

Therapy Dog in School Policy

Last reviewed: November 2025

Next review due by: September 2026

We do things differently.....

H.E.R.E

*High Standards
Empathy
Resilience
Emotional Response*

Contents

Policy Statement.....	2
Rationale.....	2
Information	3
Communication, Introduction and Integration of the Dog	3
Curriculum.....	4
Complaints and Allegations	4
Contingency Plans.....	4
Health and Safety.....	5
Pupils, Staff and Visitors.....	5
The Dog.....	6
Appendix1-Risk Assessment	7
Therapy Dog Risk Assessment	7
1. Description of Activity	7
2. Persons at Risk.....	7
3. Risk Assessment Table	7
4. Dog & Handler Requirements.....	8
5. Pupil Participation Controls	8
6. Emergency Procedures	8
7. Review & Monitoring.....	9

Policy Statement

Arbour Academy is committed to the safety of its pupils, employees and visitors. This policy has been implemented to ensure that the welfare of these stakeholders, as well as the dog, are prioritised at all times.

Arbour does not allow dogs on the school site unless specifically authorised by the Head of School or if they are assistance dogs.

This policy outlines the measures put in place to allow the school to authorise a therapy/reading dog on the school site.

Rationale

The value of animal therapy is known to have multiple benefits to pupil wellbeing and mental health. Existing UK schools with a therapy dog report:

- Increased pupil attendance by up to 16% (Knockhill Primary Academy)
- Decreased anxiety and improved social interactions in pupils (Kingshill School)
- Benefits to the development of communication and emotional skills of pupils (Bristnall Hall Academy)
- Increased understanding of responsibility and development in empathy in pupils

(Sancton Wood School)

The additional value of having a therapy dog to support with reading in school is widely reported by UK charities as:

- Benefitting pupils who are reluctant to read, unconfident readers and those with additional needs (Therapy Dogs Nationwide)
- Improving reading skills, encouraging positive behaviour and building self-confidence and self-esteem (Bark and Reading)
- Reducing stress and nerves when reading out loud to a group and creating a calming environment to develop confidence (Pets as Therapy)

All of these benefits will be of huge value to our pupils given that:

- The proportion of pupils with additional needs at Norham High School is well over twice the national average (30% compared to 12.1% national average).
- Reading is a key priority for the school, particularly targeting reluctant readers
- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on reading ages in KS3
- The average reading age of a Year 8 pupil is currently 10 years 9 months (chronological age of 12+)
- The average reading age of a Year 7 pupil is currently 10 years (chronological age of 11+)

Information

When identifying a therapy/reading dog to work in school, the following information must apply:

- The dog must have a named owner who is an employee at the school
- The owner must take full responsibility for the care of the dog and keep the dog up to date with their vaccinations, worm and flea treatments and any other treatment they may require to maintain good health
- Consideration must be made to the breed and nature of the dog
- The breeder must be reputable and provide evidence of full health checks of both parents of the dog
- The dog should be hypoallergenic to reduce the risk of allergy
- The dog must undergo training at a reputable training company
- The dog must have a base in school where they will remain when not working
- The dog must be at least 6 months of age to work directly with pupils on therapeutic and reading intervention

Communication, Introduction and Integration of the Dog

The school must ensure that prior to the placement of a dog that all stakeholders have been informed. The following steps are in place:

- All staff will be communicated with via the weekly staff bulletin and the offer of a drop-in session. All staff will be given the option to opt of involvement with a therapy dog if they have any concerns regarding health and safety, allergies or fears of animals.
- Letters will be sent to all parents/carers informing them of the school's decision to have a therapy dog on site. All parents/carers will be given the option to opt out of their child having involvement with the therapy dog.
- All pupils will be informed through form class. An assembly will be delivered to every year group to introduce a dog and inform pupils of key messages regarding health and safety. All pupils will also have the option to opt of involvement with a therapy dog.
- The dog will attend school open evenings and events to introduce them to new parents/carers and pupils.
- All visitors will be informed that there is a therapy dog on site via a notice in the school reception and notice on the school website.

The dog will then be introduced to the school site on a gradual basis over time in order to protect the welfare of the dog and all stakeholders. The dog will not work directly with pupils until they are fully trained, integrated and used to all aspects of school life i.e., school bells, fire alarms, transitions between classes and familiarity with staff.

