

# Brunshaw Primary School

*'Inspiring  
resilient and  
learners,  
positive and  
community.'*



*children to be  
aspirational  
within a  
considerate*

## Therapy Dog Policy

April 2026

Agreed by Governors: **21<sup>st</sup> May 2026**

## **Therapy Dog Policy**

Brunshaw Primary School recognises the benefits that a trained therapy dog can bring to pupils, staff, and the wider school community. The therapy dog supports emotional wellbeing, mental health, and learning development. This policy sets out the framework for safely integrating a therapy dog into the school environment.

This policy applies to all pupils, staff, governors, volunteers, visitors and contractors when a therapy dog is present on school premises or involved in school activities.

### **1. Aims**

The aims of introducing a therapy dog are to:

- promote emotional wellbeing and reduce anxiety;
- support pupils with self-regulation and social communication;
- encourage positive behaviour and motivation;
- develop confidence in reading through supported reading sessions;
- provide a calm and nurturing intervention;
- enhance the inclusive ethos of the school.

### **2. Roles and Responsibilities**

#### **Headteacher**

- Approves the use of a therapy dog in school.
- Ensures suitable risk assessments are completed and reviewed.
- Ensures insurance arrangements are in place.
- Oversees implementation of this policy.

#### **Governing Body**

- Monitors implementation of the policy.
- Ensures leadership has considered health, safety and safeguarding requirements.
- Ensure that the school has a written policy for dogs in school.
- Has the right to refuse entry to the dog.
- Agrees that a school dog will benefit the children and staff of Brunshaw Primary School.

#### **Therapy Dog Handler**

- The dog will be owned by Mrs Cooper, Assistant Head Teacher.
- Maintains full control of the dog at all times.
- Ensures the dog is healthy, groomed, vaccinated and suitable for school work.
- Removes the dog immediately if signs of stress, illness or unsafe behaviour are observed.
- Keeps records of training, vaccinations and veterinary care.

#### **Staff**

- Follow this policy and associated risk assessments.
- Supervise pupils during planned interactions.
- Report concerns promptly.

The curriculum will support learning about dogs and how best to behave around our dog. This will include highlighting that not all dogs are well trained and that caution must be used around unknown dogs outside school.

### **3. Expectations of Children**

To ensure the safety and wellbeing of pupils and the therapy dog, children will be expected to follow clear guidance when interacting with the dog.

- Children must never be left alone with the dog and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times.
- Children will be explicitly taught about the dog and how to behave appropriately and care for the dog.
- Children should remain calm around the dog and avoid sudden movements.
- Children must not stare into the dog's eyes, put their face near the dog, or approach in a way that may appear threatening.
- Children should always approach the dog sensibly and whilst standing up unless directed otherwise by an adult.
- Children should never go near or disturb the dog when it is sleeping or eating.
- Children must not play roughly with the dog.
- Children must wait until the dog is sitting or lying down before touching or stroking the dog.
- Children should stroke the dog gently on the body, chest or back and avoid the face or top of the head.
- Children should not eat close to the dog.
- Children should always wash or sanitise their hands after handling the dog.
- Children will be reminded that dogs communicate through body language. If the dog shows signs of stress, fear or discomfort, the supervising adult will end the interaction and remove the dog if necessary.
- If the dog is surrounded by too many children, the supervising adult will manage the situation to ensure the dog remains calm and safe.

### **4. Selection and Welfare of the Dog**

The Therapy Dog is a Cockerpoo, chosen for its intelligence, friendly and playful nature, and suitability for working with children

The therapy dog must:

- have a calm, predictable temperament;
- be comfortable around children and normal school activity;
- be appropriately trained or assessed for therapy work;
- be fully vaccinated, wormed and flea treated as advised by a vet;
- be clean and well groomed before attending school;
- have access to water, rest breaks and a quiet space;
- not be forced into interactions;

The dog will not attend school when unwell, injured or showing signs of stress.

### **5. Risk Assessment and Safety**

A specific risk assessment will be completed before the dog attends school and reviewed regularly. This policy should be read in conjunction with Therapy Dog Risk Assessment.

