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**Therapy Dog Policy –**

**Lache Primary School**

**Introduction**

Children can benefit educationally and emotionally, increase their understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills through contact with a suitable calm dog. In addition to these benefits, children take great enjoyment from interaction with animals. The breed, Cockapoo, has been carefully selected as suitable for this type of environment. The dog is well cared for and responsibly owned by Mrs Seager.

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

This policy shows how we have thought carefully about school life with a pet dog and how, through careful management, there is a very low risk of harm.

**Context:**

• The dog will be owned by Mrs Seager.

• Veterinary costs will be paid by the owner, with the exception of non-essential veterinary costs required by the school.

• The dog is a Cockapoo, chosen for its mild temperament and low shedding coat.

• The senior leadership team and teaching staff have agreed that a dog will bring many benefits to Lache Primary School.

• The vast majority of pupils are very keen to have a school pet on site.

• Letters will be sent home to parents, so they can decide whether their child is happy to come into contact with the dog or not. If a child is fearful of dogs but willing to develop their confidence, the school will support them throughout this process and individual care plans can be put in place if necessary.

• The risk assessment (attached) will be reviewed annually.

• When visitors and pupils arrive at school they will be advised of the presence of a dog.

• The dog will undergo training; the cost of training will be borne by the school.

**Day-to-day Management**

The dog will:

• not be allowed in school if unwell.

• be carried, kept on a lead or if trained sufficiently, walking alongside an adult

responding to commands, when moving between classrooms or when on a

walk.

• be under the full control and supervision of an adult at all times.

• be fully trained to a pen and a bed.

• have all immunisations, worming and flea treatments kept up to date.

• never be taken off the site by pupils.

**Pupils will:**

• NOT have sole responsibility for, or be left alone with, the dog.

• meet the dog in small groups or individually with adult supervision.

• be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dog every time

they meet him:

* always remain calm around the dog
* do not make sudden movements, be gentle
* do not put your face near the dog
* always approach the dog standing up
* do not disturb the dog when it is eating or sleeping
* do not eat close to the dog and never feed the dog.

• learn about how dogs express their feelings through their body language. Growling or baring of teeth indicates that a 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 he should immediately be removed from that particular situation or environment.

• follow appropriate health and safety principles:

**Health and Safety Principles**

Children will always wash their hands after handling the dog.

Any dog poo will be cleaned up immediately and disposed of appropriately by the dog’s owner or an appropriate member of staff. Children must never attempt to do this.

Should a bite (even playful) occur:

1. Parents will be contacted immediately.

2. The wound will be cleaned and covered with a sterile, non-sticky dressing.

3. The child/adult will be released for medical attention.

4. All relevant staff will be informed.

5. A full investigation into the circumstances will be led by the Head Teacher.

6. The suitability of the dog will be reassessed.

**Reasons to have a dog in school**

Social Development

Dogs in school offer an opportunity for improving social development. They are especially useful for teaching pupil’s social skills, such as responsibility. Specifically, schools are using dogs to help older pupils build self-esteem, learn about positive and negative reinforcement, responsibility and boundaries. Older pupils use dogs to help communicate, teach kindness and empower pupils. With a dog in the classroom, pupils 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 pupils also learn about responsibility, caring and sharing when helping each other take care of a dog at school.

As a Reward

Dogs will be gentle and loving, but at the same time full of fun and enjoyment for the pupils. Those pupils going ‘above and beyond’ will be rewarded with spending time during lunch or break-time to interact with the dog. Walking, grooming and playing are some of the responsibilities pupils will be allowed to undertake. It has been proved that working and playing with a dog improves children’s social skills and self-esteem.

Support

Dogs can work with pupils on a one-to-one basis and will especially help those pupils who have been bullied, abused, are going through upsetting/difficult times or are even scared of/phobic about dogs. The dog will bring much joy and help to all the pupils they meet and are happy to provide plenty of hugs to the pupils with whom they are spending time. Pupils who struggle with social interaction can find a reassuring friend in a dog. Dogs in school have also been used to help with developing positive behaviour.

Reading Programmes with dogs are very successful with some pupils. Children who might be embarrassed to read aloud to the class or even 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, pupils gain social support and peer interaction. Dogs are incredibly calm and happy to have pupils read to them or join a group of children whilst they are having a book reading session. Dogs give unconditional acceptance, as they are non-judgemental, which is especially crucial to struggling, emerging readers. The dogs also provide confidence to children and they make amazing listeners, providing the children with a sense of comfort and love. Research has proved that students who read to dogs show an increase in reading levels, word recognition, a higher desire to read and write and an increase in intrapersonal and interpersonal skills.