



Pitton CE Primary School

School Wellbeing Dog Risk Assessment

Introduction

The value of pet 'therapy' is widely accepted as a powerful aid to stimulation and communication. 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. There are also benefits seen in pupils' willingness to learn and participate and increased positive social interactions and behaviour through a shared responsibility. Well-being 'school-based' dogs offer a variety of benefits to pupils, including improved emotional well-being, enhanced social skills, and increased academic motivation. They can help reduce stress and anxiety, foster empathy and responsibility, and even improve reading skills. In addition to this, pupils will benefit in the following areas:

Improved Emotional Well-being:

- **Reduced Stress and Anxiety:** Interacting with PAT dogs can lower cortisol levels (the stress hormone) and increase oxytocin (the feel-good hormone), leading to a calming effect and reduced anxiety.
- **Increased Happiness and Mood:** The presence of a PAT dog can create a more positive and enjoyable environment, improving overall mood and fostering a sense of well-being.
- **Greater Sense of Security and Comfort:** For some pupils, especially those with anxiety or emotional difficulties, the presence of a PAT dog can provide a sense of security and comfort, making them feel safer and more relaxed.

Enhanced Social Skills:

- **Increased Social Interaction:** PAT dogs can act as icebreakers, encouraging students to interact with each other and build relationships.
- **Improved Communication Skills:** Interacting with a dog can help pupils develop their communication skills, including learning to express their feelings and understand social cues.
- **Development of Empathy and Compassion:** Pupils can learn to understand and respond to the needs of the dog, which can translate into greater empathy and compassion towards others.

Increased Academic Motivation and Performance:

- **Improved Reading Skills:** Studies have shown that therapy dogs can improve reading fluency and motivation, as pupils may feel less pressure reading to a dog than to a teacher or peer.

- **Enhanced Executive Functioning Skills:** Working with PAT dogs can stimulate memory, problem-solving skills, and attention span, all of which are important for academic success.
- **Increased Motivation to Learn:** The presence of a PAT dog can create a more positive and engaging learning environment, making pupils more motivated to participate in class and complete tasks.

Other Benefits:

- **Reduced Absenteeism:** Pupils may be more likely to attend school when they know they will have the opportunity to interact with a PAT dog.
- **Improved Behavior:** In some cases, therapy dogs have been shown to reduce aggressive behaviour and improve overall behaviour in the classroom.
- **Stronger Teacher-Student Relationships:** Interacting with a PAT dog can create a positive and relaxed atmosphere, fostering better relationships between teachers and students.

The rationale behind this decision was:

1. For the school to have a pet that was able to live as naturally as conditions would allow.
2. For the dog to be properly cared for outside of the school day.
3. To have a pet that the children could interact with and also be of benefit to the children's social and emotional development.

Prior to purchasing Poppy, visits were made to the home of the puppy's parents to ensure that the temperament of the parents was suitable for interaction with children. Once settled in her new home with Mrs Guymer it was decided that Poppy would be introduced to the children gradually. A local vet's practice thoroughly checked Poppy for temperament and any illnesses and is responsible for her vaccination programme. There are no diseases that could be caught from the puppy as she is kept up to date with immunisations including rabies and her worming treatment is in line with European vet guidelines. A register of her annual health check is kept both by Mrs Guymer and the vet's surgery (Avon Lodge Vets in Salisbury). Poppy is also insured with Many Pets Insurance.

It is accepted that interacting with animals is not appropriate for all children but that for some it has the potential to provide many positive benefits. Any parent who does not wish their child to interact with the dog should notify the school office.

Bringing a dog into your school is a significant commitment which should be carefully understood and planned.

At the heart of the safety and success of any programme will be a clear focus on the wellbeing of the dog.

This risk assessment will be reviewed annually, and the impact of a school dog will be evaluated by the school leadership team.

Hazard	Risk	Controls in Place	Review Date ANNUALLY
<p>Poppy getting over excited when interacting with children</p>	<p>Child being scratched/nipped by the dog</p>	<p>Children are not left with the dog unsupervised</p> <p>The dog will always be on a lead when not kept in crate.</p> <p>Children encouraged to be calm and quiet when the dog is moving around the school.</p> <p>The dog will be trained not to jump up or mouth the children.</p> <p>Children in class will be reminded of rules regarding the dog. This will also be extended to PSHE sessions and school assemblies.</p> <p>Children will be taught what to do to prevent the dog from chasing them. (i.e.. stand still, cross arms)</p> <p>The dog will under-go formal group puppy training with an experienced local trainer and Mrs Guymer. (Fun for dogs attended for full puppy course-Autumn 2023).</p> <p>The dog will undergo conditioning to the school classroom environment. This area of training will allow future reading or nurture intervention to involve the school dog in a calming/therapeutic manner.</p> <p>Risk of scratching and mouthing will reduce as the puppy matures and the risk assessment will be reviewed as the dog progresses through his weekly training.</p> <p>All staff have been introduced to the dog and the expectations of having a school dog.</p> <p>The dog's care will be maintained weekly and a full body check before visiting to ensure claws are kept short and she is in good health.</p>	

