

# Bushbury Hill Primary School



## Therapy and Wellbeing Dog Policy

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## **School Dog Policy**

### **Lola**

The Senior Leadership Team at Bushbury Hill Primary School in consultation with Lucinda Dunn, the School's Educational Psychologist considered the options regarding the possibility of using a therapy / wellbeing dog in school. This dog is called Lola. When not in school, she lives with Lucinda Dunn and her family as a pet and is responsibly owned and very well cared for. She receives regular veterinary check-ups and immunisations.

We have consulted the on-line information from The Dogs' Trust from to gain an insight into the benefits and responsibilities of having a School Dog.

The motivations behind this decision were as follows:

1. For the school to have access to a dog that was able to live as naturally as conditions would allow and was used to promote socialisation and interactions from a young age
2. For the animal to be properly cared for outside of the school day
3. To have a dog that the children could interact with and also be of benefit to the children's social, emotional and mental health development as well as promoting the learning and achievement of the pupils
4. For the addition of a school dog to make Bushbury Hill Primary a wonderful learning environment for life skills as well as Lola being part of the school community

The top priority for any dog has been to ensure that the temperament of the dog is suitable for interaction with children.

Lola is a third line pure pedigree Bolognese dog, breed by experienced and Kennel Club registered breeders Garsak Danes, Gary Hooker and Michael Young. Gary is also a Crufts Registered Judge. Lola was bred at their home with full time care and supervision by themselves and their 'live in' puppy carer. Care was taken by Lucinda Dunn to find experienced and regulated breeders who breed in a home environment so the puppy developed good attachment and obedience behaviours.

The Bolognese breed has been carefully selected as a suitable breed for this type of school environment. Bolognese are a small companion breed originating in Italy. The Bolognese is a calm, faithful dog with a fluffy, pure-white coat. They are very playful, easy-going and love people. They are a quiet, intelligent and polite breed and like lots of physical and emotional attention. They do not shed their coat. Bolognese is a hypoallergenic breed.

And here she is.....



## Research regarding dogs in school

A growing body of research is showing the benefits of children having contact with and interacting with animals in school and the community. A National Institute Health study in the US (reference below) has produced a meta literature review on the positive effects of human and animal interaction and has found positive effects of the company of a dog in these areas;

- When reading in the presence of a dog lower blood pressure was recorded (Friedman et al 83)
- An improvement of social skills
- An increased activation of oxytocin (a calming and regulating neurochemical) when in the presence of a dog
- children with Autism and social skills difficulties interact with a dog more frequently than people and learn to develop their confidence and their skills in this area (Prothmann et al 2009)
- therapeutic sessions with the dog present found better emotional recognition and regulation after one session only (Prothmann et al 2009)
- therapeutic sessions with the dog present prompted development of social skills and extroversion skills (Prothmann et al 2009)
- in the presence of a dog children with Autism and social skills difficulties were more aware of the social environments and how to respond (Martin and Farnum 2002)
- better social interactions between peers (Hergovich et al 2002)
- positive effects on empathy (Hergovich et al 2002)
- fewer prompts needed by adults and increased memory when completing tasks (Gee et al 2009)
- increased attention to tasks (Kotrschal and Ortbauer 2003)
- when dogs were involved in Occupational Therapy in schools more language and social interactions were seen (Sams et al 2006)

The research studies show that the bond made between humans and dogs can impact people and animals in positive ways. Research shows therapy dogs can reduce stress

physiologically (cortisol levels) and increase attachment responses that trigger oxytocin – a hormone that increases trust in humans. Often dogs feel the same when engaging in animal assisted activities as if they were at home, depending on the environmental context.

### **Benefits of therapy dogs**

Animal assisted therapy can:

- teach empathy and appropriate interpersonal skills
- help individuals develop social skills
- be soothing and the presence of animals can more quickly build rapport between the professional and client, and
- improve individual's skills to pick up social cues imperative to human relationships.

Dogs in the classroom provide both physical and emotional health benefits for students. A dog present in the classroom promotes a positive mood and provides significant anti-stress effects on the body. In fact, the simple act of petting a dog has the effect of lowering blood pressure and heart rate. Pet therapy also lowers stress hormones, like cortisol, and increases oxytocin. In other words, just being in contact with a therapy dog calms children down when they're upset and helps keep their anxiety at bay. And reducing feelings of anxiety and depression enables them to focus on learning.

