**ATTAIN ACADEMY PARTNERSHIP**

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**Therapy Dog in School Policy**

**October 2023**

**Attain Academy Partnership**

Attain Academy Partnership aims to provide an outstanding education for all children in all schools, relevant to the world in which they live. We would like all members of Attain to become:

* Ambitious, knowledgeable, capable learners who are resilient and independent thinkers
* Enterprising, creative and articulate pupils who have a real love of learning and strive for aspirational goals
* Ethical, informed and responsible citizens who value differences and inclusivity
* Healthy, confident and caring individuals who contribute to a mutually supportive environment

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| **Document Reference** | **Number:** MAT091 | | **Version:** 2023-1 |
| **Policy Approved and Minuted** | **By:** Attain Trust Board | | **Date:** |
| **Date of Next Review** | October 2025 | |  |
| **Status:** Non-statutory | | **EIA:** N/A | |

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# 1. Introduction

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Research has shown many benefits to therapy and reading dogs in school settings. The academy has introduced the use of a therapy dog who works with our pupils to improve literacy and pupil behaviour and wellbeing. This policy is designed to set out to pupils, parents and visitors the reasons for having a therapy dog at the academy (Section 2 – The benefits of a therapy dog) and the rules and responsibilities to ensure the safety of pupils, staff, visitors and the therapy dog (Sections 3 and 4 – Principles and Code of Conduct). Although there is a risk in bringing a dog into a school environment, this can be mitigated against with a robust risk assessment to ensure the safety of all pupils, staff and visitors (Appendix A - Risk Assessment template).

Attain Academy Partnership (herein referred to as the trust) recognises that there are educational benefits (both academic and emotional) of using dogs in the classroom. The trust does not allow dogs (except guide dogs) onto trust premises and this is still the case. However the trust does make an exception for named therapy / assistance dogs. It is the headteacher’s / head of school’s responsibility to ensure there is appropriate educational purpose when dogs are permitted on the academy grounds.

**Government guidance regarding pets and animals in school**:

**(Chapter 8: Pets and Animal Contact - GOV.UK - Updated March 2021)**

Pets and other animals in school can enhance the learning environment. However, contact with animals can pose a risk of infection including gastro-intestinal infection, fungal infections and parasites. Some people, such as pregnant women and those with a weakened immune system, are at greater risk of developing a severe infection. However, sensible measures can be taken to reduce the risk of infection to the children and to staff. Only mature and toilet trained pets should be considered and the headteacher should ensure that a knowledgeable person is responsible for the animal. There should be a written agreement within the school detailing:

* The types of animals allowed in the school
* How to manage them and permitted behaviour whilst on the premises
* Where they can go and where they cannot go when in the school
* Any insurance liability of owners and handlers

Animals should always be supervised when in contact with the children and those handling animals advised to wash their hands immediately afterwards. Animals should have recommended treatments and immunisations, be regularly groomed (including claws trimmed) and checked for signs of infection. Bedding should be laundered regularly. Feeding areas should be kept clean and their food stored away from human food. Food not consumed in 20 minutes should be taken away or covered to prevent attracting pests.

# 2. The benefits of a therapy dog

Therapy dogs have been proven to help develop pupils’ reading skills, improve behaviour, attendance and academic confidence, as well as increasing pupil understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills. At the academy we hope that a therapy dog will support our staff team in bringing all of these benefits to our pupils.

Animal assisted interventions (also known as AAI’s) can:

* 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;
* Therapy dogs have been shown to support emotional regulation through the positive impact on the autonomic nervous system
* Show that children working with therapy dogs have experienced increased improved motivation for learning, resulting in improved outcomes;
* therapy dogs are being used to support children with their social and emotional learning needs, which can also aid literacy development.

