THERAPY AND ASSISTANCE DOG POLICY

Supporting regulation. Enabling participation.
Protecting wellbeing and welfare.



RIVERSIDE BRIDGE SCHOOL

INSPIRE, EMPOWER, ACHIEVE

This policy forms part of the Riverside Bridge School Policy Framework
and should be read alongside any related policies, procedures and guidance.

RIVERSIDE BRIDGE SCHOOL
INSPIRE, EMPOWER, ACHIEVE

OUR COMMITMENT

At Riverside Bridge School, every policy reflects our commitment to creating a safe, inclusive and ambitious school community in which every pupil is valued, every voice matters and every family is respected and supported.

Our policies translate our values into consistent practice. They support high expectations, clear responsibilities, effective partnership and informed decision-making, ensuring that the needs, rights, wellbeing and future outcomes of our pupils remain at the heart of our work.

We work collaboratively, act with integrity and continually reflect upon and improve our practice to achieve the best possible outcomes for every pupil.

POLICY PRINCIPLES

Our Policy Principles underpin how we work together and guide the decisions and actions we take to support every pupil and their families.



POLICY PURPOSE & FRAMEWORK

Riverside Bridge School policies set out the expectations, responsibilities and approaches that support safe, consistent and high-quality practice across the school. They translate our values, statutory responsibilities and professional expectations into clear guidance for everyday decision-making and practice.

Each policy forms part of the Riverside Bridge School Policy Framework and should be read alongside any related policies, procedures, statutory guidance and school frameworks referenced within the document.

Policies apply to the members of the school community identified within each document, including staff, governors, parents and carers, volunteers, contractors and other professionals where relevant. Everyone is expected to understand and apply the requirements appropriate to their role and to seek further guidance where clarification is required.

CURRICULUM DRIVERS



Our Drivers provide a shared golden thread across curriculum, school life, policy and leadership, helping ensure that our decisions and practice remain focused on the experiences and futures we want for every pupil.

STATEMENT OF INTENT

This policy sets out Riverside Bridge School's approach to the safe, purposeful and inclusive use of its trained therapy and assistance dogs as part of the school's wider provision for pupils.

Riverside Bridge School recognises that carefully planned interaction with a trained school dog can provide meaningful opportunities to support pupils' communication, emotional regulation, confidence, engagement, social interaction, independence and sense of belonging.

As a specialist school for pupils with complex SEND, Riverside Bridge School recognises that pupils may experience and communicate interaction with animals in very different ways. Pupils may have sensory, physical, medical, communication, social, emotional or behavioural needs that affect whether interaction with a school dog is appropriate and how this should be organised.

The school will therefore never assume that interaction with a dog is beneficial or appropriate simply because another pupil enjoys or benefits from it. Participation will be individually considered, carefully planned and responsive to each pupil's communication, presentation and needs.

An approved school dog may support planned educational, developmental, pastoral and wellbeing activities, including individual or small-group sessions, supported classroom visits, communication and interaction activities, emotional regulation and wellbeing work, familiarisation, assemblies and appropriately planned community activities.

The school recognises that the term "assistance dog" has a particular meaning in relation to disabled people and Equality Act access rights. For the purposes of this policy, the term "therapy and assistance dog" describes elements of the trained role undertaken by an approved school dog within Riverside Bridge School. It does not mean that a school dog is an assistance dog allocated to an individual disabled person. Nothing within this policy limits or replaces the rights of a pupil, employee or visitor who uses their own assistance dog. Any such access requirement will be considered individually under the Equality Act 2010 and the school's reasonable-adjustment arrangements.

The presence of a school dog does not replace teaching, professional assessment, clinical therapy, medical intervention or appropriately trained staff. Activities involving a school dog will remain within the competence and role of the adults involved.

The school also recognises that every approved school dog is a sentient animal whose physical and emotional welfare must be protected. Educational or wellbeing benefit to pupils will never justify exposing a dog to avoidable fear, distress, exhaustion, pain or harm.

Our responsibilities to pupils, families, staff and school dogs

Riverside Bridge School will ensure that every approved school dog is appropriately trained, authorised, insured, risk assessed, supervised and monitored. The school will ensure that pupils are able to participate or withdraw without disadvantage, that their communication is respected and that parent/carer information and relevant medical, allergy, cultural, religious and individual needs are considered appropriately.

