



School Therapy Dog Policy

Policy Date:	25 th September 2023	Version: 1.2		
Policy Review Date:	September 2026	Headteacher Nitash Odedra	<i>N. Odedra</i>	25/09/2023
Ratified by Governing Body:				
Sue Welford (Chair of Governors)		<i>Sue Welford</i>	25/09/2023	

1. Introduction

Research has shown many benefits to therapy and reading dogs in school settings. Rushey Mead Primary School has introduced the use of a therapy dog into the emotional well-being provision at school. This policy is designed to set out to pupils, parents, staff and visitors the reasons for having a school dog and the rules and responsibilities to ensure the safety of pupils, staff, visitors and the school dog. Although there is a risk in bringing a dog into a school environment, this can be mitigated against with a robust risk assessment to ensure the safety of all pupils, parents, staff and visitors. (Appendix A - Risk Assessment).

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 interactions with a dog.

The latest guidance from the government regarding pets and animals in school are below.

Chapter 8: pets and animal contact - GOV.UK - Updated March 2021

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-protection-in-schools-and-other-childcare-facilities/chapter-8-pets-and-animal-contact> 3/5

Pets and other animals in school can enhance the learning environment. However, contact with animals can pose a risk of infection including gastro-intestinal infection, fungal infections and parasites. Some people, such as pregnant women and those with a weakened immune system, are at greater risk of developing a severe infection. However, sensible measures can be taken to reduce the risk of infection to the children and to staff. Only mature and toilet trained pets should be considered and the Headteacher should ensure that a knowledgeable person is responsible for the animal. There should be a written agreement within the school detailing:

- ***the types of animals allowed in the school***
- ***how to manage them and permitted behaviour whilst on the premises***
- ***where they can go and where they cannot go when in the school***
- ***any insurance liability of owners and handlers***

Animals should always be supervised when in contact with the children and those handling animals advised to wash their hands immediately afterwards. Animals should have recommended treatments and immunisations, be regularly groomed (including claws trimmed) and checked for signs of infection. Bedding should be laundered regularly. Feeding areas should be kept clean and their food stored away from human food. Food not consumed in 20 minutes should be taken away or covered to prevent attracting pests.

2. The benefits of a school dog

School dogs have been proven to help develop Pupils' reading skills, improve behaviour, attendance and academic confidence, as well as increasing student understanding of responsibility and in the development of empathy and nurturing skills. At Rushey Mead Primary School, we hope that a school dog will be a beneficial addition to our therapeutic offer in addition to the interventions we already

offer and promoting engagement for those children who have found it difficult to access talking therapies in the past.

Animal assisted interventions (also known as AAI's) can:

- Teach empathy and appropriate interpersonal skills;
- Help individuals develop social skills;
- Be soothing;
- Improve a child's ability to pick up on social cues which are imperative to human relationships;
- Therapy dogs have been shown to support emotional regulation through the positive impact on the autonomic nervous system
- Show that children working with therapy dogs have experienced improved motivation for learning, resulting in improved outcomes;

Therapy dogs are being used to support children with their social and emotional learning needs, which can also aid literacy development.

Research into the effects of therapy dogs in schools is showing a range of benefits including:

- Increase in school attendance;
- Improved confidence;
- Decreased pupil anxiety resulting in improvements in learning, such as increases in reading and writing levels;
- Improved motivation to learn;
- Enhanced relationships with peers and teachers due to experiencing trust and unconditional positive interactions with a therapy dog;
- Helping children learn how to express their feelings and enter into more trusting relationships.
- Increase social skills and self-esteem
- Teach responsibility and respect to all life

Confidence benefits

"If children are partnered with a dog to read to, for example, the dog provides comfort, encourages positive social behaviour, enhances self-esteem, motivates speech and inspires children to have fun and enjoy the non-judgemental experience"

Bark & Read – The Kennel Club (<https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/barkandread>)

SEND benefits

"Therapy Dogs Nationwide dogs have also shown to help with special needs and autistic children and adults by giving focus and providing a calming environment."

