

SACRED HEART CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL



SCHOOL DOG POLICY

Approved by:	LGC	30 th June 2020
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Last reviewed on:	June 2023
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Next review due by:	June 2024
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Sacred Heart Catholic High School

School Dog Policy



We have a school dog, a Cockerpoo called Tilly. She comes to school once or twice a week and has been coming into Sacred Heart since she was 14 weeks old. She has grown up around some of the students during lockdown, has been coming into school ever since and is very well behaved. She is health checked and fully vaccinated annually. She lives mainly in Mrs Howell's office, although she can visit students in some classrooms, the Library and the Learning Centre. She has taken on the role of a 'Reading Dog'.

We did a lot of research about the benefits, and also the problems, that a school dog might bring. This policy outlines the benefits of a school dog and can be read in conjunction with the School Dog Risk Assessment (available on request).

Reasons for having a dog in school

Academic research has shown that dogs working and helping in the school environment can achieve the following:

- 1) Increase academic achievement
- 2) Increase reading and literacy skills
- 3) Calming behaviours
- 4) Increase social skills and self-esteem
- 5) Increase confidence

- 6) Teach responsibility and respect to all life

- 7) Help prevent truancy
- 8) Motivate students who are often difficult to reach

Students can benefit educationally and emotionally, increase their understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills through contact with pets. In addition to these benefits, they take great enjoyment from interaction with dogs and puppies. As dogs are one of the most popular pets, it is more than likely that students will already have some exposure to a dog.

Reading

Before Tilly was our school dog, we used to have a Reading Dog visit school. Reading programmes with dogs were working wonders for some of our students. Students who might be embarrassed to read aloud to the class or to adults are likely to be less scared to read to a dog. “It might be less stressful for a child to read aloud to a dog than to a teacher or a peer. After all, a dog won’t judge or correct you.” Dogs are used to encourage struggling readers to practise reading aloud. With the presence of a “calm and well-trained dog,” students find social support and peer interaction.

Tilly is a calm and friendly dog. We encourage KS3 students, especially reluctant readers, to visit Mrs Howell’s office and read a good book to Tilly, with a mug of hot chocolate. Students can also read to Tilly in the Library and the Learning Centre. Dogs give unconditional acceptance, as they are non-judgmental, which is especially crucial to weaker readers. A dog can also provide confidence to students as they do not make fun of them when they read, but above all they make good listeners, providing the students with a sense of comfort and love. Research has proved that students who read to dogs show an increase in reading levels, a higher desire to read and write, and an increase in interpersonal skills among the students they mix with.

Behaviour

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

Social Development:

Dogs in school offer an opportunity for improving social development. They are especially useful for teaching students’ social skills and responsibility. Specifically, with a dog in the classroom, students have the opportunity to learn how to care for the animal. This includes walking and grooming. Researchers report that involving students in the daily care of classroom dogs is a positive experience, promoting their own daily care. The students also learn about responsibility, caring and sharing when helping each other take care of a dog at school.

As a reward:

A dog will be gentle and loving, but at the same time full of fun and enjoyment for the students. Those students 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, may be rewarded with spending time during lunch or break to interact with Tilly. Walking, grooming, playing and training are some of the responsibility students will be allowed to undertake. It has been proved that working and playing with a dog improves students’ social skills and self-esteem.

Tilly will sometimes work with students on a one to one basis and can especially help those students who have been bullied, abused, are going through upsetting/difficult times or even scared/phobic of dogs. Tilly brings much joy to all

the students she meets and is happy to provide plenty of hugs for the students she spends time with. Students who struggle with social interaction can find a reassuring friend in Tilly.

Attendance

Students can be encouraged back into school using meeting Tilly and caring for her as an incentive

Bullying

This can be a problem in all schools with students anxious about school for fear of taunting and abuse. But in some schools, dogs are making a difference in the fight against bullies. 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 and aggression in participation students declined.

Worries about having a school dog

We know that some students might be scared of a dog in case it bites or licks people, or people might have had a bad experience with a dog before. An adult will always be with Tilly and no one will have to spend any time with the dog if they don't want to. We hope that a school dog will help some to overcome their worries and fears. We know that the students will have to be calm and sensible around the dog so that the dog doesn't get frightened too.

Mrs Howell has been responsible for making sure Tilly is well trained. The school dog will not disturb classes when they are working.