Curriculum

The curriculum will support learning about dogs and how best to behave around our dog. A dog will support pupils with:

- Reading – pupils will read to the dog
- Responsibility– pupils will take part in daily responsibilities of looking after a dog such as walking, brushing, feeding and watering.
- Welfare – pupils will be offered time with the dog for therapy
- Rewards – the dog will be involved with rewarding pupils for those who would like to be involved

A dog will follow a structured timetable, ensuring that its work has meaning and sessions will be pre- planned and linked to the school's curriculum.

Complaints and Allegations

Arbour Academy has completed a thorough risk assessment to allow for the presence of dogs on the school site. This will be reviewed and updated annually unless required sooner. If anyone reports any issues regarding the dog, they will be asked to raise their concerns in writing which will be responded to in line with our complaint's procedure.

Should the dog hurt anyone:

- Parents/carers will be informed immediately (if pupil)
- First aid procedure will be fully implemented
- Pupil or staff members will be released for medical attention if required
- A full investigation of circumstances will be conducted. A dog will not be permitted onto the school site until the investigation is completed.
- The suitability of a dog will be re-assessed following the investigation.

Should the dog get hurt by someone:

- The owner will be informed immediately
- The owner will visit the registered vet if deemed necessary
- A full investigation of circumstances will be undertaken
- The access of the person responsible for injuring the dog will be re-assessed following investigation.

A dog in school will be covered by the school's public liability insurance for injury to the dog through negligence of a member of staff or the fabric of the building. Additional insurance is required to cover the owner for third party public liability in the event that the dog injures a member of staff, pupil or visitor.

Contingency Plans

If the dog escapes from the school building and is loose on the school grounds:

- The owner will be informed immediately
- The owner and other identified handlers/members of staff will be asked to secure exits to

- prevent the dog from leaving the grounds
- Pupils will be informed not to approach or chase the dog

The owner will secure the dog with a lead using training commands. If the dog escapes from the school site:

- The owner will be informed immediately
- The owner and other identified handlers/members of staff will be asked to search the surrounding area
- Pupils will be informed not to approach or chase the dog
- If found, the owner will secure the dog with a lead using training commands
- If not found, the missing dog will be reported to the correct outside agencies

In case of an emergency evacuation/fire drill:

- The appropriate adult will walk the dog on a lead to the assembly point
- The dog will be passed to the owner
- The dog will remain with the owner until the building is deemed safe and all pupils have re-entered classrooms.
- If the owner is not on site when there is an evacuation, then another member of staff will be delegated responsible for the ownership of the dog during this time

In the case of severe weather:

- The dog will only be walked during cooler period of the day in hot weather to prevent overheating and burns to paws
- A fan will be provided to keep the dog cool during hot weather if required
- The dog will only be walked if the ground is deemed appropriate during snow/ice periods (clear of both) to prevent frostbite
- The dog will be kept in a room which is warm during cold weather periods

Health and Safety

To ensure the safety and welfare of our pupils, staff, visitors and a therapy dog, a full risk assessment is in place (Appendix 1). The following outlined steps will be taken to protect all on the school site.

Pupils, Staff and Visitors

- The dog will be supervised at all times when moving around the school building and will be kept on a lead when on a walk.
- The dog will be under the full control and supervision of an adult at all times when on the school site.
- Pupils will never be left alone with the dog.
- Pupils and staff will be informed on how to act around the dog prior to its integration. New staff and pupils will receive this advice prior to joining the school.
- The number of pupils having access at one time will be monitored and limited to a reasonable amount.
- Adults will immediately remove the dog from the situation if it shows any signs of distress (growling, bearing teeth, tail lowered between legs).
- The dog will be kept away from any area within the school where food is being prepared or consumed i.e., kitchen, dining hall, technology department).
- Anyone who has access to the dog must wash his or her hands before and after interaction.
- The dog will be discouraged from jumping, scratching and licking.
- Pupils will only access the dog when they are scheduled to meet or work with the dog.
- The dog will not be linked with any pupil whose parents/carers withdraw consent or where there is a high risk of the pupil injuring the dog or putting himself or herself in danger with the dog.
- Sensible precautions will be put in place to minimise the risk of the spread of infectious disease.
- The dog will not enter the school site unless free from parasites.

