



Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School

# Dogs in School Policy

July 2021



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## Dog in School Policy

### Introduction

At Our Lady of Lourdes, we pride ourselves in the holistic education we can afford our children. In resourcing their learning, we aspire to think 'big' and look for ways of expanding children's experience and supporting their progress. It's widely accepted that altering the parameters of school to make it a more welcoming and nurturing place can alleviate anxieties, encourage positive mental health and help promote the learning and working environment for everyone. Having our two dogs in school is one way we look to do this. Children and staff can benefit educationally and emotionally, children increase their understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills through contact with the dogs. In addition to these benefits, children take great enjoyment from interaction with the dogs and for some, it helps to regulate their emotions helping them be ready to learn.

### Is there a risk in bringing a dog into a school environment?

There is a risk of bringing dogs into school for both children and adults. Managing these risks however can ensure that the school dogs support learning and wellbeing in a measured and safe manner.

### School Policy

- The dogs will be owned by Mr. Barber (Penny) and Miss Garbarz (Danny)
- The dogs are chosen for their very mild temperament.
- The Headteacher, and the Governors have agreed that the school can have a dog.
- Parents/carers will be informed that a dog will be in school and they will be asked to indicate if their child should be kept away from the dog for either health or cultural reasons.
- A risk assessment is in place and this will be reviewed annually and in light of any incidents linked to the dogs.
- Staff, visitors and students known to have allergic reactions to dogs must not go near the dogs.
- Should either of the dogs become unwell they will not be allowed on site.
- The dogs 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.
- Students will receive information through assemblies and tutors about how to behave around the dogs.
- Students must never be left alone with the dogs and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times when the dogs are present with students.
- Students should be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dogs.
- Students should remain calm around the dogs. They should not make sudden movements and must never stare into the dog's eyes as this could be threatening for the dog. Students should not put their faces near the dogs and should always approach it standing up.
- Students must not be allowed to play too roughly with the dogs.
- Students should never go near the dogs when they are sleeping or eating.
- If the dogs are surrounded by a large number of students, the dogs could become nervous and agitated. Therefore, the adult in charge of the dogs must ensure that s/he monitors the situation.
- Dogs express their feelings through their body language. Growling or baring of teeth indicates the dogs are 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 s/he should be immediately removed

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from that particular situation or environment.

- Students should not feed, or eat close to the dogs.
- Students should always wash their hands after handling a dogs.
- Any dog foul should be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately.
- If a bite or allergy incident were to occur, first aid will be given; the parents/carers will be contacted. The incident will be reviewed for future learning to avoid similar circumstances.
- The two dogs will never be on site at the same time

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

The Governing Body has a responsibility to ensure that the school has a written policy for dogs in school.

The Headteacher is responsible for implementing this policy. The Headteacher may delegate this responsibility.

Teachers and staff are required to abide by this policy.

The Health and Safety Officer is responsible for providing information, advice and guidance as and when required.

### **Appendix 1**

#### **Reasons to have a dog in school**

Bullying can be a problem in all schools with students anxious about school for fear of taunting and abuse. But in some schools, dogs are making a difference in the fight against bullies. Researchers report that students 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 students declined by 55%, and general aggression went down 62%.

Attendance: Mandy was a student with poor attendance and truancy. Mandy was encouraged back into school using caring for River, a dog, as an incentive. By telling Mandy that "if she didn't come to school to care for him, he wouldn't get walks, water or love," Mandy came to school almost every day for the rest of the year, only missing two days.

Behaviour problems occur in school and these can interfere with learning. Some schools are using dogs to improve behaviour problems by promoting positive behaviour in students. In a controlled study, students were found to have fewer disciplinary referrals in schools with a dog than schools without. Student's behaviour improved towards teachers, and students also 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 programmes with dogs are doing wonders for some students. Children who might be embarrassed to read out loud to the class or even adults are less likely to be 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," students find social support and peer interaction.

Dogs are 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-judgemental, which is especially crucial to struggling, emerging readers. The dogs also

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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 students 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 students they mix with.

**Social Development:** Dogs in school offer an opportunity for improving social development. They are especially useful for teaching students social skills and responsibility. Specifically, schools are using dogs to help older students build self-esteem; learn about positive and negative reinforcement, responsibility, and boundaries. Older students use dogs to help communicate, teach kindness, and empower students.

Finally, in having the two dogs as part of our learning community children can be exposed to wider issues that in themselves are learning opportunities.

With a dog in the classroom, students have the opportunity to learn how to care for the animal. This includes walking and grooming. Researchers report that involving students in the daily care of classroom dogs is a positive experience, promoting their own daily care. The students also learn about responsibility, caring, and sharing when helping each other take care of a dog at school.

**As a reward:** Dogs will be gentle and loving, but at the same time full of fun and enjoyment for the students. Those students who have performed incredibly well during the week or those that have made progress in a certain subject, or those who have achieved tasks set for them, will be rewarded with spending time during lunch or break to interact with the dog. Walking, grooming, playing and training are some of the responsibilities students will be allowed to undertake. It has been proved that working and playing with a dog improves children's social skills and self-esteem.

**Support Dogs** can work with students on a one-to-one basis and will especially help those students 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 students they meet and are happy to provide plenty of hugs to the students they are spending time with. Students who struggle with social interaction can find a reassuring friend in a dog.

**The wider community:** Dogs can be a great way to help students to interact with members of the wider community. For example, students may take the dog to visit other schools, hospitals or care homes and help others to benefit from this therapeutic support.