

Great Bardfield Primary School



Well-being Dogs in School Policy (Including Risk Assessment)

Approved by:	Elizabeth Crow (Headteacher)
---------------------	------------------------------

Ratified by Governors:	September 2025
-------------------------------	----------------

Next review due by:	September 2027
----------------------------	----------------

The benefits of a school dog

At Great Bardfield Primary School we believe that having a dog in school has many benefits:

- dogs can help children develop empathy skills, encourage them to act respectfully and improve relationships between children
- reading to a dog can be beneficial for reluctant readers. There is less pressure and less perceived judgement when reading to a dog
- dogs can have a calming effect on children
- they can help children develop emotional literacy
- dogs can encourage children who are typically more withdrawn, to engage with and participate in school life
- they can help children to regulate their own behaviour
- dogs can reduce stress and improve wellbeing for both children and staff
- they can improve self-esteem for children
- dogs can teach children about responsibility and caring for animals

Is there a risk in bringing dogs into a school environment?

This policy shows that we have thought carefully about school life with a dog and how, through careful management, there is a very low risk of harm. Any risks can be mitigated against with a robust risk assessment to ensure the safety of all children, staff and visitors. (Included in this policy.) Our curriculum supports learning about dogs and how best to behave around school dogs. This will include highlighting that not all dogs are well trained and that caution must be used around unknown dogs outside school.

Health and Safety Principles

Children and adults will always wash their hands or use hand sanitiser after handling a dog. Any dog excrement will be cleared up immediately and disposed of appropriately by the adult in charge of the dog at the time. Children must never be allowed to do this.

Should a bite occur (even playfully):

- 1) Parents will be contacted immediately.
- 2) The wound will be cleaned and covered with a sterile, non-sticky dressing.
- 3) The child/adult will be released for medical attention.
- 4) All staff will be informed.
- 5) A full investigation will take place.

Our rules to keep children, staff and dogs safe in school

- School dogs will be owned by teachers. This means that there will never be more than one dog associated with a class at any time. The owners are fully responsible for the welfare of the dogs e.g. keeping their vaccinations and worming tablets up-to-date
- Only the school dogs are allowed on the premises. Only dogs specifically authorised by the Headteacher are allowed on the school site. This includes drop off and collection times.
- Parents have been informed that we have dogs in school. All potential new parents who have a tour of the school are shown and told about the dogs.
- There is a risk assessment in place which will be reviewed annually.
- Staff, visitors and children known to have allergic reactions to dogs will not go near them. There is a sign to alert visitors to the fact that we have school dogs where visitors sign in.
- Children will never be left alone with the dog and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times.
- At the start of each school year, the teaching staff who own the school dogs will run a whole school assembly to remind children about appropriate behaviour around dogs:
 - Always remain calm
 - Be gentle
 - Do not put your face near the dog's face
 - Never disturb a dog that is eating or sleeping
 - Always approach the dog standing up
 - Do not feed the dog.
- A dog should never be surrounded by a large number of children, the dog could become nervous and agitated. The adult in charge of the dog must ensure that they monitor the situation.
- Always remember that 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 a dog is displaying any of these warning signs he should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment.
- Children should not eat close to any dogs.
- Any dog foul should be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately by an adult.
- Parents will be consulted on allowing their pupils access to the dogs
- The dogs will be included in the fire evacuation procedure under the supervision of their owner or the delegated responsible adult.

Actions

If someone reports having an issue with the dog, this information must be passed to the Headteacher or a member of the senior leadership team as soon as possible. All concerns will be responded to by the Headteacher.

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. Teachers, staff, pupils, parents and visitors are required to abide by this policy.

APPENDIX 1

Research highlighting the benefits of school dogs

The amount of UK research looking at the impact that school dogs can have, is small. However, more research has come out of America and Australia, where dogs in school have been more commonplace.

"Reading to dogs has been proven to help children develop literacy skills and build confidence, through both the calming effect the dogs' presence has on children and the fact that the dog will listen to the children read without being judgmental or critical. This comforting environment helps to nurture children's enthusiasm for reading and provides them with the confidence needed to read aloud. When dogs are in a room of children trying to read they become less stressed, less self-conscious and more confident because dogs are non-judgmental. If children are partnered with a dog to read to, the dog provides comfort, encourages positive social behaviour, enhances self-esteem, motivates speech and inspires children to have fun and enjoy the experience of reading."