Appropriate safeguards will be maintained in relation to supervision, handling, hygiene, infection prevention, safeguarding, reasonable adjustments, emergency response, record-keeping and animal welfare.

Each approved school dog will have an individual operational record setting out dog-specific information, including training, handler arrangements, health and veterinary information, insurance requirements, working restrictions and welfare arrangements.

Through this policy, Riverside Bridge School will use trained school dogs purposefully and proportionately, supporting pupils' participation and wellbeing while protecting the safety, dignity, choice and welfare of everyone involved.

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APPROVED BY: Governing Board

APPROVED ON: September 2026

REVIEWED DUE ON: September 2027

Section 01

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Establishing purpose. Defining boundaries. Protecting safe participation.

This policy establishes the governance, safeguarding, health and safety and animal-welfare framework for the use of trained therapy and assistance dogs at Riverside Bridge School. It applies to any dog formally approved by the Headteacher to undertake a recognised role within the school.

The policy applies whenever an approved school dog is on school premises or participating in an authorised school activity. This includes direct work with pupils, classroom activity, pastoral or wellbeing work, assemblies, events, educational visits and appropriately planned community activity. It applies to employees, agency staff, volunteers, pupils, visitors and contractors where their work or presence may bring them into contact with an approved school dog.

This is an enduring policy and does not contain the changing operational details of individual dogs. Each approved dog will instead have an individual operational record containing relevant information about its identity, training, handlers, veterinary care, insurance, working arrangements, welfare requirements and any dog-specific restrictions. Current parent/carer communications, withdrawal information, checklists and recording forms will also be maintained operationally.

This separation ensures that Riverside Bridge School can approve additional appropriately trained dogs in the future without requiring the governing policy to be rewritten, whilst maintaining clear accountability for each individual animal.

Section 02

LEGAL AND PROFESSIONAL FRAMEWORK

Meeting duties. Managing risk. Respecting rights.

Riverside Bridge School will manage its therapy and assistance dog programme within the relevant legal and professional framework. This includes the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, Animal Welfare Act 2006, Equality Act 2010, Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR and, where applicable, the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013.

The school will also have regard to current statutory safeguarding requirements, including Keeping Children Safe in Education, Department for Education health and safety guidance, relevant Equality Act guidance and UK Health Security Agency guidance concerning health protection and infection prevention within education settings.

The school has responsibilities towards employees and towards pupils, visitors and others who may be affected by school activities. The presence and use of school dogs will therefore be subject to suitable and sufficient risk assessment. Risk will be managed proportionately: the school will not assume that risk is negligible because a dog is trained, but neither will it impose unnecessary restrictions simply because an animal is present.

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 is equally important to the operation of this policy. Each approved school dog must have its welfare needs appropriately met, including its need for a suitable environment and diet, the ability to exhibit normal behaviour, appropriate companionship or separation and protection from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

The Equality Act 2010 requires the school to avoid unlawful discrimination and make reasonable adjustments where required. The school will therefore consider the needs of pupils, employees and visitors who cannot safely or comfortably be around a school dog, as well as the rights of a disabled person who uses their own assistance dog.

Section 03

STATUS AND ROLE OF AN APPROVED SCHOOL DOG

Defining the role. Maintaining boundaries. Using dogs purposefully.

Riverside Bridge School may approve one or more trained therapy and assistance dogs to undertake a school role where the Headteacher is satisfied that the individual dog, its training, handler arrangements, insurance, welfare arrangements and associated risk controls are appropriate.

Approval applies to an individual dog. The approval of one dog does not automatically permit another dog to undertake the same role. Before any additional dog begins working within the school, the same approval, risk-management, training and welfare requirements established by this policy will apply.

Each approved dog will have an individual operational record containing its name, breed, relevant training history and provider, primary handler, any authorised additional handlers, veterinary information, insurance arrangements, designated school base and rest area and any restrictions or controls specific to that animal.

An approved school dog may contribute to communication and interaction, emotional regulation, confidence, engagement, social development, wellbeing, independence and participation in learning. Dogs may also support appropriate familiarisation with animals and carefully planned school or community activities. Their involvement must always have an identifiable educational, developmental, pastoral or wellbeing purpose.

A school dog will not be used simply for novelty or entertainment where there is no meaningful purpose to its involvement.

