

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

POLICY ON SCHOOL DOGS

1. Introduction

School Dogs are becoming an ever popular and worthwhile addition to schools across Scotland.

There is a growing body of thought that children can benefit educationally and emotionally, increase their understanding of responsibility, and develop empathy and nurturing skills through contact with a school dog. In addition to these benefits, children take great enjoyment from interaction with a school dog. Scottish Borders Council value the development of children's well-being, their moral and social education as highly as academic attainment. We believe a "school dog" will be a unique way to enrich all areas of the children's wider education, skills, and well-being within the Scottish Borders.

What must be discussed and identified is whether there are risks or concerns in bringing a dog into a school environment. Of course, there are risks and concerns with bringing a School Dog into School and therefore, these require to be carefully assessed and managed.

A school dog is a live animal which must be cared for, nurtured, and safeguarded in terms of its welfare and the important dog freedoms or rights which are a cornerstone of the Scottish Government Code of Practice Guidance for the welfare of dogs. This should be paramount and a therefore a cornerstone of any Policy on School Dogs.

Those Five Freedoms are: -

1. its needs for a suitable environment
2. its need for a suitable diet
3. its need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns.
4. any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals.
5. its needs to be protected from suffering, injury, and disease.

This Policy aims to address the risks, concerns and the importance of dogs rights or freedoms, and therefore set documented standards and controls to be adhered to at all times.

2. Policy

1. This policy applies to designated Scottish Borders Council "school dogs" only. It does not affect the school's right to prohibit other dogs on school property. Scottish Borders Council's policy is that dogs are not allowed anywhere on the school estate site at any

time unless specifically authorised by the Head Teacher. This policy outlines measures put in place to allow an authorised school dog to be present on the school premises only.

2. A "school dog" is defined for the purposes of this policy, as a dog which has undergone the required mandatory training and independent certified assessment. Training should be to a satisfactory standard through Canine Concern Scotland/ Kennel Club/ Dogs Trust or some other such equivalent body assessed by Scottish Borders Council as the appropriate standard to be met. Independent Certified Assessment shall be from a Clinical Animal Behaviourist who will be able to work on the skills and attitude that will help the dog feel safe and confident and able to relax within the school environment. Consideration should be given to the appropriate expert to assess the training and behaviour. The Animal Behaviour and Training Council (ABTC) is a regulatory body which represents and maintains a register of animal trainers and behaviourists fulfilling accreditation criteria and belonging to approved member associations. Abtcouncil.org.uk. In addition, The Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour (ASAB) is an independent organisation which accredits Certified Clinical Animal Behaviourists. Asab.org. In addition, veterinarians who hold Advanced Practitioner or specialist status in Animal Behaviour can be found via the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons- findavet.rcvs.org.uk. Consideration must be given to the fact that dogs behaviours continuously change and develop. Thus, independent certification should be reviewed annually or sooner where there have been any changes that may affect the dog, or there have been changes noted in the dog's temperament.
3. Only when such assessment and satisfactory training has been obtained, reviewed, and approved by an officer of the Council will the dog become a certified school dog for the purposes of this policy and cleared for use in a Scottish Borders Council school.
4. Following approval, the dog will be gradually introduced to the school, it is preferable for the dog to first visit the school during the holidays, or over several weekends, giving them the chance to explore the environment gradually, slowly, and calmly on a loose lead without children being present. For the first few months the dog should attend school only for short periods and meet only small groups of children in controlled situations, and any physical interaction should only involve one child at a time, If possible.
5. At no point should the dog be brought into the school with children as a puppy. Exposure to a school environment might interfere with a puppy's natural sleeping patterns, which could have a detrimental impact on their behaviour and wellbeing.
6. The school dog will belong to an owner which will be a member of the teaching staff/ senior management of the school with whom they form an important bond and live as part of that owner's family. The owner will also be the specific member of staff assigned to the school dog as the handler of the school dog.
7. The school dog will go home to the owner/handler's home every day after school and overnight along with weekends and holidays. The school dog handler/ owner will be responsible for the well-being and safety of the school dog. A school dog will never be left in school or on the school premises overnight. Priority for the well-being of the school dog will be an integral part of all risk assessments undertaken. Upholding of the Five Freedoms or rights of the school dog will be the responsibility of the owner/ handler.

