Therapy Dog Policy

Name of School	Northern Federation
Date of Policy Review	01.11.2021
Date of Next Review	01.11.2024
Name of Executive Headteacher	Mr John Bailey

1. Introduction

Research has shown many benefits to therapy and reading dogs in school settings. Northern Federation 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 Northern Federation (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 (Appendix A - Risk Assessment).

Northern Federation recognises that there are educational benefits (both academic and emotional) of using dogs in the classroom. Northern Federation works to the standard Hampshire policy which does not allow dogs (except guide dogs) onto the school premises and this is still in place. However the school does make exceptions for named therapy / assistance dogs. It is the Head is Schools responsibility on both sites to ensure there is appropriate educational purpose when the dogs are housed in our School grounds.

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 developing empathy and nurturing skills.

Northern Federations school dog will be trained as a therapy dog and certified by Pets as Therapy when he is a year old, as well as being trained as a reading dog through his 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)

"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/)

'Therapy dogs have been found to reduce physiological symptoms of stress through lowering cortisol levels (8), increasing positive emotions (1, 9–13), promoting engagement in learning activities and positive attitudes toward learning (6, 11, 14, 15), reducing negative behaviours like task avoidance and aggression in the classroom (16–19), as well as encouraging prosocial behaviours and acting as a "social catalyst" to facilitate social interactions with others.' – (Grove et al. 2021)

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. Working practice

The Executive Headteacher has agreed to a school dog ('Ralph') working across the federation.

Ralph is an F1B Golden doodle 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. Ralph's legal owner is Mrs Morley. Mrs Morley will ensure that the dog is vaccinated and has regular flea and worm treatment.

A risk assessment has been produced for Ralph and approved by the schools safeguarding lead Mr Bailey (Executive headteacher). Ralph is now included in the fire evacuation procedure under the supervision of trained staff.

The schools' 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 Ralph's time working at Northern Federation.

Staff, parents and students will be informed in writing that a dog will be in school. Parents and carers can indicate that their child is not allowed to interact with the dog by returning the consent slip sent to all parents and included in the home school agreement.

When Ralph is working there will be visible sign to notify reception that this is the case so any visitors can be informed and concerns relayed to the staff member in charge of Ralph. Ralph's timetable will be displayed on the door of the Head of School office at both the infant and junior site so all staff members are aware of the dogs movements. Only staff trained to handle the dog in student sessions will have permission to do so.

4. Role of the dog

Northern Federation supports the use of dogs for the academic, social and emotional benefits they can bring to our children. They will be used in a variety of situations as discussed and agreed between the teacher and the dog owner. An example of the activities may include:

- Taking part in 1:1 reading work
- Supporting/motivating children during 1:1 sessions
- Providing comfort to a distressed child (fallen over at playtime, argument with friend etc.)
- Accompanying children to see visitors that they may find stressful (police, social workers, school nurse)
- Accompanying children outside if they can't take part in PE e.g. children with a broken arm can still walk the dog!
- A fun friend to play with for children struggling with social interactions
- A role model: sits quietly on the carpet, listens carefully, gentle and kind to everyone, eats healthy snacks, takes regular exercise, drinks water, waits their turn, shares.
- Providing opportunities for children to be responsible.
- A reward for good behavior/effort.
- Accompanying children to the library
- As part of the ELSA team supporting work on social skills and self-esteem or as the ultimate confidential friend
- During active academic based interventions

Our dog provides affection and comfort to children throughout the school. Ralph was chosen because of his temperament. He is friendly, patient, confident, at ease in all situations and gentle. He enjoys human contact and is content to be patted and handled, sometimes clumsily.

The dog will be introduced to children gently and slowly and all children are taught how to handle and look after the dogs properly during assemblies and small group sessions.

5. Roles and responsibilities

Staff responsibilities

Mrs Morley and Mrs Fullick will know the whereabouts of the dog and which staff are supervising at all times. This will be displayed on a timetable on the Head of School office door at each site. If the dog is ill he will not be allowed into school. Mrs Morley has responsibility for ensuring appropriate alternative care for Ralph if he is not able to be in the school on a given day. Mrs Morley is responsible for ensuring Ralph is trained and certified as a therapy dog by Pets As Therapy when he turns 1. Mrs Morley and Mrs Fullick are responsible for the training and integration of Ralph into the school community leading up to this point.