Professional and clinical boundaries

The presence of a trained dog can complement Riverside Bridge School's wider provision, but it does not make an activity a clinical therapy. School dog activity must not be represented as replacing occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, psychological support, medical treatment, professional assessment or other specialist intervention.

Where a school dog is involved alongside a clinical or therapeutic professional, the activity must remain within the competence, professional responsibilities and agreed plans of those involved. Claims about therapeutic or medical benefits will not exceed the dog's training, the competence of the adults involved or the evidence available.

Assistance dog distinction

Within this policy, “assistance” describes elements of the trained role undertaken by an approved Riverside Bridge School dog. It does not mean that the school dog is an assistance dog allocated to an individual disabled person.

Where a pupil, employee or visitor uses their own assistance dog, their access requirements will be considered independently through the school’s equality and reasonable-adjustment arrangements. The presence of an approved school dog will not in itself justify restricting another assistance dog.

Where two dogs may be present, Riverside Bridge School will plan appropriately for routes, timing, space, separation, handler requirements and the welfare of both animals while seeking to preserve the disabled person’s appropriate access.

Section 04

PRINCIPLES

Protecting choice. Planning purposefully. Responding to individual need.

All school dog activity will be based on the principle that participation must be purposeful, voluntary and appropriate to the individual pupil.

An interaction should have an identifiable educational, developmental, pastoral or wellbeing rationale and the anticipated benefit should be proportionate to the risks and demands placed upon both the pupil and the dog.

No pupil will be required to approach, touch, feed or work with a school dog. A pupil will not be disadvantaged, sanctioned or unnecessarily excluded from learning because they do not wish to interact with a dog or because an allergy, medical condition, fear, cultural or religious consideration means that direct interaction is inappropriate.

Riverside Bridge School recognises that spoken language is only one means through which a pupil may communicate their wishes. Staff will consider speech, signing, symbols, communication devices, facial expression, body language, movement, behaviour and changes in regulation when determining whether a pupil wishes to participate.

Turning away, retreating, becoming distressed or dysregulated, saying or signing “no”, using an agreed symbol or otherwise communicating discomfort will be treated as meaningful withdrawal of assent. Parent/carer agreement does not override the pupil’s own communication at the point of interaction.

The dog’s communication must be respected in the same way. Movement away, avoidance, freezing, hiding, changes in posture, repeated stress behaviours, growling or attempts to leave will be treated as meaningful indicators that the interaction may need to change or stop.

Risk assessment is therefore dynamic. An authorised handler may modify, postpone or terminate an activity immediately where the pupil or dog is no longer comfortable or where the environment becomes unsafe. No additional permission is required before the handler stops an activity.

Section 05

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Establishing accountability. Supporting safe practice. Protecting welfare.

The Governing Board provides strategic oversight of the school's therapy and assistance dog arrangements. It will approve or ratify this policy in accordance with the school's governance arrangements and hold the Headteacher to account for its effective implementation.

The Board will seek appropriate assurance that risks are being managed, appropriate resources and insurance arrangements are in place, significant incidents are reviewed and the welfare of both pupils and school dogs is being protected. It will not routinely become involved in the management of individual activities or day-to-day handling arrangements.

The Headteacher has overall accountability for authorising the use of therapy and assistance dogs within Riverside Bridge School. No dog may undertake a school role until the Headteacher is satisfied that appropriate training, handler competence, insurance, risk assessment, health, welfare and emergency arrangements are in place.

The Headteacher may place conditions on an individual dog's role and may suspend or withdraw authorisation where there is a concern about safety, suitability, welfare or compliance with this policy. Significant incidents will be reviewed by the Headteacher and specialist advice obtained where appropriate.

The School Dog Lead and Master Handler will be identified for each approved dog and may also act as its primary handler. The School Dog Lead is responsible for the day-to-day oversight of that dog's role within school.

This includes maintaining operational records, monitoring training and handler competence, ensuring relevant health and welfare information remains current, planning workload and rest and reviewing whether the dog is fit and willing to work. The School Dog Lead will ensure that relevant pupil information is considered before planned direct work and that the environment is suitable.

The School Dog Lead is also responsible for ensuring that incidents, near misses and welfare concerns are recorded and escalated appropriately and that changes in risk are reviewed promptly. They will liaise with the Headteacher, families, staff, veterinary professionals and relevant training professionals as necessary.