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

* Increase in school attendance;
* Improved confidence;
* Decreased pupil anxiety resulting in improvements in learning, such as increases in reading and writing levels;
* Improved motivation to learn;
* Enhanced relationships with peers and teachers due to experiencing trust and unconditional positive interactions with a therapy dog;
* Helping children learn how to express their feelings and enter into more trusting relationships.
* Increase social skills and self-esteem
* Teach responsibility and respect to all life

2.1 The following information has been taken from a range of sources to provide further detail about the benefits of having a dog in school:

**Literacy benefits**

Reading to dogs has been proven to help children develop literacy skills and build confidence, through both the calming effect the dogs' presence has on children and the fact that the dog will listen to the children read without being judgemental or critical. This comforting environment helps to nurture children's enthusiasm for reading and provides them with the confidence needed to read aloud. When dogs are in a room of children trying to read they become less stressed, less self-conscious and more confident because dogs are non-judgemental. If children are partnered with a dog to read to, the dog provides comfort, encourages positive social behaviour, enhances self-esteem, motivates speech and inspires children to have fun and enjoy the experience of reading. (See Bark & Read – The Kennel Club, <https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/barkandread>)

**Therapy benefits**

Therapy Dogs Nationwide dogs have also shown to help with special needs and autistic children and adults by giving focus and providing a calming environment. (See Therapy Dogs Nationwide <http://www.tdn.org.uk/schools/>)

**Behaviour & rewards**

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%. Behaviour problems occur in school and these can interfere with learning. Some schools are using dogs to improve behaviour problems by promoting positive behaviour in pupils. In a controlled study, pupils were found to have fewer disciplinary referrals in schools with a dog than schools without. Pupils’ behaviour improved toward teachers, and pupils also showed more confidence and responsibility. Additionally, parents reported that children seemed more interested in school as a result of having a dog at school.

**Mental Health and Wellbeing Benefits**

Some mental health challenges and psychiatric disorders are known to respond well to therapy dogs.  Patients diagnosed with a range of issues, such as depression, bi-polar disorder, Autism, ADHD, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and Alzheimer's disease, benefit from their interaction with therapy dogs and other companion animals.

Sometimes, emotional challenges are the result of physical health problems, and therapy dogs can help with those too. Research suggests that patients who are recovering from difficult surgery or a bad accident who participate in animal-assisted therapy may feel less pain. ﻿ Studies have shown that such interactions can increase the mood-boosting hormone oxytocin and decrease the stress hormone cortisol.

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 in the classroom. When children are more relaxed and less stressed, they’re going to learn more.

**Social Development**

Dogs in school offer an opportunity for improving social development. They are especially useful for teaching pupils social skills and responsibility. Schools are using dogs to help older pupils build self-esteem; learn about positive and negative reinforcement, responsibility, and boundaries. Pupils can use dogs to help communicate, teach kindness, and empower Pupils. With a dog in school, pupils have the opportunity to learn how to care for the dog.  This includes walking and grooming.  Research reports that involving pupils in the daily care of a classroom dog 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.

**Pastoral Care**

Therapy Dogs can work with pupils on a one-one basis and will especially help those pupils who have been bullied, abused, going through upsetting/difficult times or even scared/phobic of dogs. The dog will bring much joy and help to all the pupils they meet and are happy to provide plenty of hugs to the pupils they are spending time with. Pupils who struggle with social interaction can find a reassuring friend in a dog.

# 3. Principles

3.1 The CEO and headteacher / head of school have agreed that the academy can have dogs in school to work with identified pupils,

3.2 Only dogs certified as a therapy dog from an approved organisation and approved by the headteacher / head of school are allowed on the academy site.

3.3 The legal owner of the therapy dog has full responsibility for the welfare of the therapy dog and all expenses relating to pet insurance, food and other expenses and ensuring that the dog is vaccinated, wormed and flea treated.

3.4 The legal owner of the therapy dog, has produced a risk assessment in conjunction with staff which has been approved by the Safeguarding

3.5 The dog will be included in the fire evacuation procedure under the supervision of its legal owner or other trained staff members.

3.6 The academy’s liability insurance covers the academy for risk related to a working dog on site. The Chief Finance Officer has responsibility for ensuring this remains on the academy’s policy during the therapy dog’s time working at the academy.

3.7 Staff, parents and pupils will be informed in writing that a dog will be in the academy.

3.8 Parents can indicate that their child is not allowed to be present during dog therapy sessions by emailing or calling the academy office to inform the headteacher / head of school.