Control measures will include:

- only the school dog being allowed on site unless a known therapy or assistance dog has prior Headteacher approval;
- the dog remaining with the handler at all times;
- use of a lead unless in a secure agreed space;
- supervised pupil interactions only;
- clear hygiene procedures before and after contact;
- consideration of allergies, phobias and medical needs;
- agreed routes and spaces within school;
- safe storage of food and equipment;
- immediate removal of the dog if risks increase.
- Hygiene and infection control

## **6. Consent and Inclusion**

Staff, parents and children will be informed by letter that a dog will be in school. A risk assessment will be in place and reviewed annually.

Parents/carers will be informed that the school has a therapy dog. Where pupils take part in planned regular sessions, parental consent will be sought.

Staff, visitors and children known to have allergic reactions to dogs must not go near the dog. Visitors will be informed on arrival, signage will be displayed and an information book will be provided.

No pupil will be required to interact with the dog. Reasonable adjustments will be made for pupils with allergies, fears, sensory needs or cultural considerations. Parents have the right to withdraw consent for their child to interact with the Therapy Dog and must make school aware of any allergies.

## **7. Safeguarding**

All therapy dog work will take place within normal safeguarding procedures. Children must never be left alone with the dog and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times. Pupils will remain supervised by school staff at all times. The therapy dog must never be used as a substitute for professional therapeutic or mental health services.

## **8. Managing Incidents**

Any incident involving injury, distress, aggressive behaviour, escape, damage or significant concern will be reported to the Headteacher immediately, recorded in line with school procedures and reviewed before further visits take place.

Parents/carers will be informed where their child is directly involved in an incident.

## **9. Insurance and Legal Considerations**

The school will ensure appropriate public liability insurance is in place and that the therapy dog arrangement complies with relevant health and safety, safeguarding, equality and data protection requirements.

The office will know the whereabouts of the dog and which staff are supervising at all times.

The dog will be included in the fire evacuation procedure under the supervision of Mrs Cooper or another member of SLT.

## **10. Monitoring and Review**

The impact of the therapy dog provision will be reviewed periodically, including feedback from pupils, staff and parents/carers. This policy will be reviewed annually or sooner if required.

## **11. Actions**

If someone reports having an issue with the dog, this information must be passed to the a member of SLT as soon as possible. All concerns will be responded to.

Teachers, staff, pupils, parents and visitors are required to abide by this policy.

## **Appendix 1 – Reasons to Have a Therapy Dog in School**

In summary, academic research has shown that dogs working and helping in the school environment can achieve the following:-

- Improve academic achievement
- Increase literacy skills
- Calming behaviours
- Increase social skills and self-esteem
- Increase confidence
- Teach responsibility and respect to all life
- Help prevent truancy
- Motivate children who are often less attentive

The following information has been taken from a range of sources to provide further detail about the benefits of having a dog in school:

### Behaviour:

In some schools, dogs are making a difference in the behaviour of pupils. 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.

### Regulating emotions:

Research and practice in educational settings suggest that therapy dogs can play a valuable role in supporting pupils to regulate their emotions and engage more successfully in school life. The presence of a calm, predictable and non-judgemental dog can help reduce anxiety, lower stress levels and create a sense of safety for children who may be dysregulated, overwhelmed or finding it difficult to manage strong feelings. Interactions with a therapy dog can support co-regulation alongside a trusted adult, helping pupils practise strategies such as breathing, grounding and calming routines. Evidence also indicates that therapy dogs may increase motivation, improve confidence and support positive engagement with learning, including reading activities where children often feel more relaxed reading aloud to a dog. Used appropriately, a therapy dog can therefore be a meaningful part of a wider pastoral and inclusion approach within school.

### Attendance:

Case study: 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. EDUCATION: Reading programmes with dogs are doing wonders for some students. Children who might be embarrassed to read aloud to the class or even adults are likely to be less scared to read to a dog. “It might be less stressful for a child to read aloud to a dog than to a teacher or a peer. After all, a dog won’t judge or correct you.” Dogs are used to encourage struggling readers to practise reading aloud. With the presence of a “calm and well-trained dog,” students find social support and peer interaction. Dogs are incredibly calm and happy to have student read to them or join a group of children in the library whilst they are having a book reading session. Dogs give unconditional acceptance, as they are non-judgmental, which is especially crucial to struggling, emerging readers. The dogs also provide confidence to children as they do not make fun of them when they read, but above all they make amazing listeners, providing the children with a sense of comfort and love. Research has proved that students who read to dogs show an increase in reading levels, word recognition, a higher desire to read and write, and an increase in intra and interpersonal skills among the students they mix with.

