



## **Animal Policy**

**Policy date: May 2024**

**Ratified by Governing Body: July 2024**

**Policy Review date: September 2025**

## Introduction

At Grove Park we believe in providing children with enriching and diverse experiences that allow individuals to feel nurtured and safe. Research has shown many benefits to therapy dogs and pets within a school setting. Grove Park Primary School has introduced the use of a therapy dog, along with small creatures such as rabbits and guinea pigs to support a child's emotional well-being. This Policy is designed to set out to pupils, parents, staff, and visitors the reasons for having animals within our school and the expectations and responsibilities to ensure the safety of pupils, staff and visitors and the animals. We recognise that there is a risk associated to having animals within our setting and this has been mitigated against using a robust risk assessment to ensure the safety of all. (Appendix A- Risk Assessment). At Grove Park we know that the benefits educationally and emotionally, increase a child's understanding of responsibility, develop empathy and nurturing skills through the contact of animals. In addition to these benefits, children take great enjoyment from interacting with our animals and we see positive relationships formed. 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-schools-and-other-childcarefacilities/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.***

## The benefits of animals and a school dog

Animals such as School dogs have been proven to help develop Pupils' reading skills, improve behaviour, attendance and academic confidence, as well as increasing pupils understanding of responsibility and in the development of empathy and nurturing skills. At Grove Park Primary School, we hope that our smaller pets and school dog will be a beneficial addition 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 talking 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;
- Therapy dogs have been shown to support emotional regulation through the positive impact on the autonomic nervous system
  - Shows that children working with therapy dogs have experienced improved motivation for learning, resulting in improved outcomes.

Animals are now being used to support children with their social and emotional learning needs, which can also aid literacy development. Research into the effects of animals 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 therapy 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>) SEND benefits  
“Therapy Dogs Nationwide dogs.

## **SEND benefits**

*“Therapy Dogs Nationwide 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 Wellbeing benefits**

Some mental health challenges and psychiatric disorders are known to respond well to animals, especially dogs. Patients diagnosed with a range of issues, such as depression, bi-polar disorder, Autism, ADHD, posttraumatic 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 animals 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/ animal 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 an animal than schools without. Pupils' behaviour improved toward teachers, and children 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 and smaller animals for the children to handle.

## **Educational benefits**

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 nonjudgmental, which is especially crucial to 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

Animals in school offer an opportunity for improving social development. They are especially useful for teaching pupils' social skills and responsibility. Schools are using animals more and more to help older pupils build self-esteem; learn about positive and negative reinforcement, responsibility, and boundaries. Pupils can use the animals to help communicate, teach kindness, and empower pupils. With a range of animals in school, pupils can learn how to care for them on varying levels, this includes walking and grooming. Research reports that involving pupils in the daily care of an animal 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 the pets at school.

## Pastoral Care

Our school dog 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 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.

## Legislation

The primary applicable legislation is the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 and where risk assessment is required, the Management of Health and Safety Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000. In respect of the dog(s), it is the Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 and as amended.

It is important that suitable arrangements are in place prior to any dog being brought into the school.

- Agreement should be sought from the school Headteacher and parents should be notified of the intention to bring a dog into the classroom at least 48 hours prior to the event so letters can be sent home – the letter should ask about allergies and fears.
- A risk assessment should be carried out prior to the visit of any dog into the classroom.
- Allergic reactions cannot be discounted from handling dogs, or just from being near them. Pupils known to have allergic reactions to dogs must have their access restricted.
- Consideration should be given to the temperament and characteristics of the breed of dog being brought in, including the size of the dog and its age. You may wish to consult [www.thekennelclubbreedstandards](http://www.thekennelclubbreedstandards) if you have any concerns as to the suitability of a particular breed of a dog. A puppy will not have its adult teeth and will be unlikely to cause the same degree of damage as an adult dog. Thought should also be given to the environment that the animal has been brought up in. Dogs and puppies which have been brought up in a family home environment should be well used to the behaviour and sounds of children.
- Dogs with young puppies (those under the age of 8 weeks) must not be brought into school as there is the risk of the mother becoming overprotective, which may cause her to react out of character.
- Dogs must be kept on a lead at all times and under the full control and supervision of their owner.
- Pupils must never be left alone with dogs and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times – this should be the dog's owner.

