

School Dog Risk Assessment –Updated March 2026 Review 2029

Introduction

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. The DFE paper "Mental health and wellbeing provision in schools"¹ suggests "It might also be helpful for schools to further their awareness of risk factors relating to mental illness, particularly where pupils are not behaving in overtly disruptive ways, such as pupils who might be suffering with anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicidal thoughts." and continues " is there a relationship between high spend and high cost interventions such as targeted counselling and better outcomes, or are schools investing in more preventative strategies, at a lower cost, more successful in promoting whole school mental health and wellbeing?" The school recognises that a school dog working with the children would meet this preventative response to the mental wellbeing of the children and school community.

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 school therapy dog. During school fairs there may be other animals on the premises and further risk assessments for these individual occasions will be written.

CLEAPPS notes that "the Animal Welfare Act 2006, requires the owner and persons responsible for looking after an animal to ensure it will not suffer unnecessarily."²

As part of the preparation for having a school dog the school explored experiences from other schools as well as professional guidance including CLEAPPS and The Key.

When guide dogs and the School Therapy dog 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 our school dog 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 school dog handler has the responsibility to ensure that:

- Dogs are physically fit before visiting the school environment. If the dog is unwell they will not be brought to school.
- Dogs are kept on a lead throughout the day unless they are in their crate
- They remain with the dog at all times, unless the dog is locked in the crate in a locked office.
- 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. There is a clear site identified for the dog to use as a toilet. Faeces will be bagged as will wet newspaper from the crate after accidents. These will be binned separately away from children.

Background

The leadership of St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary school considered the options regarding the possibility of obtaining a dog as a school pet in October 2018. Over a period of time following this discussion research into a possible

¹ Mental health and wellbeing provision in schools Review of published policies and information Research report October 2018 Rebecca Brown ²

CLEAPPS Choosing animals to keep in school GL202 Oct 2016

source of a suitable puppy led to the final decision to introduce a puppy in January 2020 or when a suitable puppy is sourced.

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.

Prior to purchasing the puppy, the Head Teacher Mrs Sanderson, visited the home of the dog's parents to ensure that the temperament of the parents was suitable for interaction with children. This visit was supported by the Ability Dogs for Young People Charity and a breeder that the charity uses for their own dogs was chosen. The puppy would live with Mrs Sanderson in her home and be introduced to the school environment and the children following the advice of the charity who have supported two other schools who introduced therapy dogs into school. The school have identified the Carisbrooke's Vets, who will thoroughly check the puppy for any illnesses and is responsible for his vaccination programme. There are no diseases that could be caught from the puppy as he is kept up to date with immunisations including rabies and his worming treatment is in line with European vet guidelines. Both the school and the vets' surgery keep a register of his annual health check.

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 puppy is invited to write to inform Mrs Sanderson 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.

The dog will have pet insurance to provide support for health care. There will also be insurance for the dog in school. Costs for the dog will be shared between the school and Mrs Sanderson. No school funds will be used for equipment or feeding of the dog at the home.

The puppy will attend weekly puppy training sessions at the Ability Dogs for Young People. The Charity will provide support for the socialisation of the puppy as well as training the school community.

Risk Assessment for School Dog

Purpose

1. **Dogs teach children responsibility.** Having to remember to feed, provide water and show support for a dog can give children a sense of importance and satisfaction that they can't get from school or other chores. The relationship that develops can be life-changing for a child and a great support system as they themselves continue to grow and develop.
2. **Dogs teach children patience.** Dogs do not always do as they are told first time!
3. **Dogs teach children compassion.** Just like humans, dogs feel emotion and pain. They are prone to injuries and the infirmities of age during their relatively short lives.
4. **Dogs teach children about socialisation.** Like most of us, dogs are social animals who enjoy and need attention and affection. By learning how to interact with a dog, children can learn how to better socialise with other children. If they can learn the social cues of a dog, then interacting with humans who can talk will be a walk in the park (pun intended).
5. **Dogs are fun.** Last, but certainly not least, dogs are a lot of fun. They greet you with a wagging tail every day and can cheer you up even on your worst day.

