



## St Erme with Trispen Community Primary School

### SCHOOL DOG POLICY AND RISK ASSESSMENT

#### INTRODUCTION AND AIMS

The rationale behind this decision was as follows:

1. For the school to have a pet that was able to live as naturally as conditions would allow.
2. For the animal to be properly cared for outside of the school day.
3. To have a pet that the children could interact with and also be of benefit to the children's social and emotional development.

The value of pet 'therapy' is widely accepted as a powerful aid to stimulation and communication. Studies have shown that the presence of companion animals can improve the well-being of children and lower the rate of anxiety, simply by making the environment happier, more enjoyable and less forbidding.

Current research is suggesting that a 'companion' animal in school can make a difference to the well-being of both staff and pupils. With this in mind, St Erme with Trispen Primary School has become the daytime home on occasions for Connie, Coco & Pepsi. Research indicates that these types of dogs are well suited to working in an environment with children.

#### WHY DO WE BELIEVE A SCHOOL DOG IS SO IMPORTANT?

School dogs are able to provide comfort and affection to individuals in a variety of settings. For some, school can be a stressful setting and this stress can inhibit learning, manifest as unwanted behaviour and create a strain on the resources which can help young people cope with emotions, disorders or relationships. Through providing a comforting presence in the school they can be an inexpensive way to assist students in focussing on their education. Empirical evidence has shown that school dogs can enhance a child's psychological development, improve social skills and increase self-esteem among other benefits. Dogs can also teach responsibility, compassion and respect for other living things. Dogs in school can be used to calm fears, relieve anxiety and teach skills.

Here is a summary of potential benefits adapted from the Australian Companion Animal Council:

- **Physical** – Interaction with a furry friend reduces blood pressure, provides tactile stimulation, assists with pain management, gives motivation to move, walk and stimulates the senses
- **Social** – A visit with a dog provides a positive mutual topic for discussion, promotes greater self-esteem and well-being and focused interaction with others

- **Cognitive** – Companionship with a dog stimulates memory, problem solving and game playing
- **Emotional** – A four-legged visitor improves self-esteem, acceptance from others and lifts the mood of the school
- **Environmental** – A dog in a work environment decreases the feeling of a sterile environment, de-stresses adults and children alike.

## **WHAT ARE THE DESIRED GOALS?**

The following is a summary of the desired goals:

- Increased empathy and compassion
- Improved social skills for pupils
- Reduced anxiety levels and help children to decompress after stressful and traumatic circumstances • Improved attitudes towards school and self
- Improve reading skills, comprehension and literary interest
- Lessen the emotional trauma of a critical incident/event for students, teachers and staff
- Improved school attendance

## **WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS?**

Questions and concerns are inevitable when it comes to introducing something new, and perhaps perceived as radical, into school. We believe the most frequent risks are:

- Liability
- Supervision
- Allergic Reactions
- Risk of harm – to both adult and animal
- Animal maintenance
- Maintenance costs
- Hygiene Cleanliness
- Phobic students and staff
- Animal Odour

These concerns are addressed in the School's Risk Assessment.

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Prior to purchasing the puppies, the Head Teacher Mrs Drake, Miss Lewis & Mrs Mullineaux, visited the home of the dog's parents to ensure that the temperament of the parents was suitable for interaction with children. The puppy would live with their owners in their homes and be introduced to the school environment and the children gradually. A veterinarian practice, thoroughly checked the puppies for any illnesses and are up to date with their vaccination programme. There are no diseases that could be caught from the puppy as they are kept up to date with immunisations including rabies and worming treatment is in line with European vet guidelines. The school and vets' surgery keep a register of their annual health check.

To minimise the risk to children in school, animals are not allowed on school premises. The definition of animals includes all pets including insects, fish and birds. The only exceptions to this rule are assistant animals (dogs for the blind etc.) and the animals that have permanent residences on the school grounds.

When guide dogs and school animals are allowed on school premises, the animal's owner and handlers must ensure that the animal is not a nuisance and that it does not interfere with the school environment. If any parent or pupil object to the animal's presence then arrangements must be made to ensure that this animal is kept away from them. If necessary, the animal may need exclusion from specific areas.

It is a requirement of all our residential animals that they are within the following recommended guidelines:

- All animals should be regularly groomed and checked for signs of infection or other illness.
- Pets that are ill should be diagnosed and treated by a vet and should not be allowed in the school premises until their health is restored.
- All animals should have received relevant inoculations.
- All animals should be wormed regularly every six months.
- Claws should be kept trimmed to reduce the risk of scratches.
- Pets should have been exercised before being allowed to work with children.
- All pets should have their coats cleaned regularly.

The dog owner/handler has the responsibility to ensure that:

- Dogs are physically fit before visiting the school environment
- Dogs are kept on a lead throughout the visit/work – except in controlled supervised circumstances.
- They remain with the dog at all times
- The dog is discouraged from jumping, scratching and licking
- The dog is of an acceptable hygienic standard, i.e. not wet, muddy etc.
- Natural relief for dogs is taken into account prior to visiting

- Training classes from a reputable instructor are attended – both at home and at school. Work will also be undertaken to ensure that children know how to approach dogs and how to behave when dogs are around

## **ANIMAL WELL-BEING**

Mrs Drake, Miss Lewis & Mrs Mullineaux, via pet insurance, insures the dog. The certificate is kept in the school office and is renewed annually.

## **LEGAL LIABILITY**

The school will cover the cost of liability insurance – the likes of which is available via The Kennel Club, or similar organisation.

## **FINANCIAL ISSUES**

The dog is the financial responsibility of Mrs Drake, Miss Lewis & Mrs Mullineaux – they are financially responsible for all their care and day to day costs. The dog is the responsibility of them outside of school hours. Training costs will be paid for by the school.

## **PARENTAL CONSENT**

It is accepted that interacting with animals is not appropriate for all children but that for some it has the potential to provide many positive benefits. Any parent who does not wish their child to interact with the dog is invited to write to inform Mrs Drake of their wishes. This risk assessment will be reviewed annually and the school senior leadership team will evaluate the impact of a school dog on a regular basis.

**Date of this revision: November 2023**

**Date of next revision: November 2024**