removed from any situations where it is stressed.

8. How will children and staff with dog allergies be looked after?

No child or staff member will need to interact with the dog, this will relieve the possibility of allergic reactions. We already manage a range of allergies at school, and this will be no different for children and adults that are allergic to dogs. Individual needs will be met and we are happy to work with parents to put additional control measures in place for individual allergies.

The dog will be kept in a well-ventilated room and children and adults with allergies will not need to be in close proximity with the dog.

Whilst there is no guarantee, the breed of dog has been chosen for its low/non-shed coat so there will be minimal, if any, moulting.

The dog will be fed high-quality food and will be regularly groomed to reduce any possibility of

allergens.

9. How will children and staff with a fear/phobia of dogs be looked after?

Access to the dog is carefully managed and supervised and children do not need to interact with the dog should they/their parents wish not to.

During education sessions about the dog, fears will be acknowledged and addressed. This way children will know that fear of dogs is normal and understandable.

Children and adults who are nervous will be given the option to meet the dog in a smaller, calmer setting and will be offered separate sessions on training and interacting with dogs should they wish – they do not have to do this. The dog will always wear a harness and short lead if interacting with such individuals.

We hope to work closely with parents of children who are fearful of dogs to alleviate their worries and to teach them how to manage this.

Policy Date: Autumn 2020

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