

Our schools believe in providing children with enriching and diverse experiences which allow them to feel nurtured and safe. This can be through the use of therapy pets which could be school owned animals, staff pets or visiting providers.

There are many benefits such as developing responsibility, empathy, nurture and enjoyment of interacting with animals and forming positive relationship.

NOTE: Pets are bought into school to support educational aims and pupil personal development – this means that dogs (in particular) cannot be bought in purely for the benefit of the staff (where they may not have day care organised for their dog).

Welfare of animals – see page 2

Animals chosen as school animals – see page 3

- Fish
- Rabbits and guinea pigs
- Chickens
- Dogs
- Other animals
- Food stuffs & transport

Risk assessments – see page 3

- Must be authorised by the Head
- Parents/carers must be informed at least 5 school days beforehand
- Risk assessment must include how the animal will be evacuated when needed

Animals in school – see page 3

- School dogs
- Therapy animals
- Visiting animals to support education

Pupil behaviour around dogs – see page 4

- Pupils must not be left alone with dogs – adult supervision is needed at all times
- Children are taught and reminded of expectations around behaviour with a dog and how to recognise that the dog is becoming stressed
- Dogs will have an appropriate space to relax in which is not accessed by children
- Pupils, where applicable, will sign a code of conduct written in a suitable age/stage of development with supporting Communicate In Print
- Length of time children interact will be limited according to the response of the dog. A dog which moves away repeatedly or demonstrates stressed behaviour will be taken to their designed rest space

Parent/carers and visitors bringing dogs onto the school grounds – see page 4

- Schools will make reasonable adjustments to ensure disabled people are not discriminated against
- Registered assistance dogs – parents/carers/visitors should contact the school first so that reasonable adjustments can be made. They will need to provide to the school the evidence that the dog is qualified and with which organisation
- No other dogs are allowed on school grounds (even when carried)
- Dogs must not be tied up by/near the school gates and left unattended at any time

Responsibilities – see page 4

- Head
- Staff
- Animal owner
- Parents/carers
- Pupils



Policy Document for: Animals in school

Due for Review: Spring 2026

Additions/amendments in this version

Page 1	Addition to Aspire pets which visit the school
Page 1	Clarification for what pets need an individual risk assessment
Page 2	Clarification around staff pets and the reasons they can and cannot be bought into school
Page 3	Additions for other types of animals and clarification on food and transport for the animals
Page 3	Risk assessments: change to parent/carer notification to 5 school days
Page 3	Clarifications to school dogs
Page 4	Clarifications to visiting animals, pupil behaviour
Page 4	Clarification to parents/carers and visitors requesting dogs to come on site
Page 4	Additions for responsibilities for Head
Page 4	Additions for staff responsibilities

Introduction

In our schools, we believe in providing children with enriching and diverse experiences that allow individuals to feel nurtured and safe. Research has shown many benefits to therapy dogs and pets within a school setting.

Our schools have different animals which have been carefully chosen around meeting the needs of our pupils.

- Grove Park has introduced the use of a therapy dog, along with small creatures such as rabbits and guinea pigs to support a child's emotional well-being.
- Aspire school have a visiting Pets As Therapy dog as well as staff pets which can be bought in for curriculum enrichment and personal development by agreement with the Head Teacher (edited May 25)

This Policy is designed to set out to pupils, parents, staff, and visitors the reasons for having animals within our school and the expectations and responsibilities to ensure the safety of pupils, staff and visitors and the animals.

Benefits of animals in our schools

There are many benefits, both educationally and emotionally, which increase a child's understanding of responsibility, develop empathy and nurturing skills through the contact of animals. In addition to these benefits, children take great enjoyment from interacting with our animals and we see positive relationships formed.

We recognise that there is a risk associated to having animals within our setting and this has been mitigated against using a robust risk assessment for each animal or group (such as guinea pigs and rabbits) to ensure the safety of all.

Animals such as School dogs have been proven to help develop Pupils' reading skills, improve behaviour, attendance and academic confidence, as well as increasing pupils understanding of responsibility and in the development of empathy and nurturing skills [Pets in schools | Blue Cross](#) Access to school animals is an addition to the school offers for social, emotional & mental health

support and will help promote engagement for those children who have found it difficult to access talking therapies in the past.

Using animals in school to support aims to:

- Teach empathy and appropriate interpersonal skills;
- Help individuals develop social skills;
- Be soothing;
- Improve a child's ability to pick up on social cues which are imperative to human relationships; researchers report that pupils can identify with animals, and with empathy for the dog, can better understand how classmates may feel. It was found that violent behaviour in participating pupils declined by 55%, and general aggression went down 62%.
- Therapy dogs have been shown to support emotional regulation through the positive impact on the autonomic nervous system
- Shows that children working with therapy dogs have experienced improved motivation and confidence for learning, resulting in improved outcomes.
- Support social, emotional and mental health needs which aids development of reading such as the Paws and Read scheme [Schools - THERAPY DOGS NATIONWIDE \(tdn.org.uk\)](https://www.tdn.org.uk) Research has proved that pupils who read to dogs show an increase in reading levels, word recognition, a higher desire to read and write, and an increase in intrapersonal and interpersonal skills among the pupils they mix with
- Increase attendance
- Reduce anxiety; evidence shows that just by being near a dog when stressed can reduce anxiety. In a survey, 92% of pupils said they felt more relaxed during teaching and learning time when there was a dog/ animal in the classroom
- Teach responsibility and respect to all life

Bark & Read – The Kennel Club (<https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/barkandread>) SEND benefits “Therapy Dogs Nationwide dogs.

