



**Botwell House Catholic  
Primary School  
Therapy Dog  
Proposal & Risk  
Assessment**

**1. Meet our School Therapy Dog ????**



## 2. Introduction

Research has shown many benefits to therapy and reading dogs in school settings. Botwell House would like to introduce the use of a therapy dog into the emotional well-being provision at school. This policy is designed to set out to students, parents and visitors the reasons for having a school dog at Botwell House (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. 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.

## 3. 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 Botwell House we hope that a dog will be a beneficial addition to the therapeutic offer, acting as an adjunct to the interventions already offer and promoting engagement for students who may have found it difficult to access talking therapies in the past.

Animal assisted therapy can:

- Teach empathy and [appropriate interpersonal skills](#);
- Help individuals [develop social skills](#);
- Be soothing and support the development of [rapport between the professional and client](#), and improve individual's skills to pick up social cues imperative to human relationships;
- Professionals can process that information and use it to [help clients see how their behaviour affects others](#);
- Therapy dogs have been shown to support emotional regulation through the positive impact on the autonomic nervous system
- A recent [report](#) highlighted children working with therapy dogs experienced increased motivation for learning, resulting in improved outcomes;
- Therapy dogs are being used to support children with [social and emotional](#) learning needs, which in turn can [assist](#) with [literacy development](#).
- [Research](#) into the effects of therapy dogs in schools is showing a

- range of benefits including:
- [Increase in school attendance](#);
  - [Gains in confidence](#);
  - Decreases in learner anxiety behaviours resulting in improved learning outcomes, such as [increases in reading](#) and [writing levels](#);
  - Positive changes towards learning and [improved motivation](#),
  - Enhanced relationships with peers and teachers due to experiencing trust and unconditional positive regard from a therapy dog. This in turn helps students learn how to [express their feelings](#) and enter into more trusting relationships.

### **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>

### **SEN 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 Benefits**

“There is emerging evidence to suggest that Animal Assisted Psychotherapy improves the efficacy of mental health treatments in self-selected adolescent populations via reductions in primary symptomatology, and via secondary factors that improve therapeutic processes and quality, such as engagement and retention”.

[Incorporating animal-assisted therapy in mental health treatments for adolescents: A systematic review of canine assisted psychotherapy](#)

## Behaviour benefits

“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%. In a controlled study, students were found to have fewer disciplinary referrals in schools with a dog than schools without. Students’ behaviour improved toward teachers, and students also showed more confidence and responsibility.”

## Training

The [DfE](#) doesn’t issue any school-specific guidance on keeping pets in schools. If you decide to get a school pet, then you'll have to abide by the [Animal Welfare Act 2006](#), which places a duty on animal owners to ensure their animal's welfare needs are met.

**Training that will be carried out:**

<https://www.therapydogtraining.co.uk/training>

## Cost implications for the school

- Training £100 (Approx)
  - Membership to the School Therapy Dog Association - £185 PA
  - Therapy Dog Liability Insurance - £170 PA (Approx)
- <https://www.cliverton.co.uk/policies/therapy-dog-insurance/>

## Risk Assessment

### Area: Interaction with pupils and staff

**Reason: To ensure the school dog interacts appropriately at all times**

<b>Step 1</b> Identify the hazards	<b>Step 2</b> Who might be harmed & how?	<b>Step 3</b> What are you already doing?	<b>Risk Rating</b> Trivial / low / medium / high / stop	<b>Step 4</b> Is anything further needed?
School dog biting a child or adult	Child or adult could be hurt if the school dog bites	The school dog is being trained not to bite. When the dog is approached in the correct way there is very limited danger. He lives with Mr Lathwell who handles him all the time to ensure that he is used to interaction with children	Low	Ensure that children and adults do not interact with the school dog without supervision. Ensure that all interaction with the school dog is completed in the agreed way
Jumping up / scratching	If the school dog becomes excited there is a danger that he could jump up and knock a child over or leave a scratch mark	The temperament of the dog and the agreed training programme has involved not jumping up with praise/rewards being given when successful. A letter will be sent home asking parents to sign and return the form if they were unwilling for their child to have contact with the school dog. Parents asked to explain their wishes to their child and ask them not to approach the dog if they do not want any contact	Medium	Ensure that children and adults do not interact with the school dog without supervision. The school dog will be under lead control by an authorized adult when people are interacting with him
Running loose	If the school dog was to run loose she could hurt children/adults or damage property	The school dog will be contained at all times either in an office (with a clear sign on the door), in a cage or on a lead	Low	Monitor that the equipment used to contain the school dog is appropriate and effective

