

Queen's College Preparatory School
(including Early Years Foundation Stage)

School Dog Policy

Policy Document



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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 well-being of children and lower the rate of anxiety, simply by making the environment happier, more enjoyable and less forbidding.

What is the rationale behind getting a QCPS School Dog?

A school dog initially undergoes specialised puppy training (basic and advanced) and then is slowly acclimatised into the school environment whilst receiving ongoing. This specialised training is important for the well-being of both the dog and the children at school.

The impact School Dogs have on children and teenagers in the educational environment is amazing. School Dogs have the potential to:

- 1) Improve academic achievement
- 2) Increase literacy skills
- 3) Support a child in regulating their behaviours
- 4) Increase social skills and self esteem
- 5) Increase confidence
- 6) Help prevent truancy and increase attendance
- 7) Teach responsibility and respect to all life
- 8) Teach children how to respect and look after a dog
- 9) Motivate children who are often not that attentive

The concept of dogs supporting children has been around for many years, with more recently a vast supporting range of evidence through papers and academic studies.

Sigmund Freud believed that dogs had a 'special sense' that allowed them to judge a person's character accurately. His dog Jo-Fi (a Chow) attended all of his therapy sessions. Freud believed that the presence of her dog had a calming influence on all of his patients, especially children.

It was the academic work of Boris Levinson and her dog Jingles in the 1960's that brought the world evidence that pets were good for children and more importantly that pets could help children. Levinson felt that many children could derive benefit from pet psychology – the withdrawn, the inhibited, the autistic, the obsessive compulsive, the fearful, the submissive, the culturally disadvantaged and the young non-verbal.

In the 1970's Dr Samuel Corson of Ohio State University had good success with a group of 20 dogs who helped children and other patients at a psychiatric hospital. At the same time Skeezer, a mongrel dog, became America's first Canine Co-Therapist with children. For seven years Skeezer

worked as a member of staff at the Children's Psychiatric Hospital in Michigan where she helped children who were severely troubled and those who needed a helping hand with their emotions.

More recently, American psychologist Dr Stacia Bjarnson discovered that children with social, emotional, behavioural and academic issues tended to open up and talk about their feelings when in the presence of her poodle Noodle, who was a registered therapy dog. Noodle currently works with Dr Bjarnson at the Northwest Village School in Connecticut, a special school for over 200 children. Noodle works with children in both group settings and on an individual basis.

Logistics of having a School Dog

The school dog's legal owner will be the Assistant Head, Francesca Buchanan who will care for the dog out of school hours in her home and will bear all the costs associated with having a pet dog, including the purchase of the dog. The Parents' Circle will support the costs associated with the dog's work in School.

The dog will be primarily kept in Miss Buchanan's office. At other times the dog will spend time in the Headmistress' office where there is access to a fenced off outside space which is only accessible from inside the office. Both these offices are separate from the classrooms to ensure the dog *only comes into contact with girls who are happy to have contact with a dog under strict supervision*. In the early stages, interaction with the girls will be very limited.

Who conducts the School Dog training?

The Assistant Head, Francesca Buchanan will be the legal owner of the School Dog and as a result, will be responsible for her training. Appropriate training has been obtained; initially the dog has completed basic and then advanced puppy training through 'Off the Lead' a nationally recognised company. The dog will continue to have her training updated with regular 'top-up' sessions.

How will the dog be used in school?

Each dog can work in anywhere from one to all four of the areas.

Classroom Canines – these dogs will be happy to simply 'chill out' in the classroom whilst the children are having their lesson (s). Their very presence will have a calming effect on the children. Research studies in both Britain and America have concluded that having a dog in a school classroom can have many positive benefits – these include help to calm children down, improve academic achievement, motivate those children who are often not that attentive, teach responsibility and encourage children to respect all life. Furthermore, it has been shown that when classmates share the affection and care of a 'class' dog, a bond forms among the classmates and strengthens their team ethics.

Listening Canines – these dogs will be incredibly calm and happy to have an individual child read to them or join a group of children in the library whilst they are having a book reading session. Dogs give unconditional acceptance, as they are non-judgmental, which is especially crucial to struggling, emerging readers. The listening canines also provide confidence to children as they do not make fun of them when they read, but above all they make amazing listeners, providing the children with a sense of comfort and love. In America, the ‘Read’ Dogs, as they are known, have proved through research that children who read to these dogs show an increase in reading levels, word recognition, a higher desire to read and write, and an increase in intra and interpersonal skills among the children they mix with.

Reward Canines – these dogs will be gentle and loving, but at the same time full of fun and enjoyment for the children. Those children who have performed incredibly well during the week or those who have made progress in a certain subject, or those who have achieved tasks set for them, will be rewarded with spending time during lunch or break to interact with these dogs. Walking, grooming, playing and training are some of the responsibilities the children will be allowed to undertake with the reward dogs. It has been proved that working and playing with a dog improves children’s social skills and self-esteem.

Therapy Canines – these dogs will work with children on a one-one basis only and will especially help those children who are reluctant to be in school, are suffering from social, emotional and mental health issues, are going through upsetting/difficult times or even scared/phobic of dogs. These dogs will bring much joy to all those children they meet. Children who struggle with social interaction will find a reassuring friend in a School Dog.

A fully comprehensive risk assessment has been written and will be periodically checked to ensure all aspects of the dog’s involvement at school has been considered.

Health, hygiene and dog welfare

In the interest of health and hygiene, the dog will be toileted either away from the school building or in a sectioned-off area of the school (Headmistress’s office terrace) where children have no access.

The dog will initially come to school for one day a week and this will gradually be built up. Initially, she will have limited access to the girls. She will be regularly walked by a member of staff and have plenty of opportunities to use the toileting area. She will be kept in the Assistant Head or Headmistress’ office and will only have planned and supervised contact with girls and visitors. She will be provided with food and unlimited access to water, a bed and her favourite toys. The dog will be carefully trained over a period of time and we will work very closely with other professionals to ensure her welfare is always carefully considered.

The School Dog will be regularly groomed and checked for signs of infection or other illness.

If the dog is ill, it will be diagnosed and treated by a vet and not be allowed on the school premises until their health is restored. The dog will have received relevant inoculations and be wormed regularly every three months. The dog's claws should be kept trimmed to reduce the risk of scratches. The dog will always have been exercised in the morning before being allowed to work with children.

Children and staff who are allergic or fearful of dogs

The school dog is a Cocker Spaniel. In order to interact with the dog, girls will not need to touch her unless of course they wish to, and this will therefore relieve some of the possibility of reactions. The school already manages a number of allergies at school and this is no different for those who are allergic to dogs. Individual needs will always be met and the school will work with parents to put additional control measures in place where needed.

Access to the school dog will be carefully managed and supervised. *Girls will not need to have any contact with the dog unless they are keen to do so* and their parents have given express permission. It is hoped that the school dog can work closely with any girls fearful of dogs to alleviate the fear and help them manage it. Guidance from professionals will be regularly consulted to help with this particular issue.

A child at QCPS will only work with our school dog if they are happy to do so and as long as their parent has given written consent. This will be sought for all girls prior to close contact work taking place with the dog in a classroom setting. If any parent or pupil objects to the dog's presence then arrangements will be made to ensure that this animal is kept away from them. If necessary, the animal may need exclusion from specific areas.