NOTE: Pets are bought into school to support educational aims and pupil personal development – this means that dogs (in particular) cannot be bought in purely for the benefit of the staff (where they may not have day care organised for their dog) Added Sept 2025

Legislation

The primary applicable legislation is the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 and the Management of Health and Safety Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000.

Welfare of animals

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 covers the welfare of all/any visiting animals. All schools will ensure that they comply with this by:

- Providing a suitable environment
- Providing a suitable diet and water
- Ensuring the animal can display normal behaviours
- Meeting the needs of the animal for suitable housing and meeting social needs
- For all animals to be free from pain, suffering, injury and disease

[Advice and Welfare Information for Animals | RSPCA - RSPCA - rspca.org.uk](https://www.rspca.org.uk)

Animals chosen as school animals

Consideration is given to the type of animal chosen and ensuring that its needs will be fully met such as:

- Fish will have a suitably sized tank, well positioned (by an electrical supply and out of direct sunlight), correct equipment to monitor water quality and plenty of places to hide and suitable enrichment
- Rabbits and guinea pigs must be kept in pairs and will have a large house and exercise area, with a constant supply of hay and enrichment including areas to dig. They will have areas to live in where they are not disturbed by children. They will be handled sufficiently by adults to ensure that they are not stressed when being handled by children as part of educational objectives
- Chickens must be kept in a group with a fox proof house and secure run to live in. The run will have additional wiring to reduce risks from Avian flu (from wild birds coming in to eat the hen food). The run will be managed carefully to ensure that the hens have a dust bath and ability to forage, and that mud is limited to prevent disease to the hens
- Dogs – see section below
- Other animals – such as reptiles or snails must be in suitable housing. Where electric is required (such as for heat lamps) this must be plugged directly into a socket and not using an extension lead (added Sept 25).

All food for all animals must be part of their risk assessment and housed in a suitable location and container (added Sept 25)

Animals must be transported in suitable sized transport carriers

Risk assessments

Before any animal comes into our schools, a risk assessment is undertaken which must be signed off by the Head. Parents/carers are informed for consent at least 5 school days (edited Sept 25) ahead of a visit or a new pet arriving. We know that some of our pupils have allergies and some have fears around certain animals and it is important that this is known and respected for each child. Children with allergies to dogs will not be exposed to a dog in school.

Risk assessments will also consider the needs of the animal, including naming staff members who will be responsible for evacuating them in case of an emergency evacuation.

Animals in schools

School dogs

School based dogs will have additional risk assessments in place and will be certified under a nationally recognised scheme such as Pets As Therapy or Therapy Dogs Nationwide. If a younger dog comes into school, it will be being trained to achieve certified status with such an organisation.

- Dogs in school will be on a lead at all times and always supervised by their owner.
- The owner of the dog will be responsible for the dog at all times and must take responsibility in the event of harm accidentally or otherwise
- All school dogs must be insured by their owner and the evidence copied and given to the Head (added Sept 25)

Therapy animals

Any animal visiting to offer therapy will be registered under a national scheme such as Pets as Therapy or Therapy Dogs Nationwide. This ensures that they are assessed and suitable to be used as therapy pet.

Visiting animals to support education

At times, the schools may choose to get a recognised provider to come into school to deliver education. This may include bringing suitably chosen animals. Parental consent will be obtained ahead of any such visit. This could include local organisations such as Creepy Claws (added Sept 25)

The schools ask organisations such as Blue Cross or Dogs Trust to come into school to deliver assemblies or focussed lessons around dogs and dog safety.

Pupil behaviour around dogs

- Pupils will not be left along with dogs; there will be suitable adult supervision at all times (dog's owner) as well as staff member(s)
- Children will be taught, and reminded of, expectations of behaviour around the dog to help them learn appropriate behaviours and how to recognise the dog is becoming stressed and they must move away. This is an important life skill for children
- The dog will have an appropriate space to relax in which will not be accessed by children
- Pupils will sign the Code of Conduct, written in a suitable age/stage of development, with supporting Communicate in Print to remind them of the expectations
- The length of time children will be interacting with the dog will be limited according to the response of the dog. Should the dog move away repeatedly or demonstrate stressed body language, the dog will be taken to a designated space to rest to support their welfare (added Sept 25)

Parents/carers & visitors bringing dogs into school grounds

Under the Equality Act 2010, the schools must make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled people are not discriminated against.

