



Dogs in School Policy & Risk Assessment

Studies have shown that the presence of companion animals can improve the well-being of children and lower the rate of anxiety, simply by making the environment happier, more enjoyable and less forbidding. Children can benefit educationally and emotionally, increase their understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills through contact with a suitable calm dog.

The rationale:

- For the school to have a pet that was able to live as naturally as conditions would allow
- For the animal to be properly cared for outside of the school day
- To have a pet that the children could interact with and also be of benefit to the children's social and emotional development
- To have a pet that will support sensory regulation and communication of children with complex communication needs
- Support the Christian Values which underpin all we do in school
- To support the school's ongoing commitment to creating a calming, loving and family orientated environment

What are the benefits of having a school dog?

Numerous research studies have shown the benefits of dogs in schools. Evidence indicates that benefits include:

- Cognitive – companionship with a dog stimulates memory, problem-solving and game-playing
- Social – a dog provides a positive mutual topic for discussion, encourages responsibility, wellbeing, and focused interaction with others as well as intensive interaction

- 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. Having animals to pet and be around stimulates the vagus nerve in the brain which enables us to regulate our emotions, this then has a knock on impact on how others regulate around us and how we support others to co-regulate.
- Physical – interaction with a furry friend reduces blood pressure, provides tactile stimulation, assists with pain management, gives motivation to move, walk and stimulates the senses
- Environmental – a dog in a school increases the sense of a family environment, with all of the above benefits continuing long after the school day is over
- Reading and communication – reading to dogs has been proven to help children develop literacy skills and build confidence, through both the calming effect the dog's presence has on children as well as the fact that a dog will listen to children read without being judgemental or critical. This comforting environment helps to nurture children's enthusiasm for reading and provides them with the confidence to read aloud. Studies have shown there are benefits for preverbal children in developing interaction verbal and nonverbal communication, as with reading, the dog provides a non-judgemental, no demanding buddy to communicate with.

Merlin will always be supervised by a member of staff, predominantly, Mrs Walker. The welfare of the children and the dog is of the utmost importance, the risk assessment will identify key measures to ensure both, including ensuring that the dog has appropriate areas to rest, feed and toilet

The dog will be subjected to the most thorough cleanliness and grooming regime. Children will be taught to wash their hands after coming into direct contact with the dogs. The dog will also only be allowed in situations with children who voluntarily wish to be in close proximity.

The dog will be extremely well looked after. He will be based safely with their owners. There will be measures put into place to ensure that both the dog and the children are safe. He will be fully insured and will have regular visits to the vets where they will be kept up to date with vaccinations, worming and flea treatments.

Some children may have had upsetting experiences and thus have a fear of dogs (or another animal). The dog will only be in direct contact with children who feel comfortable to do so. Children will be made aware of where the dog is and when it will visit. The dog is currently small in stature and will therefore look 'less threatening' than larger dogs but he will grow! Experience and research

have shown that, with proper guidance and handling, children can learn to overcome their fear of animals and grow in respect and appreciation for them.

Hazard	Who is affected/at risk	Risk	Actions/control measures	Person responsible
Bites and scratches	Staff and pupils	Low	Dog has good temperament and is used to being around children. An adult will remain with the dog at all times Children are taught how to approach the dog and interact with it.	RW
Poor hygiene and health risks	Staff and pupils	Low	Dog will not be allowed in school if unwell Dog is regularly treated for fleas Dog is groomed every 8 weeks All staff and children are required to wash their hands after contact with the dog Dog waste will be cleared promptly and safely – pupils are told to stay away	RW
Allergies	Staff and pupils	Low	Parents asked to advise us of any allergies	RW
Phobias	Staff and pupils	Low	Parents are told about the dog's presence in the school Contact with the dog is optional	RW
Activities and games involving dogs	Staff and pupils Dogs	Low	An adult will remain with the dog at all times The number of children interacting with the dog at once is limited Children who misbehave or upset the dog will not take part A time limit is set on any activity so the dog does not get tired	RW
Children misbehaving	Staff and pupils Dogs	Low	Children are told in advance what to expect around the dog and how to behave An adult is always with the dog Staff are ready to remove children who misbehave or upset the dog	RW
Damage caused to school	Dogs	Low	Dog will remain on a lead at all times Dog will have own toys	RW

materials, equipment and the school site			Floor area where the dog spends most of its time will be kept clear of objects it may damage/chew	
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Meet Merlin



Merlin is a Labrador. He is friendly, fun-loving and very gentle. He lives in a home with children. He is well-cared for by responsible adults.

Daily Management

Merlin will

- Not be allowed in school if unwell
- Be carried or kept on a lead when moving between classrooms or on a walk
- Be under full control and supervision of an adult at all times
- Be up to date with all injections

- Never be taken off site by pupils

Pupils will:

- Not have sole responsibility for or be left alone with Merlin
- Meet Merlin in a group of no more than 3 children
- Be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around Merlin every time they meet him
- Not pick Merlin up
- Always remain calm around Merlin
- Not make sudden movements and be gentle
- Not put their face near to Merlin
- Not disturb Merlin if he is eating or sleeping
- Not eat close to Merlin and never feed him
- Learn about how dogs express their feelings through their body language. Growling or baring of teeth indicates a 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 Merlin is displaying any of these warning signs he should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment

Health and Safety Principles

- Children will always wash their hands after handling Merlin
- Any dog foul will be cleaned up immediately and disposed of appropriately by Merlin's owner. Children must never attempt to do this

Should a bite (even playful) occur:

1. Parents will be contacted immediately
2. The wound will be cleaned and further medical attention sought if necessary
3. All staff will be informed
4. A full investigation into the circumstance will be led by the Headteacher
5. The suitability of Merlin will be re-assessed by the Local Academy Council