*The NIH study summarises, "The presence of a dog in an educational setting seems to support concentration, attention, motivation, and relaxation reflecting reduction of high stress levels which inhibit effective learning and performance."*

### **How will it work?**

As a 'Reading Dog', Lola can encourage those children who are less confident at reading to have a friendly audience and to develop a confidence and passion for reading.

As a therapy dog she may listen to any little worries and will be a comforter to sit alongside. She might be taken for walks to calm those pupils who need a bit of space and may be a gentle companion to sooth away any distress.

There will, of course, be lots of times when she will simply provide treat time, fun times and friendship for those pupils who are always 'Being the Best That They Can Be'.

Schools can use dogs in animal-assisted activities, which is an umbrella term covering many different ways animals can be used to help humans. One example is to facilitate emotional or physical mental health and wellbeing through the presence of a therapy

dog. These activities aren't necessarily overseen by a professional but can be part of the regular school day.

The therapy dog could be used within a specific psychological intervention. This aims to improve a person's social, cognitive and emotional functioning. A health care professional who uses a therapy dog in treatment may be viewed as less threatening, potentially increasing the connection between the client and professional.

Lola will come into school regularly with Lucinda, yet there may also be times she can be available to be in school if Lucinda is not in school as requested by the school senior leadership team.

Lola's role in school will be varied. This will be decided on a regular plan and on a needs basis for the pupils. Lola will be present at different times such as reading sessions, Cool Kids, Sensory Circuits times to support Social and Emotional needs of Pupils, Rainbow Room and targeted learning times. There may be occasions when pupils take her for short walks in the grounds with staff. Lola will need regular breaks when in school.

No adult or pupil will be expected to interact with Lola if they do not want to. Parents will be informed that Lola is to join the school community and they can inform school that they don't want their child to interact with Lola via the school office. There will be a chance for parents to be introduced to Lola if they so wish and information can be provided on the breeding if required.

For those children that have a fear of dogs having Lola present in school in a safe and structured way may help to break down some of those barriers in time.

### **Is there a risk in bringing a dog into a school environment?**

This policy, together with the separate comprehensive risk assessment and advice taken on line from the Dogs Trust, shows how we have thought very carefully about school life with a school visiting dog. We have also consulted with another school and Local Authority for advice. With very careful management and constant reassessment, there is a very low risk of harm.

*Dogs are not allowed anywhere on the school site at any time unless specifically authorised by the school leadership team. This includes drop off and collection times. This policy outlines measures put in place to allow the school dog to be present.*

## Context

- The governors have the right to refuse to allow the dog in school
- The Chair of Governors, Alan Jasper and the Governing Board agree that a school dog will benefit the children and staff of Bushbury Hill Primary School.
- Only the school dog is allowed on the premises. All other dogs must not come on site unless they are a known therapy or assistance dog and the head teacher has been informed beforehand.
- Staff, parents and children have been informed by letter that a dog will be introduced to school. Charlotte Underwood, Headteacher has produced a risk assessment and this will be reviewed annually.
- The dog will be owned by Lucinda Dunn, Educational Psychologist. Any costs for Lola's school work will be covered by school and Lucinda Dunn will liaise with school leadership team regarding this. These will be minimal.
- Veterinary and insurance costs will be paid by the owner.
- Materials that Lola needs in the day as well as a toileting spillage kit will be available in school for all visits.
- The dog is a Bolognese, chosen for its mild, caring and gentle temperament and non-moulting coat. Lola is a hypoallergenic breed.
- Lola is happy to be handled, touched and walked, even by small children.
- The vast majority of pupils are very keen to have a small dog on site; most parents are delighted.
- Where there are any concerns of fears expressed by individuals, a suitable care plan will be set up.
- The risk assessment (attached) is reviewed annually or immediately if there is urgent cause for concern.
- Visitors and pupils will be informed of the dog upon arrival.
- The office will know the whereabouts of the dog and which staff are supervising at all times. There will be staff selected in each phase to take responsibility for the dog if the dog is in that area and there will also be allocated pastoral staff with responsibility
- The dog will be included in the fire evacuation procedure under the supervision of Mrs Underwood and in her absence, Mrs Selvey.

