

Pet Therapy:

School Policy and Risk Assessment





Introduction/Rationale

Research has shown there are many benefits of therapy and reading dogs in school settings. Cathkin High School would like to introduce the use of a therapy dog to support and enhance the learning and well-being provision at school.

This policy is designed to explain to learners, parents/carers and visitors the benefits of a school dog, as well as explain and the roles and responsibilities to ensure the safety of everyone involved. Although there is a risk in bringing a dog into any school environment, this can be mitigated against with a robust Risk Assessment to ensure the safety of all young people, staff and visitors (Appendix A - Risk Assessment).

The benefits of a school dog/Context

School dogs have been proven to help develop learners' reading skills, improve behaviour, attendance and academic confidence, as well as increasing learner understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills. At Cathkin High, our school dog Gus will support our staff team in bringing all of these benefits to our learners. Gus will be trained as a therapy dog and a reading dog. The plan is to register Gus as an Emotional Support Animal and once he has passed through adolescence and completed accredited behavioural trainings.

Animal assisted therapy can;

- ✓ Teach empathy and appropriate interpersonal skills.
- ✓ Help individuals develop social skills.
- ✓ Therapy dogs have been shown to support emotional regulation through the positive impact on the autonomic nervous system.
- ✓ A recent report 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
- ✓ Gains in confidence
- ✓ Decreases in learner anxiety behaviours resulting in improved learning outcomes, such as increases in reading and writing levels
- ✓ 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 students learn how to express their feelings and enter into more trusting relationships.

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>)

Additional Support Needs 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.”

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

Learners can identify with animals, and with empathy for a dog, can better understand how classmates may feel in order to support promoting positive relationships. When 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 learners.

“Researchers report that students 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 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-DogPolicy>)

Literacy Benefits

Reading to dogs has been proven to help young people develop literacy skills and build confidence, through both the calming effect the dogs' presence has on learners and the fact that the dog will listen to the learner read without being judgemental or critical. The environment helps to nurture the learner's enthusiasm for reading and provides them with the confidence needed to read aloud. When dogs are in a room of learners, learners become less stressed, less self-conscious and become more confident because dogs are non-judgemental. If learners are partnered with a dog to read to, the dog provides comfort, encourages positive social behaviour, enhances self-esteem, motivates speech and inspires the learner to have fun and enjoy the experience of reading. (Please see further information in Appendix B)



Gus, our school dog

Gus, our gorgeous Border Terrier was born in June 2021. His legal owner is Mrs Lynn Blair, Depute Head at Cathkin High School. He is a pure breed and is Kennel Club Registered. Mrs Blair has full responsibility for the welfare of Gus ensuring that he is vaccinated, wormed and flea treated. (Please see more information about Gus in Appendix C.)

Team Gus

The day to day care and welfare of Gus is overtaken by a team of staff who ensure that Gus is fed, watered, taken for toilet breaks, given play time, appropriately trained and is well rested throughout the day.

Insurance

Cathkin High's liability insurance covers the school for risk related to a working dog on site.

Training

Training for Gus to be a Reading and Therapy dog will be ongoing. We also hope that Gus will be trained to support learners specifically with autism and other diagnosed disabilities through the company Pawsable, a dog training company that specialises in this area of work. In the short term, Gus will be in the building for familiarisation purposes whilst training is ongoing. Team Gus staff will receive dog handling training by a trainer full qualified and approved by The Institute of Modern Dog Trainers (IMDT), The Dog Training College, Licenced Canine Body Language and Pet First Aid. Only named staff trained to handle Gus in pupil sessions will have permission to do so.

Staff Responsibilities

Mrs Blair will know the whereabouts of Gus and which staff are supervising at all times. Gus's timetable will be displayed on her office door. All staff working with Gus will also have a copy of his timetable along with the school office and Senior Leadership Team. All staff who are working with Gus will receive appropriate training at the same time as him.



Gus will be kept on a lead when moving around the school or on a walk and will be under the full control and supervision of a trained member of Team Gus. Gus will reside in Mrs Blair's office and/or other members of the school leadership team when not interacting with pupils for therapy or reading sessions..

Staff, visitors and learners who have known allergies to dogs must not go near Gus and must take personal responsibility for this. Staff leading therapy or reading sessions with Gus have a responsibility to ensure all staff, learners or visitors present are happy for Gus to enter the room.

Learners will never be left alone with Gus and there will always be appropriate adult supervision at all times. Learners will be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around Gus before any interactions during a familiarisation, therapy sessions or visits. If Gus is surrounded by a large number of young people, he could become nervous and agitated, therefore, the adult in charge of Gus must ensure they monitor the situation. If Gus displays any warning signs such as growling or flattening of his ears, he should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment by the trained staff member handling him.

Learner/Parent/Carer Responsibilities

Parents/carers will be asked to complete a consent form for their child prior to any activities where they will be working with Gus. Learners with consent should be careful to stroke Gus on his body, chest and back and not on his face or top of head. Learners must wait until Gus is sitting or lying down before touching or stroking him. Gus should not be disturbed whilst he is sleeping or eating. Any play with Gus must be gentle. Learners are not allowed to eat during sessions with Gus and must always wash their hands after handling / stroking him.

The following links have been used to Support the school in introducing Gus as a school therapy dog.

Links to Advice on Dogs in Schools:

- <https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/help-advice/factsheets-downloads/school%20dogs.pdf>
- <https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/1935/bark-and-read-standards-of-practice.pdf>



- <https://www.dogsforgood.org/documents/2021/01/community-dogs-in-schools-factsheet.pdf/>
- BBC News – “Every school ‘needs dog as stress-buster’”
- Pawsable



Appendix A – Gus Risk Assessment



Education Resources General Risk Assessment

Assessment Title	School Therapy Dog, Gus, March 2022			Generic <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Specific <input type="checkbox"/>	
Scope of Assessment	To ensure a safe and supportive environment for Gus and all stakeholders working with him			Reference	CHS/TD
				N° Affected	various
Persons: Employee <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Service User <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Contractor <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Visitor <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Young Person <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Frequency: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Monthly <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Weekly <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Daily <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hourly <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occasionally <input type="checkbox"/>					
RISK COLOUR CODE/ SCORE	LOW RISK ✓		MEDIUM RISK	HIGH RISK	VERY HIGH RISK

Aide Memoir ✓ - present and considered, X considered not to be present						Machinery	x	Slip / Trip / Fall	x	Traffic / Driving	x	Dangerous Substances	x
Hygiene	✓	Workplace	✓	Handling / Lifting	✓	Environment	✓	Access Equipment	x	Electricity	x	Moving / Falling Objects	x
Temperature	✓	Fire / Explosion	✓	Pressure System	x	Weather	x	DSE / Ergonomics	x	Violence	x	Tools / Work Equipment	x
Work at Height	x	Noise / Vibration	✓	Other (s) (note)	x	Note: Infectious disease							
Hazard/ Concerns				Risk Rating	Control Measures						Residual Risk Rating	Further Action Required	
Animal Behaviour				Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gus will receive on-going formal training, socialising and conditioning within the school environment. 						Low		



Staff, learners or visitors could be injured if Gus is not comfortable in the school environment and reacts, including bites and scratches.		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gus will be certified before commencing formal therapy and reading sessions.• Learners and parents/carers are warned of the hazard before familiarisation, reading and therapy sessions with Gus and take part only with consent.• Learners are taught appropriate behaviour around Gus, what to do to prevent over stimulating or upsetting Gus and how to remain calm around him.• Learners are supervised by an adult during all sessions.• Learners are never left with Gus unsupervised.• Gus will always be in the care of a responsible adult who will have received dog handling training.• If Gus exhibits any warning behaviours such growling or lowered ears he will be removed immediately from the situation.• Gus resides in the office of Lynn Blair, Depute Head and other members of the school leadership team (SLT) and is not out in the school community out with the designated timetabled sessions.• Gus will always be on a lead when he is out with Lynn Blair's/SLT offices.• In the event that a learner, staff member or visitor is bitten or scratched (even if only a "play" bite) the First Aider will inspect and assess the injury. The suitability of Gus will then be reassessed by the Head Teacher.• Visitors to the school will be made aware of Gus by the school office.		
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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.	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All immunisations (including rabies vaccination) are kept up to date in accordance with European Pet Passport scheme and Lynn Blair is responsible for keeping a register of this.• Flea and worming treatments are carried out compliant with European Vet guidelines.• Gus will not be permitted in the school dining hall at meal times.• The school will keep an up to date list of learners with known allergic reactions/dog phobia's and learners know to have these will not work with Gus at any time.• Gus is taken regularly outside the school building for toilet facilities by a designated member of staff trained to handle Gus.• All waste produced by Gus will be handled and disposed of hygienically by designated staff members only. Contaminated items and surfaces are immediately washed and disinfected.• Learners and staff are not allowed to eat around Gus.• Learners and staff must always wash their hands after handling Gus.• Immediate medical assistance will be sought where/if an allergic reaction takes place that is not known.	Low	
Animal Phobias Learners or staff could suffer distress or distress to Gus if they become scared or upset around him.	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identified learners whom the school feel would benefit with working with Gus, are encouraged but never forced to take part in Gus sessions.• Where there are learners with a phobias, every effort is made to segregate Gus from those with phobias. Learners/parents/carers must make their phobias know to the school and take personal responsibility not to go near Gus.• Out with familiarisation, reading and therapy Gus will reside in Lynn Blair's/SLT offices.	Low	