Only adults authorised by the Headteacher and assessed as competent handlers may take responsibility for an approved school dog. Handlers must follow the current risk assessment, dog-specific arrangements and any instructions established by the School Dog Lead.
The authorised handler has immediate responsibility for the dog during an activity and has authority to modify or stop an interaction whenever safety or welfare requires this.
Pupils will not be made responsible for controlling a dog. A pupil may hold or share a lead only where this forms part of a specifically planned and directly supervised activity and the individual risks have been considered.

All staff have a responsibility to support the safe implementation of this policy. They must follow handler instructions and relevant risk assessments, respect dog-free areas and not summon, feed, handle, photograph or move an approved dog without appropriate permission.
Staff must report hazards, allergies, significant fears, changes in pupil presentation, incidents and welfare concerns promptly. They must also support pupils to use their usual communication systems and ensure that interaction with a school dog never becomes an expectation for participation in learning.

Parents and carers are expected to provide the school with relevant information that may affect safe participation. This may include allergies, asthma, immune compromise, medical needs, significant fears or phobias, cultural or religious considerations or previous adverse experiences involving dogs.
This information will be considered alongside the pupil's own communication and presentation when deciding whether and how interaction should take place. Parents and carers may request that their child does not interact directly with a school dog and may amend that decision at any time.

Section 06

APPROVAL, INSURANCE AND READINESS TO ATTEND

Checking suitability. Maintaining assurance. Preventing avoidable risk.

No dog will begin working within Riverside Bridge School until the Headteacher is satisfied that the necessary arrangements are in place.

Each approved dog must have an appropriate risk assessment, documented training and handler arrangements, veterinary registration, microchip and emergency information, suitable health and grooming arrangements and appropriate vaccination and parasite-control arrangements based on veterinary advice. A suitable rest space, toileting arrangements and emergency arrangements must also be identified.

Each approved dog will have a confidential operational record containing the relevant evidence and current information. The record must remain sufficiently current to allow the School Dog Lead and Headteacher to determine that the dog continues to be suitable for its role.

The Headteacher will ensure that responsibility is allocated for notifying relevant insurers of the school dog programme and confirming that appropriate public and employer liability cover is in place. Any conditions imposed by the insurer will be reflected in the risk assessment and operational arrangements.

Responsibility for routine and exceptional costs, including training, equipment, food, veterinary care and transport, will be agreed through appropriate school arrangements. No expenditure will be committed on behalf of the school without appropriate authorisation.

Fitness to attend and work

Readiness to work will be considered each time an approved dog attends school. A previous assessment of suitability does not mean that the dog is automatically fit to work on every occasion.

A school dog will not undertake work if it is unwell, injured, affected by a contagious condition, excessively tired or distressed, showing a significant unexplained change in behaviour or receiving treatment that makes participation inappropriate. Environmental conditions, including heat, cold, noise and the intensity of planned activities, will also be considered.

The School Dog Lead or Headteacher may suspend activity while veterinary, training or other specialist advice is obtained.

Section 07

ACCESS, CHOICE AND REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

Respecting choice. Removing disadvantage. Planning individual access.

Families will receive clear information about Riverside Bridge School's use of trained therapy and assistance dogs. This will explain their role, the types of interaction that may take place, how activities are supervised, how safety and hygiene are managed and how families can raise an allergy, medical concern, fear, cultural or religious consideration or request that their child does not participate in direct interaction.

For ordinary school dog activity, Riverside Bridge School operates a notification and right-to-withdraw arrangement in relation to planned direct interaction with a school dog. Current parent/carer communications and withdrawal arrangements will be maintained as operational documents rather than permanent appendices to this policy.

A current record of known withdrawals, allergies and agreed adjustments will be maintained. Relevant staff must check this information before arranging direct contact. A parent/carer may amend their decision at any time and a withdrawal will remain in effect until the school is told otherwise.

Where direct interaction has been withdrawn or is not appropriate, the pupil will be provided with an appropriate alternative and will not be disadvantaged.

Where a proposed activity is significantly more intensive, unusual or individually targeted than ordinary interaction, the school may seek specific parent/carer agreement before it takes place.

Pupil assent

Parent/carer permission or non-withdrawal does not override the pupil's own choice.

The pupil's assent will be considered at every interaction. Where a pupil turns away, retreats, avoids the dog, becomes distressed or dysregulated, says or signs "no", uses an agreed symbol or otherwise communicates that they do not wish to participate, staff will respect this and will not press the pupil to continue.

