



School Dog Policy

Updated: September 2025
Next Review: September 2026

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 self-confidence issues.

Increasingly in schools, it is becoming recognised that children's emotional wellbeing is at the root of positive behaviour and success with socialising as well as in the classroom. A dog can support children who are anxious about school and could be the reason that they want to come in every morning. Children with trouble managing their behaviour could learn to care for the dog and the dog could be helpful in de-escalating anger. 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.

School Policy

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.

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 poorly they will not be allowed into school.

The dog will be under the supervision of an adult at all times and children must never be left alone with the dog.

Appropriate behaviour around the dog

Whenever the dog is with children the adult supervising should ensure the children carry out the following:

- they should remain calm around the dog
- they should not make sudden movements and must never stare into a dog's eyes as this could be threatening for the dog
- they should not put their face near the dog and should always approach it standing up
- they should never go near or disturb the dog whilst she is sleeping or eating
- they must not play roughly with the dog
- the dog should not be stroked until she is sitting or lying down
- the adult in charge of the dog must ensure she is not surrounded by a large number of people which may make her anxious and stressed
- if the dog is displaying warning signs that she is angry or threatened such as growling or baring teeth, flattened ears, tail between the legs or whining then she should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment
- children should not eat close to the dog
- the dog should only be stroked on her body, chest, back and not by her 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.

All visitors will be informed about the dog and if anyone has a fear or is allergic then the office staff will ask that the dog is kept away from them throughout their visit.

In the event of the school being evacuated following an alarm then the dog will accompany the adult who is supervising at the time

Actions

If someone reports having an issue with the dog, this information must be passed to the Head teacher 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.

Reasons to have a dog in school

Academic research has shown that dogs working and helping in the school environment can achieve the following:

- Improve academic achievement
- Increase literacy skills
- Encourage calming behaviours
- Increase social skills and self-esteem
- Increase confidence
- Teach responsibility and respect to all life
- Help prevent truancy
- 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, they have empathy for the dog and 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%. If behaviour problems occur in school then 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 towards 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 can help some students. Children who might be reluctant to read aloud are likely to be less so if reading 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 students 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 and 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. Children who have performed incredibly well during the week or those who have made progress in a certain area, or those who have achieved tasks set for them can be rewarded with spending time during lunch or break to interact the dog. Walking, grooming, playing and training are some of the responsibilities students could 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-to-one basis and will especially help those children who have been bullied, abused, going through upsetting/difficult times or even scared/phobic of dogs. The dog will bring joy and help to all the children they meet and are happy to provide plenty of hugs to the children they are spending time with. Children who struggle with social interaction can find a reassuring friend in a dog.

School Dog Frequently Asked Questions

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

The legal owner of the dogs are the members of staff that own the dogs; they will bear the costs associated with owning the dog.

Will the dog be a distraction?

The dog will be kept in safe areas and will only go to other parts of the school under the supervision of an adult.

Has a risk assessment been undertaken?

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 (see appendix 3).

Who is responsible for training?

The teacher that owns the dog is the legal owner and they has taken the dog to training and socialization classes. They will be responsible for any further training that may be required.

Will my child pick up infections from the dog?

The dog is 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 before eating if they have been handling the dog. If the dog leaves a mess in the grounds it will be cleared by an adult and the area disinfected if necessary. No child will be asked to pick up dog mess.

How will the dog be toileted to ensure hygiene for all?

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.

How will the dog's welfare be considered?

The dog will be walked regularly and given free time outside. The dog will be kept in the safe area and will only have supervised contact with children and visitors. The dog will be carefully trained over a period of time and will have unlimited access to water. We will work carefully to ensure the dog's welfare is always considered. If they are showing signs of stress or anxiety they will be taken away from the situation and returned to their owner.

How will this be managed where children have allergies?

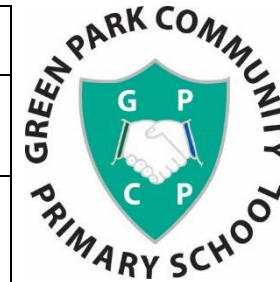
Children will not need to touch the dog which will relieve the possibility of allergic reactions. If a child is allergic to dogs then the dog will be kept well away. The dog will be regularly groomed to minimize any hair left in the school when moulting. The school already manages children with allergies and this will be no different for children and adults that are allergic to dogs.

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

Access to the dog will be carefully supervised and children do not need to have close contact with her unless they are happy to do so. We hope that seeing the dog over time and the non-threatening behaviour it exhibits, that a nervous child will gradually become more confident. 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 FOR:		Keeping animals in school	
Establishment: Green Park Community Primary School, DOVER	Assessment by: R Hawkins	Date: November 2025	
1st Review Date Due : November 2026	Manager Approval: R Hawkins	Date:	



Hazard / Risk	Who is at Risk?	How can the hazards cause harm?	Normal Control Measures	Are Normal Control Measures Y/N/NA	
				In Place	Adequate
Animal Health Diseases , parasites	Staff/Pupils and Visitors	Disease/infections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only healthy animals obtained from accredited or high-quality sources. • Animals must not be able to come into contact with wild rodents etc. due to the possibility of disease transmission. • Arrangements in place for care during holidays / weekends • Someone involved is experienced in the housing, feeding, handling and care requirements. • Cages and tanks kept secure and clean for the well being of the animal and the pupils and staff. 	Y	Y
				Y	Y
				Y	Y
				Y	Y
				Y	Y
Bites and scratches	Staff/Pupils and Visitors	Disease/infections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils instructed in handling animals and closely supervised • Keep animals away from face • Mammals regularly handled 	Y	Y
				Y	Y
				Y	Y