8. It is anticipated that a school dog will likely be resident within the school each day for a large part, if not the whole, of the school day. A school dog is by definition a dog that spends much of their time in the classroom or elsewhere in the school environment, on a consistent ongoing basis. However, as per Kennel Club guidance each active session should be no longer than one hour, and dogs should work for no longer than three active hours during the day. They should have access to a quiet, safe, and comfortable place to rest for a proportionate break between sessions. During this time, only the owner/ handler should be allowed access to the dog. The Dog's welfare will always be paramount.
9. Attendance in school each day, although likely, should not however be seen as a "given". Care should be taken to assess and identify should the school dog not wish to attend. The school dog's wishes in attendance each day should be assessed on an ongoing daily basis to ensure that its health, safety and wellbeing are being monitored and maintained. School dogs who have become accustomed to their role in school will and should therefore provide "consent" to their role in school by behaving in such a way to show whether they wish to enter the school each day and it is crucial that due cognisance is taken of those wishes. For example, Priorsford Primary's School Dog "Peggy" lets her owner/ handler (Mrs Sharp), know each day whether she wishes to attend school. Sometimes she does not wish to come out of the car when the door is opened at the school entrance and her wishes are always respected. She is never made to attend. It is vital part of this policy that the dog's needs and wants are catered for as much as possible including providing consent to attendance each day.
10. It is the intention of the Policy that Parents and Carers will be consulted about the intention to receive a school dog before it is welcomed into the school and becomes a school dog. Parent and Carers will receive copies of the School Dogs Policy and the Risk Assessment relating to the school dog concerned. Parents and Carers should be advised that the mandatory training and certificates including insurance documents are available to them to view and receive copies of, on request.
11. Parents/carers have the right to withhold consent for their child to have any direct contact with the school dog. Any such wishes will be respected and upheld by the school.
12. Any visitors who have allergy to dogs or the specific breed of the school dog, and who have made this known to the school management team, should not be permitted to have any contact with the dog and should be strongly advised that they do not approach the "school dog" when in school. Procedures should be put in place to undertake a further specific and therefore individual risk assessment to assess the level of the risk or allergy to them, and such risk managed accordingly to reduce the risk to the lowest level reasonably practicable.
13. Any staff member or pupil who has allergy to dogs or possible allergy to dogs or the specific breed of the school dog, and who has made this known to the school management team, should have a specific or individual risk assessment carried out to assess the level of the risk or allergy to them, and such risk managed accordingly to reduce the risk to the lowest level reasonably practicable.
14. Any pupil with a fear of dogs will be respected and never be forced to interact with the school dog. They can receive coaching in a controlled environment with the school dog to help them overcome their fears only if they so wish and this is discussed, and risk

assessed as appropriate and in conjunction with, and with the relevant consent of, the pupil's parent/carer.

