

Studley St Mary's C.E Academy

School Therapy Dog Policy

Updated: January 2024

Review frequency	Every 3 years
Review date	January 2027
Date adopted by AGC	
Member of staff responsible	Headteacher

Research has shown many benefits to therapy and reading dogs in school settings. Studley St Mary's Church of England Academy has a school dog who works with our students to improve literacy and student behaviour and wellbeing. This policy is designed to set out to students, parents and visitors the reasons for having a school dog at St. Marys Academy (Section 2 – The benefits of a school dog) and the rules and responsibilities to ensure the safety of students, staff, visitors and the school dog (Sections 3 and 4 – Principles and Code of Conduct). Although there is a risk in bringing a dog into a school environment, this can be mitigated against with a robust risk assessment to ensure the safety of all students, staff and visitors (Appendix A - Risk Assessment).

2 The benefits of a school dog

School dogs have been proven to help develop students' reading skills, improve behaviour, attendance and academic confidence, as well as increasing student understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills. At Studley St Mary's Church of England Academy we have a school dog to support our staff team in bringing all of these benefits to our students. Studley St Mary's Church of England Academy school dog is trained as a therapy dog and certified by Pets as Therapy, as well as being trained as a reading dog through her puppy training (see Section 4 – code of conduct).

2.1 Literacy benefits

"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 judgemental 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-judgemental. 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>)

School Dog Policy – The White Horse Federation

(<https://www.ridgewayschool.com/downloads/default/TWHF-School-Dog-Policy-V2.pdf>)

2.2 Therapy benefits

There is a strong body of evidence that indicates that Therapy dogs have a positive impact on the well-being and mental health of all students but especially those with a diagnosis of ASD, SEND needs or attachment needs.

School Dogs - Therapy Dogs Nationwide (<http://www.tdn.org.uk/schools/>)

2.3 Attendance & punctuality benefits

Therapy dogs are shown to have a positive impact on student attendance across the whole student body but in particular on persistent absenteeism.

Case Study – Hazel Oak School Dog Policy (<https://hazel.oak.co.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2018/02/School-Dog-Policy.pdf>)

2.4 Behaviour & rewards

Research has shown that the presence of a school dog has a positive impact on the incidents and intensity of violent and extreme behaviours in school. There is also evidence that a school dog has a positive impact on student confidence and engagement with school.

Case Study – Hazel Oak School Dog Policy (<https://hazel.oak.co.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2018/02/School-Dog-Policy.pdf>)

3 Principles

3.1 The Head of Studley St Mary's Church of England Academy agrees to a school dog (Joy) working in the Academy.

3.2 Only the school dog (Joy) is allowed inside the premises. All other dogs must not come inside unless they are a known therapy or assistance dog and the Head has approved their presence prior to the visit.

3.3 Joy is a Golden Retriever chosen because it is an intelligent breed that will respond well to training and which is known to be good with children, sheds little hair, and is very sociable and friendly.

3.4 Joy's name legal owner is Jo Stevens. She has full responsibility for the welfare of the school dog and all expenses relating to food and ensuring that the dog is vaccinated, wormed and flea treated.

3.5 Jo Stevens, the legal owner of the school dog and the Head teacher, have produced a risk assessment which has been approved by the Safeguarding Lead and this will be reviewed annually.

3.6 The dog will be included in the fire evacuation procedure under the supervision of Jo Stevens.

3.7 The Academy's liability insurance covers the school for risk related to a working dog on site. The Finance Manager has responsibility for ensuring this remains on the school's policy during Joy's time working at St. Marys Academy.

3.8 Staff, parents and students will be informed in writing that a dog will be in school. A full parent consultation has taken place to ensure that those students with allergies or concerns are fully identified and catered for

3.9 Parents can indicate that their child is not allowed to be present during dog therapy sessions by emailing the school or calling to inform the Head Teacher.

3.10 The presence of a school dog will sign posted to visitors at reception and the school website. Reception staff will relay visitor issues to the SLT as soon as possible.

3.11 Joy will only engage in student therapy and reading sessions once certified as a therapy dog by Pets As Therapy (<https://petsastherapy.org/>).