For pupils who do not use spoken language, body language, movement, facial expression and changes in regulation will be recognised as meaningful communication of assent or withdrawal.

Allergies, fears and other individual needs

Known allergies, asthma, immune compromise, significant fears and relevant cultural or religious considerations will be assessed individually and sensitively. The response will depend on the needs of the individual rather than automatically excluding either the pupil or dog.

Reasonable controls may include changes to timing or location, increased distance, dog-free routes or rooms, additional cleaning or ventilation, handwashing arrangements, reduced duration, carefully planned familiarisation or provision of an alternative activity.

The school cannot guarantee that the entire school environment will be completely free from dog allergen. It will instead identify reasonable and proportionate controls and review whether those controls are effective.

Dog-free areas

Approved school dogs will not enter kitchens, food-preparation areas or food-storage areas. They will not routinely enter toilets, changing areas or rooms designated dog-free because of an individual need.

Dining or food-serving areas will only be used outside food service where the risk assessment, hygiene requirements and individual needs allow this.

Section 08

SAFEGUARDING AND SUPERVISION

Maintaining oversight. Recognising vulnerability. Safeguarding everyone.

An approved school dog will never be left alone with a pupil. An authorised adult handler will remain responsible for the dog throughout direct interaction, and activities will take place in an appropriately observable environment consistent with the school's safeguarding and safer-working expectations.

Before planned direct work, staff will consider the information necessary to understand the pupil and the foreseeable risks. Depending on the individual, this may include their communication profile, medical information, healthcare plan, sensory and regulation needs, individual risk assessment and Positive Support arrangements.

Particular care will be taken where a pupil may grab, strike, kick, squeeze, chase, feed, corner or otherwise interact unpredictably with a dog. This does not automatically prevent participation. Staff should first consider whether changes to staffing, distance, duration, physical environment or the nature of the activity can reduce the risk to an acceptable level. Where this cannot be achieved, the activity will not proceed.

A school dog must never be used to restrain, block, herd, pursue or compel a pupil and must not form part of a restrictive physical intervention.

Any safeguarding disclosure or concern arising during school dog activity will be recorded and reported through the school's normal safeguarding procedures without delay.

Photography and video will be managed through Riverside Bridge School's existing consent, data-protection and communication arrangements. The fact that an activity involving a dog may be positive or suitable for publicity does not override these requirements.

Section 09

RISK ASSESSMENT AND SAFE INTERACTION

Anticipating hazards. Teaching safe interaction. Responding dynamically.

Riverside Bridge School will maintain an overarching risk assessment for its therapy and assistance dog programme, supplemented by dog-specific, pupil-specific or activity-specific assessment where this is required.

Assessment will consider foreseeable hazards such as bites, scratches, mouthing, jumping, trips, collisions, allergies, infection, fear or distress, resource guarding, escape or loss of control, unpredictable interaction, sensory overload, environmental hazards, interaction with other animals and risks to the dog's own welfare.

The risk assessment will be reviewed at least annually and sooner following an accident, significant near miss, welfare concern, significant change in a dog's health or behaviour, change of handler, material change to the environment or working arrangements, or relevant professional advice.

Safe interaction

Pupils will be taught how to interact safely before direct contact takes place. Teaching must be accessible to the pupil and may therefore use spoken language, signing, symbols, modelling, social narratives, objects, visual sequences or the pupil's individual communication system.

The core expectations are simple: pupils should wait for handler permission, approach calmly, use gentle touch where directed, avoid the dog's face, leave the dog a clear route to move away, avoid disturbing a dog while eating, drinking, toileting, sleeping or resting, and stop immediately when the handler asks or when the dog moves away.

Pupils must not hug, climb on, ride, corner, chase, poke or pull a dog, and they must not remove food, toys or other objects from a dog's mouth.

Where a dog becomes over-excited, repeatedly jumps or mouths, barks persistently, guards an item, avoids interaction or displays signs of stress, the handler will create distance and modify or terminate the activity. Behaviour will not be minimised because the dog is familiar, trained or normally calm.

Section 10

HEALTH, HYGIENE AND INFECTION PREVENTION

Reducing infection. Maintaining hygiene. Protecting health.

Appropriate infection-prevention arrangements will apply whenever an approved school dog is present. Particular attention will be given to hand hygiene, safe management of dog equipment and food, toileting and waste, environmental contamination and the needs of pupils who may be at increased risk of infection.

