



# Headcorn Primary School: School Dog Policy

September 2021 (to be reviewed annually as appropriate)

**Introduction:** The value of pet 'therapy' is widely accepted as a powerful aid to stimulation and communication. Studies have shown that the presence of companion animals can improve the wellbeing of children and adults, lowering the rate of anxiety, simply by making the environment happier, more enjoyable and less forbidding. The team at Headcorn Primary School have been considering obtaining a dog as a school therapy pet for some time and the decision was made in July 2021 to go ahead with the project following regular visits by a therapy dog to a specific year group. The positive impact of these weekly visits was undeniable. Unfortunately, this dog was unable to continue to visit to a change in circumstances of its owner.

Research has shown many benefits to therapy and reading dogs in school settings. Headcorn Primary School would like to introduce the use of a therapy dog into the emotional wellbeing provision at schools.

This policy is designed to set out to children, staff, parents, carers and visitors the reasons for having a school dog at Headcorn Primary School and the rules and responsibilities to ensure the safety of all on site including the school dog himself. 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. (See Appendix A: Risk Assessment.)

## The benefits of a school dog

School dogs have been proven to help develop children's reading skills, improve behaviour, attendance, punctuality and academic confidence, as well as increasing children's understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills. At Headcorn Primary School we hope that a dog will be a beneficial addition to the therapeutic offer, acting as an addition to the interventions already offered and promoting engagement for children who may have found it difficult to access talking therapies in the past.

Animal assisted therapy can:

- Teach children empathy and appropriate interpersonal skills;
- Help individuals develop social skills;
- Improve individual's skills to pick up social cues imperative to human relationships;
- Professionals can process that information and use it to help children see how their behaviour affects others;
- Therapy dogs have been shown to support emotional regulation through the positive impact on the autonomic nervous system;
- A recent report has highlighted children working with therapy dogs experienced increased motivation for learning, resulting in improved outcomes;
- Therapy dogs are being used to support children with social and emotional learning needs, which in turn can assist with literacy development.

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

- Increase in school attendance
- Improvement in punctuality
- Gains in confidence
- Decreases in learner anxiety behaviours resulting in improved outcomes, such as increases in reading and writing levels;
- Positive changes towards learning and improved motivation, and;
- Enhanced relationships with peers and teachers due to experiencing trust and unconditional positive regard from a therapy dog. This in turn helps pupils learn how to express their feelings and enter into more trusting relationships.

## Meet Teddy our Goldendoodle School Dog



Teddy, our Goldendoodle was purchased from a reputable breeder who has had many dogs who have become therapy dog in schools, care homes, etc. Miss Symonds was able to meet some of the older dogs to check temperament and suitability for one of these dogs to join us on our school site.

The Goldendoodle breed was chosen for both breeds (Golden Retriever and Poodle) suitability for children, gentleness, friendliness and capacity for training. Doodle breeds also have coats which have minimal shedding due to the mix with the wool coat of Poodles. The larger breed was also chosen as their temperaments are less yappy, jumpy to that of their smaller counterpart doodle breeds and as they grow and age, they become slower, more pondering, gentle giants. (More photos at the end of this policy!)

The plan is for Miss Symonds to register the dog as an Emotional Support Animal once he has passed through adolescence and completed accredited behavioural training (Ashford Dog Training Club / Dogs Trust / Kennel Club / APT). Miss Symonds plans to obtain additional therapy dog registration through the organisation Pets as Therapy.

It is accepted that interacting with animals is not appropriate for all children but for some it has the potential to provide many positive benefits. Any parents or carer who does not want their child to interact with 'Teddy' is invited to write to Miss Symonds and inform her of their wishes. Any parents or carer that has concerns about their child interacting or being on site with an animal e.g., regarding anxiety, allergies, etc, they are invited to write to Miss Symonds expressing their concerns and speaking about how these are to be addressed.

**Confidence Benefits:** "If children are partnered with a dog to read to, for example, the dog provides comfort, encourages positive social behaviour, enhances self-esteem, motivates speech and inspires children to have fun and enjoy the non-judgemental experience."

