



# St Robert's First School

## School Dog Policy



We have a school dog who is a Cockapoo called Honey. She comes to school every day and has been a full time member of staff since she was 12 weeks old in April 2020, growing up around the children. She is very well behaved and lives mainly in Mr Sutcliffe's room although she is often out in classrooms visiting the children or hearing readers.

Children can come to have Honey Time whenever they would like to see her, this can be because they are feeling a bit sad about something or if they just want a quick cuddle; she usually cheers everyone up and does a great job.

The children from the school council decided that they wanted a school dog and did a lot of research about the benefits and problems that this would have in school.

## **A Note from the children of our School Council**

### **Why we would like to have a school dog**

We would like to have a school dog to bring extra excitement into school. We think that a dog would help us to become more responsible and show us how to look after a pet. We would like a school dog to be our school mascot. We think that having a dog in school would make us more determined to finish our work so that we can see the dog as a treat. We could have rewards for getting house points or learning points to spend time with the dog. We think a dog might cheer you up if you are feeling sad. We would like to learn how to train a dog and help develop our confidence and skills with animals. We think that taking the dog for a walk will help us to be good at being a 'Green School' and a 'Healthy School' because the dog will keep us fit and healthy too. We think that some people who aren't used to dogs would get the opportunity to spend time with a dog and they would become part of our school family.

### **Worries about having a school dog**

We know that some children might be scared of a dog in case it bites or licks people, or people might have had a bad experience with a dog before. We know that an adult will always be with the dog and that no one will have to spend any time with the dog if they didn't want to. We hope that a school dog will help everyone to overcome their worries and fears. We know that the children will have to be calm and sensible around the dog so that the dog doesn't get frightened too.

We don't want the dog to disturb classes when they are working, so we want the dog to be well trained, we want to help the dog to be trained.

We want hygiene to be really strict. We would always have to wash our hands properly after we have touched the dog and the dog wouldn't be allowed to lick anyone's faces. We would have to make sure that the dog went to the toilet away from where we play outside.

We feel the type of dog that we get is very important and that it comes from a reputable breeder. We do not want a small dog or one that barks a lot, but we do want one that is friendly and cuddly.

The dog would attend school most days and come home with Mr Sutcliffe. She would generally stay in his office and spend time in some classrooms and in the library. She will always be under adult supervision and on a lead.

We understand that some families may have concerns about having a dog in school and would like to reassure everyone that we have a Dog Policy and full risk assessments available for anyone who would like to get further information. Mr Sutcliffe is also available to discuss this and talk to anyone about how it works in school.

**No one** will be forced to spend time with the dog if they do not want to and all parents have the right to request that their child does not have contact with the dog.

### **Reasons to have a dog in school**

Children can benefit educationally and emotionally, 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 while still at school.

**Behaviour** problems occur in school and these can interfere with learning. Some schools are using dogs to improve behaviour problems by promoting positive behaviour in students. In a controlled study, students were found to have fewer disciplinary referrals in schools with a dog than schools without. Students' behaviour improved toward teachers, and students also showed more confidence and responsibility. Additionally, parents reported that children seemed more interested in school as a result of having a dog at school.

**Attendance** Children can be encouraged back into school using caring for a dog as an incentive

**Social Development:** Dogs in school offer an opportunity for improving social development. They are especially useful for teaching students social skills and responsibility. Specifically, With a dog in the classroom, students have the opportunity to learn how to care for the animal. This includes walking and grooming. Researchers report that involving students in the daily care of classroom dogs is a positive experience, promoting their own daily care. The students also learn about responsibility, caring and sharing when helping each other take care of a dog at school.

**As a reward:** Dogs will be gentle and living, but at the same time full of fun and enjoyment for the students. Those students who have performed incredibly well during the week or those who have made progress in a certain subject, or those who have achieved tasks set for them, may be rewarded with spending time during lunch or break to interact with these dogs. Walking, grooming, playing and training are some of the responsibilities students will be allowed to undertake. It has been proved that working and playing with a dog improves children's social skills and self-esteem.

