

The Dog Mentor School Policy

At the heart of The Dog Mentor is a belief in the power of connection. We know that strong, trusting relationships are the foundation for emotional wellbeing, learning, and personal growth. Our work prioritises emotional regulation, helping pupils to manage their feelings, build resilience, and respond calmly to challenges — with the support of a trained dog acting as a therapeutic presence. This isn't about novelty or pet therapy; it's a structured intervention grounded in evidence, measurable outcomes, and real emotional impact. We are committed to inclusion, ensuring every child — including those with SEND, SEMH needs, or those at risk of disengagement — has access to the support they deserve. We value pupil voice, promote open communication, and track individual progress through behaviour logs, attendance data, and wellbeing observations. Above all, the safety and welfare of both pupils and dogs are central to everything we do. The Dog Mentor isn't just a programme — it's a values-driven approach to creating safer, calmer, more connected schools.

This policy must be approved by Governors BEFORE a school starts with The Dog Mentor Programme and The Dog Mentor Programme recommends that it is reviewed annually. The aim of the policy is to ensure that everyone involved in The Dog Mentor Programme is safe and that their wellbeing is prioritised.

Date of Policy:

Signatures of Chair of Governors:

Rationale

The Dog Mentor Programme is a UK programme that trains dogs and their handlers to work safely with children and young people. The programme is regulated and is underpinned by academic research and there is clear evidence of impact when schools invest in a Dog Mentor. The Dog Mentor Programme can have a positive impact on attendance, wellbeing and progress and many schools have demonstrated this positive impact.

Children, young people and staff can all benefit from having a Dog Mentor as part of the school community.

Children and young people can benefit educationally and emotionally; they can develop their understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills through contact with a dog. In addition to these benefits, children and young people 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. The responsibility of the Governors is to ensure that the Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team have carried out a thorough Risk Assessment and follows the clear guidance of The Dog Mentor Programme.

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

School commitment:

- The dog will be owned by a member of staff.
- Only a trained school dog is allowed on the premises. All other dogs must not come on site unless they are a known therapy, assistance dog or Dog Mentor Dog and the Head of School has been informed beforehand.
- The dog has been chosen because of its intelligence and that will respond well to training and which is known to be good with children, which sheds little hair and is very sociable and friendly.
- The Dog Mentor has a personalised coat and bandana and these uniform signals that the dog is trained and has a recognised role in the school community. It is recommended that the dog wears a uniform when working, but the uniform can be removed when they are having a break.
- The Dog Mentor should have a timetable for the days/sessions they are in school and working.
- Governors, staff, parents and young people have been informed by letter that a dog will be in school.
- The Head of School has produced a risk assessment (please see Appendix 3 of this policy) 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 he 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, otherwise known as a handler.
- Children/young people must never be left alone with the dog and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times.
- Children/young people should be repeatedly educated and then reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dog.
- Children/young people should remain calm around the dog.
- Children/young people 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 **he should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment.**
- Children should not eat close to the dog and everyone on the school site should understand that dropped food or litter is a threat to the dog's health.

- Children should be careful to stroke the dog on his/her body, chest, back and not by his/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.
- Parents will be consulted on allowing their pupils access to the dog.
- All visitors will be informed about the dog and related protocols on arrival and office staff will relay visitor issues to the Headteacher or business manager as soon possible.
- Appropriately trained staff will maintain records and anecdotal evidence of the work and impact of the school 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 and emergency Lockdown procedure.

Actions

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

Roles and Responsibilities

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

The Headteacher or Business Manager 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 Attendance for individual children and young people
- 2) Improve academic achievement
- 3) Increase literacy skills
- 4) Calm behaviours
- 5) Increase social skills and self-esteem
- 6) Increase confidence
- 7) Teach responsibility and respect to all life
- 8) Help prevent truancy

9) 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:

Wellbeing and Behaviour: The Dog Mentor aligns with the Nuture UK principle that ‘All Behaviour is Communication’.

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. 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: Alice was a student with poor attendance and truancy. Alice was encouraged back into school using care for Jock, a Dog Mentor, as an incentive. By telling Alice that “if she didn’t come to school to care for him, he wouldn’t get walks, water or love,” Alice came to school almost every day for the rest of the year, only missing two days. There are many other Alices and Jocks.

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. Dog Mentors can work with students on a one-one basis and will especially help those students who 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.

Curriculum interventions

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.

Appendix 2

The Dog Mentor 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 a member of staff; he/she will bear the costs associated with owning the dog; the school budget will support insurance and staff training costs where appropriate.

Q Has the dog the right temperament to work around children?

A Yes. The dog will then undergo The Dog Mentor Training programme and they will be assessed on their suitability to work in a school.

Q Will the dog be a distraction?

A The dog will be kept in an agreed designated space and this space is separate from the classrooms / playground area to ensure it only comes into contact with children who are happy to have contact and have parental permission for this, under strict supervision.

The dog will also have a space to spend time in classrooms, the library and in the outdoor areas where children can interact safely.

The dog will also attend meetings with staff to support further socialisation, following consultation with staff beforehand.

In terms of learning there is rigorous academic research to show that young people use the comfort of a dog to ‘reset’ their learning.

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. We have also completed the Risk Assessment template – see Appendix 3.

Q Who is responsible for training?

A The dog owner will be the legal owner of the dog and as a result will be responsible for its training. However, appropriate professional training will be obtained, and the dog will work towards being trained as a school dog through The Dog Mentor programme. Its owner and chosen handlers will also be trained as part of the programme.

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 dog 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 dog during that time. This will also be used as a behaviour reward, in line with our behaviour policy. The dog will be kept in the designated area 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 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 unless permission for this has been given. We hope to work closely with parent of children with anxiety around animals and also the young people themselves. The Dog Mentor programme is committed to addressing anxiety around dogs and providing practical strategies for how to manage these fears.