15. All vaccinations, worming treatments and vet checks will be kept up to date by the designated school dog handler and owner. If the school dog is ill, he/she will not be allowed into school.
16. The school dog will be kept on a lead when moving between classrooms or on a walk and will be under the full control and supervision of the handler/ owner/ appropriate adult.
17. Children will never be left alone with the school dog and there must always be appropriate adult supervision, when the school dog is present with pupils.
18. Notices will be displayed in school to inform children, staff, and visitors to the school of the school dog's presence. Pupils should be taught and frequently reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the school dog.
19. Children should be taught to remain calm around the school dog. They should not make sudden movements and must never stare into the school dog's eyes as this could be threatening for the dog.
20. Children should be taught to never put their face near any dog and should always approach it standing up. Children should never go near or disturb the school dog that is sleeping or eating. Children must not be allowed to play too roughly with the school dog. If the school dog is surrounded by many children, the school dog could become nervous and agitated. Therefore, the appropriate adult in charge of the dog must ensure that they monitor the situation and continually assess risk.
21. Dogs express their feelings through their body language. Each dog is different. Growling or baring of teeth indicate that the dog is not happy, and it is feeling angry or threatened or stressed. Flattened ears, tail lowered or between their legs, hiding behind their owner, whining, or growling could be signs that the dog is frightened or nervous. It is important to recognise that each dog is different, and it is important to recognise that if the school dog is displaying any of these warning signs or signals, then the school dog should be immediately removed from that situation or environment.
22. Balanced with the above stressor behaviour indications, the school dog should however have the freedom to exhibit its "normal canine behaviour", and this is to be cherished. This is a crucial right of the school dog. This should have an impact on the school's expectation of the dog's role within the school. Normal behaviour can vary from dog to dog and therefore every school dog will have its own character traits and quirks which the owner/ handler and pupils, staff and frequent visitors to the school will recognise and appreciate. Dogs generally convey contentment through looking calm and relaxed. It is expected that the owner/ handler will be responsible for ensuring that the school dog is importantly allowed the freedom to exhibit "its" normal behaviour patterns within the school environment to allow the school dog to flourish and be happy within its role as a school dog.
23. Children should not feed or eat close to the school dog. The school dog will not be allowed to enter the school kitchen or go into the hall during mealtimes to ensure strict hygiene controls and infection control measure are maintained.

24. Children should always wash their hands after handling / or stroking a school dog.
25. Dog faeces represent a severe risk to human health. Parasitic infections, as well as gastrointestinal illnesses such as norovirus and salmonella can be transmitted from dogs to humans, amongst other diseases. Any school dog foul must be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately by an adult. The school dog will be trained to use a designated and suitably segregated (agreement on appropriate location and segregation should be made with Property Management and Health and Safety Teams), external toileting area that is out-of-bounds to the children. If any 'accidents' occur in areas where children have access to, appropriate measures will be taken to disinfect the affected site so that appropriate infection control measures are always in place as per generic risk assessment.

3. Roles, Responsibilities and Insurance

1. Scottish Borders Council has a responsibility to ensure that all schools have the written policy and risk assessment for "school dogs" in their schools.
2. The Headteacher has overall responsibility for implementing this policy and asking the owner and school dog handler to undertake the risk assessment and any further individual specific risk assessments, as is required for visitors/pupils with allergy who are made known to the school.
3. The Headteacher may delegate this overall responsibility for policy implementation and oversee of risk assessment requirements to the Deputy Head teacher or some other staff member within the senior leadership team, if required. Teachers and staff are required to always abide by this policy.
4. The Health and Safety Team of Scottish Borders Council is responsible for providing any further information, advice, and guidance, as and when required.
5. Scottish Borders Council will have third party insurance cover for the public liability of the school dog when on school premises. This must cover the school dog providing a service or training within the school premises and Scottish Borders Council will have responsibility that cover remains in place and renewed appropriately.
6. The owner/ handler will have responsibility for obtaining adequate domestic pet insurance for the school dog which will be distinct from the third-party liability insurance cover obtained for the school dog within the school premises obtained by and for Scottish Borders Council.
7. Scottish Borders Council retains the right to undertake a full review of the School Dogs Policy and the decision allowing the school dog within school. For example, should a considerable proportion of the School Parent/ Carer community be in opposition to the introduction of a school dog or opinions change within the school community following the use of a school dog then it is deemed that a review should take place.
8. Scottish Borders Council retains the right to immediately revoke access to the school dog within school and ask the owner/handler to remove it from school if it is deemed disruptive, unsafe or the health or wellbeing of the dog is questioned. A full review to include a comprehensive Health and Safety audit must always be carried out before the reintroduction of the school dog on the school premises in such circumstances.

