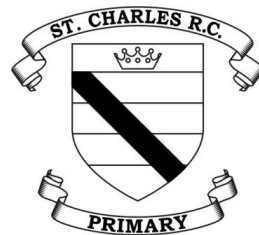


St Charles RC Primary School

Dog Handling Policy 2021-22



Our mission at St. Charles RC Primary School is to try and centre our life in Jesus Christ, the spiritual foundation of our community.

We aim to pass on the faith we share in partnership with you.

We want the children in our care to grow and develop to their full potential within a caring Catholic community which recognises fully their true worth and God given talents. We look forward to working with you in a spirit of mutual trust and support.

We take pride belonging to St. Charles RC Primary School.

MISSION STATEMENT

As a family of God, we love to learn and learn to love

1 Introduction

Research has shown many benefits to therapy and reading dogs in school settings. St Charles RC Primary 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 Charles (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 St Charles RC Primary we have a school dog to support our staff team in bringing all of these benefits to our students. St Charles' school dog will be trained as a therapy dog and certified by Pets as Therapy, as well as being trained as a reading dog through her 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>)

“Children who read to dogs are less likely to be embarrassed reading aloud and find the experience less stressful. Research has proved that children who read to dogs show an increase in reading levels, word recognition, and a higher desire to read and write.” - School Dog Policy – The White Horse Federation (<https://www.ridgewayschool.com/downloads/default/TWHF-School-Dog-Policy-V2.pdf>)

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

2.3 Attendance & punctuality benefits

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

2.4 Behaviour & rewards

“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%. 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. Students’ behaviour improved toward 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.” - Hazel Oak School Dog Policy (<https://hazel-oak.co.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2018/02/School-Dog-Policy.pdf>)

3 Principles

3.1 The Headteacher, Dr Clare Campbell, and Chair of Governors, Stuart O’Brien, and the Governing Board agree to a school dog (“Charley”) working in the school.

3.2 Charley is a Miniature Dachshund 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.

3.3 Charley’s legal owner is Dr Campbell. Dr Campbell has full responsibility for the welfare of the school dog and all expenses relating to pet insurance, food and other expenses and ensuring that the dog is vaccinated, wormed and flea treated.

3.4 Dr Campbell, the legal owner of the school dog, has produced a risk assessment which has been approved by the Safeguarding Lead and this will be reviewed annually.

3.5 The dog will be included in the fire evacuation procedure under the supervision of Dr Campbell or other trained staff members.

3.6 The school's liability insurance covers the school for risk related to a working dog on site. The School Business Manager has responsibility for ensuring this remains on the school's policy during Charley's time working at St Charles.

3.7 Staff, parents and students will be informed in writing that a dog will be in school.

3.8 Parents can indicate that their child is not allowed to be present during dog therapy sessions by phoning 01617944536 to inform the School office.

3.9 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 headteacher as soon as possible.

3.10 Charley will only have student therapy and reading sessions once certified as a therapy dog.

3.11 Only staff trained to handle the dog in student sessions will have permission to do so.

4 Code of Conduct

4.1.1 Staff Responsibilities Dr Campbell will know the whereabouts of the dog and which staff are supervising at all times.

4.1.2 If the dog is ill she will not be allowed into school. Dr Campbell has responsibility for ensuring appropriate alternative care for Charley if she is not able to be in the school on a given day.

4.1.3 Dr Campbell is responsible for ensuring Charley is trained and certified as a therapy dog.

4.1.4 Charley will be kept in the headteacher's office when not interacting with students for therapy or reading sessions. Charley will only visit designated therapy or reading lessons and not be allowed in other areas of the school.

4.1.5 Staff, visitors and children known to have allergic reactions to dogs must not go near Charley. The School Nurse keeps a list of all students and staff with a reported allergy to dogs (dander) and ensures that all trained handlers for Charley know who these students and staff are.

4.1.6 Staff leading therapy or reading sessions with Charley have a responsibility to ensure all staff, students or visitors present are happy for Charley to enter the room.

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

4.1.8 Students will be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dog before any interaction during a therapy sessions or visit.

4.1.9 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 should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment by the trained staff member handling her.

4.1.10 Any dog foul should be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately by the trained dog handling staff only.

4.1.11 St Charles RC Primary School 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 should be careful to stroke Charley on her body, chest, back and not by her face or top of head.

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

4.2.4 Students are not be allowed to play roughly with the dog.

4.2.5 Students must wait until the school dog is sitting or lying down before touching or stroking her.

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

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

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

Appendix A: Risk Assessment

Hazard	Who is affected/at risk	Risk rating (low, medium or high)	Actions/control measures	Person responsible
Bites and scratches	Staff, pupils and handlers	low	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Dogs must have a good temperament and be used to being around children	Clare Campbell

Hazard	Who is affected/at risk	Risk rating (low, medium or high)	Actions/control measures	Person responsible
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dogs must be well trained not to bite, scratch or jump up • Handler will remain with dog at all times • Children are taught how to approach and interact with the dog 	
Poor hygiene and health risks	Staff, pupils and handlers	low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All dogs that visit are vaccinated, wormed, and treated for fleas • All staff and pupils are required to wash their hands after contact with dogs • Handlers take dog off site to toilet and safely dispose of any waste • Dogs are not taken anywhere near food preparation areas 	Clare Campbell
Allergies	Staff and pupils	low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog breeds are low moulting • We seek parental permission for children to interact with dogs • Alternative activities are provided in a separate room for those with allergies 	Clare Campbell
Phobias	Staff and pupils	low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We tell parents and children about the dog in advance • Contact with dogs is optional • Alternative activities are provided in a separate room for those with a phobia 	Clare Campbell
Activities and games involving the dog	Staff, pupils, dogs and handlers	low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handler remains with dogs at all times • Handler speaks to school staff in advance and ensure the area and activity is safe 	Clare Campbell

Hazard	Who is affected/at risk	Risk rating (low, medium or high)	Actions/control measures	Person responsible
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We check with the handler and set a limit for the number of children who can interact with a dog at once • School staff remove children who misbehave or upset dogs • We set a time limit on activities as recommended by handlers, so dogs do not get tired 	
Children misbehaving	Pupils, dogs and handlers	low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are told in advance what to expect and how to behave • School staff are present at all time during the visit • School staff are ready to remove children who misbehave or upset dogs 	Clare Campbell
Damage caused to school materials, equipment and the school site	Dogs	low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dogs are kept in secured rooms, with closed doors • Handlers bring suitable toys if necessary • Areas/classrooms are cleared as much as possible before dogs visit 	Clare Campbell

Appendix B: 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 Dr Campbell. She 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 headteacher's office area. The dog will only spend time in classrooms at specific planned sessions where students can interact safely outside of lesson times and therefore the dog will not be a distraction to students during 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 Dr Campbell is the legal owner of the dog and as a result, will be responsible for her training. Appropriate professional training will be obtained and the dog will work towards being trained as a school dog in dog training classes. The school will have the dog assessed and certified as a therapy dog before she 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 headteacher's 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. Therefore a student will not be forced to be in contact with 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.

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 headteacher's office area with its legal owner, Dr Campbell, 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 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 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 school dog was specifically chosen for being a breed known for sociable dispositions and minimal moulting, she will be given a high quality food and regularly groomed to reduce any possibility of allergens.

Appendix C: Advice on School Dogs

The Dogs Trust – School Dogs <https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/help-advice/factsheets-downloads/school%20dogs.pdf>

The Kennel Club – Bark and Read <https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/barkandread>

BBC News – “Every school ‘needs dog as stress-buster’” <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-47655600>