- Prior to the visit, pupils should be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around dogs. Pupils are likely to become excited and it is important that they react calmly and carefully around the dog(s). 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 be told not to put their face near a dog and should always approach it standing up.
- Pupils should be told never to go near or disturb a dog that is sleeping or eating.
- Pupils should not feed, or eat close to the dogs.
- Pupils should always wash their hands after handling a dog.

## **Parents Bringing Dogs into School Grounds**

Parents are not permitted to bring dogs onto the school site, unless under a working assistance role. If a child or family member requires an assistance dog, the owner will have to notify the school for approval and a share risk assessment will need to be in place before the dog can be on site. Once it is agreed, the owner should always keep their dog on a lead. The adult must always have control of the dog – children must never be left alone with or in charge of the dog. Any dog foul should be cleaned immediately. It is at the owners risk when interacting with the wider public.

## **Responsibilities**

### **Pupil Responsibilities**

- Pupils whose parents have withdrawn consent are not allowed to attend any animal session.
- Pupils should be careful to stroke the animals in the correct manner i.e. on the body, chest, back and not by the face or top of head.
- Pupils must always wash their hands before and after stroking and handling the animals.
- Pupils must wait until the school dog is sitting or lying down before touching or stroking him
- Pupils are not allowed to approach or disturb the animals whilst they are sleeping or eating.
- Pupils are not allowed to play roughly with the animals, always ensuring a calm and quiet approach.
- Pupils are not allowed to eat during animal assisted therapy sessions.
- Pupils understand that any deliberate violence or threatening behaviour towards the animals will result in a consequence with the more severe being excluded.

### **Staff Responsibilities**

- Mrs Flain, Head of School is the registered owner of the school dog, and it lives with her and her family. Mrs Flain will know the whereabouts of the dog and which staff are always supervising.
- Mrs Flain is responsible for ensuring the training and accreditation of the dog is current and maintained.
- The school dog will be kept in Mrs Flain's Office, the Head Teacher's or SLT's Office or Mrs Cornell's Office when Mrs Flain is not available or is working with a pupil/in a meeting where the school dog is not required.

- The dog must be kept on a lead when moving around the school.
- Pupils must never be left alone with the dog/ pets and there must be always appropriate adult supervision.
- Pupils will be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dog/ pets before any interaction during a session or visit.
- Staff, visitors, and children known to have allergic reactions to dogs/pets must not go near the dog/pets. The Office keeps a list of all pupils and staff with a reported allergy to dogs/pets which is kept on Arbor.
- If the dog is surrounded by many children, the dog could become nervous and agitated. Therefore, the adult in charge of the dog must ensure that s/he monitors the situation. If the dog 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 the dog is ill, he will not be allowed into school. Mrs Flain has responsibility for ensuring appropriate alternative care for the dog if the dog is not to be in school on a given day.
- Mrs Flain will maintain records and collect evidence of impact of the school dog/ pets to better inform research into the benefits of animal assisted therapy.
  - Mrs Day will over see the daily care of our pets: rabbit and guinea pigs and will be responsible for maintaining their welfare when at school.
  - During the holiday periods, some may go home to staff foster families or stay with Mrs Day at home.
  - Children will not be allowed to enter cuddle corner without adult supervision and all doors will be locked when the sessions are not taking place.
  - Mrs Day will require clean and dispose of mess from cuddle corner, ensuring it is safe for the children to access.
  - Our pets will be able to visit other locations within the school grounds, offering stimulation and vegetation.
  - The school is responsible for the health care of the pets and this will be recorded.
  - The maintenance of cuddle corner will be cared for by our site team.

