



Devonshire Primary Academy Therapy Dog Policy



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Person responsible for policy: Mr A. Brannigan

1. Introduction

Children can benefit educationally and emotionally, increase their understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills through contact with pets. In addition to these benefits, children take great enjoyment from interaction with dogs and puppies. As dogs are one of the most popular pets, it is more than likely that children will have some exposure to a dog while still at school and at the request of pupils Devonshire Primary Academy have researched and found a Cockapoo to join the school community.

2. Reasons to have a dog in school.

a. 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.

b. Attendance

Children can be encouraged back into school using caring for a dog as an incentive.

c. Social Development

Dogs in school offer an opportunity for improving social development. They are especially useful for teaching students social skills and responsibility. Specifically, with a dog in the classroom, 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.

d. 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, may 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 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.

e. Reading

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 interpersonal skills among the students they mix with.

f. Bullying

This can be a problem in all schools with students anxious about school for fear of taunting and abuse. But in some schools dogs are making a difference in the fight against bullies. 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 participation students declined by 55%, and general aggression went down 62%.

g. Transition to High School

Transitioning to High School from year 6 is sometimes a difficult, traumatic experience. Our therapy dog will accompany the children on their visits as a supportive, familiar friend in order to make the experience as positive and productive as possible.

3. Guidance

Bringing dogs into the classroom;

It is important that suitable arrangements are in place prior to any dog being brought into the school. These arrangements must follow this school policy on Dogs in School, which is based on the following guidance:

- Parents should be notified of the intention to bring a dog into the school
- A risk assessment should be in place
- The dog should be well used to the behaviour and sounds of children
- If the dog is ill she must not be brought into school
- The dog must be kept on a lead at all times and under the full control and supervision of their owner
- Children will never be left alone with the dog and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times.
- Prior to the dog being in a classroom or in school, pupils will be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around dogs. Children are likely to become excited and it is important that they react calmly and carefully 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. Children should be told not to put their face near the dog and should always approach it standing up.
- Children should be told never to go near or disturb a dog that is sleeping or eating.
- Children must not be allowed to play too roughly with the dog.
- Consider the number of children who would be patting/stroking or meeting the dog. A large number of children could cause the dog to become nervous and agitated. On-going monitoring of the situation is vital. Since dogs cannot speak, the only way they can be understood is through their body language. Growling or baring 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. Dogs displaying any of these warning signs should be immediately removed from the environment. Pupils will be made aware of these warning signs.

- Children should not feed, or eat close to the dog.
- Children should always wash their hands after handling the dog.
- Any dog foul should be cleaned immediately. Designated staff will use gloves and spray to clear all dog waste when walking the dog around the outside of the school grounds.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

The Board of Governors has a responsibility to ensure that the school has a written policy for dogs in School.

The Headteacher is responsible for developing this guidance into a school practice and implementing it.

Teachers and all staff are required to abide by this policy.

The Health and Safety Officer is responsible for providing information, advice and guidance as and when required.

They recommend:

- Using an assured breeder.
 - Having the puppy health checked by a vet and a record of injections kept.
 - Ensuring the puppy and pupils are trained to handle the school environment.
 - Ensuring the dog is fully inoculated.
 - Ensuring the dog has a quiet space for sleep and peace.
 - Give children and parents the opportunity to not have their child around the dog.
 - Give thought to children who are scared of dogs. Send a request form home for parents to identify children who have dog allergies and provide anti-allergy wipes or keep the dog away from those children.
- Only allowing handling when the dog is calm and the owner has confidence in the dog.