Hands must be washed with liquid soap and running water after touching a school dog or its equipment, bedding, food, treats or waste, and before eating or handling food following animal contact. Hand sanitiser will not routinely be treated as a substitute for appropriate handwashing following animal contact.

Pupils must not allow a dog to lick their face or broken skin and must not share food, utensils or drinking vessels with a dog. Cuts and grazes should be appropriately covered before direct interaction, and additional controls will be considered for pupils who are immunocompromised or otherwise at increased risk.

Only an authorised adult will routinely provide food or treats. A pupil may give a treat where this forms part of a specifically planned and closely supervised activity.
Dog bowls, bedding, leads, toys and grooming equipment will be stored and cleaned appropriately and separately from human food-preparation arrangements. Dog equipment must not be cleaned in food-preparation sinks.

Approved dogs will toilet in designated areas away from pupil play and main access routes wherever reasonably practicable. Waste will be removed promptly and hygienically. Where a dog vomits, has diarrhoea, urinates indoors or otherwise contaminates an area, pupils will be kept away until appropriate cleaning and disinfection have taken place.

Each approved dog will be appropriately groomed and maintained. Concerns such as parasites, skin conditions or other health issues that may increase risk will be addressed before direct work continues where necessary.

Section 11

SCHOOL DOG WELFARE AND WORKLOAD

Recognising need. Preventing distress. Protecting animal welfare.

The welfare of every approved school dog is a fundamental condition of the programme and carries equal importance alongside the safety and wellbeing of pupils and adults.

In accordance with the Animal Welfare Act 2006, Riverside Bridge School will ensure that each dog has a suitable environment and diet, opportunities to display normal behaviour, appropriate companionship or separation and protection from pain, injury, suffering and disease.

Each dog will have continuous access to fresh water, regular opportunities for toileting and appropriate exercise, planned periods of rest and opportunities for calm decompression. A secure, comfortable and pupil-free rest area will be provided. Pupils, staff and visitors must not disturb a dog in this area except where access by the handler is required or in an emergency.

A dog's workload will be planned rather than determined by demand for sessions. The School Dog Lead will consider the individual dog's age, health, fatigue, frequency and intensity of activities, travel, environmental temperature, noise, crowds and opportunities for rest. Veterinary and training advice will be taken into account where appropriate.

No school dog will be expected to work in unsafe heat or cold, around hazardous substances, within excessive noise or uncontrolled crowds, or in any environment that the handler considers unsuitable.

Recognising stress

Handlers and relevant staff must remain alert to signs that a dog is uncomfortable or becoming stressed. These may include repeated yawning or lip licking, turning away, hiding, freezing, changes in posture, persistent panting, pacing, shaking, growling or attempts to leave.

These signs will be treated as communication rather than disobedience. Demands will be reduced and the dog will be given space or removed from the activity.

Growling or other warning behaviour will never be punished. It will trigger an immediate safety and welfare response and, where appropriate, a review of the activity or risk assessment.

No school dog has an obligation to complete a session. The authorised handler's decision to stop an activity on safety or welfare grounds is final.

Section 12

INCIDENTS, EMERGENCIES AND REPORTING

Responding promptly. Recording accurately. Reviewing controls.

Any accident, near miss, allergic reaction, loss of control or welfare concern involving a school dog will be treated seriously. The immediate priority will be to protect the pupil, other people and the dog, provide any necessary first aid or emergency assistance and prevent further harm.

Bite, scratch, collision or other injury

Where an injury occurs, the dog and person involved will be calmly separated and the immediate environment made safe. Appropriate first aid will be provided and medical or emergency assistance sought where required.

The Headteacher will be informed and the pupil's parent/carer notified as appropriate. The incident will be recorded through the school's accident or incident arrangements, including factual information about the circumstances, supervision, what happened immediately beforehand, the injury or impact and action taken.

The school will consider whether safeguarding, veterinary, insurance, local authority or statutory reporting requirements apply. Direct-contact work may be suspended while the incident is investigated, the risk assessment reviewed and specialist advice obtained.

Allergic or medical reaction

Where a pupil experiences an allergic or other medical reaction, staff will follow the pupil's Individual Healthcare Plan and the school's first-aid and emergency procedures. Exposure will be removed where safe, medical assistance obtained where necessary and parents/carers informed. Controls will be reviewed before further interaction.