## **Day-to-day Management**

### **The dog will:**

- be kept on a lead or carried when moving around school or on a walk
- will go to the toilet in a specific place either on the school site or away from the site
- be under full supervision of an adult at all times
- be fully trained to a bed/crate and stay in the Reception Office or Headteacher's office. Lola will have regular breaks during the day in her crate.
- have had all required immunisations and treatments prior to joining Bushbury Hill Primary School and will continue to have the required treatments regularly.
- not be allowed in school if unwell.

### **Pupils will:**

- be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dog every time they meet/work with her.
- always remain calm around the dog.
- Everyone must wait until Lola is sitting or lying down before touching or stroking her.
- Children should be careful to stroke Lola on her body, chest, back and not by her face or top of head.
- Children should always wash their hands after handling Lola.
- 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.
- be gentle and kind – not make sudden movements or try to tease
- respect the dog's resting time – not disturb her when sleeping or eating
- eat their own food away from the dog – the dog will not be allowed in the dining hall when food is being served or when children are having milk and fruit

- learn about how dogs express their feelings through their body language.

(Growling or baring of teeth indicates that the dog is feeling angry or threatened. Flattened ears, tail lowered or between their legs, hiding behind the owner, whining or growling are signs that the dog is frightened or nervous. If the dog is displaying any of these warning signs, she should be immediately removed from the situation or environment. Pupils and adult will have lots of ongoing education and reminders about the dog's own needs and how she must be treated.)

## **Health and Safety Principles**

Children and adults will always wash their hands after handling the dog.

Any dog foul will be cleaned immediately, disposed of appropriately and sprayed with appropriate disinfectant by the supervising adult. Children must never attempt to do this and will never be asked.

### **Should a bite or scratch (even playful) occur:**

- The wound will be assessed and treated by a first aid trained member of staff and any appropriate medical attention will be sought
- Parents will be contacted immediately
- The dog will be removed from the situation
- A full investigation into the circumstances will be carried out by Charlotte Underwood and passed to governors as necessary
- The suitability of the dog will be re-assessed by governors

Policy is to be reviewed every 2 years.

### References –

Psychosocial and Psychophysiological Effects of Human-Animal Interactions: the Possible Role of Oxytocin (Beetz et al 2012), *Frontiers in Psychology*

## School Dog Risk Assessment

<b>Hazard</b>	<b>Risk</b>	<b>Risk 1 – 5*</b>	<b>Controls in Place</b>
Dog getting over excited when interacting with children.	Child knocked to the ground.	1	The dog will always be in the care of a responsible adult and will never be allowed to roam freely around the school premises. Children will not be left unsupervised with the dog.
	Child scratched by dog.	3	
	Child bitten by dog.	4	<p>Pupils will be taught how to respond and treat Lola.</p> <p>Education of this nature is continually given to children, and often to the whole school through assemblies and PSHE sessions.</p> <p>Pupils will be taught what to do to prevent the dog from chasing them.</p> <p>The dog will also undergo conditioning to the school classroom environment, this training will ensure future therapy or reading sessions to involve the school dog can be done in a calming/therapeutic manner.</p> <p>All staff will have been introduced to the dog and expectations of having a school dog.</p> <p>She will attend the vets regularly to ensure she is in good health and that her claws are kept short.</p>
The dog gets loose from her crate or lead.	As above	1	The dog's crate is big enough for her to be happy and safe during the school day and the children are taught not to tease her.
The dog causing allergies.	Children or staff have allergic reactions	1	<p>Parents have been asked to inform the school of any known allergies before the introduction of the dog to the school. A list of any children/staff who should not interact with the dog will kept on the school SIMs system.</p> <p>The children will have the opportunity to interact with the dog as they wish and those with allergies will be able to opt out of interaction.</p> <p>Children will be taught to wash their hands after active participation with the dog.</p>
Children getting germs from the dog.	Children or staff will contract diseases that can be carried by dogs.	1	<p>Should the dog defecate on the school site a member of staff will clear this up immediately and dispose of it in a safe way. She will be trained to toilet in an area of the grounds that children have limited access to. The area will be disinfected as required.</p> <p>All immunisations are kept up to date and school will keep a record of this. Flea treatment is carried out and records kept in school.</p> <p>The dog will not be allowed in the school dining hall at meal times; and never in the food preparation area.</p>