

St Katherine's School
&
Nursery



Creating Our Future by Learning Together

The Dog Mentor
Policy
September 2023

Purpose of the Policy

This policy sets out:

- The role of the Dog Mentor within school life.
- How we will respect the welfare of the school dog and ensure they are kept healthy, safe and thriving.
- Protocols and risk assessments for interacting with the Dog Mentor.

Why mental health and wellbeing is important?

At St Katherine's School & Nursery, we aim to promote positive mental health and wellbeing for our whole school community; pupils, staff, parents and carers, and we recognise how important mental health and emotional wellbeing is to our lives in just the same way as physical health. We recognise that children's mental health is a crucial factor in their overall wellbeing and can affect their learning and achievement. All children go through ups and downs through their school career/life and some face significant life events. About 1 in 10 children aged 5 to 16 have a diagnosable mental health need and these can have an enormous impact on their quality of life, relationships and academic achievement.

The Department for Education (DfE) recognises that: "In order to help their children succeed; schools have a role to play in supporting them to be resilient and mentally healthy".

We also recognise the role that stigma can play in preventing understanding and awareness of mental health issues and aim to create an open and positive culture that encourages discussion and understanding of mental health issues.

Schools can be a place for children to experience a nurturing and supportive environment that has the potential to develop self-esteem and give positive experiences for overcoming adversity and building resilience. For some, school will be a place of respite and offer positive role models and relationships, which are critical in promoting children's wellbeing and can help create a sense of belonging and community.

Definition of Mental Health and Wellbeing

We use the World Health Organisation's definition of mental health and wellbeing:

"A state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community."

Mental health and wellbeing is just not the absence of mental health problems.

We want all children to:

- feel confident in themselves
- be able to express a range of emotions appropriately
- be able to make and maintain positive relationships with others

- cope with the stresses of everyday life
- manage times of stress and be able to deal with change
- learn and achieve

Why is a school dog is beneficial to the wider school community?

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 interaction with a dog. By having The Dog Mentor in school, we want to encourage those children specifically who are vulnerable, or those who are less confident with learning and can help children become resilient learners. Having a Dog Mentor in school can encourage reluctant children to come to school. It offers children opportunities to improve social development skills and unconditional acceptance. For some children, a dog will be a special friend, helping them to build self-esteem, relax and have fun. For others, time spent with a dog will be a reward for excellent effort.

General Details

The Dog Mentor is:

Owned by the school and housed with a member of staff – Miss Sarah Aikenhead (Deputy Headteacher)

A hypoallergenic breed – a Cockapoo.

Insured by RPA which means the dog has public liability insurance, meaning he can come into school. He also has his own insurance.

Regularly checked by the vet for check-ups and yearly vaccinations and worming and flea treatments will be kept up-to-date.

A member of The Dog Mentor programme and has gained bronze, silver and gold awards.

Guidelines to Interaction with The Dog Mentor

At all times of interaction there must be an adult who takes the leading role when interacting with The Dog Mentor. If children, or visiting adults, do not abide by the guidance given by the authorised adult the interaction will be cancelled. See appendix 1 for guidelines.

The risk assessment for The Dog Mentor must be followed by all staff, children and parents.

Appendix 1

Guidelines

The following guidelines must be followed when interacting with the school dog.

These guidelines apply to all adults and children:

- Never enter The Dog Mentor's room without an authorised adult.
- There must be an adult present during all interaction.
- Always approach The Dog Mentor calmly (voice and movement)
- Always approach The Dog Mentor slowly.
- Never run up to The Dog Mentor.
- To start interaction, the back of a hand will be offered for The Dog Mentor to sniff.
- Keep noise levels low during interaction with The Dog Mentor.
- All interaction must remain calm with the adult staying in control at all times.
- Visiting children and adults can only handle equipment if the authorising adult gives permission.
- There must not be any interaction with The Dog Mentor whilst he is eating.
- Hands must be washed after interaction with The Dog Mentor.