Therapy Dogs Nationwide (<http://www.tdn.org.uk/schools/>)

Mental Health and Wellbeing benefits

Some mental health challenges and psychiatric disorders are known to respond well to therapy dogs. Patients diagnosed with a range of issues, such as depression, bi-polar disorder, Autism, ADHD, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and Alzheimer's disease, benefit from their interaction with therapy dogs and other companion animals.

Sometimes, emotional challenges are the result of physical health problems, and therapy dogs can help with those too. Research suggests that patients who are recovering from difficult surgery or a bad accident who participate in animal-assisted therapy may feel less pain. Studies have shown that such interactions can increase the mood-boosting hormone oxytocin and decrease the stress hormone cortisol.

Evidence shows that just by being near a dog when stressed can reduce anxiety. In a survey, 92% of pupils said they felt more relaxed during teaching and learning time when there was a dog in the classroom. When children are more relaxed and less stressed, they're going to learn more.

Behaviour benefits

Researchers report that Pupils 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 Pupils declined by 55%, and general aggression went down 62%. In a controlled study, Pupils were found to have fewer disciplinary referrals in schools with a dog than schools without. Pupils' behaviour improved toward teachers, and Pupils also showed more confidence and responsibility.

The following information has been taken from a range of sources to provide further detail about the benefits of having a dog in school:

Education

Reading programmes with dogs are doing wonders for some pupils. 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, pupils find social support and peer interaction. Dogs are incredibly calm and happy to have pupils 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 pupils who read to dogs show an increase in reading levels, word recognition, a higher desire to read and write, and an increase in intrapersonal and interpersonal skills among the pupils they mix with.

Social Development

Dogs in school offer an opportunity for improving social development. They are especially useful for teaching pupils social skills and responsibility. Schools are using dogs to help older pupils build self-esteem; learn about positive and negative reinforcement, responsibility, and boundaries. Pupils can use dogs to help communicate, teach kindness, and empower Pupils. With a dog in school, pupils have the opportunity to learn how to care for the dog. This includes walking and grooming. Research reports that involving pupils in the daily care of a classroom dog is a positive experience, promoting their own daily care. The pupils also learn about responsibility, caring, and sharing when helping each other take care of a dog at school.

Pastoral Care

Therapy Dogs can work with pupils on a one-one basis and will especially help those pupils who have 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 pupils they meet and are happy to provide plenty of hugs to the pupils they are spending time with. Pupils who struggle with social interaction can find a reassuring friend in a dog.

3. Responsibilities

Pupil Responsibilities

- Pupils whose parents have withdrawn consent are not allowed to attend dog therapy sessions.
- Pupils should be careful to stroke the dog on her body, chest, shoulders, and the top of the head, not on her face or tail.
- Pupils must always wash their hands before and after stroking and handling the dog.
- Pupils must wait until the school dog is stationary; standing, sitting or lying down before touching or stroking her.
- Pupils are not allowed to approach or disturb the dog whilst she is sleeping or eating.
- Pupils are not allowed to play roughly with the dog.
- Pupils are not allowed to eat during animal assisted therapy sessions.
- Pupils understand that any deliberate violence or threatening behaviour towards the dog will result in a fixed term exclusion.

Staff Responsibilities

- Miss Jackson will know the whereabouts of the dog and which staff are supervising at all times.
- Miss Jackson is responsible for ensuring the training and accreditation of the dog.
- The therapy dog will be kept in Miss Jackson's Office, the Head Teacher's or Deputy Head Teacher's Office or the Business Manager's Office when Miss Jackson is not available or is working with a pupil/in a meeting where the school dog is not required.
- The therapy dog must be kept on a lead during core hours, when moving around the inside of the school building as per the Therapy Dog risk assessment.
- Pupils must never be left alone with the dog and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times.
- Pupils will be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dog before any interaction during a therapy session or visit.
- Staff, visitors and children known to have allergic reactions to dogs must not go near the therapy dog. Miss Jackson keeps a list of all pupils and staff with a reported allergy to dogs which is kept in the Therapy dog folder/box.
- 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. If the dog is displaying any warning signs such as growling or flattening of her ears, she should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment by the trained staff member handling her, the children initially being asked to back up to give her space so she also feels safe.
- Any dog excrement should be picked up immediately, double bagged and disposed of appropriately by the trained dog handling staff.
- If the dog is ill she will not be allowed into school. Miss Jackson has responsibility for ensuring appropriate alternative care for the dog if the dog is not to be in school on a given day.

