

Blackburn with Darwen L.A.

St. Thomas's Centre

School 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?

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 1).

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.

School Policy

The dogs are owned by Mrs Amanda Leaver (SBM) and Miss Charlotte Leaver (SENca)

- The Management Committee have the right to refuse entry to the dogs.
- Only the school dogs are 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 dogs are Bichon Frise chosen because they are an intelligent breed that will respond well to training and which is known to be good with children, which sheds no hair and are very sociable and friendly.
- Staff, parents and children have been informed by letter that the dogs will be in school. A risk assessment has been produced and this will be reviewed annually.

- Staff, visitors and children known to have allergic reactions to dogs must not go near the dogs. All visitors will be informed on arrival that there are dogs in school.
- If the dogs are ill they will not be allowed into school.
- The dogs will be kept on leads 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 dogs and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times.
- Children should be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dogs. Children should remain calm around the dogs.
- Children should never go near or disturb the dogs when they are sleeping or eating.
- Children must not be allowed to play roughly with the dog.
- Everyone should wait until Pixie and Bonnie are sitting or lying down before touching or stroking them
- If the dogs are surrounded by a large number of children, the dogs 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 dogs are frightened or nervous. If the dogs are displaying any of these warning signs they should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment.
- Children should not eat close to the dogs.
- Children should always wash their hands after handling a dog.
- Parents will be consulted on allowing their children access to the dogs via an opt out agreement.
- All visitors will be informed about the dogs and related protocols on arrival and office staff will relay visitor concerns to the Head Teacher or SBM as soon as possible.
- Appropriately trained staff will maintain records and anecdotal evidence of the work and impact of the school dogs.
- The dogs annual injections will be kept up to date and have an annual health check
- The dogs will also have flea and worming treatment prescribed by a vet.
- The office will know the whereabouts of the dogs and which staff are supervising at all times.
- The dogs will have a timetable for interaction with the children
- The dog will be included in the fire evacuation procedure under the supervision of Miss Leaver

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

Actions

If someone reports having an issue with the dogs, this information must be passed to the Head Teacher or SBM 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 dogs. 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 school refusing
- 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 the dogs in school, students have the opportunity to learn how to care for the animals. 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 the dogs 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 gained their points for golden time or those who have achieved tasks set for them, will be rewarded with spending time interacting 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 dogs 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 (FAQs)

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 Amanda Leaver and Miss Charlotte Leaver; they 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 dogs are 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 dogs will be kept in the office area. The office is separate from the classrooms / playground area to ensure they only come into contact with children who are happy to have contact and have parental permission for this, under strict supervision. The dogs will also have a space to spend time in classrooms, hall and in the garden where children can interact safely. The dogs can 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 Amanda Leaver and Miss Charlotte Leaver will be the legal owners of the dogs and as a result, will be responsible for their training. An appropriate professional trainer has been obtained and the dogs will work towards being trained as school Therapy dog.

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.

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

A: The dogs will be walked regularly and given free time outside. Parents will be able to give permission in advance to allow their child to be able to walk with a member of staff and the dogs during that time. This will also be used as a behaviour reward, in line with our behaviour policy. The dogs will be kept in the admin area/SEN office and will only have planned and supervised contact

with children and visitors. The dogs 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 not moulting, and is recognised as a hypoallergenic breed they are 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 unless permission for this has been given. 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.