3.9 The presence of a therapy dog will be sign posted to visitors at reception and on the academy website. Reception staff will relay visitor issues to the SLT as soon as possible.

3.10 The therapy dog will only have pupil therapy and reading sessions once certified as a therapy dog by Pets As Therapy (<https://petsastherapy.org/>).

3.11 Only staff trained to handle the dog in pupil sessions will have permission to do so.

# 4. Code of Conduct

## 4.1 Legal Dog Owner or Handler

4.1.1 The legal dog owner or handler is responsible for the dog at all times and must take responsibility in the event of any harm accidently or otherwise that befalls a pupil or member of staff.

4.1.2 The legal dog owner is responsible for ensuring the therapy dog is trained and certified as a therapy dog by Pets As Therapy for example.

4.1.3 Dogs that are ill must not be brought into the academy

4.1.4 The owner of the dog must Understand the standards for working with dogs in schools (see section 6 below)

## 4.2 Staff Responsibilities

4.2.1 Staff will know the whereabouts of the dog and which staff are supervising at all times.

4.2.2 A risk assessment should be carried out prior to the visit of any dog into the classroom.

4.2.3 The therapy dog must be kept on a lead when moving between classrooms or on a walk and will be under the full control and supervision of a trained adult (see clause 3.12).

4.2.4 The therapy dog will be kept in an agreed safe location when not interacting with pupils for therapy or reading sessions. The dog will only visit designated therapy or reading lessons and not be allowed in other areas of the academy.

4.2.5 Staff, visitors and children known to have allergic reactions to dogs must not go near the therapy dog. The receptionist keeps a list of all pupils and staff with a reported allergy to dogs (dander) and ensures that all trained handlers for the therapy dog know who these pupils and staff are.

4.2.6 Staff leading therapy or reading sessions with the therapy dog have a responsibility to ensure all staff, pupils or visitors present are happy for the therapy dog to enter the room.

4.2.7 Pupils must never be left alone with the therapy dog and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times.

4.2.8 Pupils will be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dog before any interaction during a therapy sessions or visit.

4.2.9 If the therapy 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 monitors the situation. If the dog is displaying any warning signs such as growling or flattening of her ears, it should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment by the trained staff member handling her.

4.2.10 Any dog foul should be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately by the trained dog handling staff only.

4.2.11 The academy staff will maintain records and anecdotal evidence of the work and impact of the therapy dog to better inform research into the benefits of a therapy / reading dog.

## 4.2 Pupil Responsibilities

4.2.1 Pupils whose parents have withdrawn consent are not allowed to attend dog therapy sessions

4.2.2 Pupils should be careful to stroke the therapy dog on her body, chest, back and not by its face or top of head.

4.2.3 Pupils are not allowed to approach the therapy dog or disturb it whilst it is sleeping or eating.

4.2.4 Pupils are not be allowed to play roughly with the dog.

4.2.5 Pupils must wait until the therapy dog is sitting or lying down before touching or stroking him.

4.2.6 Pupils are not allowed to eat during sessions with the therapy dog.

4.2.7 Pupils must always wash their hands after handling / stroking the therapy dog.

4.2.8 Pupils understand that any deliberate violence or threatening behaviour towards the therapy dog will result in a fixed term exclusion.

# 5. Legislation

* The primary applicable legislation is the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
* Animal Welfare Act 2006

# 6. Further Information

* [Bark & Read Foundation](https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/about-us/charity-work/bark-and-read/) works with charities, social enterprises and individuals in schools to help children to read with their specially rained support dogs.
  + [Bark & Read Standards of Practice](https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/1935/bark-and-read-standards-of-practice.pdf) for Providers of Animal Assisted Interventions in schools
* [Dogs for Good](https://www.dogsforgood.org/)**: click here for further information on** [their community dogs programs for schools](https://www.dogsforgood.org/community-dog/community-dogs-schools/).
  + [Standards of practice in animal assisted intervention](https://www.dogsforgood.org/community-dog/standards-of-practice-in-animal-assisted-intervention/)

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# Appendix A – Therapy Dog Risk Assessment template