<b>Step 1</b> Identify the hazards	<b>Step 2</b> Who might be harmed & how?	<b>Step 3</b> What are you already doing?	<b>Risk Rating</b> Trivial / low / medium / high / stop	<b>Step 4</b> Is anything further needed?
Direct interaction with children/ staff	If the school dog is allowed to interact when not in the correct frame of mind children/ staff could be scratched	No interaction is allowed without authorisation. Interaction will be cancelled if the school dog shows signs of incorrect behaviour. Rewards/praise will be given to reinforce the desired behaviour	Medium	Ensure that the dog is approached in the agreed manner
Destruction of materials	If allowed the school dog may chew/destroy some school materials/resources	The school dog will be contained at all times. The school dog will have his own toys to play with and normal school resources will be removed	Low	Monitor that the equipment used to contain the school dog is appropriate and effective

### Area: Pupils and staff interaction with the school dog

**Reason: To ensure the school dog is effectively supported to interact appropriately at all times**

<b>Step 1</b> Identify the hazards	<b>Step 2</b> Who might be harmed & how?	<b>Step 3</b> What are you already doing?	<b>Risk Rating</b> Trivial / low / medium / high / stop	<b>Step 4</b> Is anything further needed?
Incorrect / inconsistent interaction with dog	If a child/adult interact with the school dog in the incorrect or inconsistent way this will affect the school dogs training and have a negative impact on future interaction	Agreed expectations that must be followed at all times when interacting with the school dog. There cannot be any interaction with the school dog without authorisation	Medium	If there are any inconsistencies in approach with the school dog the adult/child will have the interaction stopped

<b>Step 1</b> Identify the hazards	<b>Step 2</b> Who might be harmed & how?	<b>Step 3</b> What are you already doing?	<b>Risk Rating</b> Trivial / low / medium / high / stop	<b>Step 4</b> Is anything further needed?
Use of rewards / treats	Children and adults could be harmed if the school dog is over excited when receiving a reward/treat. Children/adult must clean their hands after handling treats	Alcohol gel will be available to all adults (and children with written permission from parents). Treats will only be given to the school dog with authorisation	Low	Reminders to the children to wash hands / use alcohol gel after handling treats. Treats to be locked away to ensure they can only be used after authorisation
Pupil/staff knowledge of interaction with a puppy / dog	If adults and children have limited knowledge of how to interact correctly this could result in harm to the school dog or themselves	The Dog's Trust will be visiting each year group to conduct a 'Be Dog Smart' course with all of the children	Medium	There will be an agreed format for how to interact with the school

## Area: Hygiene / Health

**Reason: To ensure that pupils, staff and the school dog do not have an increased risk of illness as a result of the school dog being in school**

<b>Step 1</b> Identify the hazards	<b>Step 2</b> Who might be harmed & how?	<b>Step 3</b> What are you already doing?	<b>Risk Rating</b> Trivial / low / medium / high / stop	<b>Step 4</b> Is anything further needed?
Worms / fleas	If the school dog is not treated for worms there is a danger that germs can be transferred to humans	The school dog will be treated monthly at a local vets to ensure he is correctly treated for worms and fleas	Low	Monitor that vet visits happen promptly and take actions suggested by the vet
Faeces	If a child/adult come into contact with the school dog's faeces some germs could be transferred	The school dog will only be walked under supervision. No child will be asked to pick up the dog's faeces, this will always be undertaken by the adult in supervision	Low	If a child finds faeces on the School field/playground they will report it to an adult