- Miss Jackson will maintain records and collect evidence of impact of the school dog to better inform research into the benefits of animal assisted therapy.

4. Principles

- The Head Teacher and the Governors have agreed to the presence of a therapy dog at Rushey Mead Primary School.
- Staff, parents and pupils will be informed in writing that a dog will be in school.
- The presence of a school dog will be made clear to visitors, via a sign, upon their arrival at the School Office and at the Staff entrance from the car park.
- Parents will need to sign the Animal Assisted Therapy consent form in order for their children to be present during Animal Assisted Therapy.
- Only the school dog is allowed on the premises. No other dogs are permitted, a risk assessment has been approved by the Head Teacher and Health and Safety Lead. This will be reviewed annually.
- The dog will be included in the fire evacuation procedure under the supervision of Miss Jackson or other trained staff members.
- The dog is covered by the school's Public Liability Insurance policy and the Business Manager has responsibility for ensuring this remains on the school's policy during the presence of a therapy dog at Rushey Mead Primary School. The dog is also fully insured by the school.
- Only staff trained to handle the dog on school premises will have permission to do so via the SLT of the school.

5. 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 Miss Jackson. She will bear the costs associated with owning the dog at home; the school budget will fund training costs and insurance. The school's public liability insurance covers a school therapy dog as long as stringent measures are in place including a robust risk assessment, the parental choice of accessing the dog for their child/children, a responsible owner trained alongside the dog and appropriate pet insurance.

Q Where is the dog from?

A The dog is a rescue from Cyprus. Miss Jackson, the school and Underdog International, who facilitated the adoption, discussed the appropriateness of this dog for this role. She was approximately 1 year old when adopted by Miss Jackson in July 2021. The dog is a female Labrador who has a good temperament, intelligence and a shorter coat to try and eliminate any fur allergies.

Q Has a risk assessment been undertaken?

A Yes, a full risk assessment has been undertaken and measures put in place to reduce risk, this is regularly reviewed and updated. The school has carefully considered having a dog in school and sought advice from many sources, including other schools that successfully have a school dog.

Q Who is responsible for training?

A Miss Jackson will be the legal owner of the dog and as a result, will be responsible for her arranging training. The school will be funding the dog's training towards becoming the school therapy dog. Appropriate professional therapy dog training will be obtained and the dog will work with a 1:1 trainer with advice from the Pets As Therapy charity, The Dogs Trust, and The Kennel Club.

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 walks around the grounds and dog foul will be picked up, double bagged and disposed of in the agreed refuse bin.

Q Will the dog be a distraction to pupils' learning?

A The dog will be kept in Miss Jackson's office secured when needed with a dog gate. To enable the dog to have more space to roam when she is not working, she also has access to the Head Teachers office, Deputy Head's Office and Business Managers Office, all who will support Miss Jackson in caring for the school dog. This area is also contained within a dog gate to ensure the office can be accessed.

Q What if my child is scared of dogs? Will they be forced to be in the same room as the dog?

A The dog will be kept in Miss Jackson's Office and Miss Jackson will ensure the school dog only comes into close contact with children who are happy to have contact with her and where there has been no refusal of permission by parents, this will be under strict supervision. A pupil will not be forced to be in contact with the dog at any time against their wishes. 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 using evidence-based interventions such as graded exposure. Where the dog will be visiting classes, discussions with the class teacher's regarding children who may be nervous or scared around dogs will take place to ensure they feel safe and comfortable during the visit (seating decisions etc...) Timetables of planned visits will be shared.

Q How will the dog's welfare be considered?

A The dog's welfare will be carefully monitored. The dog will be walked regularly throughout the day and given free time outside of sessions to rest and play. The dog is being carefully trained over a period of time and will have appropriate access to food, treats, water and toys. The dog will be allowed off lead in the school grounds as per the Therapy Dog risk assessment.

Q How will this be managed where children have allergies?

