



The Stalyhill Schools' Federation

School Dog Policy

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School Dog Policy

In the Stalyhill Schools' Federation we will continuously strive to ensure that everyone is treated with respect and dignity. Each person will be given fair and equal opportunities to develop their full potential regardless of their gender, transgender, ethnicity, culture and religious background, sexuality, disability, or special educational needs and ability. The school will actively promote equality and foster positive attitudes and commitment to an education for equality.

1. RATIONALE

The value of pet therapy is widely accepted as a powerful aid to support communication, interaction and motivation in children. Research has shown that therapy dogs can improve the well-being of children, reduce their anxiety levels by making the school environment happier and a more enjoyable place to be. Dogs are a great comfort to children who are upset in any way and in need of calm, consolation, comfort, breathing space or a distraction from becoming overwhelmed or dysregulated. Children can benefit educationally and emotionally; a therapy dog can motivate and encourage their participation, increase their understanding of responsibility, develop empathy and nurturing skills and improve their behaviour and self-esteem. Children cannot fail in any way in their relationship with a therapy dog; they do not judge or condemn and offer unconditional affection. Children can also learn the principles of good pet ownership and be taught how to be around dogs safely and responsibly.

Attendance

Pupils with poor attendance can be encouraged back into school using the therapy dog, as an incentive. They can greet children at the school gate, which helps to support our anxious pupils coming into school.

Behaviour

Some of our children find it very difficult to regulate their behaviour for a range of reasons and this can interfere with learning and wellbeing. Schools are using dogs to improve behaviour by promoting positive behaviour in pupils. In a controlled study, pupils were found to have fewer disciplinary referrals in schools with a dog than schools without. Pupil's behaviour improved toward teachers, and pupils showed more confidence and responsibility. Additionally, parents reported that children seemed more interested in school as a result of having a dog at school.

Reading

Reading programmes with dogs do 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 will not 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

prove to be incredibly calm and happy to have a student 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. Above all they make amazing listeners, providing the children with a sense of comfort and love. Research has proven 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 intra 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. Specifically, schools are using dogs to help pupils build self-esteem; learn about positive and negative reinforcement, responsibility, and boundaries. With a dog in the classroom, pupils have the opportunity to learn how to care for the animal. This includes walking and grooming. Researchers report that involving pupils in the daily care of classroom dogs 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. Walking, grooming, playing and training are some of the responsibilities pupils will be allowed to undertake. It has been proved that working and playing with a dog improves children's social skills and self-esteem.

Therapeutic Work

Dogs can work with pupils on a one-one basis and will especially help those pupils who have experienced trauma, going through upsetting/difficult times or, with consent, those who are 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.

Other benefits for pupils;

- ✓ Inspiring – Dogs are fun! They will greet you with a wagging tail and unconditional love, which will inspire you to come into school each day and thrive.
- ✓ Discovering – Therapy dogs can help with socialisation. By learning how to interact with them, your communication and interaction skills will improve.
- ✓ Caring – Our therapy dog is part of the Stalyhill family and can help teach you compassion. Just like humans, animals feel emotion and pain and so you must ensure that you care for them.
- ✓ Improving – Dogs can teach us how to be patient. She does not always master the things she is asked to do first time. Keep trying and don't give up!
- ✓ Achieving – Therapy Dogs love for you to share your achievements with them. Work hard and aim high to make them proud.

2. General Information

- The Stalyhill School Therapy dog, Indie, will live with Mrs Plant, the Head of Infant School. Mrs Plant will cover the day-to-day cost of pet ownership, including food, pet insurance and vet bills and equipment.
- Indie is a Cockapoo and is a caring and well-behaved dog who indicates she has the right temperament to become an asset to our school community. The breed has been chosen for their temperament, intelligence and hypoallergenic qualities, as she does not shed hair.
- Indie is fully insured under the school's insurance cover with public liability insurance, which means she is fully insured to be present on the school site. Parents have been reminded that no dogs, other than assistance dogs, are permitted to be on school grounds.
- Indie will be trained as a School Therapy Dog. Indie's training is being delivered by PAWS therapy who have successfully introduced many therapy dogs into UK schools.
- Indie will regularly visit the vet for check-ups and will be up to date with all of her immunisations, flea and worming treatments.
- Support from the Dog's Trust will be utilised to help educate the children around animal safety including an EY/KS1 and KS2 assembly.
- Wherever possible, Indie will wear her therapy dog jacket so will be clearly identifiable in her role.
- If children have any known allergies to dogs, parents should inform school as soon as possible so school can ensure that they do not have any contact with the therapy dog.
- Any parent who does not wish their child to interact with Indie should email or speak to the school office to inform school of their wishes.

Routine

- Indie will travel into school with Mrs Plant restrained by a dog seatbelt.
- Indie will have a timetable that she will follow which will include plenty of rest and play time.
- Indie has a space in Mrs Plant's office, including a crate, which she is used to using. This will be her safe space and resting place with access to food and water.
- Indie will have familiar people she can be left with if Mrs Plant needs to leave her.
- Indie will take regular breaks away from the school playground – any dog foul is immediately disposed of in the appropriate waste disposal bin
- Indie will visit classrooms / individual pupils according to her timetable and pupil need. This will be built up slowly and will regularly be reviewed as she grows and matures.
- Indie can greet pupils when coming into school / leaving school
- Indie will always be supervised by an appropriate adult

3. Pupil and Staff Safety

- The therapy dog will be owned by Mrs Plant.
- Parents have been informed by letter that a therapy dog will be in school.
- A risk assessment has been completed and is available on the school website.
- Staff, visitors and pupils known to have allergic reactions to dogs must not go near the therapy dog. It is parent's responsibility to inform school as soon as possible if their child has an allergy to dogs.
- If the therapy dog is ill, it will not be allowed into school.
- The therapy dog will be kept on a lead when moving between classrooms or on a walk and will be under the full control and supervision of an adult.
- Pupils must never be left alone with the therapy dog and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times when the dog is present with pupils.
- Pupils will be regularly reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dog and will receive Dog's Trust workshops annually regarding this and regular internal reminders.
- Pupils 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.
- Pupils should not put their faces near the therapy dog and will always approach standing up.
- Pupils should not go near or disturb the dog if it is sleeping or eating.
- Pupils must not be allowed to play too roughly with the dog.
- If the dog is surrounded by a large number of pupils, the dog could become nervous and agitated. Therefore, the adult in charge of the dog must ensure that s/he monitors the situation.
- Pupils must not feed or have food near the therapy dog.
- Pupils should wash their hands after handling the dog.
- Any dog foul or urine should be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately, with the affected area appropriately disinfected.
- Dogs express their feelings 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. If the dog is displaying any of these warning signs, they should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment.