

Believe and Achieve



School Dog Policy

J Bartle

N Hill

HEAD TEACHER

CHAIR OF GOVERNORS

September 2025

September 2026

DATE

DATE TO BE REVIEWED

School Dog Policy

Name of dog: Cooper

Breed: Golden Retriever

Current age: 5 years old

Owner: Mrs Barron

Introduction:

Children can benefit in many different ways through having contact and interactions with a dog. Therapy dogs are used to react and respond to people and their environment under the guidance of their owner. Research has shown that having a therapy dog in school can 'help to reduce student anxiety, stress and contributes to good attendance'. They can provide educational and emotional support for pupils and staff and have been proven to have many benefits in the school environment.

These include:

- Teaching empathy and appropriate interpersonal skills
- Develop communication and social skills
- Raise confidence
- Give children a sense of responsibility
- Provide calm in moments of stress and anxiety
- Increased/improved attendance
- Increased motivation to learn
- Enhanced relationships with peers and staff through the experience of receiving unconditional love from a dog

Are there risks when bringing a dog into the school environment?

Yes, there are some risks associated with bringing a dog into school. There are however a number of incidents or injuries that happen in the school environment that far exceed the number that may be caused by a dog. The dog will be just another risk that will be managed carefully to avoid accidents from happening. A thorough risk assessment has been carried out and is reviewed regularly.

This policy outlines the risks managed and the measures put in place to ensure that our school dog can be present.

Please note: All other dogs are not permitted on the school premises at any time unless authorised by the Head Teacher (Jayne Bartle). E.g. Police dogs. This includes drop off and pick up times.

School Policy:

The dog will be owned by Mrs Barron.

- Cooper is insured to be in school by Pet Business Insurance Ltd.
- Staff, children, parents and Governors have all shared their views on having a therapy dog in school.
- The Head Teacher and Governors have the right to refuse entry to the dog.
- Only Cooper 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 before the visit.
- Cooper is a Golden Retriever and has been chosen as our school's therapy dog because of his gentle nature. This breed typically respond well to training whilst being patient and tolerant. They are also a sociable and friendly breed who usually respond well to children.
- The Governors of Coxhoe Primary School have agreed and signed to say that they feel the children at our school will benefit from having a school dog.
- Staff, parents and children have been informed that a dog will be present at school. All visitors will be informed that we have a school dog and signs will be placed around school on the doors of rooms where Cooper may be.
- All parents have completed an online consent form to allow their child to interact. This list is checked before each session to ensure only children with consent attend.
- Mrs Barron has produced a risk assessment that will be reviewed annually or where required.
- Staff, visitors and children who are allergic to Cooper must not be in contact with him. Cooper has his own space and children are invited to visit him in this room with a designated adult. Only on specific occasions will Cooper visit children in their classroom or will be in the school hall for assembly (just as a service dog would be on a visit into school). This will be managed carefully by an appropriate adult. Cooper may spend time in Mrs Bartle or Mrs Caygill's office when they are present. Cooper will spend time in the EYFS setting once all children have left the school premises.
- If Cooper is ill or is showing signs of tiredness/low well-being, he will not be brought into school.