A Children will not need to touch the dog or be in the same room as the dog at any point 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. She will be regularly groomed to reduce any possibility of allergens. A letter will go out to all pupils at the start of each year to ask about allergies or where parents refuse to allow their child to access the dog.

Significant Findings of Risk Assessment

Site / Premises: Rushey Mead Primary School		Assessment Serial Number: RA21			
Department:		Assessment Carried Out By		Date Carried Out or Reviewed	Reviewed By (Name)
Activity / Process:	Therapy Dog – Harper	Name: Wendy West Signature: <i>W.A. West</i>		01/09/2021	W. West on 19/08/2022 and NJ (in progress)
Fears/Phobias:	Staff who are anxious or have a phobia about dogs must let the school know asap. This information will be kept on file as are the children with allergies or a fear of dogs. Where a member of staff has a fear/phobia of dogs, there will be communication around movement in school (where possible) so it is clear when Harper will be moving around within the school building. Part of the therapy dog's work is also to work with children who may be a bit scared/afraid of dogs.	Responsible Manager / Team Leader etc Name: Natasha Jackson Signature: <i>N.A. Jackson</i>		3.10.22 15.8.23	NJ NJ
				3.10.23 Full review - End August 2024	NJ

Risk Rating.

The Risk Rating process is provided for guidance only. It is the risk assessors' evaluation of the risks that is important, and this may differ from the result indicated by the risk rating matrix. Even after taking the risk rating into consideration employers still have a duty to ensure that sufficient and adequate control measures are in place to ensure that any remaining risks are kept as low as is reasonably practicable.

What are the Hazards? (What can go wrong)	Who might be Harmed & How ?	Existing Control Measures (What are you already doing to manage the hazards/risks?)	Risk Rating with controls in place			Additional Controls Required (Where the existing controls are insufficient to reduce the risk to an acceptable level) Use the scoring table below to assist in planning actions.	Action By Who ?	Action When ?	Additional Action Completed (Initials)
			Likelihood	Impact / Severity	Risk Rating Score				
Canine related diseases and parasites	Pupils/ staff Ill health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dog to have necessary and current vaccinations before coming into school. Vaccinations and other medical treatment is the responsibility of the owner Dog to have regular veterinary checks Dog will be kept free of fleas, ticks Dog to be bathed regularly Dog lives with owner/handler when not in school and only visits on agreed days 	2	3	6	All aspects of Harper's care are the responsibility of her owner/handler. Harper is covered by the school's public liability insurance certificate whilst in school.	NJ	Ongoing	NJ
Dog excrement and urine	Ill-health, slips and falls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dog to be wormed on a regular basis Any excrement, or urine (on the rare occasion this may happen indoors) will be cleaned up immediately and 	2	3	6	Additionally, when Harper is out on a walk, the member of staff walking Harper, has poo bags to take with them and it is that person's	NJ	Ongoing	NJ

		thoroughly disposed of responsibly and hygienically by the owner or at the time of the incident. The immediate area will be sprayed with disinfectant spray, which the school will supply.	2	3	6	responsibility to ensure the excrement is double bagged and disposed of responsibly and hygienically in the agreed refuse bin.		
Hygiene/ Infection	Ill-health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate provision for hand-washing • Following contact with the dog, children will be advised not to touch any part of their face with their hands before hands are thoroughly washed • Children will be reminded to wash their hands after spending time with the dog • All wounds on exposed skin are suitably covered 						
Walks in the school grounds		When outside in the school grounds on her walks during the day, the dog will be on lead where there are multiple classes outside in an area. Where there are fewer children outside, the dog can be off lead. She is very focused on her ball and chasing it when outside and to ensure she has exercise to get her relaxed and calm for sessions with the children.						
Bites, cuts and scratches	Ill-health	<p>There will be no unsupervised contact with children.</p> <p>Dog closely supervised, kept under control and on a lead at all times during school day hours when moving within the school building between 7:50am – 4:15pm.</p> <p>The owner will have hold of the lead at all times when walking in the school building during core hours (see above). An additional lead can be attached so that children may 'help' to walk Harper for a short time which will be fitted once outside so as to not cause a potential trip hazard.</p> <p>Pupils and staff will be made aware of the procedures of meeting and handling the dog:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always remain calm around the dog • Don't make sudden movements • Don't stare into a dog's eyes as this could be interpreted as a threat 	2	3	6	Harper is a Labrador Retriever – she is very loving although can still get a bit excitable on meeting new people (can occasionally jump up in excitement with new adults and when in the school office area), we are continuing to work on this, and it has vastly improved.	NJ	Ongoing

