

ILLUMINATE MINDS TRUST

SCHOOL DOG MENTOR POLICY



Reviewed: Autumn Term 2024
Next Review: Autumn Term 2027

1. Rationale and Aim

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 interaction with a dog. Research has shown the impact dogs in schools can be significant in terms of pupil progress, wellbeing and attitudes to learning. How the dog or dogs are used is dependent on the needs of the school, the personnel working with them and specific areas of development for the school. For example:

- the dog may be looked after by the Head Teacher and used as a reward or incentive or to welcome children to school at the start of the day;
- the dog may be used to support and encourage good attendance through being with the member of staff who leads on attendance;
- the dog may work with the SENCO, supporting therapeutic interventions including reading and speech and language work;
- the dog may support with pupils who find emotional self-regulation challenging and enable them to develop strategies to improve self-control and their ability to self-soothe in a positive way.

The rationale, benefits and management of the school dog / school dogs into Pelham Academy Trust schools is outlined in this policy. Any decision to introduce a school dog / dogs into any Trust school will be first and foremost for the benefit of pupils' social, emotional and learning needs.

2. Is there a risk in bringing a dog into a school environment?

There is a risk but it is a risk that needs to be managed. Using the Dog Mentor Organisation supports the school in implementing this safely and mitigates against risk. The organization undertakes an assessment of the dog and assesses suitability as well as working with staff in learning how to reduce risk, communicate safety measures to pupils and staff and put in place procedures which keep the dog safe and ensure the safety of pupils, staff and visitors to the school. A thorough risk assessment is carried out on the school environment and the dog with measures clearly communicated to all stakeholders. All risk assessments and a School Dog Policy will be implemented with the support and guidance of the Dog Mentor Organisation to ensure that our schools are fully compliant and risk minimized.

3. The Benefits of Dogs in School Communities

In summary, having dogs working and helping in the school environment has been seen in other schools nationally to achieve the following:

- Improve academic achievement
- Increase literacy skills
- Calming behaviours and positive attachments
- Increase social skills and self-esteem
- Increase confidence
- Teach responsibility and respect to all life

- Help prevent truancy and improve attendance
- Motivate children who are often less attentive

COGNITIVE

Companionship with a dog stimulates memory, problem solving and game playing.

BEHAVIOURAL

Behaviour problems occur in school and these can interfere with learning. We would hope that by having a dog in school we would see a difference in the behaviour of pupils in terms of improved attitude toward school and learning, the ability of pupils to also become more confident and develop a sense of responsibility. If pupils can identify with animals, and with empathy for the dog, they then can better understand how other children may feel.

SOCIAL

A dog provides a positive mutual topic for discussion, encourages responsibility, wellbeing and focused interaction with others. After experiencing unconditional love and trust from a dog, children are often seen developing enhanced relationships with peers and staff. Dogs in school offer an opportunity for improving social development. They are especially useful for teaching pupils social skills and responsibility. Specifically, schools nationally are using dogs to help build self-esteem; learn about positive and negative reinforcement, teach kindness, responsibility, and boundaries. With a dog in school, pupils have the opportunity to learn how to care for the animal. This includes walking and grooming. Involving pupils in the daily care of school dog is a positive experience, promoting their own daily care.

EMOTIONAL

A school dog improves self-esteem, acceptance from others and lifts mood, often provoking laughter and fun. Dogs can also teach compassion and respect for other living things as well as relieving anxiety. Pupils can learn how to express their feelings and enter into more trusting relationships. Pupils should be encouraged to gently pat or talk to the dog to teach sensitive touch and to help them to be calm.

ENVIRONMENTAL

A dog increases the sense of a family environment, being part of something, another purpose for coming to school and can therefore be seen to positively impact on attendance. Some of these benefits listed above will continue for the young person long after the school day is over in terms of how pupils reflect on their day and improve their own attitude to going to school and being part of the school community, also boosting the pupil's connection to the school environment.

ACADEMIC

Reading to dogs has been proven to help children develop their literacy skills and build confidence in reading. 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. Dogs are used to encourage struggling readers to practice reading aloud. This activity can create a calming effect on the pupil, as well the dog will listen to the pupil read with no judgement or criticism. Dogs make amazing listeners, providing the children with a sense of comfort and love. This, in turn,

creates an environment where a pupil's enthusiasm for reading can grow alongside greater confidence in reading aloud. A school dog will be able to support reluctant readers.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Pupils can develop a sense of responsibility and be rewarded or recognized for good work or behaviour through having the opportunity to walk the dog on school grounds with supervision from the named member of staff. Again, this can have a significant impact on improvement in a pupil's attendance as they have a responsibility to the dog and need to be in school to undertake specific care of the dog in their view. It is also another reason for the pupil to want to come to school.