Area: Interaction with pupils and staff

Assessment Date: March 2026

Reason: To ensure the school dog interacts appropriately at all times

Review Date: March 2027

Step 1 Identify the hazards	Step 2 Who might be harmed & how?	Step 3 What are you already doing?	Risk Rating Trivial/ low / medium / high / stop	Step 4 Is anything further needed?	Step 5 Action & Review		
					Action required	Responsible person	Date completed
School dog biting a child or adult	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child or adult could be hurt if the school dog bites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school dog is being trained not to bite. When the dog is approached in the correct way there is very limited danger. 	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that children and adults do not interact with the school dog without supervision • Ensure that all interaction with the school dog is completed in the agreed way 	School dog is supervised at all times Pupils are given understanding of their behaviour when interacting with the dog	HT	March 2026

Jumping up/scratching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If the school dog becomes excited there is a danger that he could jump up and knock a child over or leave a scratch mark 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The temperament of dog and the agreed training programme has involved not jumping up with praise/rewards being given when successful 	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that children and adults do not interact with the school dog without supervision The school dog will be enclosed in a crate when people come to interact with him or under lead control by an authorised adult 	The dog is always on the lead when walking through the school.	HT	March 2026
Running loose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If the school dog was to run loose he could hurt children/adults or damage property 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school dog will be contained at all times either in an office or on a lead 	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor that the equipment used to contain the school dog is appropriate and effective. T <p>If the dog does get loose from his pen the teacher on duty will call for a designated staff member who will come and put the dog back in his pen.</p> <p>There are five members of staff who will be called upon in the event of the dog getting loose or if he needs attention at any other time, they are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Mrs Maggie Sanderson (Head Teacher). Mrs Janey Chadwick (FAM). Mrs Katrina Gibson (TA) Mr Peter Booth (Senior Teacher) Mrs Patsy Mauri HoS 	The dog is allowed on the school field when all children are inside. The dog is allowed loose in the wood when there are no children in the wood. The dog is accompanied at all times by HT or member of staff. These times are for exercise and will not exceed 10 mins on the field & 20 minutes in the wood.	HT	March 2026
Direct interaction With children/staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If the school dog is allowed to interact when not in the correct frame of mind children/ staff could be scratched 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No interaction is allowed without authorisation Interaction will be cancelled if the school dog shows signs of incorrect behaviour Rewards/praise will be given to reinforce the desired behaviour 	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that the school dog is approached in the agreed manner 	Dog is more settled in school but if he is displaying that he is unsettled he does not interact with pupils.	HT	March 2026
Destruction of materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If allowed the school dog may chew/destroy some school materials/resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school dog will be contained at all times The school dog will have his own toys to play with and normal school resources will be removed 	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor that the equipment used to contain the school dog is appropriate and effective 	Dog has not shown that he is a chewer. This continues to be monitored	HT	March 2026
Area: Pupils and staff interaction with the school dog						Assessment Date: October 24	

Reason: To ensure the school dog is effectively supported to interact appropriately at all times					Review Date: March 2027		
Step 1 Identify the hazards	Step 2 Who might be harmed & how?	Step 3 What are you already doing?	Risk Rating Trivial/ low / medium / high / stop	Step 4 Is anything further needed?	Step 5 Action & Review		
					Action required	Responsible person	Date completed
Incorrect/ inconsistent interaction with the school dog	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If a child/adult interact with the school dog in the incorrect or inconsistent way this will affect the school dogs training and have a negative impact on future interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agreed guidelines that must be followed at all times when interacting with the school dog There cannot be any interaction with the school dog without authorisation 	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If there are any inconsistencies in approach with the school dog the adult/child will have the interaction stopped 	Review with pupils who join the school in year transfer and the new Reception class.	HT	Ongoing
Use of rewards/treats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children and adults could be harmed if the school dog is over excited when receiving a reward/treat Children/adult must clean their hands after handling treats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Antibacterial gel/foam Treats will only be given to the school dog with authorisation 	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reminders to the children to wash hands / use Gel/foam after handling treats Treats to be locked away to ensure they can only be used after authorisation 	During lock down children not allowed to touch dog. If they do at any point hands are washed.	HT	Ongoing
Pupil/staff knowledge of interaction with a puppy/dog	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If adults and children have limited knowledge of how to interact correctly this could result in harm to the school dog or themselves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Ability Dog for Young People will led an assembly to share how we look after our school dog with the children 	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There will be an agreed format for how to interact with the school dog 	This should be revisited annually and after end of lockdown	HT/AD4YP	Annually
Area: Hygiene/Health					Assessment Date: March 2026		

Reason: To ensure that pupils, staff and the school dog to not have an increased risk of illness as a result of the school dog being in school

