

WILLOW, THERAPY DOG POLICY



St Peter's Catholic Primary School and Forest School supports the use of a therapy dog for the academic, social and emotional benefits of pupils. Children can increase their understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills through contact with pets. In addition to these benefits, many children take great enjoyment from interaction with dogs. As dogs are one of the most popular pets, it is more than likely that children will have some exposure to a dog in the community whilst they are still attending school. A therapy dog is one which provides affection and comfort to pupils in school, with the most important characteristic being that it must be friendly, patient, confident, gentle and at ease in all situations. It must enjoy human contact and be content to be petted and handled, sometimes clumsily, experience sudden loud noises and movements and to allow unfamiliar people to make physical contact with it.

This policy applies to Willow, our school dog. It does not affect the school's right to prohibit other dogs on school property.

Roles and responsibilities.

- The governing body has a responsibility to ensure that the school has a written policy and risk assessment, and this is reviewed annually and in response to any incidents associated with Willow.
- Mrs Gili Ross and Katy Seed are responsible for implementing this policy.
- All pupils, staff, parents, governors and other visitors in school are required to abide by this policy.

Reasons to have a therapy dog in school.

1. Behaviour:

A school dog enables children to put many values into practice: from friendship to patience, respect, love and happiness. Each of these values can be developed through and alongside Willow. With Willow to care for, children are more mindful of their behaviour. Incidents of running in corridors and shouting unnecessarily are reduced; they are generally more aware of the impact of their behaviour and choices.

2. Attendance:

Children can be encouraged back into school using caring for Willow eg. walking or grooming, as an incentive to attend school. Research has demonstrated that the presence of a therapy dog in school can decrease anxiety and enable children to work through issues, which may be adversely affecting their attendance by providing a comforting and calm presence.

3. Social Development:

Therapy dogs in schools offer an opportunity for improving social development, they are especially useful for teaching pupils' social skills and responsibility eg caring for an animal – walking/grooming. Research has reported that involving pupils in the daily care of a School Therapy Dog is a highly positive experience and can help in promoting their own daily care. Pupils learn about caring and sharing when helping each other to care for Willow. Willow may work on a one-to-one basis with pupils and will especially help those children who may be going through upsetting or difficult times or who may be scared or phobic of dogs. Dogs can bring much enjoyment to those they interact with and pupils who struggle with social interaction can find a reassuring friend in a dog.

4. As a reward:

Willow will, where appropriate, offer fun and enjoyment for pupils and time spent interacting with her, walking, grooming, and playing may, when relevant, be used as a reward. Research has proven that working and playing with a dog improves children's social skills and self-esteem.

5. Reading:

Reading programmes with dogs have been found to work well with some pupils. Children who might be embarrassed to read aloud in class, are likely to feel more able to read to a dog. A school therapy dog can be a calming influence and can also join a group of children whilst they are having a book reading session. Dogs give unconditional acceptance as they are non-judgemental, which is especially important for struggling readers. Research has proven that pupils who read to dogs show an increase in reading levels, word recognition, a higher desire to read and write and an increase in interpersonal skills amongst the pupils they mix with. As a focus or context for learning, Willow can provide an excellent resource and tangible motivation for children in all subject areas.

Minimum standards approved for Willow in School

- Willow will have a strict cleanliness routine at all times.
- Willow will be in good health with all vaccinations, worm and flea treatment up to date.
- Willow will not urinate or defecate in inappropriate locations.
- Willow will not annoy any member of staff or pupil by seeking attention.
- Willow will not bark.
- Willow will not show any aggression towards people.
- Willow will not steal food or other items from pupils, staff or other visitors in school.
- Willow will not pose a health or safety threat to any pupil, member of staff, or other visitor in school.

Procedures in school

- Willow is owned, cared for, trained and supervised by Katy Seed, Family Learning Mentor
- Parents/carers will be made aware that a dog will be in school and will be asked to notify school of any allergies on their child's medical consent form. Parents/carers have the right to notify school that they do not wish for their child to have any direct contact with Willow and any such wishes will be respected and upheld by school
- Willow's breed is a Labrador Retriever. This is a breed well known for having a calm, intelligent, friendly temperament. Willow has been around children since birth and has never shown aggression to any person or animal. Any member of staff or visitor to school with a known allergic reaction to dogs, who is likely to come into contact with Willow, is expected to notify the supervising adult in control of the dog at that time so that alternative provision can be made.
- If an allergy were to occur, first aid by a trained first aider would be given, and the parents/carers will be contacted. A record of incidents will be maintained and reviewed in conjunction with the risk assessment and policy.
- Willow's health and wellbeing is prioritised along with that of the pupils and staff. Willow is insured and will not be in school if she is unwell.
- Willow will be kept on a lead when moving between classrooms or on a walk and will be under full control at all times.
- Any pupil, staff member, parent/carer or visitor to school who has a fear of dogs will be respected and will never be forced to interact with Willow.
- Pupils will be supervised appropriately when they are with Willow.
- Pupils will be reminded of appropriate behaviour around Willow.
- Pupils, parents, staff and visitors to school are not to feed Willow. Willow will not be allowed to enter the school kitchen.
- Children should always wash their hands after handling Willow.
- Any dog foul will be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately. Willow will use a designated external toileting area.

Written by: Katy Seed, Family Learning Mentor/Forest School Lead

Date: July 2023.