

	<p>Offley Endowed Primary School and Nursery</p> <p>School Dog Policy</p>	<p>Reviewed: May 25</p> <p>Next Review: May 27</p>
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1. Introduction

Research has shown many benefits to therapy and reading dogs in school settings. Offley Endowed Primary School and Nursery has introduced the use of a well-being 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-schoolsand-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.

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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 Offley Endowed Primary School and Nursery, we hope that having a school dog is beneficial 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 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;
- Dogs have been shown to support emotional regulation through the positive impact on the autonomic nervous system
- Show that children working with well-being dogs have experienced improved motivation
- for learning, resulting in improved outcomes.

Well-being 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 well-being 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 well-being 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>)

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SEND benefits

“Therapy Dogs and well-being 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 Well-being 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

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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

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 school dog, Bandit, has brought much joy and help to all the pupils he meets. Pupils who struggle with social interaction can find a reassuring friend in Bandit.

3. Responsibilities

Pupil Responsibilities

- Pupils should be careful to stroke Bandit on his body, chest, back and not by his face or top of head.
- Pupils must always wash their hands before and after stroking and handling Bandit.
- Pupils must wait until Bandit is sitting or lying down before touching or stroking him.
- Pupils are not allowed to approach or disturb Bandit whilst he is sleeping or eating.
- Pupils are not allowed to play roughly with Bandit.
- Pupils are not allowed to eat during animal assisted therapy sessions.
- Pupils understand that any deliberate violence or threatening behaviour towards Bandit will result in a fixed term exclusion.

Staff Responsibilities

- Mr Edwards will know the whereabouts of Bandit and which staff are supervising at all times.

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- Mr Edwards is responsible for ensuring the training and accreditation Bandit.
- Bandit will be kept in Mr Edwards' Office.
- Pupils must never be left alone with Bandit and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times.
- Pupils will be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around Bandit before any interaction, during a session or visit.
- Staff, visitors and children known to have allergic reactions to dogs must not go near Bandit. The Office keeps a list of all pupils and staff with a reported allergy to dogs.
- If Bandit is surrounded by a large number of children, he could become nervous and agitated. Therefore, the adult in charge of Bandit must ensure that s/he monitors the situation. If Bandit is displaying any warning signs such as growling or flattening of his ears, he should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment by the trained staff member handling him.
- Any dog foul should be cleaned immediately, double bagged and disposed of appropriately by the trained dog handling staff.
- If Bandit is ill he will not be allowed into school. Mr Edwards has responsibility for ensuring appropriate alternative care for him if he is not to be in school on a given day.
- Mr Edwards will maintain records and collect evidence of impact of Bandit to better inform research into the benefits of animal assisted therapy at Offley.

4. Principles

- The Head Teacher and the Governors have agreed to the presence of a well-being dog at Offley Endowed Primary School and Nursery.
- Staff, parents and pupils were informed in writing that Bandit 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 consent form in order for their children to be present during Animal Assisted Therapy.
- Only Bandit is allowed on the premises. No other dogs are permitted. A risk assessment has been approved by the Head Teacher and Chair(s) of Governors. This will be reviewed annually.
- Bandit is included in the fire evacuation procedure under the supervision of Mr Edwards or other trained staff members.
- Bandit is covered by the school's Public Liability Insurance policy and the Office staff have responsibility for ensuring this remains on the school's policy during the presence of a dog at Offley Endowed. He is also fully insured by the school.

5. School Dog Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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

The legal owner of Bandit will be Mr Edwards. He will bear the costs associated with owning him at home; the school budget will support any training costs and insurance. The school's

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---	---	--

public liability insurance covers a school 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?

Bandit was with his previous owner from 6 weeks old. They had a baby and could not give the time to him anymore. Mr Edwards researched the appropriateness of a school dog and looked at breeds suitable for the role for a 12 month period prior to acquiring Bandit. He was born on May 27th 2022 and was 7 months old when acquired by Mr Edwards. Bandit is a Bordernese – a cross between a Border Collie and a Bernese Mountain dog. He has a good temperament and intelligence.

Q Has a risk assessment been undertaken?

Yes, a full risk assessment has been undertaken and measures put in place to reduce risk. The school 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?

Mr Edwards will be the legal owner of the dog and as a result, will be responsible for his training. In the future it is hoped that 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?

In the interest of health and hygiene our school dog will be toileted by Mr Edwards for a half an hour walk on his journey to school. He will also be taken out for walks both off site and on the school grounds.

Q Will the dog be a distraction to Pupils’ learning?

Bandit will be kept in Mr Edwards’ office. To enable Bandit to have more space to roam when he is not working, he also has access to the school office and the corridor outside the Head’s office.

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

Bandit will be kept in Mr Edwards’ Office and Mr Edwards will ensure the he only comes into contact with children who are happy to have contact with him 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 Bandit at any time against their wishes. We hope to work closely with

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parents of children who are fearful of dogs to alleviate their fear and to teach them how to manage this using evidence-based intervention such as graded exposure.

Q How will the dog’s welfare be considered?

Bandit’s welfare is carefully monitored. He is will be walked regularly throughout the day and given free time outside of sessions to rest and play. Bandit will be carefully trained over a period of time and will have appropriate access to food, treats, water and toys.

Q How will this be managed where children have allergies?

Children will not need to touch Bandit or be in the same room as him 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. He 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.

See also – Risk Assessment