



Northumberland's P.R.U.

Therapy / Assistance Animal Policy 2024-25

Approved by the Headteacher, Mr R Carr	Date: 6th January 2025
Approved by the Management Committee	Date: 27th January 2025 (Chair)
Last Reviewed On:	January 2025
Next Review Due By:	January 2026

1 Introduction

Research has shown many benefits to therapy and reading dogs in school settings.

Northumberland PRU has two school dogs who work with our pupils to improve literacy and student behaviour and wellbeing. This policy is designed to set out to pupils, parents and visitors the reasons for having a school dog at Northumberland PRU.

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 pupils' reading skills, improve behaviour, attendance and academic confidence, as well as increasing pupil understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills. At Northumberland PRU we have two school dogs to support our staff team in bringing all of these benefits to our pupils.

Each of Northumberland PRU's school dogs will be trained as a therapy dog and certified by Pets as Therapy, as well as being trained as a reading dog through additional training.

2.1 Literacy benefits

“Reading to dogs has been proven to help pupil develop literacy skills and build confidence, through both the calming effect the dogs' presence has on pupils and the fact that the dog will listen to the pupil read without being judgemental or critical. This comforting environment helps to nurture pupils' enthusiasm for reading and provides them with the confidence needed to read aloud.

When dogs are in a room of pupils trying to read they become less stressed, less self-conscious and more confident because dogs are non-judgemental. If pupils 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.” Ref: SWA/DPD/JPD 1 Issue No: 01 (May 2021) 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 he 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://hazeloak.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.”

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

3 Therapy/Assistance Animals in Northumberland PRU Protocols

3.1 Aims:

Northumberland PRU hope that having dogs in school as therapy/assistance animals will support the pupils in the following:

- Presenting with regulated and safe behaviours
- Developing skills in empathy and compassion
- Taking responsibility for looking after and caring for an animal
- Accessing an additional strategy to help calm, avoid escalation and to de-escalate when in crisis when appropriate and safe
- Experiencing having a pet when this is not possible in the home environment

3.2 Protocols:

- The dogs must be on a lead when accessing communal areas
- The dogs will complete the appropriate training once they have reached the age to access training
- Dogs will not be directly involved in incidents involving physical restraint but may be on standby to support with recovery
- SLT will investigate any incidents where either staff, pupils or students or the dogs are hurt
- The Headteacher and Management Committee have the final decision about dogs being in school
- Dog owners must take responsibility for ensuring dogs are moved away from any staff or students who are uncomfortable around dogs
- Northumberland PRU is clear that staff electing to bring in their own animals from home to offer service in school, fully accept all risk and agree that Northumberland PRU cannot be held liable for any illness or injury to an animal

4 Code of Conduct

4.1 Staff Responsibilities

4.1.1 Mrs Ayre/Mr McCudden will know the whereabouts of the dogs and which staff are supervising at all times.

4.1.2 If the dog is ill they will not be allowed into school. Mrs Ayre/Mr McCudden have responsibility for ensuring appropriate alternative care for Dexter/Stanley if they are not able to be in the school on a given day.

4.1.3 Mrs Ayre/Mr McCudden are responsible for ensuring Dexter/Stanley are trained and certified as a therapy dog by Pets As Therapy (with support and finance from Northumberland PRU).

4.1.4 Dexter/Stanley 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.

4.1.5 Dexter/Stanley will be kept in the SLT (DSL)/Deputy Headteacher office when not interacting with students for therapy or reading sessions. Dexter/Stanley will only visit designated therapy or reading lessons and not be allowed in other areas of the school unless this is pre-planned.

4.1.6 Staff, visitors and pupils known to have allergic reactions to dogs must not go near Dexter/Stanley. The receptionist keeps a list of all students and staff with a reported allergy to dogs (dander) and ensures that all trained handlers for Dexter/Stanley know who these students and staff are.

4.1.7 Staff leading therapy or reading sessions with Dexter/Stanley have a responsibility to ensure all staff, pupils or visitors present are happy for Dexter/Stanley to enter the room.

4.1.8 Pupils must never be left alone with Dexter/Stanley 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.

4.1.10 If a dog is surrounded by a large number of pupils, 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, they should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment by the trained staff member handling her.

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

4.1.12 Northumberland PRU 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 Pupils whose parents have withdrawn consent are not allowed to attend dog therapy sessions.

4.2.2 Pupils should be careful to stroke Dexter/Stanley on their body, chest, back and not by their face or top of head.

4.2.3 Pupils are not allowed to approach Dexter/Stanley or disturb them whilst they are sleeping or eating.

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

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

4.2.6 Pupils are not allowed to eat during sessions with Dexter/Stanley.

4.2.7 Pupils must always wash their hands after handling / stroking Dexter/Stanley.

4.2.8 Pupils understand that any deliberate violence or threatening behaviour towards Dexter/Stanley will result in a fixed-term suspension.

Training to be completed:

Source: therapydogtraining.co.uk

Therapy Dog Workshop 1

How to deliver a safe and effective service- legal considerations, health and safety, insurance etc.

Therapy Dog Workshop 2

Looking out for your dog – the impact of the therapy environment on your dog’s health/wellbeing. Considerations and minimum standards.