- Bark & Read – The Kennel Club

(<https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/barkandread>)

The University of Buckingham vice-chancellor, Sir Anthony, states school dogs are "a powerfully cost-effective way of helping children feel more secure at schools". Sir Anthony spoke at a conference about the need to improve young people's sense of wellbeing. "The quickest and biggest hit that we can make to improve mental health in our schools and to make them feel safe for children, is to have at least one dog in every single school in the country," said Sir Anthony.

BBC News "Every school 'needs dog as stress-buster'"

(<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-47655600>)

Research from Monash University in Australia, found that the pros of having a school dog included:

Enhancing wellbeing and reducing stress

Researchers found evidence that having a therapy dog can 'enhance children's wellbeing in a variety of settings, including schools'.

They also found evidence that therapy dogs can 'reduce physiological symptoms of stress' by:

- lowering cortisol levels
- increasing children's positive emotions
- promoting engagement in learning activities
- encouraging positive attitudes toward learning
- reducing negative behaviours
- encouraging positive social behaviours

A research review conducted by Georgia Southern University in the USA found 'much evidence' to support 'the emotional and social benefits of children interacting with a dog in the classroom.'

Research from both Monash University and Georgia Southern University found that children benefited from increased confidence, improved literacy skills and an improvement in reading scores when they read to dogs. Specifically, reading to a dog lead to:

- an improvement in reading accuracy
- improved oral reading fluency
- better comprehension
- more positive attitudes towards reading
- improved behaviours toward reading
- improving physical development

APPENDIX 2

Dogs in School Risk Assessment September 2025

HAZARD	WHO IS AFFECTED/AT RISK	RISK RATING (LOW, MEDIUM, HIGH)	ACTIONS/CONTROL MEASURES	PERSON RESPONSIBLE
Bites, scratches or illness caused by dog	Staff, pupils, visitors	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All dogs that visit are vaccinated, wormed, and treated for fleas• Dogs are groomed regularly if applicable to their breed• All staff and pupils are required to wash their hands after contact with dogs• Handlers clear up dog urine and faeces promptly and dispose of this safely – pupils are told to stay away• Dogs are not taken anywhere near food preparation areas• Should a bite occur (even playfully):<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Parents will be contacted immediately.2) The wound will be cleaned and covered with a sterile, non-sticky dressing.3) The child/adult will be released for medical attention.4) All staff will be informed.5) A full investigation will take place.	Mrs Whittaker, Mrs Dodkins, Mrs Crow

HAZARD	WHO IS AFFECTED/AT RISK	RISK RATING (LOW, MEDIUM, HIGH)	ACTIONS/CONTROL MEASURES	PERSON RESPONSIBLE
Allergies	Staff, pupils, visitors	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We seek parental permission for children to interact with dogs 	Mrs Whittaker, Mrs Dodkins, Mrs Crow
Phobias	Staff, pupils, visitors	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents, children and visitors know about dogs in school • Contact with dogs is optional 	Mrs Whittaker, Mrs Dodkins, Mrs Crow
Activities and games involving the dog	Staff, pupils, dogs	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A competent adult or the dog's owner remain with dogs at all times • We check with the owner and set a limit for the number of children who can interact with a dog at once • A competent adult or the dog's owner clean up urine and faeces • School staff do not allow children who misbehave or could potentially upset dogs to have contact with them • We set a time limit on activities as recommended by the owners, so dogs do not get tired or over stimulated 	Mrs Whittaker, Mrs Dodkins, Mrs Crow

HAZARD	WHO IS AFFECTED/AT RISK	RISK RATING (LOW, MEDIUM, HIGH)	ACTIONS/CONTROL MEASURES	PERSON RESPONSIBLE
Children's behaviour	Pupils, dogs	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are taught how to behave around dogs in our annual assembly. They are also reminded at other times as necessary. • Children never have unsupervised contact with a dog 	Mrs Whittaker, Mrs Dodkins, Mrs Crow
Damage caused to school materials, equipment and the school site	Dogs	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dogs are supervised at all times • When not with a competent adult or the dog's owner, dogs are kept in secured areas, with closed doors 	Mrs Whittaker, Mrs Dodkins, Mrs Crow