*Bark & Read – The Kennel Club* (<https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/barkandread> )

**SEN Benefits:** "Therapy Dogs Nationwide say dogs have also shown to help with special needs and autistic children and adults by giving focus and providing a calming environment."

*Therapy Dogs Nationwide* (<http://www.tdn.org.uk/schools/> )

**Mental Health Benefits:** "There is emerging evidence to suggest that Animal Assisted Psychotherapy improves the efficacy of mental health treatments in self-selected adolescent populations via reductions in primary symptomatology, and via secondary factors that improve therapeutic processes and quality, such as engagement and retention". *Incorporating animal-assisted therapy in mental health treatments for adolescents: A systematic review of canine assisted psychotherapy: Melanie G. Jones, Simon M. Rice, Susan M. Cotton 2019; 14(1), 2019.*

**Behaviour Benefits:** "Researchers report that students can identify with animal, and with empathy for the dog, can better understand how classmates may feel. It was found that violent behaviour in participating students declined by 55%, and general aggression went down 62%. In a controlled study, students were found to have fewer disciplinary referrals in schools with a dog than schools without. Students' behaviour improved toward teachers, and students also showed more confidence and responsibility."

*Hazel Oak School Dog Policy* (<https://hazel-oak.co.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2018/02/School-Dog-Policy.pdf> )

## Principles

The Head Teacher, Miss Symonds and the Governors have agreed to the presence of a therapy dog at Headcorn Primary School.

Only the school dog is allowed on the premises. No other dogs are permitted unless the Head Teacher has approved their visit.

The therapy dog is an F1 Goldendoodle. The school dog is not Kennel Club registered as it is a cross breed, selected for its temperament, reduced risk of congenial health issues, and hypoallergenic, minimal-shedding coat.

Miss Symonds is the legal owner of the dog and has full responsibility for its welfare. Miss Symonds will pay all expenses relating to pet insurance, vaccinations, flea and worm treatment, resources, food and maintenance costs.

Miss Symonds has produced a risk assessment which has been approved by the Designated Safeguarding Lead Team. This will be reviewed annually.

The dog will be included in the Fire Evacuation Procedure, Bomb Threat evacuation procedure and Lockdown Procedure under the supervision of Miss Symonds or other trained staff members.

The dog is also fully insured by Miss Symonds through 'Bought by Many' which includes a separate Public Liability Insurance.

Staff, parents, carers and children have been informed in writing that a dog will be in school.

Parents and carers will need to sign the Animal Assisted Therapy consent form in order for their children to be present during Animal Assisted Therapy when this is available to be offered as part of our Nurture provision.

The presence of a school dog will be made clear to visitors upon their arrival at the school reception.

Only staff trained to handle the dog will have permission to do so. Whilst training, this will be limited to his owner and handler, Miss Symonds and selected members of staff with prior agreement.

## **Code of Conduct**

### **Staff Responsibilities**

Miss Symonds will know the whereabouts of the dog and which staff are supervising it at all times.

If the dog is ill, he will not be allowed into school. Miss Symonds has responsibility for ensuring appropriate alternative care for the dog if he is not able to be in the school on a given day.

The dog must be kept on a lead when moving around the school.

The dog will be kept in the SLT Office, the Inclusion Office, the SBM office or the Nurture Room when Miss Symonds is not available or is working with a pupil who is not permitted to work with or has requested not to have contact with the school dog.

Staff, visitors and children known to have allergic reactions to dogs must not go near the therapy dog. The School Office keeps a list of all children and staff with a reported allergy to dogs.

Children must never be left alone with the dog and there will be appropriate adult supervision at all times.

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

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 s/he monitors the situation.

If the dog is displaying any warning signs such as growling, flattening of ears, pacing, recoiling from touch, etc., children should be directed to move back immediately, and the dog should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment by the trained staff member handling him.

The dog will be trained to respond to a timetable of walk breaks and allowed to foul or urinate in two designated areas only that the children do not have access to: the grass mound at the back of Keeler House and the grassed area of the staff carpark.

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

The dog will not enter the school hall during lunchtimes and only then after the floor has been swept of dropped food.

### **Children's Responsibilities**

Children whose parents/carers have withdrawn consent are not allowed to attend dog therapy sessions or interact with the school dog.