Cuts / minor injury from defective housing	Staff/Pupils and Visitors	Disease/infections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Animal housing inspected regularly for defects 	Y	Y
Allergy Phobias	Staff/Pupils and Visitors	skin rashes, irritation to the eyes and nose or breathing difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children / staff known to have allergic reactions / phobias to specific animals have restricted access. 	Y	Y
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good general hygiene and hand washing followed. 	Y	Y
Hygiene Infection	Staff/Pupils and Visitors	Disease/infections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adequate provision for hand washing (soap hot water) readily available. 	Y	Y
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper towels provided rather than communal hand towels. 	Y	Y
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not allow children to touch any part of their face with their hands before hands are washed. 	Y	Y
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Younger pupils should be seen to wash their hands. 	Y	Y
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All wounds on exposed skin are suitably covered. 	Y	Y
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Soiled bedding disposed of in sealed plastic bags with normal refuse. 	Y	Y
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foodstuffs stored carefully to prevent contamination and infestation. 	Y	Y
Keeping farm animals	Staff/Pupils and Visitors	Disease/infections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check that other members of the school / neighbours are happy with arrangements 	N/A	N/A
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Registration with DEFRA (only required if, for example you had > 50 chickens DEFRA encourage keepers to register voluntarily to alert owners in case of disease outbreaks) 	N/A	N/A
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Birds separated from wild birds and their faeces. due to the possibility of disease transmission 	N/A	N/A

Additional Control Measures <i>(to take account of local/individual circumstances including changes such as working practices, equipment, staffing levels).</i>	Action by Whom <i>(list the name of the person/people who have been designated to conduct actions)</i>	Action by When <i>(set timescales for the completion of the actions – remember to prioritise them)</i>	Action Completed <i>(record the actual date of completion for each action listed)</i>	Residual Risk Rating
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<p>Further guidance is provided in CLEAPSS guidance documents: L56 Housing and Keeping Animals Laboratory Handbook (section 14.1). PS86A Farm animals in school and on visits PS55 bringing pets and other animals into schools</p> <p>Growing school ‘Get your hands Dirty’ New resource to help teachers consider the issues involved in growing plants/ caring for animals in school http://www.growingschools.org.uk/resources/resource.aspx?id=298</p> <p>When Jacq is walked, a member of staff, familiar to Jacq will always be in control. Children will be instructed how to behave around her and she will always be observable.</p> <p>When children give a treat to Jacq- they are instructed to do so with open hands and to wash hands after.</p> <p>When Neville is walked, a member of staff, familiar to him, will always hold his lead. Children will be instructed how to behave around him and he will always be observable.</p> <p>When children give a treat to Neville - they are instructed to do so with open hands and to wash hands after.</p> <p>Neville must not be given a treat when other dogs are present.</p> <p>Neville must be kept on his lead at all times, unless being walked on the field (RG), or if he is in a</p>	<p>RH/CH</p> <p>RH/CH</p> <p>RG</p> <p>RG</p> <p>RG</p> <p>RG</p>	<p>At all times</p> <p>At reward times</p> <p>At all times</p> <p>At reward times</p> <p>At reward times</p> <p>At all times</p>		<p>Low</p> <p>Low</p> <p>Low</p> <p>Low</p> <p>Low</p> <p>Low</p>
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designated room (with the doors shut and an adult present).	RG	At all times		Low
Neville's food and drinks bowl will not be on the floor when children are in the room with him.				
When Watson is walked, a member of staff, familiar to him, will always hold his lead. Children will be instructed how to behave around him and he will always be observable.	MC	At all times		Low
When children give a treat to Watson - they are instructed to do so with open hands and to wash hands after.	MC	At reward times		Low
Watson must not be given a treat when other dogs are present.	MC	At reward times		Low
Watson must be kept on his lead at all times, unless being walked on the field (MC), or if he is in a designated room (with the doors shut and an adult present).	MC	At all times		Low
Watson's's food and drinks bowl will not be on the floor when children are in the room with him.	MC	At all times		Low
When Bertie is walked, a member of staff, familiar to him, will always hold his lead. Children will be instructed how to behave around him and he will always be observable.	LR/WS/LK	At all times		Low
When children give a treat to Bertie - they are instructed to do so with open hands and to wash hands after.	LR/WS/LK	At reward times		Low

Bertie must not be given a treat when other dogs are present.	LR/WS/LK	At reward times		Low
Bertie must be kept on his lead at all times, unless being walked on the field (LR), or if he is in a designated room (with the doors shut and an adult present).	LR/WS/LK	At all times		Low
Bertie's food and drinks bowl will not be on the floor when children are in the room with him.	LR/WS/LK	At all times		Low

RESIDUAL RISK RATING	ACTION REQUIRED
VERY HIGH (VH) Strong likelihood of fatality / serious injury occurring	The activity must not take place at all. You must identify further controls to reduce the risk rating.
HIGH (H) Possibility of fatality/serious injury occurring	You must identify further controls to reduce the risk rating. Seek further advice, e.g. from your H&S Team
MEDIUM (M) Possibility of significant injury or over 3 day absence occurring	If it is not possible to lower risk further, you will need to consider the risk against the benefit. Monitor risk assessments at this rating more regularly and closely.
LOW (L) Possibility of minor injury only	No further action required.