Potential trip hazard	Staff fall / knocked down	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don't put your face near the dog Always approach the dog standing up Do not disturb a dog that is sleeping or eating Don't eat close to the dog and never feed the dog your food or other food/treats without permission <p>First aid kit held in handler's office. The owner will ensure the dog is not abused or over petted to avoid any incidents. If the dog appears anxious or over-stimulated, she will be removed to a different environment, or the visiting session may be cut short.</p>	3	2	6	Harper is more excited in the morning on the walk through the school to her owner's office, but is most often on the lead during this time, but will recall to her owner when the command 'Harper come' is used. There is a possibility that Harper's excitement could mean she is nearer to an adult than usual.	NJ	Ongoing	NJ
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		Harper will be off lead during Management meetings and Governor meetings and any other meetings she may attend where all parties are comfortable around dogs, otherwise she will be on lead or not in the meeting.											
Allergic reaction to dog	Ill-health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">All parents/carers and members of the school community will be informed via the website, prospectus, newsletters and letter home that there will be a dog on site and asked to inform the school if they or their child has an allergy to dogs or severe fear of dogsParents/carers of children chosen to regularly work with the dog will be contacted individuallyOwner will bring a dog blanket/bed to each session for the dog to lay onAreas where dog visits will be kept well ventilatedDog first aid kit held in handler's officePupils known to be allergic to dogs will not be allowed access to the dogThose thought to be highly allergic to dogs will have a statement included in their care plan/class teachers and school office to be made aware of this informationVisitors to the school will be informed on arrival that there is a dog on the premises via the sign on the main office door	2	3	6	Labrador with short coat. All allergy information will be collected before the dog is working with any children. A relevant file will be kept in the school office. Letter sent annually to parents regarding fear of dogs or allergies, children starting in-year to have the letter as part of the admissions process	NJ	Ongoing					
Noise, barking	Anxiety	<p>The dog is sociable & will not be left with children unsupervised at any time.</p> <p>The dog may bark when she hears whistling (dogs have a much more sensitive sense of hearing) so this should not happen when in the main office area & all included offices to ensure the dog is not scared or anxious, or provoked to bark.</p> <p>If problems occur, dog will be removed from the situation/school by the owner.</p>	2	3	6	Any issues to be reported immediately to SLT.	All	Ongoing					

Fire drill and evacuation	Dog left in the building in an emergency	<p>The owner will be responsible for safely leading the dog from the building to a place of safety, this will always be on lead.</p> <p>Wherever possible, when the owner is not present to do this, the dog's harness must be on to evacuate as this is the best way to keep her safe in a challenging situation.</p> <p>If a fire evacuation happens when owner is teaching or not with the dog, she will get back to the dog asap or deputise for the day to someone who is able to evacuate the dog safely in her absence.</p>	2	3	6	<p>Harness to be taken out with the dog on the lead and put on as quickly as possible once evacuated for her safety.</p>	NJ / Deputised person	Ongoing	
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Scoring Table					Risk Scoring Guide				
LEVEL OF RISK		OVERALL RATING	HOW THE RISK SHOULD BE TACKLED/MANAGED		Consider the potential harm or injury that could result from the identified hazard if an accident or incident were to occur, based on the table below.				
HIGH RISK		15-25	Immediate Management Action						
MEDIUM RISK		9-12	Plan for Change						
LOW RISK		1-8	Continue to Manage						
Likelihood (A)	5 Almost Certain	5	10	15	20	25	Impact Criteria (B)		
	4 Probable /Likely	4	8	12	16	20			
	3 Possible	3	6	9	12	15			
	2 Unlikely	2	4	6	8	10			
	1 Very Unlikely / Rare	1	2	3	4	5			
		Impact (B)					Likelihood Criteria (A)		
Risk Score									