		<ul style="list-style-type: none">All sessions will take place only in designated areas of the school where learners can avoid contact with Gus if desired.		
School emergency evacuation (including drills) Gus could become distressed by the evacuation and behave in an unexpected way, e.g. become defensive or try to escape.	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Gus is accompanied by a trained adult at all times. In the event of an emergency evacuation, he will immediately proceed to the nearest fire exit with whoever has responsibility for him at that time. The responsible adult will walk as far away as possible from other people evacuating whilst maintaining a safe distance from the building.	Low	
Claim is made against school A parent or visitor could make a claim against the school relating to the behaviour of the dog.	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Cathkin High School has public liability insurance which covers liability for Gus. Gus is also fully insured by Lynn Blair.	Low	



Appendix B – Reading Schools

Below is some information provided by the organisation, Reading Dogs.

- ✓ *Studies show that reading fluency has increased between 12-30% in children after participating in reading dogs programmes*
- ✓ *Gives children extra practice with reading and oral skills*
- ✓ *Some children feel reading becomes less difficult and become more confident reading aloud*
- ✓ *Reading to dogs has motivated children to read more at home, especially to their pets*
- ✓ *Children want to try and read more difficult books as they go through the programme*
- ✓ *Children feel more confident when answering reading related questions*

Emotional Benefits

- ✓ *Children enjoy the programme and think it's fun. They look forward to coming to the library because they feel the dog is waiting for them.*
- ✓ *Children feel comfortable reading to dogs because dogs don't judge them if they mispronounce a word.*
- ✓ *Petting dogs can help with motor skills and is known to be a calming factor as it can reduce stress, blood pressure and anxiety*
- ✓ *Children often feel safe when sitting with a dog from the programme*
- ✓ *Reading to dogs can boost the confidence of struggling readers and gives them an increased sense of pride*
- ✓ *A child can feel like a leader by reading aloud and pretending (s)he is the teacher*

Social Benefits

- ✓ *Children learn to take turns while waiting to read to the dog*
- ✓ *Children can learn kindness and empathy by petting and interacting with the dog*
- ✓ *Communication skills can be improved by practicing reading aloud*
- ✓ *Participants enjoy communicating with each other and talking about the session, the dog and the book they read*

Bark & Read – The Kennel Club (<https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/barkandread>). Children who read to dogs are less likely to be embarrassed reading aloud and find the experience less stressful. Research has proved that children who read to dogs show an increase in reading levels, word recognition, and a higher desire to read and write.



Appendix C – About Gus

Gus was born on 9th June 2021 on a farm in Hexham His Mum Isla and Dad Moss are the proud parents of Gus, brothers Leo and Grubster and sister Indie. He is a full pedigree Border Terrier and is registered with the Kennel Club.

Gus moved to Glasgow to live with his new family on 3rd August 2021. Gus loves all people, all dogs, slippers, socks, sticks, the beach, snoozing and all fruit and vegetable that dogs are allowed to eat. His favourite thing is to play with a ball. Below are some Gus highlights!

