



# Setting Dog Policy

## Introduction

Research has shown many benefits to therapy and reading dogs in school/settings. Oasis would like to introduce the use of a dog into the emotional well-being provision at the setting. This policy is designed to set out to children, parents and visitors the reasons for having a dog at Oasis (Section 2 - The benefits of a setting dog) and the rules and responsibilities to ensure the safety of children, staff, visitors and the setting dog (Sections 3 and 4 - Principles and Code of Conduct). Although there is a risk in bringing a dog into a setting environment, this can be mitigated against with a robust risk assessment to ensure the safety of all children, staff and visitors (Appendix A - Risk Assessment).

## The benefits of a setting dog

Setting dogs have been proven to help develop children's' early reading skills, improve behaviour, attendance and academic confidence, as well as increasing children's understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills. At Oasis we hope that a dog will be a beneficial addition to the therapeutic offer, acting as an adjunct to the interventions already on offer and promoting engagement for children who may have found it difficult to access talking activities such as circle time and talk time in the past.

## Animal assisted support can:

- Teach empathy and appropriate interpersonal skills;
- Help individuals develop social skills;
- Be soothing and support the development of rapport between the children and staff, and improve individual's skills to pick up social cues imperative to human relationships.
- Staff can process that information and use it to help children see how their behaviour affects others.
- Dogs have been shown to support emotional regulation through the positive impact on the autonomic nervous system.
- A recent report highlighted children working with dogs experienced increased motivation for learning, resulting in improved outcomes.
- 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 dogs in schools/settings show a range of benefits including:

- Increase in attendance;
- Gains in confidence; - Decreases in learner anxiety behaviours resulting in improved learning outcomes, such as increases in early reading and confidence levels;
- Positive changes towards learning and improved motivation.

- Enhanced relationships with peers and staff due to experiencing trust and unconditional positive regard from a dog. This in turn helps children learn how to express their feelings and enter into more trusting relationships.

### **Confidence benefits**

"If children are partnered with a dog to explore/share books, 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**

"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**

The gentle nature of dogs has been seen to have a calming effect on children and can help support children's wellbeing. Dogs show no judgement, provide unconditional companionship, and help ease some of the pressure's children feel when going through very difficult times.

The calm, gentle temperaments of dogs can support children and their ability to cope with different situations that may be challenging for them. Dogs can provide that much-needed form of emotional stability for children. Some other ways that dogs can support children's wellbeing include:

- having a soothing, relaxing and positive effects on children's moods
- helping provide a renewed motivation and purpose for children as they will often look forward to working with a dog
- supporting children who have difficulties with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, trauma and can also help reduce stress. A busy learning environment for a child can be stressful and overwhelming for various reasons.
- supporting children with various learning difficulties
- supporting teaching children about compassion, respect and empathy for others; they learn about care and consideration for animals
- helping to support and ease anxiety

<https://www.twinkl.co.uk/twinkl-digest/early-years-digest/could-therapy-dogs-support-children-in-your-setting>)

### **Behaviour benefits**

"Researchers report that children can identify with animals, and with empathy for the dog, can better understand how peers may feel. It was found that violent behaviour in participating children

declined by 55%, and general aggression went down 62%. In a controlled study, children were found to have fewer disciplinary referrals in schools/settings with a dog than schools/settings without. Children's' behaviour improved toward staff, and children also showed more confidence and responsibility."

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

## **Principles**

The Oasis Manager and Trustees, have agreed to the presence of a dog at the setting.

Only the setting dog is allowed on the premises. No other dogs are permitted unless the Manager has approved their visit.

The dog is an F1 Cockapoo. The dog is not Kennel Club registered as it is a cross-breed, selected for its temperament, reduced risk of congenital health issues, and hypoallergenic, non-shedding coat.

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

Nicky Osborne and the Manager have worked together to produce a risk assessment which has been approved by the Safeguarding Team and this will be reviewed annually.

The dog will be included in the fire evacuation procedure under the supervision of Nicky Osborne or other trained staff members.

The dog is covered by the settings Public Liability Insurance policy and the Manager has responsibility for ensuring this remains on the settings policy during the presence of a dog at Oasis. The dog is also insured by Nicky Osborne.

Staff, parents and visitors will be informed that a dog will be in the setting.

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

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

## **Code of Conduct**

### **Staff Responsibilities**

Nicky Osborne will know the whereabouts of the dog and which staff are supervising at all times.

If the dog is ill, she will not be allowed into the setting. Nicky Osborne has responsibility for ensuring appropriate alternative care for the dog if she is not able to be in the setting on a given day.

Nicky Osborne is responsible for ensuring the training of the dog.

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

The dog will be kept in the Reception Office when Nicky Osborne is not available or is working with children or parents.

Staff, visitors and children known to have allergic reactions to dogs must not go near the dog. The reception staff 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 **MUST** be appropriate adult supervision at all times.

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

The dog resides in the office and is not out in the nursery outside of designated walk times. With the support of a responsible adult, the dog is taken for short walks around the onsite Community Centre field with a small group of children (no more than 3 children).

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 or flattening of her ears, she should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment by the trained staff member handling her.

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

### **Children's Responsibilities**

Children whose parents have withdrawn consent are not allowed to spend time with the dog during sessions.

Children should be careful to stroke the dog on her body, chest, back and not by her face or top of head.

Children are not allowed to approach or disturb the dog whilst she is sleeping or eating.

Children are not allowed to play roughly with the dog.

Children must wait until the dog is sitting or lying down before touching or stroking her.

Children are not allowed to eat whilst spending time with the dog.

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

Children will be supported to always show kind behaviour towards the dog.

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

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

The legal owner of the dog will be Nicky Osborne. She will bear the costs associated with owning the dog; the setting budget will support liability insurance and training costs only where appropriate.