Ralph must be kept on a lead when moving between classrooms or on a walk and will be under the full control and supervision of a trained adult. Ralph will be kept in the Head of School office when not interacting with students for organised sessions. Staff, visitors and children known to have allergic reactions to dogs must not go near Ralph. The office keeps a list of all students and staff with a reported allergy to dogs (dander) and ensures that all trained adults for Ralph know who

these students and staff are. Staff handling Ralph have a responsibility to ensure all staff, students or visitors present are happy for Ralph to enter the room. Students must never be left alone with Ralph and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times.

Our school cares for and uses dogs and therefore will ensure that we afford them the following:

- Sufficient space for the normal behaviour and postural requirements of the species
- Proper ventilation, lighting and temperature control
- Clean drinking water
- A clean bed (regularly maintained and cleaned)
- A quiet area to go to where undue stress and disturbance are minimised (Head of school office Infant and Junior)

In the event of a fire or critical incident the dog would leave the building with the owner.

Pupil responsibilities

Students whose parents have withdrawn consent are not allowed to attend dog therapy sessions. Students should be careful to stroke Ralph on his body, chest, back and not by her face or top of head. When Ralph is sleeping or eating he must not be disturbed. Ralph will sit or lay down before he is allowed to be stroked or interacted with. Students understand that any deliberate violence or threatening behaviour towards Ralph will result in exclusion.

6. Risk Assessment

A full risk assessment has been undertaken and is available for anybody to view in the school office. The following minimum standards shall be in effect for dogs approved to be working in school.

- The dog will be clean, well-groomed and not smell offensive.
- The dog will be toileted in a specific area (not used for children – the far side of the car park) at the discretion of the owner and any resulting mess cleared up straight away.
- The dog will not annoy people or seek attention.
- The dog will not vocalise unnecessarily.
- The dog will not show aggression towards people or animals.
- The dog will not solicit or steal food (food will be stored appropriately in the classroom area).
- The dog will not pose a threat to children or school personnel.

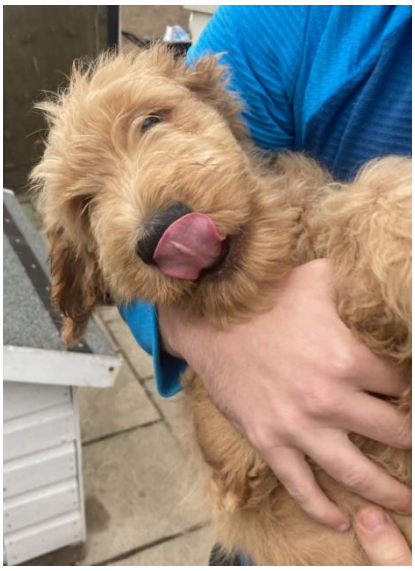
The dogs are owned by school staff and must meet the standards of health as prescribed by their vet at the owner's expense. The school bears no financial responsibility for the care or feeding of the animal. The school will however insure the dog for public liability and ensure that the dog has all that is necessary for a caring environment provided in school EG. Crate, bed etc.

The owner will provide:

- Proof of current vaccinations and the annual health document from a registered vet
- A visually clean dog with no evidence of ticks and fleas
- A visually healthy, alert and not grossly overweight/underweight dog

These requirements will be met on an annual basis, prior to the start of the school year. The Executive Headteacher shall notify parents on an annual basis regarding the use of therapy dogs in our building via our home school agreement.

The school dog - Ralph



Appendix A – School Dog Risk Assessment

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 Mrs Morley. She will bear the costs associated with owning the dog; the school budget will support liability insurance, resources for school use 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. The dogs mother is a registered therapy dog.

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 Mrs Morley will be 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 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 when he is 1 years old.

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. The dog will not be allowed in the main playground at any time.

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 Head of School'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 Head of school's office 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 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 with allergies 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, he will be given a high quality food and regularly groomed to reduce any possibility of allergens.