- Where a person has a registered assistance dog, they should contact the school first so that reasonable adjustments can be made to ensure successful access. They will need to provide documents to the school to demonstrate how the dog has been qualified and with which organisation (edited Sept 25)
- No other dogs are permitted on the school premises (even when carried)
- Dogs MUST NOT be tied up by/near the school gates and left unattended during pick up/drop off/other event

All dogs on the school premises must be kept on lead at all times. The adult with the dog must be in control of the dog (i.e. have hold of the head). Children must not be left alone with the dog, or in sole charge of the dog on lead. Should any dog defecate on the school grounds, this must be immediately cleared up and disposed of by the owner off site. The school cannot take responsibility for interactions with dogs brought onto site.

First aid

Should anyone be scratched or bitten by an animal at school, first aid will be administered immediately. In case of a pupil, parents/carers may be called.

Responsibilities

Head of School/Head Teacher

The Head will:

- Seek permission from the CEO for the proposed animals in school if they are school pets (edited Sept 25)
- Inform staff, parents and pupils will be informed in writing that animals will be in school
- Seek permissions from parents for their children to interact (added Sept 25)
- Seek permissions from staff regarding interaction with the school pet (added Sept 25)

- Ensure that a sign is displayed at the school entrance if there is a visiting animal
- Must ensure that the animal has suitable access to a quiet area which is away from children
- Maintain records and collect evidence of impact of the animals in school which will be shared with the Trust CEO and Trustees
- Liaise with the site team around any maintenance needed in the area the animals are held in

Staff

- Will teach the children how to carefully and appropriately approach and interact with any animal, alongside the animal owner
- Must teach pupils so they understand that any deliberate violence or threatening behaviour towards the animals will result in a consequence in line with the **behaviour policy/Wellbeing Around the Child** policy (Aspire) (edited Sept 25)
- Pupils will be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dog/ pets before any interaction during a session or visit
- Check the consents for their pupils which will be on Arbor before attending any animal session with their class/pupils
- Inform the Head if they have any relevant allergies so they are not exposed to any animal which could trigger these
- Ensure that pupils do not access the area that the animals are in without permission and are being appropriately supervised

Animal owner

- Bring in evidence of vaccinations and insurance (as relevant)
- Bear any costs related to their animal associated with owning it at home
- Ensure that their animal is appropriately handled and trained, and work towards/hold certification for Pets as Therapy/Therapy Dogs Nationwide
- Ensure that the animal is on lead/transported securely around the site
- Ensure that they are present with their animal at all times, or that a suitable alternative adult is present and has received appropriate training for the needs of the animal
- Ensure they are aware of behaviour that the animal displays which demonstrates that they are stressed. If any animal displays stressed behaviour, they will be removed immediately to their safe, quiet space
- Create care sheets/feeding sheets for their animal which are held in school and shared with staff as necessary
- Dogs/cats: provide suitable poo bags/litter trays for their pet and ensure that they clean up behind them and dispose of the waste accordingly
- Ensure that any area that the animal is in has been secured to prevent pupils accessing without permission
- If the animal is unwell, it will not be brought into school

Parents/carers

- Must give signed consent for their child as well as ensuring any allergies are known to staff

Pupils

- Pupils will not be allowed to play roughly with any animal
- Only a small number of children will be allowed to approach the animal at any one time to avoid the dog becoming overwhelmed
- Pupils will not eat near any school animal
- Children will wash their hands after handling any animal
- Any child who does not have consent will not be allowed to attend any animal session

- Pupils must not approach a dog unless the dog is sitting/laying down and they have permission from the animal owner
- Must not approach or disturb any animal whilst they are eating or sleeping
- Follow the school behaviour policy and understand that deliberate violence or threatening behaviour towards an animal will result in consequences

Equal Opportunities

At BA MAT we are committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all members of our school community irrespective of race, religion or belief, gender, gender reassignment, disability, sexual orientation, age, pregnancy or maternity, marriage and civil partnership or socio-economic background. We are determined to develop a culture of inclusion and diversity in which all those connected to the school feel proud of their identity and ability to participate fully in school life. We tackle discrimination through the positive promotion of equality by challenging stereotypes and by creating an environment that champions respect for all. We believe that diversity is a strength that should be respected and celebrated by all those who learn, teach and visit us.

All school policies have an explicit aim of promoting equality and will be reviewed in terms of their contribution and effectiveness in achieving this aim.

Impact assessment

An initial impact assessment has been carried out for this policy and is graded as follows:

A	Positive impact is explicitly intended and very likely
B	An adverse impact is unlikely, and on the contrary the policy has the clear potential to have a positive impact by reducing and removing barriers and inequalities that currently exist
C	An adverse impact is unlikely. On the contrary there is potential to reduce barriers and inequalities that currently exist. There is insufficient evidence, however, for this assessment to be made with as much confidence as is desirable
D	Adverse impact is unlikely, but positive impact is also unlikely
E	Adverse impact is probable or certain, since certain groups will be disadvantaged, either proportionately or absolutely, or both. Remedial action is therefore necessary