Escape or loss of control

Pupils must not chase a dog that escapes or moves out of the handler's control. The authorised handler will follow the agreed recall and containment arrangements while other staff prioritise pupil safety and secure relevant access points.

The event will be recorded as an incident or near miss and the circumstances reviewed before normal activity resumes.

Fire, evacuation, lockdown and invacuation

Emergency arrangements for each approved school dog will form part of its operational plan. During evacuation, an authorised handler will take responsibility for the dog without delaying the evacuation or safety of pupils. A suitable deputy arrangement will be identified wherever practicable.

Lockdown and invacuation arrangements will identify a safe location for the dog without compromising safeguarding or site security.

Welfare concerns

Any concern that a school dog is unwell, being mistreated, overworked, handled inappropriately or presenting a new risk must be reported promptly to the School Dog Lead and Headteacher.

Where a concern relates to an adult's conduct, safeguarding or staff-conduct procedures will also be followed where appropriate.

Section 13

TRAINING AND COMMUNICATION

Developing competence. Building understanding. Communicating clearly.

Authorised handlers will receive suitable training and continuing support appropriate to the individual dog's working role. Handler competence will include safe handling, understanding canine behaviour and stress signals, management of pupil interaction, hygiene, emergency arrangements and recognition of when an activity should be modified or stopped.

Staff are not expected to become dog handlers. They do, however, need sufficient understanding to work safely in an environment in which approved school dogs may be present. Staff information and training will therefore be proportionate to their responsibilities and will cover the school dog programme, interaction expectations, pupil choice and assent, allergy and adjustment arrangements, dog body language, hygiene, reporting routes and emergency arrangements.

Relevant information will be refreshed at least annually and following significant changes. Supply staff, volunteers, contractors and visitors will be given the information they reasonably need before entering areas where interaction with a school dog is foreseeable.

Pupils will be prepared using communication and teaching approaches appropriate to their individual needs. This may include visual supports, modelling, social narratives, signing, repetition, structured familiarisation and supported practice.

Families will receive clear information about the role of school dogs, how they may work with pupils, how safety is managed, how to report allergies or other relevant needs, how to request an adjustment or withdraw their child from direct interaction, and how pupil assent is respected.

Current letters, forms and dog-specific communications will be maintained within the operational documentation rather than reproduced permanently within this policy.

Section 14

MONITORING AND REVIEW

Monitoring impact. Learning from experience. Maintaining safe practice.

The School Dog Lead will monitor the operation of the programme and the suitability of each approved dog's continuing role. Monitoring will consider both the impact on pupils and the welfare of the animal.

The school will consider patterns in participation, withdrawals and reasonable adjustments alongside accidents, near misses, allergy or fear-related concerns, complaints and other feedback. The School Dog Lead will also monitor each dog's health, behaviour, workload, opportunities for rest and any emerging signs of stress.

Monitoring will not focus simply on how frequently a dog is used. The central question will be whether its involvement remains purposeful, proportionate, safe and beneficial and whether appropriate safeguards continue to operate effectively.

The Headteacher will review significant incidents, recurring concerns or material changes and may suspend, restrict or withdraw an individual dog from activity where necessary. The Governing Board will receive appropriate assurance about the safe and effective operation of the programme through its strategic oversight arrangements.

This policy will be formally reviewed annually and sooner where a significant incident, material change in a dog's health or behaviour, change in handler arrangements, change in premises or practice, new professional advice or relevant legal or national guidance indicates that review is necessary.

Operational risk assessments and dog-specific working arrangements will be reviewed more frequently whenever circumstances require this.

Section 15

RELATED POLICIES & FRAMEWORKS

Connecting practice. Strengthening consistency.

This policy should be read alongside Riverside Bridge School's current:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Risk Management Policy
- First Aid Policy
- Medical Needs Policy
- Infection Prevention and Control Policy
- Positive Support Policy
- Restrictive Physical Intervention Policy
- Accessibility Plan
- SEND Policy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion arrangements
- Educational Visits Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Data Retention Policy and Data Retention Schedule
- Mobile and Smart Technology Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Volunteer Management Policy
- Emergency Management and Business Continuity Plan
- Lockdown and Invacuation Policy
- School Dog Risk Assessment
- School Dog Operational Procedures and Records