<b>Step 1</b> Identify the hazards	<b>Step 2</b> Who might be harmed & how?	<b>Step 3</b> What are you already doing?	<b>Risk Rating</b> Trivial / low / medium / high / stop	<b>Step 4</b> Is anything further needed?
Allergies	If a child is allergic to dogs they could become unwell	Children will not be in contact with the school dog if we have received a negative response form from parents/guardians. If a child has an allergy the school dog will not carry out tasks near the child All of the school dog's resources will be locked away.	Medium	Remind children not to enter area
Children's access to school dog's resource	If a child has access to the school dog's treats/food and eats some they could become unwell	No child will be allowed to enter the school dog's area without authorisation	Low	
Contact with food preparation areas	If the school dog enters a food preparation area this could be unhygienic	The school dog will be in a contained area or on a lead at all times around school. He will never enter the school kitchen	Trivial	
Cleaning hands after interacting with the school dog	If hands are not cleaned children/adults could become unwell	All adults and children will clean their hands after interaction with the school dog	Low	Remind children and adults to clean their hands

## Area: Activities involving the school dog, including walking

**Reason: To ensure that the school dog has a meaningful and safe impact on the school community**

<b>Step 1</b> Identify the hazards	<b>Step 2</b> Who might be harmed & how?	<b>Step 3</b> What are you already doing?	<b>Risk Rating</b> Trivial / low / medium / high / stop	<b>Step 4</b> Is anything further needed?
Walking the dog on and off the site	Children could be harmed during a walk offsite if they are not focussed. Children might be harmed if they do not interact correctly when the school dog is on a walk	If the school dog is taken off site normal risk assessed procedure will take place. No children will take the lead when the school dog goes for a walk unless authorised to do so by accompanying adult. No children will be allowed to interact with the school dog when he is on a walk unless permission is given	Medium	Careful consideration needs to be given to the amount of time the school dog is allowed to walk around school during play/lunchtimes

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Visits to classroom	If the school dog visits a class and the children do not follow the correct procedure she may become over excited	The school dog will initially only make classroom visits with Mr Lathwell The children in classrooms will follow the agreed procedure or interaction will stop	Medium	Careful consideration will be given to when the school dog can visit classrooms and be under the control of the class teacher or teaching assistant
Being fed	If a child tries to interact when the school dog is eating she may respond aggressively	No child will be allowed in the school dog's contained area when he is eating. Children may prepare the food for the school dog (washing their hands afterwards). All feeding will be supervised	Low	Reminders to the children feeding the school dog to not interact when he is eating
School events	If the school dog is overwhelmed he may become aggressive or boisterous	The school dog will only attend school events if they are appropriate and he will be under the control of a supervising adult	Low	Monitor the school dog's reaction to school events. If the school events are too overwhelming the school dog might not attend school on that day
Other dogs (on and off the site)	If the school dog is overwhelmed she may become aggressive or boisterous	No other dogs will be allowed on the school premises At no time will the school dog be walked by a child and as a result if another dog is seen this will be dealt with by the supervising adult	Low	Monitor the school dog's reaction when out walking

## **School Dog Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) – to publish to parents**

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

**A** The legal owner of the dog will be Mr Lathwell . He will bear the costs associated with owning the dog; the school budget will support liability insurance and staff training costs only 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 to students' learning?**

**A** The dog will be kept in the SLT office area. The dog will only spend time in classrooms, support areas and the rest of the school at specific planned sessions and therefore the dog will not be a distraction to students during core lessons. 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.

### **Q Who is responsible for training?**

**A** Mr Lathwell will be the legal owner of the dog and as a result, will be responsible for his training. Appropriate professional training will be obtained and the dog will work towards being trained as a school dog in dog training classes with advice from the Pets As Therapy charity. The school will have the dog assessed and certified as a therapy dog by Pets As Therapy before he begins therapy and reading sessions.

### **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 outside the school by staff members.

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

A The dog will be kept in the SLTs office area. The office is separate from the classrooms / playground area which will ensure the school dog only comes into contact with children who are happy to have contact and have parental permission for this, under strict supervision of a trained member of staff.

The school dog will not be allowed into the main playground area unless she is on a lease and will only interact with children on the lease. Therefore, a student will not be forced to be in contact with dog at any time against their wiles. 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.

**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. The dog will be kept in the SLT office with its legal owner, Mr Lathwell, 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 appropriate 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 The dog is hypoallergenic, meaning that her fur causes fewer allergic reactions. 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.