Development:

Dogs in school offer an opportunity for improving social development. They are especially useful for teaching students social skills and responsibility. Specifically, schools are using dogs to help older students build self-esteem; learn about positive and negative reinforcement, responsibility, and boundaries. Older students use dogs to help communicate, teach kindness, and empower students. With a dog in school, students have

the opportunity to learn how to care for the animal. This includes walking and grooming. Researchers report that involving students in the daily care of classroom dogs is a positive experience, promoting their own daily care. The students also learn about responsibility, caring, and sharing when helping each other take care of a dog at school.

As a Reward:

Dogs will be gentle and loving, but at the same time full of fun and enjoyment for the students. Those students who have performed incredibly well during the week or those who have made progress in a certain subject, or those who have achieved tasks set for them, will be rewarded with spending time during lunch or break to interact with these dogs. Walking, grooming, playing and training are some of the responsibilities students will be allowed to undertake. It has been proved that working and playing with a dog improves children’s social skills and self-esteem. Support Dogs can work with students on a one-one basis and will especially help those students who have been bullied, abused, going through upsetting/difficult times or even scared/phobic of dogs. The dog will bring much joy and help to all the students they meet and are happy to provide plenty of hugs to the students they are spending time with. Students who struggle with social interaction can find a reassuring friend in a dog.

References- <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8897139/>  
<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/veterinary-science/articles/10.3389/fvets.2021.655104/>  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.applanim.2026.106996>

## **APPENDIX 2 – School Dog Frequently Asked Questions**

**Q** Is there a risk in bringing a dog into a school environment?

Yes, although there are a variety of accidents which can happen in a school environment which far exceed the number of injuries or incidents caused by a dog. Therefore, it is just another risk that needs to be managed. Managing these risks have been outlined in the risk assessment.

Dogs are not allowed anywhere on the school site at any time unless specifically authorised by the Head Teacher. This includes drop off and collection times. This policy outlines measures put in place to allow the school dog to be present.

**Q Who is the legal owner of the dog?**

The legal owner of the dog will be Mrs Cooper

**Q Is the dog from a reputable breeder?**

Yes. The dog is from a home where both parents were seen and has been specifically chosen for its temperament.

**Q Where will the dog be kept?**

The dog will have a safe space to rest in the office areas (leadership/head teacher's office). School will ensure she only comes into contact with children who are happy to have contact and where no parent has withdrawn consent, under strict supervision. The dog will also have a space to spend time in rooms, the library and the school grounds where children can interact safely. The dog will also attend meetings with staff to support further socialisation, following consultation with staff beforehand.

**Q Has a risk assessment been undertaken?**

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 and a reputable dog behaviourist.

**Q Who is responsible for training?**

Mrs Cooper will be the legal owner of the dog and as a result, will be responsible for its training. Appropriate professional training will be obtained.

**Q How will the dog be toileted to ensure hygiene for all?**

In the interest of health and hygiene our school dog will be toileted when taken out for short walks in the grounds. Only staff members will clear this away appropriately leaving no trace on the ground, cleaning the area with disinfectant if needed. Our policy of no dogs in the playground is still applicable as we are unable to put effective control measures in place that guarantee temperament and safety when children come into unsupervised contact with unknown dogs.

**Q How will the dog's welfare be considered?**

The dog will be walked regularly and given free time outside. This will also be used as a behaviour reward, in line with our behaviour policy. The dog will be kept in the leadership/HT office 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 unlimited 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?**

Children will not need to touch the dog, 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 breed of dog is known for minimal moulting, he is given a high quality food and regularly groomed to reduce any possibility of allergens.

**Q My child is frightened of dogs; how will you manage this?**

Access to the dog is carefully managed and supervised and children do not need to have close contact with it unless permission for this has been given. 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

April 2026

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