Children must approach the dog with calm tones, managing any excitement.

Children should be careful to approach the dog calmly from the front, to approach calmly and wait for the dog to stand still, to sit or to lay down before stroking.

Children should be careful to stroke the dog on his body, chest and back in preference to his head or face.

Children must not encourage the dog to lick them.

Children are not allowed to approach or disturb the dog when he is sleeping, grooming himself, drinking or eating.

Children are not allowed to play roughly with the dog.

Children are not allowed to eat around the dog or during therapy sessions.

Children may only give the dog treats under strict supervision of a trained handler, first being shown how to do this safely.

Children must always wash or sanitise their hands after stroking and handling the dog.

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

### **Parents' and Carers' Responsibilities**

Parents and carers will inform the school of any allergy to dog hair or any anxiety, however great or small, regarding the school dog.

At drop off and collection, parents and carers will ensure that their children approach the dog calmly, asking permission to stroke the dog before engaging.

Parents and carers will ensure that their own dogs are kept under control when approaching the school gates and only engage with our school dog with the verbal permission of his handler. Dogs left tied up whilst parents/carers enter the site, must be secured away from the school dog's position.

## **School Dog Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) – to publish to parents/carers**

### **Q: Who is the legal owner of the dog and who pays for its costs?**

A: The legal owner of the dog will be Miss Symonds. She will bear all costs associated with owning the dog including vet's bills, insurance and training costs; the school budget will not need or be expected to support any related costs.

**Q: Is the dog from a reputable breeder?**

A: Yes. The dog is from a licensed breeder where both parents were seen. The father is a Standard Poodle and is Kennel Club registered. The mother is a Golden Retriever. Both were chosen specifically for their temperament, intelligence and hypoallergenic coat.

**Q: Will the dog be a distraction to the children's learning?**

A: The dog will not interrupt learning times unless this is an agreed session with the class teacher or an Animal Assisted Therapy session. The dog will remain in the SLT office when not in a timetabled session or welcoming on the school gates at drop off or collection.

**Q: Has a risk assessment been undertaken?**

A: Yes, we have carefully considered having a dog in school and sought advice from many sources, including other schools that have successfully have a school dog. (See Appendix A: Risk Assessment)

**Q: Who is responsible for training?**

A: Miss Symonds is the legal owner and as a result will be responsible for his training. Appropriate professional training will be obtained, and the dog will work towards being trained as a therapy dog in dog training classes with advice from the Pets As Therapy charity, The Dogs Trust and The Kennel Club.

**Q: What if my child is scared of dogs? Will the be forced to be in the same room as the dog?**

A: The dog will be kept in the SLT Office or Nurture Room and Miss Symonds or trained handler will ensure that the school dog only comes into contact with children who are happy to have contact and have parental permission for this under strict supervision.

A child will not be forced to be in contact or in the same room as the dog against their wishes. We hope to work closely with parents/cares of children who are fearful or anxious of dogs to alleviate their fear and to teach them how to manage this using evidence based intervention such as graded exposure.

**Q: How will the dog's welfare be considered?**

A: The dog's welfare will be carefully monitored. The dog will be walked regularly and given free time outside of sessions to rest and play.

The dog will be carefully trained over a period of time and will have appropriate access to food, water, their own space and rest and play breaks.

**Q: How will this be managed where children have allergies?**

A: Children will not need to touch the dog or be in the same room as the dog at any point which will relieve and reduce the possibility of allergic reactions. We already manage a number of allergies at school, and this will be no different for children and adults that are allergic to dogs. Individual needs will always be met, and we are happy to work with parents/carers to put additional control measures in place for individual allergies. The school dog was specifically chosen for being a breed known for its hypoallergenic, minimal-shedding coat. He will be given a high quality food and be regularly groomed to reduce any possibility of allergens. Floors and surfaces are cleaned at least daily to ensure any possible stray dog hair is removed.

## Headcorn Primary School's Dog

Meet Teddy, our Goldendoodle. He has been at our school since the age of 12 weeks (September 2021) so has grown up in our environment, has become socialised to our site, our pupils, parents, carers and staff.

