



School Dog Policy

Review cycle	1 / 2 / 3 years	
Approved/Adopted by	Full Governing Body / Executive Headteacher	Date: July 2023
Changes made in this review cycle	July 2023 Addition of Second Dog	
Linked policies:	Attendance Policy Behaviour and Discipline Policy	
Signed		Date: July 2023
Date of next Review	July 2024	

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, and certainly at Park Mead, it is 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.

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 dog will be owned by Mrs Davidson – School Secretary.
- Veterinary costs, insurance and any additional costs will be paid by the owner.
- The Leadership team, staff and Governors have agreed that a school dog would bring many benefits to Park Mead Primary School.
- Where there are any concerns or fears expressed by individuals, individual care plans will be set up.
- The risk assessment (attached) is reviewed annually.
- Visitors and students will be informed of the dog at reception.

Preparations for having a School Dog

Having a dog in school is a big step and the arrangement needs to work for all groups in our school community. School leaders have taken advice from schools who currently have a school dog, Dogs Trust and Pets as Therapy organisers, who have provided guidance about the necessary risk assessments that we will need to put in place, as well as practical guidance, such as allocating a dog toilet area well away from anywhere the children will access. In order to ensure that the dog would be beneficial to the children's learning and wellbeing and not be a distraction, we will plan when and where the children will interact with the dog.

If any child is allergic to dog hair, we make sure that they do not come into close contact with the dog if parents request it. Likewise, if a child has a phobia of dogs we will keep the dog away from them, or we can offer opportunities for the child to be slowly introduced to the dog, to reduce their fear. Parents are invited to contact Mrs West, our Head of School, if either of these cases apply so that we can make the necessary arrangements.

George and Freddie

Our school dogs are George and Freddie, who are also Mrs Davidson's pets. George is a chocolate labrador who was born on 18 February 2017, Freddie is a black Labrador who was born on 21 January 2022. Both George and Freddie had lots of early socialisation with children and other dogs at the home of their breeder and within Mrs Davidson's family. They have regular check-ups at the vet and have up to date vaccinations, flea and worming treatment. All initial interactions with children will be short and carefully monitored.

Guidelines to interaction with the School Dog

Parents and carers are informed that there is a school dog and can request that their children do not have contact with the dog. There will always be a responsible adult in charge of the dog during interactions with children.

Children and adults are required to adhere to the following:

- Always approach George and Freddie calmly and slowly.
- Never run up to either of them.

- Offer the back of your hand for George and Freddie to sniff when meeting him.
- All interactions must remain calm with the authorised adult in control at all times.
- Children must wash their hands before eating if they have been stroking George or Freddie.
- Children must never offer George or Freddie any food.

Frequently Asked Questions

What will the school dog do on a day-to-day basis?

The dog will be based in the school office but may be on the playground at the end of the school day, as well as some play and lunch times. The dog may help with interventions (e.g. 1-1 sessions or group sessions) when appropriate. The dog may visit different classes to listen to readers with a member of staff or help with particular projects, such as learning about caring for animals. The children may be involved in walking him at lunch times and assisting with his training and care needs.

How do I know that my child will be safe around the dog?

A risk assessment and policy are in place (available on the school website). These are both reviewed annually by the Head of School. The dog is covered by public liability insurance. Children will only have contact with the dog when supervised by an adult and with permission from their parents.

Will my child pick up infections from the dog?

The dog will be 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 if they have been stroking him. There will be a dedicated dog toilet area away from areas that children access and no child will be asked to pick up dog mess.

What if my child is allergic to dogs or afraid of them?

Parents can request that their child has no contact, or restricted access to the dog in these situations. Please speak to Mrs Davidson to discuss any concerns.

Reasons to have a dog in school:

Reading confidence: 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 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 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 students build self-esteem; learn about positive and negative reinforcement, responsibility, and boundaries. With a dog visiting the classroom, students may have the opportunity to learn how to care for the animal. This could include walking, grooming and their daily care. Researchers report that involving students in the daily care of school 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. Support Dogs can work with students on a one to one basis and will especially help those students who have been going through upsetting or difficult times or even nervous 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 an assuring friend in a dog.

Attendance: Many schools have reported improved attendance of their children and families as the children are keen to meet the dog on the playground. Some schools are also using dogs to improve behaviour difficulties by promoting positive behaviour in students.