



Therapy Dog Policy

Introduction:

Ardfinnan National School would like to introduce the use of a therapy dog into our school community. Research has shown many benefits to therapy dogs in school settings. This policy is designed to set out to students, staff, parents and visitors the reasons for having a school dog and the rules and responsibilities to ensure the safety of students, staff, visitors and the school dog. While there is a risk in bringing a dog into the school environment, this can be mitigated against with a risk assessment to ensure the safety of all student, staff and visitors.

The benefits of a school dog:

School dogs have been proven to help develop students' reading skills, improve behaviour, attendance and academic confidence, as well as increasing student's understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills.

Animal assisted therapy can:

- Teach empathy and interpersonal skills
- Help pupils develop social skills
- Be soothing and support the development of social skills and relationship building
- Therapy dogs have been shown to support emotional regulation
- Therapy dogs are being used to support children with social and emotional learning needs which can in turn assist with literacy development

Research into the effects of therapy dogs in schools is showing a range of benefits including:

- Increase in school attendance
- Gains in confidence

Ardfinnan N.S Therapy Dog Policy

- Decreases in learner anxiety behaviours resulting in improved learner outcomes
- Positive changes towards learning and improved motivation
- Enhanced relationships with peers and teachers due to experiencing trust and unconditional positive regard from a therapy dog. This in turn helps a pupil learn how to express their feelings and enter into more trusting relationships.

Principles

- The Board of Management has agreed to the presence of a therapy dog in Ardfinnan National School.
- Only the school dog is allowed on the premises. No other dogs are permitted unless the Principal has approved their visit.
- The Therapy dog is a Goldendoodle. This cross breed has been selected for its temperament, reduced risk of congenital health issues and hypoallergenic, non-shedding coat
- A risk assessment has been carried out and this will be reviewed annually.
- The dog will be included in the fire evacuation procedure under the supervision of trained staff members.
- The dog is covered by the school's Public Liability Insurance Policy. The dog is also fully insured with Allianz
- Staff, parents and students will be informed that a dog will be in school.
- Only staff trained to handle the dog will have permission to do so. Whilst in training, this will be limited to selected members of staff with prior agreement.

Code of Conduct:

- Ms Quinlivan will know the whereabouts of the dog and which staff are supervising at all times.
- If the dog is ill, she will not be allowed into school.
- Ms. Quinlivan, Ms Geoghegan and Niamh Carrigan are responsible for ensuring the training of the dog under the guidance of My Canine Companion facilitator.
- The therapy dog must be kept on a lead when moving around the school.
- Pupils must never be left alone with the dog and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times
- Pupils will be reminded of what is appropriate school behaviour before any interaction with the school therapy dog.
- As our Therapy dog is a working dog in Ardfinnan National School, all staff and pupils will be reminded of not distracting the dog while it is working, supporting children or in training.

Ardfinnan N.S Therapy Dog Policy

- If the dog is surrounded by a large number of children, the dog could become nervous and agitated. Therefore the adult in charge of the dog must ensure that they monitor the situation. If the dog displays any warning signs such as growling or flattening of her ears then she should be immediately removed from that situation.
- Any dog foul should be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately.
- Records and anecdotal evidence of work and impact of the school dog will be maintained. The school will record this on the Teddy_ar_Scoil Instagram page. Parental permission for pupils to appear with Teddy on his Instagram page was sought and recorded on Aladdin Schools.

Pupil Responsibilities:

- Pupils should be careful to rub the dog on his body, chest, back and not by his face or the top of his head.
- Pupils are not allowed to approach or disturb the dog while he is sleeping or eating,
- Pupils are not allowed to play roughly with the dog.
- Pupils must wait until the school dog is sitting or lying down before touching or stroking him.
- Pupils are not allowed to eat around the dog.
- Pupils must always wash their hands before and after stroking or handling the dog.
- Pupils understand that any deliberate violence or threatening behaviour towards the dog will not be tolerated and will be addressed through the Code of Behaviour.

Review and Ratification

This policy has been ratified by the Board of Management of Ardfinnan National School on 19/3/24 and will be reviewed annually or as the need arises.

Chairperson: T. Kelly Date: 19-3-24

Principal: B. O'Donnell Date: 19/3/24