Honey sometimes works with students on a one to one basis and can especially help those students who have been bullied abused, going through upsetting/difficult times or even scared/phobic of dogs. Honey brings much joy and help to all the students they meet and are happy to provide plenty of hugs to the students she spends time

with. Students who struggle with social interaction can find a reassuring friend Honey.

**Reading** programmes with dogs are doing wonders for some students. Children who might be embarrassed to read aloud to the class or even adults are likely to be less scared to read to a dog. "It might be less stressful for a child to read aloud to a dog than to a teacher or a peer. After all, a dog won't judge or correct you." Dogs are used to encourage struggling readers to practise reading aloud. With the presence of a "calm and well-trained dog," students find social support and peer interaction.

Dogs are incredibly calm and happy to have students read to them or join a group of children in the library whilst they are having a book reading session. Dogs give unconditional acceptance, as they are non-judgmental, which is especially crucial to struggling, emerging readers. The dogs also provide confidence to children as they do not make fun of them when they read, but above all they make amazing listeners, providing the children with a sense of comfort and love. Research has proved 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 among the students they mix with.

**Bullying** can be a problem in all schools with students anxious about school for fear of taunting and abuse. But in some schools dogs are making a difference in the fight against bullies. Researchers report that students can identify with animals, and with empathy for the dog, can better understand how classmates may feel. It was found that violent behaviour in participation students declined by 55%, and general aggression went down 62%.

### **Guidance followed**

*These are the guidelines that we used before we brought Honey into school.*

It is important that suitable arrangements are in place prior to any dog being brought into the school. These arrangements must follow this school policy on Dogs in School, which is based on the following guidance:

- Parents should be notified of the intention to bring a dog into the school
- A risk assessment should be carried out prior to the visit of any dog into school
- The dog should be well used to the behaviour and sounds of children
- If the dog is ill she must not be brought into school
- The dog must be kept on a lead at all times and under the full control and supervision of their owner (Head Teacher or designated staff member)
- The Children will never be left alone with the dog and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times.

- Prior to the dog being in a classroom or in school, pupils will be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around dogs. Children are likely to become excited and it is important that they react calmly and carefully around the dog. They should not make sudden movements and must never stare into a dog's eyes as this could be threatening for the dog. Children should be told not to put their face near a dog and should always approach it standing up.
- Children should be told never to go near or disturb a dog that is sleeping or eating.
- Children must not be allowed to play too roughly with the dog.
- Consider the number of children who would be patting/stroking or meeting the dog. A large number of children could cause the dog to become nervous and agitated. On-going monitoring of the situation is vital. Since dogs cannot speak, the only way they can be understood is through their body language. Growling or baring of teeth indicate that the dog is feeling angry or threatened. Flattened ears, tail lowered or between their legs, hiding behind their owner, whining or growling are signs that the dog is frightened or nervous. Dogs displaying any of these warning signs should be immediately removed from the environment. Pupils will be made aware of these warning signs.
- Children should not feed, or eat close to the dog.
- Children should always wash their hands after handling the dog.
- Any dog foul should be cleaned immediately. Designated staff will use gloves and spray to clear all dog waste when walking the dog around the outside of the school grounds.

### **3. Roles and Responsibilities**

The board of Governors has a responsibility to ensure that the school has a written policy for dogs in School.

The Head teacher is responsible for developing this guidance into a school practice and implementing it.

Teachers and staff are required to abide by this policy.

The Health and Safety Officer is responsible for providing information, advice and guidance as and when required.

They recommend;

- Using an assured breeder.
- Having the puppy health checked by a vet and a record of injections kept.
- Ensuring the puppy and pupils are trained to handle the school environment
- Ensuring the dog is fully inoculated.
- Ensuring the dog has a quiet space for sleep and peace (Head Teacher's office).
- Give children and parents the opportunity to not have their child around the dog

- Give thought to children who are scared of dogs
- Only allowing handling when the dog is calm and the Head Teacher has confidence in the dog.