The Dog

- Pupils will be informed not to disturb the dog whilst sleeping or eating. The dog will have a designated place where it can rest and eat.
- The dog will work for three hours' maximum per day and be given sufficient time between sessions to rest, eat and toilet. Only the dog's handler will have access to the dog during this time.
- The dog will be exercised on school field when appropriate.
- The dog will be given time to adjust to the school environment (i.e., fire alarm, bells etc.) prior to being introduced to pupils.
- The dog will never be left in the building unsupervised or overnight.
- The dog will be cared for outside of school when unable to attend school i.e., due to illness etc.
- The dog will only be handled by confident staff who are familiar to the dog and able to control them.
- The dog will have access to fresh drinking water at all times.
- The dog will be given the opportunity to toilet whenever required.
- The dog's owner will ensure that the dog is not put into any potential situations that would compromise the dog's health and wellbeing.
- The dog's claws will be trimmed to reduce risk of accidental scratching.
- The dog is microchipped and registered to the owner.
- Pet insurance is in place to ensure that the dog is covered for any injury.

Appendix1-Risk Assessment

Therapy Dog Risk Assessment

Setting: Alternative Provision (11–16 years)

Activity: On-site Therapy Dog Sessions

Assessor: Colette Heavey

Date: Nov 25

Review Date: Sept 26

1. Description of Activity

A trained and assessed therapy dog will attend the Alternative Provision site to support pupils' emotional regulation, wellbeing, engagement, and social skills. Sessions may include supervised interaction, calm presence, reading, or one-to-one support with identified pupils.

2. Persons at Risk

- Pupils aged 11–16 (including SEND, SEMH, trauma-informed cohorts)
- Staff and visitors
- Therapy dog handler
- Therapy dog

3. Risk Assessment Table

Hazard	Who Might Be Harmed	Risk Level (Before Controls)	Control Measures in Place	Risk Level (After Controls)
Dog bites or scratches	Pupils, staff	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dog assessed as suitable for AP setting• Calm temperament only• Dog always supervised and on lead when required• Pupils briefed on safe interaction• No unsupervised contact• Individual risk assessments for pupils• Dog removed immediately if pupil dysregulates	Low
Pupils behaving aggressively towards dog	Dog, pupils	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sessions limited to appropriate pupils only• Staff trained in de-escalation• Allergy information gathered in advance• Consent obtained from parents/carers	Low
Allergic reactions	Pupils, staff	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dog excluded from allergy-sensitive areas• Handwashing before/after contact	Low
Fear or phobia of dogs	Pupils, staff	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participation voluntary• Advance notice of dog presence	Low

Hazard	Who Might Be Harmed	Risk Level (Before Controls)	Control Measures in Place	Risk Level (After Controls)
Slips, trips, or falls (dog movement, lead)	Pupils, staff	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog kept in designated areas only • Dog positioned calmly • Lead managed by handler • Clear floor space maintained 	Very Low
Zoonotic infections	Pupils, staff	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog fully vaccinated, flea/worm treated • Regular grooming and health checks • Hand hygiene enforced • Session's time-limited • Safe quiet space provided 	Very Low
Dog stress or fatigue	Dog	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handler monitors stress signals • Dog removed if showing distress • Dog never left alone with pupils 	Low
Safeguarding concerns (unsupervised contact)	Pupils	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handler DBS checked • Sessions logged and supervised 	Low
Cross-contamination (food, equipment)	Pupils	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog not present during meals • Dog bowls kept separate • Cleaning protocols followed 	Very Low

4. Dog & Handler Requirements

- Dog temperament assessed and suitable for work with children
- Up-to-date vaccinations, flea and worming treatments
- Regular veterinary health checks
- Handler trained in:
 - Therapy dog handling
 - Safeguarding
 - Behaviour recognition and stress signals
- Enhanced DBS check for handler
- Public liability insurance in place

5. Pupil Participation Controls

- Written parental/carer consent obtained
- Individual pupil risk assessments completed where required
- Participation is voluntary
- Pupils taught:
 - How to approach the dog safely
 - When not to interact
 - Respecting dog boundaries

6. Emergency Procedures

- Dog removed immediately if:
 - A pupil becomes dysregulated

- Dog shows signs of stress
- First aid procedures followed if injury occurs
- Incident logged and reported according to setting policy
- Risk assessment reviewed after any incident

7. Review & Monitoring

- Risk assessment reviewed:
 - Annually
 - After any incident
 - If cohort needs change
- Ongoing monitoring of dog welfare and pupil impact