- The dog will be kept on a lead when moving outside of school and when on walks on the around the village. He will always be handled by a capable member of staff who is known to the dog.
- Children will never be left alone with Cooper and will always be supervised, even in open spaces.
- Children will be consistently reminded of what is appropriate behaviour when interacting with the dog. They must always remain calm and should not make sudden movements or touch him until he is sitting down.
- Children should not disturb Cooper whilst he is eating or sleeping or when he is having his 'rest time' in his specified room.
- Children must not play roughly with the dog.
- Cooper will not be surrounded by a large number of people at any one time as this could make him nervous or agitated. Adults in charge of a group of children must always manage a situation carefully. No more than 4 children should be in the room with Cooper at any one time.
- Dogs express their feelings through their body language. If Cooper has flattened ears, his tail between his legs, whines, growls or hides behind an object or owner this could mean that he is feeling stressed, anxious or frightened and he will be immediately removed from a situation as these are warning signs that can affect the wellbeing of him or the children.
- Children and staff should not eat around Cooper in his space.
- Children should stroke Cooper on his body, chest and back and should avoid his face.
- Children should always wash their hands after time spent with Cooper.
- Any dog foul should be cleaned up and disposed of immediately. Cooper will be given a morning and evening walk by his owner and may have 1 additional walk or outdoor time to allow toilet time.
- All parents have been consulted and can contact school about their child having contact with the dog.
- All visitors will be informed about the dog and related protocols on arrival. Signs will be visible on all doors to rooms where Cooper may be.
- Staff will maintain evidence of the impact of Cooper in the school environment. This includes Mrs Barron and other staff who will lead small group reading/support sessions.
- The office staff/Mrs Bartle/ Mrs Barron will know the whereabouts and supervision of the school dog at all times.
- Cooper will be included in the fire evacuation procedure under the supervision of Mrs Bartle or appointed adult.

Actions:

If a child, parent, member of staff or school governor has an issue with the school dog, this information will be shared with the Senior Management Team as soon as possible. All concerns will be responded to by Mrs Bartle.

Roles and Responsibilities:

- The Governing Body has a responsibility to ensure that the school has a written policy for dogs in school.
- The Head Teacher and Mrs Barron are responsible for implementing this policy.
- Teachers, staff, pupils, parents and visitors are required to abide by this policy.
- The curriculum will support learning about dogs and how best to behave around our dog. This will include highlighting that not all dogs are well trained and that caution must be used around all unknown dogs outside of school.
- There will be 8 members of staff who may be called upon to attend to a situation. These are: Mrs Bartle (HT), Mrs Caygill (DHT), Mrs Barron (Legal owner), Mrs Storey (DHT), Mr Coils (Caretaker), Mrs O'Sullivan (SLT/SENDCO) and Miss Armstrong (Parent Liaison).

Reasons to have a dog in school

In summary, academic research has shown that dogs working and helping in a school environment can achieve the following:

- Improve academic achievement
- Increase Literacy skills
- Calm behaviours
- Increase social skills and self-esteem
- Increase confidence
- Teach responsibility and respect to all life
- Help improve school attendance
- Help to motivate children who are often less focused

Behaviour:

In some schools, dogs are making a difference to the behaviour of pupils. Research shows that some students can identify more easily with animals and with showing empathy with a dog, can better understand how their peers feel in certain situations. Behaviour can often interfere with learning and school dogs have been used to improve behaviour problems by promoting positive attitudes instead. Dogs are also used as a motivational tool on a reward basis, helping children to show positive behaviour so that they are able to spend time with the dog. Research has also shown that some pupils' behaviour improved towards teachers and therefore showed more responsibility for their actions. Additionally, some parents have shared that their child seemed more interested in coming to school as a result of having a dog in school.

Attendance:

Research has shown that children who had a dog in school could be persuaded more easily to get into school as they could be given responsibility over the dog throughout the day. As a result, attendance for children who regularly missed school improved, with some children's attendance reaching over 95%.

Education:

Reading programmes with dogs have shown to have a huge impact on some children. Pupils who might feel embarrassed to read aloud to their teacher or peers are more likely to be less scared when reading to a dog as the dog will not judge or correct them. Dogs can be used to encourage struggling readers to read aloud in the presence of a calm and well-trained dog.

Dogs are incredibly calm and are happy to have people around them. They are content when being read to by students and will join small groups of students for calm activities. Dogs give unconditional love and acceptance which is crucial for struggling readers with low self confidence. Research has shown that pupils who read to dogs, show an increase in reading levels, word recognition, have an increased motivation to read and write and have improved interpersonal skills among their peers.

Social Development:

Having a dog in school can provide opportunities for improved social development. They are especially useful for teaching children responsibility and social skills. Schools are using dogs to build self-esteem, learn about positive reinforcement, responsibilities and boundaries. Pupils can use dogs to help them communicate, learn kindness and develop ownership.

