



School Therapy Dog

Policy

Introduction:

This policy is designed to set out to students, staff, parents and visitors the reasons for having a school dog and the rules and responsibilities to ensure the safety of students, staff, visitors and the school dog. While there is a risk in bringing a dog into the school environment, this can be mitigated against with a risk assessment to ensure the safety of all students, staff and visitors.

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's understanding of responsibility and developing empathy and nurturing skills.

Animal assisted therapy can:

- Teach empathy and interpersonal skills.
- Help pupils develop social skills
- Be soothing and support the development of social skills and relationship building
- Therapy dogs have been shown to support emotional regulation
- Therapy dogs are being used to support children with social and emotional learning needs which can in turn 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 learner outcomes
- 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 a pupil 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>

AEN Benefits:

'Therapy Dogs Nationwide dogs have also shown to help with children with additional needs by giving focus and providing a calming environment'.

Therapy Dogs Nationwide <https://www.tdn.org.uk/schools/>

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 pupils 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 showed more confidence and responsibility.

Hazel Oak School Dog Policy <https://hazel-oak.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/School-Dog-Policy.pdf>

Principles

The Board of Management has agreed to the presence of a therapy dog in Bunscoil Chríost Rí.

Only the school dog is allowed on the premises. No other dogs are permitted unless the Principal has approved their visit.

The Therapy dog is a Golden/Irish doodle. This cross bred has been selected for its temperament, reduced risk of congenital health issues and hypoallergenic, non shedding coat.

A risk assessment has been carried out and this will be reviewed annually:

- The dog will be included in the fire evacuation procedure under the supervision of trained staff members. The dog is covered by the school's Public Liability Insurance Policy.
- Staff, parents and students will be informed that a dog will be in school.
- Only staff trained to handle the dog will have permission to do so. Whilst in training, this will be limited to selected members of staff with prior agreement.

Code of Conduct:

1. Ms Annmarie Kane & Mr Daniel O'Connell will know the whereabouts of the dog and which staff are supervising at all times.
2. If the dog is ill, she will not be allowed into school.
3. Annmarie Kane is responsible for ensuring the training of the dog.
4. The therapy dog must be kept on a lead when moving around the school.
5. Pupils must never be left alone with the dog and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times. Pupils will be reminded of what is appropriate school behaviour before any interaction with the school therapy dog.
6. As our Therapy dog is a working dog in Bunscoil Chríost Rí, all staff and pupils will be reminded of not distracting the dog while it is working, supporting children or in training.

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 they monitor the situation. If the dog displays any warning signs such as growling or flattening of her ears then she should be immediately removed from that situation.
- Any dog foul should be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately.
- Records and anecdotal evidence of work and impact of the school dog will be maintained.

Pupil Responsibilities:

- Pupils should be careful to stroke(rub) the dog on her body, chest, back and not by her face or the top of her head.
- Pupils are not allowed to approach or disturb the dog while she is sleeping or eating.
- Pupils are not allowed to play roughly with the dog.
- Pupils must wait until the school dog is sitting or lying down before touching or stroking her.
- Pupils are only allowed to eat around the dog when she is crated securely.
- Pupils must always wash their hands before and after stroking or handling the dog.
- Pupils understand that any deliberate violence or threatening behaviour towards the dog will not be tolerated and will be addressed through the Code of Behaviour.

Review and Ratification

This policy has been ratified by the Board of Management of Bunscoil Chríost Rí in 2024 and will be reviewed annually or as the need arises.

Denis Bohane

Chairperson: _____

Date: 30th January 2024

Eir Fitzpatrick

Principal: _____

Date: 30th January 2024