## **Principles**

- The Head Teacher, CEO and the Governors have agreed to the presence of animals at Grove Park Primary School.
- Staff, parents and pupils will be informed in writing that animals 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 consent form in order for their children to be present during Animal sessions

- Only the school dog is allowed on the premises. No other dogs are permitted and a risk assessment has been approved by the Head of school and Health and Safety Lead. This will be reviewed annually.
- All animals will be included in the fire evacuation procedure under the supervision of Mrs Flain or other trained staff members.
- The dog is covered by the school's Public Liability Insurance policy and Mrs Flain has responsibility for ensuring this remains on the school's policy during the presence of a dog at school. The dog is also fully insured.
- Only staff trained to handle the dog on school premises will have permission to do so. Whilst training this will be limited to his owner and handler, Mrs Flain and trained members of staff with prior agreement.

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

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

The legal owner of the dog will be Mrs Flain. She will bear the costs associated with owning the dog at home. Mrs Flain has public liability insurance that covers a school therapy 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?*

The school dog is named Draco. He is a pure breed golden retriever and has been living with Mrs Flain as a puppy. A golden retriever is known for its calm temperament, high intelligence and friendly nature. The dog was bred from 2 excellent golden retrievers who have been used as show dogs for a number of years.

*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 has 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?*

Mrs Flain will be the legal owner of the dog and as a result, will be responsible for his training. 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 when taken out for walks around the grounds. Only handlers of the dog are permitted to pick up any mess and this will be discarded immediately, away from the children and our school resources.

*Q Will the dog be a distraction to Pupils' learning?*

The dog will be kept in Mrs Flain's office secured when needed with a baby gate. To enable the dog to have more space to roam when he is not working, he also has access to the SLT office, main school office and Pastoral office, all who will support Mrs Flain in caring for the school dog. This area is also contained within a baby gate to ensure the office can be accessed. The dog will also attend

meetings with staff to support further socialisation, and support staff wellbeing, following consultation with staff beforehand.

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

The dog will be kept in Mrs Flain's Office and she will ensure the school dog only comes into contact with children who are happy to have contact with her 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 the dog at any time against their wishes. 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 using evidence-based interventions such as graded exposure.

*Q How will the dog's welfare be considered?*

The dog's welfare will be carefully monitored. The dog will be walked regularly throughout the day and given free time outside of sessions to rest and play. The dog will be carefully trained over a period and will have appropriate access to food, treats, water and toys. Through training, Mrs Flain will gradually introduce the dog when it is quiet and build up to a busier school day.

*Q How will this be managed where children have allergies?*

Children will not need to touch the dog or be in the same room as the dog at any point which will relieve the possibility of allergic reactions. We already manage several 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.

*Q. Where will the rabbit and guinea pigs be kept?*

Within our Serengeti building we have a quad space, that central to the building. It is a secure area, with 2 access doors. These will be kept locked at all times. Measures have been put in place to ensure that pets are safe at night, with raised netting above the building to stop birds or debris falling into the area.

*Q. Who will care for the pets during the school holidays?*

Whilst the pets are the schools responsibility, Mrs Day will oversee the care for the pets, this includes the weekend and holidays. She will take them home during these times.

*Q. How can you ensure the welfare of these animals?*

Sessions with the pets, in cuddle corner will be timetabled and always with supervising adults. Small group sessions will take place, so that we don't cause stress for the animals. Children, through our curriculum will be taught how to care for the animals. Regular check ups will be kept with a registered vet and Mrs Day will ensure all vaccinations and medication is up to date.

*Q. What if a pet becomes ill?*

We understand that there may be times which our animals are unwell and during these times they will be given lots of love and care, along with visiting the vet for the correct medication. If a pet is unwell, they will remain at home with Mrs Day, so that appropriate care can be given at the right times.

*Q. How will the animals be looked after if the school should be evacuated?*

In the event of a school evacuation, the animals within pet corners will be collected in carry cages and brought out to a designated safety point. The animals will be accounted for during an evacuation and designated staff will be trained to collect the smaller animals. The school dog will evacuate with Mrs Flain and remain with her during the time out of the building. During our regular fire evacuation drills we will ensure all fire marshals understand the procedures for removing the animals safely.

*Q. Where will the pets come from?*

Our rabbits and guineas will be come from a charity that seeks to rehome small pets. Through this charity, they ensure they provide us with suitable animals, who are fully vaccinated and have the right temperament to be homed with other pets and be handled.