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| --- | --- |
| **Activity:** | **Therapy Dogs in the Academy** |
| **Who is affected** | Staff, Pupils, visitors, dogs and handlers |
|  |  |
| **Hazard** | **Existing Control Measures** |
| **Animal Behaviour** |  |
| Staff, pupils or visitors could be injured if the therapy dog is not comfortable in a specific environment and reacts badly, including bites or scratches | * The dog will receive ongoing formal training, socialising and conditioning by the owner. * The dog will be certified by Pets As Therapy before commencing therapy and reading sessions * Handler will speak to academy staff in advance and ensure that the area and activity is safe. Time limits on activities will be agreed. * Pupils and parents are warned of the hazard before therapy sessions with the therapy dog and take part only with consent * Pupils are taught appropriate behaviour around the therapy dog, what to do to prevent over stimulating or upsetting the dog and how to remain calm around it * Pupils are closely supervised by an adult during dog therapy sessions * Pupils are never left with the dog unsupervised * The therapy dog will always be in the care of a responsible adult who will have received handling training * If the therapy dog exhibits any warning behaviours such as growling or lowered ears it will be removed immediately from pupils * The therapy dog is not out in the academy community outside of designated therapy, reading and reward sessions. Outside of its designated sessions the dog will reside in a designated location * The dog will always be on a lead when he is out and about in the academy. When not in its designated therapy the dog will reside in a pre-agreed location. Signage will indicate that pupils are only allowed in this area with staff supervision. * In the event that a pupil, staff member or visitor is bitten or scratched (even if only a “play” bite) the academy 1st Aider will inspect and assess the injury. The suitability of the therapy dog will then be reassessed by the headteacher / head of school. |
| **Disease, Illness Allergic Reactions** |  |
| Staff, pupils or visitors could suffer ill health if they come into contact with animal faeces or urine or have an allergy to dogs | * All immunisations are kept up to date in accordance with European Pet Passport scheme * Flea treatment is carried out at monthly intervals. Worming treatment is carried out compliant with European Vet guidelines, at 3 monthly intervals * The dog will not go in the academy dining hall at meal times; he will not be permitted into the food preparation area of the kitchen or the cooking room. * The receptionist keeps at all times an up to date list of pupils with known allergic reactions and these pupils are not present during therapy, reading or reward sessions with the dog * The dog is taken regularly outside the academy building for toilet facilities by the dog owner * All waste produced by the dog, whether accidental or routine, is handled and disposed of hygienically by its handler. Contaminated items and surfaces are immediately washed and disinfected. * Pupils and adults are not allowed to eat around the therapy dog. * Pupils and adults must always wash their hands after handling the therapy dog. * Immediate medical assistance will be sought where an allergic reaction does not subside once the animal and afflicted person are kept apart |
| **Animal Phobias** |  |
| Staff or students could suffer distress themselves or distress the dog if they become scared or upset around the dog | * All pupils are encouraged but never forced to take part in dog therapy reading sessions. * Where there are pupils with phobias, every effort is made to segregate the l dog from those with phobias – this may mean moving a pupil to another room until a therapy session is over. * Outside of therapy or reading sessions the therapy dog is kept in a pre-agreed designated secure location off site. * Therapy, reading and reward sessions will take place only in specific areas of the academy ‘The Den’ where pupils can avoid contact with the dog if desired. |
| **School emergency** |  |
| Evacuation (including drills). The dog could become distressed by the evacuation and behave in an unexpected way, e.g. become defensive or try to escape. | * The therapy dog is accompanied by a trained adult at all times. In the event of an emergency evacuation, immediately proceed to the nearest fire exit and then the adult walks as far as possible from other people evacuating whilst maintaining a safe distance from the building. * Where possible, the therapy dog to be present for sounding of the alarms outside of school hours to observe their response. * If the dog manages to escape from its handler during the evacuation, the handler must still evacuate immediately and notify staff outside of the dog’s absence. |
| **Claim is made against school.** |  |
| A parent or visitor could make a claim against the academy relating to the behaviour of the dog. | * The academy has public liability insurance which covers liability for a working therapy dog with certification. * The therapy dog will be trained and assessed as a Pets As Therapy dog prior to working in therapy sessions with pupils. |