TRANSITION

A school dog can support the transition process. Pupils who find change difficult will benefit for time spent with the dog alongside Draw and Talk or other interventions as part of reducing anxiety and giving an opportunity for worries to be heard.

REWARD SYSTEM

Dogs can be gentle and loving, but at the same time full of fun and enjoyment for the pupils. Those pupils 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 to interact with the school dog. Walking, grooming, reading with, playing and training are some of the responsibilities students will be allowed to undertake. It is also an incentive for positive behaviour and working towards a specific goal.

Rewards could be given for a variety of things including helping out, effort, could be linked to random acts of kindness, following the school rules, etc. These awards could be 'from' the school dog.

OVERCOMING PHOBIAS

Where there are pupils who have dog phobias, a school dog and careful de-sensitisation programme could be used to help reduce some of these fears.

4. Communication and Management

Introducing a dog into schools requires careful management beyond the risk assessments in terms of communicating with families and the school community. The choice of dog is important in terms of a breed which is intelligent and responds well to training as well as being known to be good with children. The Dog Mentor will support in the selection of any puppy for the school as well as assessment of any existing dog belonging to a member of staff which is being considered for introduction to the school.

Staff, parents and children will be informed by newsletter and ParentMail that a dog will be in school. 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. The school will ensure that the dog is kept separate from these children in line with the risk assessment. If the dog is ill, he will not be allowed into school. The dog will be kept on a lead when moving around the school site or on a walk and will be under the full control and supervision of an adult.

Clear messages will be given to all children and staff about the management of the dog which include:

- Children must never be left alone with the dog and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times.
- Children should be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dog. Children 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. Children should not put their face near a dog and should always approach it standing up.
- Children should never go near or disturb the dog that is sleeping or eating. Children must not be allowed to play roughly with the dog. Everyone must wait until the dog is sitting or lying down before touching or stroking him. Hands must be washed after coming in contact with the dog.
- 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.
- Children should be careful to stroke the dog on his body, chest, back and not by his 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 children access to the dog and will sign permission forms if they wish for this intervention to occur.
- All visitors will be informed about the dog and related protocols on arrival and office staff will relay visitor issues to the Head teacher ASAP. The office will know the whereabouts of the dog and which staff are supervising at all times. A timetable will always be provided.
- The dog will be included in the fire evacuation procedure under the supervision of the adult he is with at the time of an evacuation.
- 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.

SCHOOL DOG FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs):

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

The legal owner of the dog will be the member of staff. They will bear the costs associated with owning the dog.

How will any puppy be selected?

The dog must be from a home where both parents were seen and has been specifically chosen for its temperament.

Will the dog be a distraction?

The dog will have access to quiet space. The dog will always be accompanied by an adult and will never be on his own with a pupil.

Who is responsible for training?

The legal owner of the dog will be responsible for its training. Appropriate professional training will be obtained and the dog will work towards being trained as a school dog.

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 a designated area of 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 well looked after. The dog will be fully vaccinated, will visit the vet regularly for all the necessary injections, as well as regular check-ups. He will also be regularly groomed and fully insured. If the dog is unwell for any reason he will stay at home. He will be walked, fed and hydrated during the day. He will have access to a quiet area where he will be able to have 'quiet time'.

How will the situation be managed where children have allergies?

The school already manages a number of allergies and this will be no different for children and adults that are allergic to dogs. Additional control measures will be put in place for individual allergies. Any breed of dog chosen is known for minimal molting, he is given a high-quality food and regularly groomed to reduce any possibility of allergens.

It is completely understandable that there will be some concerns about possible allergic reactions to a school dog. The dog will only work with pupils who have voluntarily expressed an interest to do so and after discussion as to whether it would be a beneficial intervention. Permission would be sought in advance to any contact.

My child is frightened of dogs; how will this be managed?

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 parents of children who are fearful of dogs to alleviate their fear and to teach them how to

manage this. Some children may have had upsetting or traumatic experiences and therefore be fearful of dogs (or indeed other animals). The dog will only come into contact with pupils whose parents have given their permission. Where the dog is a puppy, it will grow up in the school environment surrounded by children. Experience and research have shown that, with proper guidance, handling and time, children can learn to overcome their fear of animals and gain a greater appreciation for them.

Jo Southby

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