Dexter		
Breed:	Poodle/Bischon/Sausage Dog	
Base:	Northumberland PRU	
Areas to be accessed:	All areas <i>(NB: Animals not able to access Cookery Room or Dining Hall)</i>	
Activities:	Emotional Regulation Support Break and lunch times Class-based visits Corridor de-escalation Lunch time walks with staff/pupils	
Safe space:	SLT (DSL) office / Deputy Headteacher office	
Planned days in school:	Monday, Wednesday & Friday	
Registered Vets:	St Clair’s Vet Blyth Northumberland NE24 3AE (T) 01670 457271	
Vaccinated: YES	Wormed: YES	Training Status: TBC

NB: Specific information relating to vet records for the dog will be provided by the owner on request.

Stanley		
Breed:	Miniature Cockapoo	
Base:	Northumberland PRU	
Areas to be accessed:	All areas <i>(NB: Animals not able to access Cookery Room or Dining Hall)</i>	
Activities:	Emotional Regulation Support Break and lunch times Class-based visits Corridor de-escalation Lunch time walks with staff/pupils	
Safe space:	SLT (DSL) office / Deputy Headteacher office	
Planned days in school:	Tuesday & Thursday	
Registered Vets:	Robson Prescott Veterinary Surgeons 74 Front Street East Bedlington Northumberland NE22 5AB (T) 01670 824745	
Vaccinated: YES	Wormed: YES	Training Status: TBC
NB: Specific information relating to vet records for the dog will be provided by the owner on request.		

Northumberland PRU – Therapy Animal Risk Assessment

Hazard	At risk			Existing Control measures
	Students	Staff	Visitors	
Animal behaviour				
				<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 The dog will receive ongoing formal training, socialising and conditioning within the school environment 2 The dog will be certified by 'Pets As Therapy' before/whilst commencing therapy and reading sessions 3 Pupils and parents are warned of the hazard before therapy sessions with

<p>Staff, pupils or visitors could be injured if the school dog is not comfortable in a specific school environment and reacts badly, including bites or scratches</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>the school dog and take part only with consent</p> <p>4 Students are taught appropriate behaviour around the school dog, what to do to prevent over stimulating or upsetting the dog and how to remain calm around her</p> <p>5 Students are closely supervised by an adult during dog therapy sessions</p> <p>6 Students are never left with the dog unsupervised</p> <p>7 The school dog will always be in the care of a responsible adult who will have received handling training</p> <p>8 If the school dog exhibits any warning behaviours such growling or lowered ears he will be removed immediately from students</p> <p>9 The school dog resides in the office of the Head and is not out in the school community outside of designated therapy, reading and reward sessions</p> <p>10 The dog will always be on a lead when he is out of the Heads office. Signage will indicate that pupils are only allowed in this area with staff supervision.</p> <p>11 In the event that a student, staff member or visitor is bitten or scratched (even if only a “play” bite) the School 1st aider will inspect and assess the injury. The suitability of the school dog will then be reassessed by the Head.</p>
<p>Disease, Illness &</p>				
<p>Allergic Reactions</p>				

<p>Staff, pupils or visitors could suffer ill health if they come into contact with animal faeces or urine or have an allergy to dogs</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Low</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 All immunisations are kept up to date in accordance with European Pet Passport scheme and Mrs Ayre/Mr McCudden are responsible for keeping a register of this. 2 Flea treatment is carried out at monthly intervals. Worming treatment is carried out compliant with European Vet guidelines, at 3 monthly intervals 3 The dog will not go in the school dining hall at meal times; he will not be permitted into the food preparation area of the kitchen or the cooking room. 4 The Receptionist keeps at all times an up-to-date list of students with known allergic reactions and these students are not present during therapy, reading or reward sessions with the dog 5 The dog is taken regularly outside the school building for toilet facilities by a designated member of staff trained to handle the school dog. 6 All waste produced by the dog, whether accidental or routine, is handled and disposed of hygienically by designated staff members only. Contaminated items and surfaces are immediately washed and disinfected. 7 Pupils and adults are not allowed to eat around the school dog. 8 Pupils and adults must always wash their hands after handling the school dog. 9 Immediate medical assistance will be sought where an allergic reaction does not subside once the animal and afflicted person are kept apart.
<p>Animal Phobias</p>				

Staff or students could suffer distress themselves or distress the school dog if they become scared or upset around the school dog	Medium	Low	Low	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All Students are encouraged but never forced to take part in dog therapy reading sessions. 2. Where there are pupils with phobias, every effort is made to segregate the school dog from those with phobias – this may mean moving a student to another room until a therapy session is over. 3. Outside of therapy or reading sessions the school dog is kept in the Heads- office and enters and exits the building outside or break and lesson changeover periods.
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				<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Therapy, reading and reward sessions will take place only in specific areas of the school (e.g. the library, Learning Support, Art terrace) where students can avoid contact with the dog if desired.
School emergency				
Evacuation (including drills). The dog could become distressed by the evacuation and behave in an unexpected way, e.g. become defensive or try to escape.	Medium	Medium	Low	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The school dog is accompanied by a trained adult at all times. In the event of an emergency evacuation, immediately proceed to the nearest fire exit and then the adult walks as far as possible from other people evacuating whilst maintaining a safe distance from the building. 2. Where possible, the school dog to be present for sounding of the alarms outside of school hours to observe their response. 3. If the dog manages to escape from an adult during the evacuation, the adult must still evacuate immediately and notify staff outside of the dog's absence.

Claim is made against school.				
A parent or visitor could make a claim against the school relating to the behaviour of the dog.	Low	High	Medium	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The school has public liability insurance which covers liability for a working therapy dog with certification. 2. The school dog will be assessed as a Pets As Therapy dog once her training and adolescence are completed prior to working in therapy sessions with students.