We ensure that hygiene is adhered to. We will always have to wash our hands properly after we have touched the dog and the dog is not allowed to lick anyone's face. We make sure that the dog toilets away from student spaces and is cleared up afterwards.

A lot of research was done into the breed most suitable for a school dog. Tilly is a Cockerpoo, she is calm, friendly and loving, intelligent and obedient. The type of dog is very important, she comes from a reputable breeder and does not bark a lot.

Tilly comes to school usually once a week. Generally, she stays in Mrs Howell's office but can spend time in the Library, Learning Centre and some classrooms. She will always be under adult supervision and on a lead when moving around school.

We understand that some families may have concerns about having a dog in school. We would like to reassure everyone that we have this School Dog Policy and a full risk assessment is available for anyone who would like further information. We would be happy to discuss how having a dog works in school.

No one will be forced to spend time with the dog if they do not want to, and all parents have the right to request that their child does not have contact with the dog.

Guidance followed

These are the guidelines we use:

- No other dogs are allowed anywhere on the school site at any time unless specifically authorised by the Headteacher. This includes before and after school. This policy outlines measures put in place to allow the *school dog* to be present.
- The Chair of Governors agrees that a school dog will benefit the students and staff of Sacred Heart High School. The full Governing Body agreed unanimously to the school dog.

- Parents can read about the school dog on our website
- A risk assessment is in place
- The dog should be well used to the behaviour and sounds of students
- If the dog is ill she must not be brought into school
- The dog must be kept on a lead at all times and under the full control and supervision of Mrs Howell or a designated staff member
- The students will never be left alone with the dog and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times
- Prior to the dog being in a classroom or in school, students will be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around dogs. Students are likely to become excited and it is important that they react calmly and carefully around the dog. They should not make sudden movements and must never stare into a dog's eyes as this could be threatening for the dog. Students should be told not to put their face near a dog and should always approach it standing up
- Students should be told never to go near or disturb a dog that is sleeping or eating
- Students must not be allowed to play too roughly with the dog
- We will always consider the number of students who would be patting/stroking or meeting the dog. A large group of students could cause any dog to become nervous and agitated. On-going monitoring of the situation is vital. Since dogs cannot speak, the only way they can be understood is through their body language. Growling or baring of teeth indicate that the dog is feeling angry or threatened. Flattened ears, tail lowered or between their legs, hiding behind their owner, whining or growling are signs that the dog is frightened or nervous. If the dog is displaying any of these warning signs should be immediately removed from the environment. Students will be made aware of these warning signs.
- Students should not feed, or eat close to the dog. Gifts and treats from students will be discouraged
- Students should always wash their hands after handling the dog
- Any dog foul should be cleaned immediately. Staff and students will use gloves, bags and cleaning spray if needed to clear all dog waste when walking the dog around outside in the school grounds. As our students are growing into responsible adults, those who walk Tilly, with a teacher, may have to be prepared to do this, with guidance from staff and the correct equipment (bags, gloves and spray), if they were to take Tilly for a walk in the school grounds. It is probably one of the only 'not so nice jobs' about having a dog - but it's certainly promoting responsible behaviour, animal care and is preparation for being a future responsible pet owner.
- Our school Insurance is with RPA, at no extra cost to the school, they provide an indemnity under Third Party Liability if a School Dog causes any third-party property damage or injury to a third party (including students) if the school were held legally liable, subject to the school undertaking appropriate risk assessments.
- RPA also cover material damage that a dog could cause in school
- What is not covered: theft of the School Dog, death of the School Dog and vet bills which are already covered under Mrs Howell's own pet insurance policies

3. Roles and Responsibilities

- The Governing Body has a responsibility to ensure that the school has a written policy for a School Dog.
- Mrs Howell is responsible for developing this guidance into school practice and implementing it
- Teachers and staff are required to abide by this policy
- The Senior member of staff responsible for Health and Safety (Mr Donnelly) will provide information, advice and guidance as and when required

Recommendations we have followed:

- Using an assured breeder
- Having the dog health checked by a vet and a record of injections kept. This will be done annually
- Ensuring the dog and students are trained to handle the school environment
- Ensuring the dog is fully vaccinated
- Ensuring the dog has a quiet space for sleep and peace (Mrs Howell's office)
- Give students and parents the opportunity to not have their child around the dog
- Give thought to students who are scared of dogs
- Only allowing handling when the dog is calm and the Mrs Howell/designated member of staff has confidence in the dog/situation

Policy Review – June 2024