3.12 Only Jo Stevens to handle the dog in student sessions.

4 Code of Conduct

4.1 Staff Responsibilities

4.1.1 Jo Stevens will know the whereabouts of the dog at all times.

4.1.2 If the dog is ill ,she will not be allowed into school.

4.1.3 Jo Stevens is responsible for ensuring Joy is trained and certified as a therapy dog by Pets As Therapy.

4.1.4 Joy must be kept on a lead when moving between classrooms or on a walk and will be under the full control and supervision of Jo Stevens.

4.1.5 Joy will be kept in the base in her crate when not interacting with students for therapy or reading sessions. Joy name will only visit designated therapy or reading lessons and not be allowed in other areas of the school.

4.1.6 Staff, visitors and children known to have allergic reactions to dogs must not go near Joy. The office staff keep a list of all students and staff with a reported allergy to dogs and ensures that all involved know who these students and staff are.

4.1.8 Students must never be left alone with Joy and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times.

4.1.9 Students will be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dog before any interaction during a therapy sessions or visit. This will be supported by visual prompts and reminders.

4.1.10 If the dog is surrounded by a large number of 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 her ears, she will be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment

4.1.11 Any dog foul should be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately by Jo Stevens. There is a designated dog fouling area that remains the responsibility of Jo Stevens

4.1.12 Studley St Mary's Church of England Academy staff will maintain records and anecdotal evidence of the work and impact of the school dog to better inform research into the benefits of a school therapy / reading dog.

4.2 Student Responsibilities

4.2.1 Students whose parents have withdrawn consent are not allowed to attend dog therapy sessions

4.2.2 Students will stroke Joy on her body, chest, back and not by her face or top of head.

4.2.3 Students are not allowed to approach Joy or disturb her whilst she is sleeping or eating.

4.2.4 Students are not allowed to play roughly with the Joy.

4.2.5 Students must wait until the Joy is sitting or lying down before touching or stroking him.

4.2.6 Students are not allowed to eat during sessions with Joy.

4.2.7 Students must always wash their hands after handling / stroking Joy.

4.2.8 Students understand that any deliberate violence or threatening behaviour towards Joy will result in a fixed term exclusion.

Appendix 2 School Dog Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q Who is the legal owner of the dog and who pays for its costs? A The legal owner of the dog will be a member of staff; they will bear the costs associated with owning the dog; the school budget will support insurance and staff training costs where appropriate.

Q Is the dog from a reputable breeder? A Yes. The dog is from a home where both parents were seen and has been specifically chosen for its temperament.

Q Will the dog be a distraction?

A The dog will be kept in the Base. The Base is separate from the classrooms / playground area to ensure it only comes into contact with children who are happy to have contact and have parental permission for this, under strict supervision. The dog will also have a space to spend time in classrooms, the library and in the outdoor areas where children can interact safely. The dog will also attend meetings with staff to support further socialisation, following consultation with staff beforehand.

Q Has a risk assessment been undertaken?

A Yes, we have carefully considered having a dog in school and sought advice from many sources, including other schools that successfully have a school dog and a reputable dog behaviourist.

Q Who is responsible for training?

A The dog owner will be the legal owner of the dog and as a result, will be responsible for its training. Appropriate professional training will be obtained and the dog will work towards being trained as a school dog through The Dog Mentor company.

Q How will the dog be toileted to ensure hygiene for all?

A In the interest of health and hygiene our school dog will be toileted when taken out for short walks in the grounds. Only staff members will clear this away appropriately leaving no trace on the ground, cleaning the area with disinfectant if needed. Our policy of no other dogs in the playground is still applicable as we are unable to put effective control measures in place that guarantee temperament and safety when children come into unsupervised contact with unknown dogs.

Q How will the dog's welfare be considered?

A The dog will be walked regularly and given free time outside. Parents will be able to give permission in advance to allow their child to be able to walk with a member of staff and the dog during that time. This will also be used as a behaviour reward, in line with our behaviour policy. The dog will be kept in the designated area and will only have planned and supervised contact with children and visitors. The dog will be carefully trained over a period of time and will have unlimited access to food and water. We will work carefully to ensure the dog's welfare is always considered.

Q How will this be managed where children have allergies?

A We already manage a number of 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. The breed of dog is known for minimal moulting, he is given a high quality food and regularly groomed to reduce any possibility of allergens.

Q My child is frightened of dogs; how will you manage this?

A Access to the dog is carefully managed and supervised and children do not need to have close contact with it unless permission for this has been given. 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