



GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS KEY FACTORS WHEN CONSIDERING THE INTRODUCTION OF A DOG INTO YOUR SCHOOL

This factsheet is designed as guidance for schools considering introducing a dog into their school. It is not a complete checklist and much will depend on your individual circumstances.

We believe there is significant potential for dogs to help young people in a range of educational environments, bringing benefits to their academic, emotional and social development.

Our experience is based on working with specially-trained dogs and dedicated handlers in a range of schools and community settings and sharing best practice with programmes around the world.

Bringing a dog into your school is a significant commitment which should be carefully understood and planned. At the heart of the safety and success of any programme will be a clear focus on the wellbeing of the dog.

Detailed below are six key factors to help and inform any decision to introduce a dog to your school, plus details of where you can get further help and advice.

DOGS IN SCHOOLS – KEY CONSIDERATIONS 'PLANNING FOR SUCCESS'



1. RIGHT REASONS

You know why you want a dog in your school and you've done your homework about what it involves.

- Ensure you understand the practical considerations of having a dog in school (e.g. toileting; hygiene standards; the need for a structured and planned timetable for your dog and their handler; space for the dog to rest for significant periods during the school day; areas of school that are unsuitable for a dog).
- Understand the standards for working with dogs in schools (see Kennel Club Bark and Read Standards below).
- Understand the costs associated with the dog and who will be responsible for them.
- Make appropriate insurance arrangements to cover your dog and their activities in school.
- Assess the risks and know what you will do if things do not go as planned.
- Have a back-up plan in place to care for the dog when they cannot attend school (e.g. if they are unwell).



2. RIGHT COMMITMENT/SUPPORT

You have support from governors, staff, parents and students to introduce a dog into your school.

- Engage all your stakeholders as you plan, to enable you to make informed decisions.
- Ensure you understand and manage any concerns up front (e.g. allergies; fears; cultural issues).
- Shape your plans based on the feedback you receive.



3. RIGHT PLACE

You have assessed that your school is an appropriate environment for a dog – and for the individual dog you select.

- Consider your school from a dog's perspective. Remember, a school is not a natural home for a dog.
- Take advice and make an informed choice about the right dog and the most appropriate arrangements for your school.
- Consider the times the dog will be in school and where they will be based.
- Understand how you will need to adapt the school environment to meet the dog's needs.
- Remember, if your dog does not feel safe, there may be a risk to students.



4. RIGHT TRAINING

You have a suitable socialisation and training programme in place to prepare the dog for school life.

- Be aware that a dog is unlikely to be mature enough to work in a school environment until they are at least one year old and have completed all their training.
- Don't expect your dog to 'get' school life; you will need to prepare them. An effective, gradual, socialisation process to introduce them into the school environment will support them to feel secure and relaxed with the children and the environment.
- Get your dog assessed to ensure they have the right temperament and have reached the right levels of training and skills to interact with students in school.
- Make sure you know where to get help from a qualified and experienced dog trainer who is committed to positive training techniques.



5. RIGHT SUPPORT FOR YOUR DOG

You have a dedicated and experienced person who understands the dog's needs who will support the dog at school and at home (while also understanding the needs of your students).

- Ensure the handler has a good understanding of dog behaviour and body language and, specifically, that they have built a trusted relationship with the dog.
- Do the appropriate checks through DBS and referencing to assure yourself that the person you select is suitable to work with children.
- Ensure they are committed to positive training techniques and to responding to the changing needs of the dog over time.
- Ensure your dog is always supported when in school. A dog should never be left alone with students.
- Ensure the handler will not be distracted by other duties when handling the dog.

- Set standards in school and ensure everyone sticks to them – the dog’s wellbeing should never be compromised.



6. RIGHT PREPARATION

You have a clear plan and procedures to prepare your school for the introduction of a dog.

- Take time to educate students, teachers and other staff to understand the dog’s needs and how to act around and engage with the dog.
- Produce a timetable for the dog, with clear rest periods away from students.
- Review how things are going regularly and make changes as required e.g. reduce dog's time in school if there are signs of fatigue.
- Have a clear plan in place of what you will do if things do not go as planned.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Standards

Bark & Read: Standards of Practice for Providers of Animal Assisted Interventions in Schools, issued by the Kennel Club. These standards provide clear guidance to people and organisations who wish to work with a dog in a school and to schools regarding their responsibilities towards the dogs and the young people who take part in these programmes. You can find the standards here:

https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/1159872/barkread_standardsofpractice_a4_8pp-booklet_web.pdf

Animal Assisted Intervention International (AAII): AAII is an international practitioners’ organisation which has published standards of practice. See section on Animal Assisted Education for standards relating to work in schools:

<https://aai-int.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/AAII-Standards-of-Practice.pdf>

School Dog programmes

Dogs for Good: You can find more information about our Community Dog for Schools programme at www.dogsforgood.org

Bark and Read: Supported by the Kennel Club Charitable Trust, the Bark and Read Foundation works with a range of charities that take dogs into schools as reading volunteers to help tackle the UK’s literacy problems. For further information, please visit: www.thekennelclub.org.uk/barkandread

Advice on dog behaviour and training

Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT): www.apdt.co.uk

Institute of Modern Dog Trainers (IMDT): www.imdt.uk.com

Animal Behaviour and Training Council (ABTC): www.abtcouncil.org.uk

Thanks to Tracey Berridge, Founder and CEO of Dogs Helping Kids (now closed), for her input to this factsheet.