

St Saviour's Catholic Primary and Nursery School



School Dog Policy 2026-2028

Legal Status:	Non-Statutory
Last Review:	December 2023
Review date:	May 2026
Next Review:	May 2028
Responsible Person:	Governing Body

Mission Statement

"Keeping Jesus at the heart of everything we do."

Introduction

Research has shown many benefits to therapy and reading dogs in school settings. St Saviour's Catholic Primary and Nursery School introduced the use of a therapy dog into the emotional well-being provision at school in June 2018. In September 2023 with the implementation of a new leadership team, two more therapy dogs were introduced to the school community.

This policy is designed to set out to pupils, parents, staff and visitors the reasons for having a school dog and the rules and responsibilities to ensure the safety of pupils, staff, visitors and the school dog.

Although there is a risk in bringing a dog into a school environment, this can be mitigated against with a risk assessment to ensure the safety of all pupils, parents, staff and visitors.

Children can benefit educationally and emotionally, increase their understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills through contact with a dog. In addition to these benefits, children take great enjoyment from interactions with a dog.

The use of school dogs is considered within the school's safeguarding framework. Any concerns arising during interactions with the dogs will be reported in line with the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures.

The Benefits of a School Therapy Dog

School dogs have been proven to help develop pupils' reading skills, improve behaviour, attendance and academic confidence, as well as increasing student understanding of responsibility and in the development of empathy and nurturing skills. At St Saviour's, we believe that our school dogs will be a beneficial addition to our therapeutic offer in addition to the interventions we already offer and promoting engagement for those children who have found it difficult to access talking therapies in the past.

Animal assisted interventions (also known as AAI's) can:

- Teach empathy and appropriate interpersonal skills;
- Help individuals develop social skills;
- Be soothing;
- Improve a child's ability to pick up on social cues which are imperative to human relationships;
- Therapy dogs have been shown to support emotional regulation through the positive impact on the autonomic nervous system;
- Show that children working with therapy dogs have experienced improved motivation for learning, resulting in improved outcomes.

Therapy dogs are being used to support children with their social and emotional learning needs which can also aid literacy development.

Research into the effects of therapy dogs in schools is showing a range of benefits including:

- Increase in school attendance;
- Improved confidence;
- Decreased pupil anxiety resulting in improvements in learning, such as increases in reading and writing levels;
- Improved motivation to learn;
- Enhanced relationships with peers and teachers due to experiencing trust and unconditional positive interactions with a therapy dog;
- Helping children learn how to express their feelings and enter into more trusting relationships;
- Increase social skills and self-esteem;
- Teach responsibility and respect to all life.

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>)

SEND Benefits

"Therapy Dogs Nationwide dogs have also shown to help with special needs and autistic children and adults by giving focus and providing a calming environment."

Therapy Dogs Nationwide (<http://www.tdn.org.uk/schools/>)

Mental Health Benefits

Some mental health challenges and psychiatric disorders are known to respond well to therapy dogs. Patients diagnosed with a range of issues, such as depression, bi-polar disorder, Autism, ADHD, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and Alzheimer's disease benefit from their interaction with therapy dogs and other companion animals.

Sometimes emotional challenges are the result of physical health problems and therapy dogs can help with those too. Research suggests that patients who are recovering from difficult surgery or a bad accident who participate in animal-assisted therapy may feel less pain. Studies have shown that such interactions can increase the mood-boosting hormone oxytocin and decrease the stress hormone cortisol.

Evidence shows that just by being near a dog when stressed can reduce anxiety. When children are more relaxed and less stressed, they're going to learn more.

Responsibilities

Pupils

- Pupils are able to withdraw from contact with the dogs.
- Pupils should be taught to be gentle with the dogs.
- Pupils must always wash their hands before and after stroking and handling the dogs.
- Pupils are not allowed to approach or disturb the dogs whilst they are sleeping or eating.
- Pupils are not allowed to play roughly with the dogs.
- Pupils understand that any deliberate violence or threatening behaviour towards the dogs will not be accepted.

Staff

- Mrs Baird and Mrs Heaton are responsible for ensuring the training and accreditation of the dogs.
- Pupils will be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dogs.
- Staff, visitors and children known to have allergic reactions to dogs must not go near the school dog. The school office keeps a list of all pupils and staff with a reported allergy to dogs which is kept in the Therapy dog folder.
- If the dogs are surrounded by a large number of children, the dog could become nervous; therefore, the adult in charge of the dog at that time must ensure that they monitor the situation.
- Any dog foul should be cleaned up immediately and disposed of appropriately.

Principles

- The head teacher and the governors have agreed to the presence of the dogs at St Saviour's.
- The presence of school dogs is made clear to visitors (via a sign) upon their arrival at the school office.
- Only the school dogs are allowed on the premises. No other dogs are permitted.
- The dogs will be included in the fire evacuation procedure and safely managed during any emergency situation.
- The school dogs are fully vaccinated and regularly health checked.