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

Yes. The dog is from a home where both parents were seen. The Father is a pedigree miniature poodle and Kennel Club registered. The Mother is a pedigree working Cooker Spaniel and Kennel Club registered, the dog was chosen specifically for her temperament, intelligence, and hypoallergenic coat.

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

The dog will be kept in the Reception Office. When this is not possible, the dog will be cared for in areas of setting which are not accessible to children. The dog will also attend meetings with staff to support further socialisation, and support staff well-being, following consultation with staff beforehand.

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

Yes, we have carefully considered having a dog in the setting and sought advice from many sources, including other schools/settings that successfully have a dog.

The setting notifies parents of the types of animals that may be handled or petted and obtain consent to this from parents, together with details of any known animal allergies.

The setting keeps an up-to-date list of children with known allergic reactions to dogs/animals. These children will be supported with alternative learning opportunities when the dog visits the learning rooms.

**Q Who is responsible for training?**

Nicky Osborne will be the legal owner of the dog and as a result, will be responsible for her training. Appropriate professional training will be obtained.

**Q How will the dog be toileted to ensure hygiene for all?**

In the interest of health and hygiene our setting dog will be toileted when taken out for short walks around the grounds.

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

The dog will be kept in the Reception Office and Nicky Osborne will ensure the 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 with the dog at any time against their wishes. We hope to work closely with parents of children who are fearful of dogs to alleviate their fear and to teach them how to manage this using evidence-based interventions such as graded exposure.

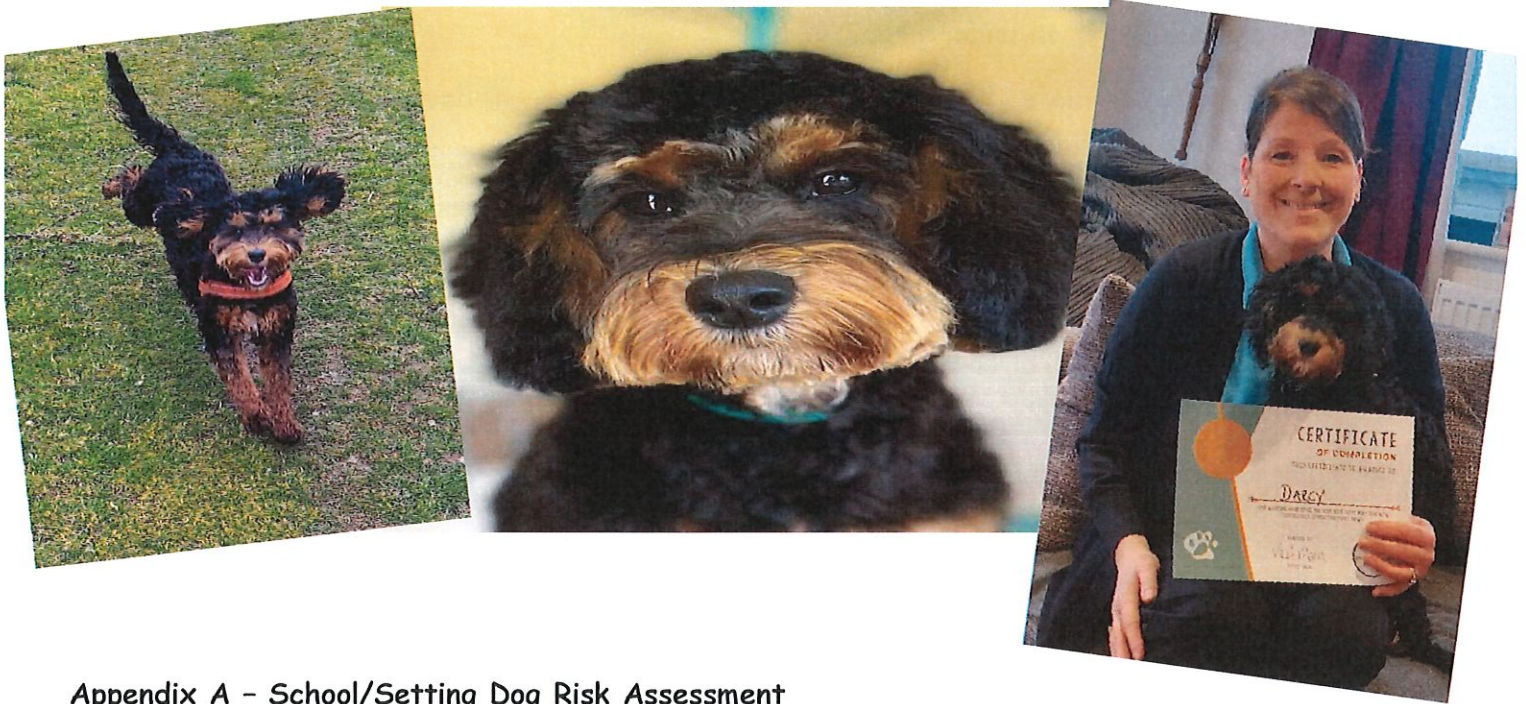
**Q How will the dog's welfare be considered?**

The dogs' 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 and water.

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

Children will not need to touch the dog or be in the same room as the dog at any point which will relieve the possibility of allergic reactions. We already manage a number of allergies at the setting, 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 to put additional control measures in place for individual allergies. The setting dog was specifically chosen for being a breed known for its hypoallergenic, non-shedding coat. She will be given a high-quality food and regularly groomed to reduce any possibility of allergens.

**Meet Darcy the Dog**



**Appendix A - School/Setting Dog Risk Assessment**

Adopted by The Oasis Management Committee on: 08.08.2023  
Representative of Management Committee Signature: Lorna Trudgeon  
Review Date: August 2024