Review Date: March 2027

Step 1 Identify the hazards	Step 2 Who might be harmed & how?	Step 3 What are you already doing?	Risk Rating Trivial/ low / medium / high / stop	Step 4 Is anything further needed?	Step 5 Action & Review		
					Action required	Responsible person	Date completed
☒ Worms/fleas	☒ If the school dog is not treated for worms there is a danger that germs can be transferred to humans	☒ The school dog will be treated monthly at a local vets to ensure he is correctly treated for worms and fleas	Low	☒ Monitor that vet visits happen promptly and take actions suggested by the vet	Wormed & flea treatment given regularly	HT	3monthly/ monthly
☒ Faeces	☒ If a child/adult come into contact with the school dog's faeces some germs could be transferred	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school dog will only be walked under supervision No child will be asked to pick up the dog's faeces, this will always be undertaken by the adult in supervision A specific area for toileting for the dog away from the children will be identified and used. Faeces will be cleaned from this area as soon as it is used. 	Low	☒ If a child finds faeces on the school field/playground they will report it to an adult There will be a dog kit that will have poo bags and hand sanitiser	Dog has toilet area. If he poos elsewhere the poo is picked up immediately and area cleaned	HT	ongoing
☒ Allergies	☒ If a child is allergic to dogs they could become unwell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents will inform the school of any allergies that will be as a result of the dog. If a child has an allergy the school dog will not carry out tasks near the child. A sign will identify classrooms where allergic children are present. 	Medium	The breed of dog does not moult. Regular grooming will be necessary.	Grooming happens regularly	HT	ongoing
☒ Children's access to school dog's resource	☒ If a child has access to the school dog's treats/food and eats some they could become unwell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All of the school dog's resources will be locked away in the Head's office. No child will be allowed to enter the school dog's area without authorisation 	Low	☒ Remind children not to enter area	Resources are kept in Headteachers office	HT	ongoing
☒ Contact with food preparation areas	☒ If the school dog enters a food preparation area this could be unhygienic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school dog will be in a contained area or on a lead at all times around school He will never enter the school kitchen 	Trivial	€ The dog will not enter the school hall during the children's lunchtime.	Dog does not enter hall during lunchtime	HT	ongoing

☒ Cleaning hands after interacting with the school dog	☒ If hands are not cleaned children/adults could become unwell	☒ All adults and children will clean their hands after interaction with the school dog	Low	☒ Remind children and adults to clean their hands	All who interact with dog are reminded to wash their hands	HT	ongoing
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Area: Activities involving the school dog, including walking

Assessment Date: March 2026


Reason: To ensure the school dog has a meaningful and safe impact on the school community

Review Date: March 2027

Step 1 Identify the hazards	Step 2 Who might be harmed & how?	Step 3 What are you already doing?	Risk Rating Trivial/ low / medium / high / stop	Step 4 Is anything further needed?	Step 5 Action & Review		
					Action required	Responsible person	Date completed
☒ Walking the dog on and off site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children could be harmed during a walk offsite if they are not focussed Children might be harmed if they do not interact correctly when the school dog is on a walk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If the school dog is taken off site normal risk assessed procedure will take place No children will take the lead when the school dog goes for a walk unless authorised to do so by accompanying adult No children will be allowed to interact with the school dog when he is on a walk unless permission is given 	Medium	☒ Careful consideration needs to be given to the amount of time the school dog is allowed to walk around school during play/lunchtimes	Dog walks around external areas at appropriate times and for the well being of the dog	HT	ongoing
☒ Visits to classroom	☒ If the school dog visits a class and the children do not follow the correct procedure he may become over excited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school dog will initially only make classroom visits with Mrs Sanderson The children in classrooms will follow the agreed procedure or interaction will stop 	Medium	☒ Careful consideration will be given to when the school dog can visit classrooms and be under the control of the class teacher or teaching assistant	Dog visits classroom and practises sitting and hearing the noise of classrooms. Children practise not calling his name and also not leaving things on the floor	HT/ class teacher	ongoing

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being fed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If a child tries to interact when the school dog is eating he may respond aggressively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No child will be allowed in the school dog's contained area when he is eating 	<p>Low</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reminders to the children the school dog to not interact when he is eating Feeding will normally happen at home but as a puppy this will also need to be at school. 	<p>Dog eats before children are at school in HT office</p>	<p>HT</p>	<p>ongoing</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If the school dog is overwhelmed he may become aggressive or boisterous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school dog will only attend school events if they are appropriate and he will be under the control of a supervising adult 	<p>Low</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor the school dog's reaction to school events If the school events are too overwhelming the school dog might not attend school on that day or will stay in his crate during the event 	<p>This happens whenever Dog is likely to interact in a situation</p>	<p>HT</p>	<p>ongoing</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other dogs (on and off site) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If the school dog encounters another dog he may become boisterous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No other dogs will be allowed on the school premises At no time will the school dog be walked by a child and as a result if another dog is seen this will be dealt with by the supervising adult 	<p>Low</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor the school dogs reaction when out walking 	<p>This is monitored</p>	<p>HT/SBM</p>	<p>ongoing</p>
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<p>Signature: </p>	<p>Review Date: 08/03/26</p>
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