4. Certification of School Dogs

1. Dogs will be considered a Certified School Dog for use in a Scottish Borders Council school only following final sign off by an approved officer of the Council who has confirmed the following is satisfactory:
 - a. The Risk Assessment for the dog in the specific school setting has been reviewed and approved by the Health and Safety Team and Protective Services Dog Officer
 - b. The dog has completed recognised training.
 - c. The dog has been assessed by a Clinical Animal Behaviourist as suitable for work in the school.
 - d. An appropriate segregated toileting area agreed with Property and H&S is in place.
 - e. All other requirements detailed in this policy have been implemented by the school.

5. Benefits of School Dogs

1. Scottish Borders Council believes that a school dog enables children to put school values into practice: from friendship to patience, respect, love, and happiness; each one of these important values can be developed through and alongside a dog.
2. Children with low attendance can be encouraged to come to school with the incentive of a meet and greet from the school dog.
3. With the UK dog population reaching 8.5 million, children and adults are bound to come in to contact with dogs at various points in their lives. Children without pet dogs can learn valuable life skills at school about how to safely interact with dogs when they are out with the home.
4. With a school dog to care for, children are more mindful of their behaviour. Incidents of running in corridors and shouting unnecessarily can be reduced; they are more aware of the impact of their behaviour and choices.
5. One of Scottish Borders Council current school priorities is to help children to develop a growth mindset, to be resilient learners who are not afraid to make mistakes and persevere to acquire new skills. A school dog is an excellent role model for this as training dogs takes time and repetition and can assist children with the growth mindset.
6. Reading programmes with school dogs are doing wonders for some pupils. Children who might be embarrassed to read aloud to the class or even adults are likely to be less scared to read to a dog. It might be less stressful for a child to read aloud to a dog than to a teacher or a peer. A dog will not judge or correct you. School Dogs can be used to encourage struggling readers to practise reading aloud and reluctant writers

to read aloud what they have written. With the presence of a calm and well-trained school dog, pupils find social support and peer interaction.

7. As a focus or context for learning, the school dog can provide an excellent resource and tangible motivation for children in all subject areas.
8. School dogs can provide confidence to children as they can make attentive listeners, providing the children with a sense of comfort and love. School Dogs can work with pupils on a one-to-one basis and will especially help those pupils who are feeling vulnerable, going through upsetting/challenging times or even those pupils who may be scared/phobic of dogs. The school dog can bring much joy and help to pupils they meet. Pupils who struggle with social interaction can find a reassuring friend in a school dog.
9. School Dogs offer an opportunity for improving social development. They are especially useful for teaching social skills and responsibility. Researchers report that pupils who can identify with animals, and have empathy for the dog, can better understand how classmates may feel. Specifically, schools are using dogs to help pupils build self-esteem; learn about positive and negative reinforcement, responsibility, and boundaries. Schools can use dogs to help communicate, teach kindness, and empowerment.
10. With a school dog, pupils can learn how to care for the animal. This includes walking and grooming. Researchers report that involving pupils in the daily care of school dogs is a positive experience, promoting their own daily care. The pupils also learn about responsibility, caring and sharing when helping each other take care of a dog at school.
11. School dogs will be gentle and loving, but at the same time full of fun and enjoyment for the pupils. Walking, grooming, playing, and training are some of the responsibilities that pupils may be allowed to undertake. There is a growing body of thought that working and playing with a school dog improves children's social skills and self-esteem.
12. Although there are risks and concerns associated with school dogs, if these can be identified, controlled, and mitigated as per policy and by the appropriate risk assessments and control methods outlined above then the educational benefits to pupils of having a school dog are clear, comprehensive, and enduring enough to make the role of a school dog worthwhile.
13. This Policy should be seen in conjunction with Appendix 1 (Model Risk Assessment) and Appendix 2 Agreement with School Dog Owner/ Handler (to be signed by SBC Officer of the council and school dog owner/handler)

Appendix 1.

Risk Assessment – “School Dogs”

Appendix 2.

Agreement with School Dog Owner/Handler- to be signed by all parties as above.

DRAFT