

# Hexham First School

## Pets and Dogs in School Policy



Date written: July 2022

Review period : 3 Years

Date of next review: July 2025

Type of policy: Non-statutory

Hexham First School recognises that the presence of animals in our school can provide a valuable learning experience but animals cannot be allowed to endanger pupil safety or disrupt learning. For that reason, there should be a clear educational purpose for an animal to visit the school. In line with RSPCA guidance the school does not support the keeping of pets on the school site.

The school recognises that a visiting animal offers the potential for a very positive learning experience for children to learn about taking care and showing responsibility for animals as well as developing an understanding of the importance of the humane treatment of living creatures.

It is the school's policy to notify pupil's parents when an animal is being introduced into the classroom. The school is particularly keen to support the introduction of service animals such as hearing dogs, therapy dogs or seeing dogs and this reflects the school's ethos of celebrating diversity and promoting inclusion.

## **Procedures**

Animals brought to school for short term/day visits:

Before bringing an animal onto the school premises during school hours, staff and pupils must seek prior authorisation. Pupils must obtain permission from their class teacher; staff will obtain authorisation from the Headteacher.

Arrangements for animal visits should be made at least 48 hours in advance to ensure that parents are appropriately notified. A letter must be sent to parents explaining about the animal visit and asking families to advise the school of any allergies, or fears the children may have.

Staff or parents must ensure that the animals are in good health and have had all the necessary immunisations or vaccinations. Where possible, evidence should be provided. Any animal brought to school must remain under control of the responsible adult at all times (member of staff the animal belongs to or the parent of the pupil who wants to bring an animal in). The animal should be restrained on a lead or in a suitable carrier. This applies to days when school is in session, prior to the start of school and for any time after the school day, whenever the animal is on the school premises. Transportation of animals to and from school will be the responsibility of the parent/guardian or other adult.

No wild animals or protected animals will be purposely brought to the building or on school grounds by anyone other than an authorised or licensed animal handler. There will be no physical contact between the animal and pupils unless it is an integral part of the learning with prior approval received from the Headteacher.

Should any pupil or adult be scratched or bitten by an animal at school, first aid must be administered immediately and in the case of a pupil, parents will be called. An incident report (signed by the Headteacher) will be sent to the involved family and the policy for animals in school will need to be reviewed accordingly.

## **Children with Medical Concerns**

Health issues must be considered when assessing the appropriateness of animals in the classroom. Prior to the consideration of the introduction of an animal to the classroom, the teacher should review the medical notes of the pupils in their class to ensure there is no conflict. It is the policy of the school to consider the safety, health and well-being of every pupil when making decisions regarding the introduction of animals to the classroom. When there is a conflict in this area, the Headteacher will confer with the staff member to find an agreeable solution to the matter in consultation with others, e.g. the parents and pupil, school and others as appropriate.

If pupils have petted an animal, it is essential that they wash their hands after the activity and that this is supervised to ensure that it is thorough.

## **Responsibility**

The owner or handler of any animal, including a service animal, is responsible for the animal at all times and must take responsibility in the event of any harm accidentally or otherwise that befalls a child. All staff must complete a risk assessment form prior to the introduction of an animal in the classroom which must be signed off by the Headteacher.

## **The Care and Humane Treatment of Animals**

Animals within the school will be handled, treated, and cared for in a humane manner. Enclosures must be appropriate to the animal and it is the responsibility of the staff member to ensure that the animal has sufficient food, water and a comfortable environment to reduce the stress for the animal. Habitats must be maintained and cleaned by staff, not pupils.

## **Guidance on Bringing Dogs into 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. Additionally, dogs are often brought into schools from outside agencies, e.g. Guide Dogs for the Blind, as well as animal rescue charities such as the Dogs Trust and occasionally by pupils, parents or teachers. Only rarely does a dog bite without warning.

Is there a risk in bringing a dog into a school environment? Of course there is, though there are a variety of accidents which can happen within the school environment which far exceed the number of injuries or incidents caused by dogs. Therefore, it is just another risk that can be successfully managed. We should not lose sight of the fact that 'nearly all biting accidents are preventable and very often depend on the behaviour of the child prior to the accident.

## **Legislation**

The primary applicable legislation is the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 and where risk assessment is required, the Management of Health and Safety Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000. In respect of the dog(s), it is the Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 and as amended.

It is important that suitable arrangements are in place prior to any dog being brought into the school.

- Agreement should be sought from the school Headteacher and parents should be notified of the intention to bring a dog into the classroom at least 48 hours prior to the event so letters can be sent home – the letter should ask about allergies and fears.
- A risk assessment should be carried out prior to the visit of any dog into the classroom.
- Allergic reactions cannot be discounted from handling dogs, or just from being near them. Pupils known to have allergic reactions to dogs must have their access restricted.
- Consideration should be given to the temperament and characteristics of the breed of dog being brought in, including the size of the dog and its age. You may wish to consult [www.thekennelclubbreedstandards](http://www.thekennelclubbreedstandards) if you have any concerns as to the suitability of a particular breed of a dog. A puppy will not have its adult teeth and will be unlikely to cause the same degree of damage as an adult dog. Thought should also be given to the environment that the animal has been brought up in. Dogs and puppies which have been brought up in a family home environment should be well used to the behaviour and sounds of children.
- Dogs that are ill must not be brought into schools.
- Dogs with young puppies (those under the age of 8 weeks) must not be brought into school as there is the risk of the mother becoming overprotective, which may cause her to react out of character.
- Dogs must be kept on a lead at all times and under the full control and supervision of their owner.
- Pupils must never be left alone with dogs and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times – this should be the dog's owner.

- Prior to the visit, pupils should be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around dogs. Pupils are likely to become excited and it is important that they react calmly and carefully around the dog(s). They should not make sudden movements and must never stare into a dog's eyes as this could be threatening for the dog. Pupils should be told not to put their face near a dog and should always approach it standing up.
- Pupils should be told never to go near or disturb a dog that is sleeping or eating.
- Pupils must not be allowed to play too roughly with the dog.
- Consider the number of pupils who would be patting/stroking or meeting the dog. A large number of pupils 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 should not feed, or eat close to the dogs.
- Pupils should always wash their hands after handling a dog.

### **Parents Bringing Dogs into School Grounds**

Parents who bring their dog into the school grounds, while walking their children to or from school, should keep their dog on a lead at all times. The adult must always have control of the dog – children must never be left alone with or in charge of the dog. Any dog foul should be cleaned immediately. Aggressive dogs, or those with a history of aggression, must not be brought into school grounds. Parents should keep their dog away from other dogs within the grounds as it is not always possible to gauge how dogs can react towards each other. This information should be circulated to parents through a newsletter or through the school website and Class Dojo.

### **Stray Dogs on School Property**

If there is a stray dog in your school grounds, contact your local Council Dog Warden who will come and remove the dog from your school. If you have a recurring problem with stray dogs on school property, you should look at how your site is secured. Remedial work to perimeter fencing may help to reduce the problem.

### **Dog Owner Walking or Exercising their Dog(s) in School Grounds**

School playing fields and playgrounds are private property and should not be used for the purposes of exercising dogs. In the first instance, if it is safe to do so, you should approach the dog owner and ask them to leave. If the practice continues or you feel unable to approach the dog owner, you should contact your Council Dog Warden or the police. If this is a particular problem for your school, you should ensure that playing fields and/or the playground are inspected prior to use for evidence of dog fouling.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

The Governors have a responsibility to ensure that the school has a written policy for pets and dogs in school. The Headteacher is responsible for developing this guidance into a school policy 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.