Children with a dog in school have the opportunity to learn how to care for an animal including walking, grooming and playing. Researchers report that pupils having daily care responsibilities for a dog being a positive experience and can promote their own daily care.

Reward:

Dogs can be gentle, loving and calm but can also be full of fun and energy. Pupils who have performed well, have worked hard or have made great progress in a certain area may be rewarded with time spent with the school dog. This can include walking, grooming, relaxed time, training or play. This can be a great opportunity to improve self-esteem.

Support dogs can work with children on a 1-1 or small group basis and can be especially beneficial for children experiencing friendship difficulties, phobias or challenging times at home or with their family. A dog can bring such joy to children that they meet and are happy to provide cuddles to those that they spend time with. Dogs can provide reassurance and friendship for children experiencing a range of difficulties.

Frequently asked questions:

Who is the legal owner of the dog and who pays for the costs?

Mrs Barron is the legal owner of the dog and she will pay for the majority of the costs associated. The school budget will support insurance, staff training and therapy training where appropriate.

Is the dog from a reputable breeder?

Yes. Cooper is a Pedigree and is Kennel Club registered. He is from a loving home where both parents were seen and documents checked. Cooper has been chosen for his temperament and is from a breed considered to be calm, tolerant and easy to train. Many of Cooper's ancestors are Crufts competitors and some litters have gone on to be mountain rescue dogs and therapy dogs. We have received lots of support from Cooper's breeders.

Will the dog be a distraction from learning?

No. Cooper will be kept either in Mrs Bartle or Mrs Caygill's office or the school office area. These spaces are separate from the classrooms/playground and small group areas to ensure that he only comes into contact with children who are happy to be with him or who's parents have given consent, under strict supervision.

Cooper will have a safe space to spend time in some classrooms, the library and the school playground where children can interact safely.

He may also attend staff meetings to support further socialization, following consultation with staff beforehand.

Has a risk assessment been undertaken?

Yes. We have carefully considered having a dog in school and have conducted lots of research over the last 3 years from many sources including other schools who have a dog where the introduction has been successful.

Who is responsible for training?

Mrs Barron is responsible for general and basic training. She has ensured that Cooper attends professional training and socialisation groups. Cooper has completed his therapy training and has received his certificate.

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

In the interest of health and hygiene, our school dog will be taken out on a morning before school and will have the opportunity to have a short break outside during the day during either assembly time, break time or lunchtime. Staff will clear any dog foul immediately leaving no trace on the ground. The space will be cleaned with disinfectant if necessary.

Our policy of no dogs on the school playground is still applicable as we are unable to put control measures in place for other dogs whose temperament and behaviour we are unsure of. We cannot guarantee safety for our children with dogs from families who are not supervised by staff.

How will the dog's wellbeing and welfare be considered?

The dog will be walked at least 2 times per day but may be walked again throughout the school day. Parents will sign a consent form before Cooper interacts with any children which will allow children to walk him with an adult. This may be used as a behaviour reward, in line with our behaviour policy. Cooper will be kept in one of the identified spaces listed above and will only have planned contact with children and visitors. He will be carefully trained over a period of time and will have unlimited access to water. We will work carefully to ensure that the Cooper's welfare is always considered.

How will allergies be managed?

Children will not need to touch the dog which will relieve the possibility of allergic reactions. We already manage a number of allergies in school and this will be no different for children and adults that are allergic to dogs. Individual needs will always need to be met and we are happy to work with parents to put additional control measures in place for allergies. Our dog will be groomed regularly to prevent moulting and will be given high quality food, especially for healthy coats.

My child is frightened of dogs, how will you manage this?

Access to Cooper will be carefully managed and supervised and children will not need to have contact unless permission for this has been given from parents. We hope to work closely with parents of children with a fear of dogs to allow opportunities for them to build up a trusting relationship and eventually alleviate their fear and to teach them how to manage this.