<p>Poppy gets loose from her cage or from her lead</p>	<p>Child being scratched/nipped by the dog</p>	<p>The dog's cage is big enough for her to be happy and safe during the school day and the children are taught not to disturb her when she is in her cage (safe space) or sleeping.</p> <p>If the dog does get loose a member of staff will put her back in her cage or on her lead and harness.</p> <p>The member of staff who is primarily responsible for ensuring the dog is secure in school is:</p> <p>Mrs Guymer- Kites Class Teacher</p>	
<p>Poppy's mood during her time in school</p>	<p>Dog gets irritable/distressed</p> <p>Child/adult getting bitten</p>	<p>The dog will undergo conditioning to the school classroom environment- sights/sounds/smells.</p> <p>Dogs should begin with a shorter length of time then build up from here, until they are familiar with the setting.</p> <p>Dog not to be disturbed when in safe space (crate)</p> <p>Initial introduction into school environment on days where two staff are present in the classroom allowing for safe management of pupils and dog.</p> <p>Children taught how to create a safe environment for the dog and rules/expectations discussed before each visit.</p> <p>All staff have been introduced to the dog and the expectations of having a school dog.</p> <p>Dog will remain with owner throughout the time in school to monitor temperament/mood/signals.</p> <p>During the summer term, additional care needs to take place to ensure that the classroom temperature is suitable for a dog and that water is always available.</p>	
<p>Poppy mouthing accidentally when taking a treat</p>	<p>Child fingers nipped by dog</p>	<p>Children taught to appropriately give and release treats to dog.</p> <p>Dog trained to avoid contact with teeth on skin/body.</p> <p>Children taught to recognise the difference between accidental 'mouthing' and biting.</p> <p>Dog to practise fire alarm procedure and recognise alarm sound. Owner to be responsible during practise sessions. Sign displayed when dog in school</p>	

Dog hair causing allergies	Children have allergic reaction	<p>Parents inform school of medical conditions/allergies before children start school. Medical information is regularly updated, and parents have been asked to inform the school of any known allergies prior to the introduction of the dog.</p> <p>Parents given choice to opt out of close contact with the dog.</p> <p>Children will have the opportunity to interact with the dog as they wish and those with allergies will be able to opt out of interaction.</p> <p>Children have been taught to wash their hands after active participation with the dog. Hand sanitiser is always available at various locations throughout the school.</p> <p>Dog cleaned and brushed regularly to minimise excess hair. Dog bedding washed regularly to reduce dust.</p> <p>Visitors advised when dog is in school.</p>	
Children getting germs from the dog	Children, Staff or parents will contract diseases that can be carried by dogs	<p>Should the dog defecate on the school site the responsible adult will clear this up immediately and dispose of it in a safe manner. The dog will be trained to toilet in an area of the school that our pupils do not have access to on a regular basis. If required areas will be disinfected with an appropriate animal disinfectant.</p> <p>The dog will be encouraged to toilet before arriving at school. Regular breaks on the field next to school for toileting.</p> <p>If the dog is unwell, she will not be in school</p>	
Health and wellbeing of dog/hygiene		<p>All immunisations (including rabies vaccination) are kept up to date in accordance with European Pet Passport Scheme and the owner keeps a register of this.</p> <p>Flea, tick and worming treatment is carried out monthly intervals, prescribed by a vet. This is carried out in line with European vet guidelines, at 3 monthly intervals.</p> <p>The dog will be kept away from food areas including school kitchen areas</p>	
Financial cost of the dog's upkeep	School unable to afford ongoing cost of the dog's day to day keep or medical bills	Although the dog is to be used for 'therapy' work within school, Mrs Guymer will be responsible for the costs of day-to-day upkeep and medical bills.	

Key Considerations- Planning for Success

Planning Considerations	Toileting area for dog; hygiene standards for all involved; space for the dog to rest; areas of school unsuitable for the dog
	Understand costs associated with the dog and who is responsible
	Make appropriate insurance arrangements to cover the dog in school
	Assess the risks and review regularly
	Ensure contingency plans are in place when the dog can't/won't attend the school
Commitment/Support	Engage all stakeholders in planning; enabling informed decisions
	Understand and manage concerns and shape plans on feedback
Appropriate Environment	Consider the environment for the dog; space and senses
	Consider the times the dog will be in school and where they will be based
	Understand the adaptations which may need to be made to the environment e.g. heatwave.
Training	Effective and gradual socialisation programme to prepare the dog for school life
	Undertake regular training and support from qualified behaviour specialist
	Following socialisation in school, seek assessment qualification through relevant agency
Support for the dog	Ensure handler understands the needs of both students and the dog in home and school environment
	Ensure handler has secure and trusted relationship with the dog understanding behaviour and body language
	Commitment to positive training techniques and responsive to changing needs of the dog over time
	Dog always supported in school. Not left at any time alone with students
	Set standards in school for Staff and students and ensure these are followed
Preparation	Time to educate students and Staff to understand the needs of the dog and how to act around and engage with the dog
	Plan safe experiences with pupils and safe spaces in crate for distance and rest periods
	Review how things are going regularly making changes as required