THERAPY DOG IN SCHOOL POLICY

Policy approved & adopted by	Headteacher
Date	Sept 2023
Review date	Sept 2026 (SJ)
Review cycle	Annual
Next Review	Sept 2027

Tor View Specialist Learning Community supports the use of a therapy dog for the academic, social and emotional benefits of pupils and students. Children can increase their understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills through contact with pets. In addition to these benefits, children take great enjoyment from interaction with dogs and puppies. 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 is specifically trained to provide affection and comfort to students 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 and to allow unfamiliar people to make physical contact with it.

This policy applies to the regulated school dog only. 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 the therapy dog.
- The Headteacher is responsible for implementing this policy and may delegate this responsibility to a Deputy Head.
- All pupils, staff, parents, governors and other visitors in school are required to abide by this policy
- The Health and Safety Officer is responsible for providing information, advice and guidance as and when required.

Reasons to have a therapy dog in school:

1. **Behaviour**

A school dog enables children to put our school values into practice: from friendship to patience, respect, love and happiness, each one of our values can be developed through and alongside a dog. With a dog 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 a dog 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 school 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 positive experience and can help in promoting their own daily care. Pupils can also learn about caring and sharing when helping each other to care for the dog. The school Therapy Dog will be able to work on a one- to one basis with pupils and will especially help those students 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**
   The school therapy dog will, where appropriate, offer fun and enjoyment for pupils and time spent interacting with it, 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 be less scared 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 students 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, the school dog can provide an excellent resource and tangible motivation for children in all subject areas.

6. **Bullying**
   This can be a problem in schools with pupils anxious about attending school for fear of abuse. In some schools, however, Therapy Dogs are making a difference and research suggests that when students have empathy for the dog,

they can better understand how classmates may feel. It was also found that violent behaviour in those that took part in the study, declined by 55% and general aggression went down 62%.

Minimum standards approved for the therapy dog in school

- The therapy dog will be clean, well-groomed and not have an offensive odour
- The therapy dog will not urinate or defecate in inappropriate locations
- The therapy dog will not annoy any member of staff or pupil/student by seeking attention
- The therapy dog will not vocalise unnecessarily
- The therapy dog will not show aggression towards people or other animals
- The therapy dog will not solicit or steal food or other items from pupils/students, staff or other visitors in school.
- The therapy dog will not pose a health or safety threat to any pupil/student, member of staff, or other visitor in school.

Procedures in school

- The dog will be owned by Ms A Y Holdsworth, CEO
- Parents/carers will be informed that a dog will be in school and will be asked to complete a consent form to indicate if their child is permitted to interact with the dog. Parents/carers have the right to withhold consent for their child to have any direct contact with the dog and any such wishes will be respected and upheld by school
- Whilst the breed of dog chosen for school is a cockapoo which are usually good for people with allergies since they produce low amounts of dander and hair, any pupil, staff or visitor known to have an allergic reaction to dogs must not go near it. Any known allergies for pupils/students will be indicated on the consent form. Any member of staff or visitor to school with a known allergic reaction to dogs, who is likely to come into contact with it, are expected to notify the supervising adult in control of the dog at that time so that alternative provision can be made.
- If an allergy or a bite 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.
- The dog's health and wellbeing is prioritised along with that of the pupils/students and staff. The dog will be insured and all necessary veterinary treatments will be maintained and up to date. If the dog is ill, she will not be allowed into school
- The dog will be kept on a lead when moving between classrooms or on a walk and will be under the full control and supervision of an adult.
- Any pupil/student, staff, parent/carer or visitor to school who has a fear of dogs will be respected and will never be forced to interact with the dog. With consent, a pupil/student may receive structured coaching in a controlled environment with the dog to help them overcome their fears.

- Pupils/students will never be left alone with the dog and appropriate adult supervision will be present at all times when the dog is present.
- Pupils/students will be reminded of appropriate behaviour around the dog.
- Pupils/students, parents/carers, staff and visitors to school are not to feed the dog. The dog will not be allowed to enter the school kitchen or go into the hall during meal times.
- Children should always wash their hands after handling the dog.
- Any dog foul will be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately. The dog will be trained to use a designated external toileting area that is out-of-bounds to pupils/students. Should any 'accidents' occur in areas where children have access to, appropriate measures will be taken to disinfect the affected site.