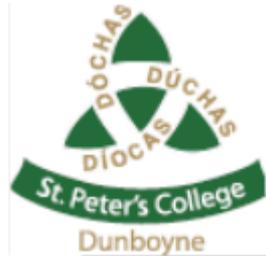


St. Peter's College
Dunboyne, Co. Meath
71950F



St Peter's College
Community Dog Policy

Person/s responsible for Review: SEN Team

Signed: *Maria Murphy*

(Chairperson of the Board of Management)

Date: 8th June 2021

SCHOOL COMMUNITY DOG POLICY

Purpose To explain the rationale and arrangements for St. Peter's College, Dunboyne for taking on a School Community Dog to augment our Wellbeing Program at the school.

The benefits to children of a school dog are well documented, and include:

- A calming effect on students;
- Improved behaviour and concentration;
- Improved self-esteem;
- Promotes for the children a sense of belonging and acceptance;
- Increased participation by more withdrawn children;
- Encouraging a sense of responsibility and respect for life;
- Helping children develop confidence in reading.

Guidelines

- Authority for a school dog at St. Peter's rests with Donncha McCarrick;
- Designated Teacher is responsible for the supervision of the Community dog when on St. Peter's premises;
- The Community dog is a pilot scheme run by the Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind;
- The School Community dog must have completed dog training before being allowed on school premises. Higher level training is required and has been provided by the Irish Guide Dogs. Evidence must be provided to School of the completion of appropriate professional training;
- The welfare of the dog must be a priority at all times and appropriate measures taken for 'timeout' and health needs of the dog;
- At the start of each school year, information about the School Therapy Dog program will be in the school newsletter. Parents are able to inform the School if they do not wish their child/children to have direct contact with the school dog, whether on medical grounds (such as allergies) or fear of dogs;
- Designated Teacher will be responsible for managing student access to the school dog;
- Designated Teacher will be responsible for setting clear expectations and guidelines on how to interact with the dog;
- All classes where possible will have regular access to the school dog. A class schedule for the school dog will be set up, based on the needs of the students and in consultation with class teachers;
- Students will be instructed to wash their hands after handling the dog;

- Staff, who are with the dog, will be responsible for the welfare of the school dog whilst on St. Peter's grounds, including the provision of water, walking the dog and ensuring appropriate toileting arrangements;
- Any cases of aggressive behaviour by the school dog to a student, parent or member of staff must be reported to the Principal and to Designated Teacher as soon as possible;
- Any students involved in inappropriate behaviour with/at the school dog will face serious sanctions and will be referred directly to the principal/Board of Management
- Designated Teacher will prepare an annual report to the Board of Management, Principal and the School Council on the school dog program;
- Insurance, in the event of the dog being injured or becoming ill at school, will be met by the designated teacher;
- Other costs, including veterinary bills and vaccinations, will also be met by the owner of the dog;
- Costs of training the dog by the Irish Guide Dogs may be offset by sponsorship from appropriate companies and individual donations or fundraising.

Appendix 1.

Reasons to have a dog in school in summary, academic research has shown that dogs working and helping in the school environment can achieve the following: -

- 1) Improve academic achievement.
- 2) Increase 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 school refusing.
- 8) Motivate children who are often less attentive.

The following information has been taken from a range of sources to provide further detail about the benefits of having a dog in school:

Behaviour:

In some schools, dogs are making a difference in the behaviour of pupils. 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 in participating students declined by 55%, and general aggression went down 62%. Behaviour problems occur in school and these can interfere with learning. Some schools are using 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 toward teachers, and students also showed more confidence and responsibility. Additionally, parents reported that children seemed more interested in school as a result of having a dog at school.

Attendance: Some examples from this academic year

Student A in 1st year now comes to school just to see Travis.

Student B in 6th year emails designated teacher to ask about Travis when she is not able to come to school.

Education:

Reading programmes with dogs are doing wonders for some students. 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," students find social support and peer interaction. Dogs are incredibly calm and happy to have student read to them or join a group of children in the library whilst they are having a book reading session. Dogs give unconditional acceptance, as they are non-judgmental, which is especially crucial to struggling, emergent readers. The dogs also provide confidence to children as they do not make fun of them when they read, but above all 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 intra and interpersonal skills among the students they mix with.

Social Development:

Dogs in school offer an opportunity for improving social development. They are especially useful for teaching students' social skills and responsibility. Specifically, schools are using dogs to help older students build self-esteem; learn about positive and negative reinforcement, responsibility, and boundaries. Older students use dogs to help communicate, teach kindness, and empower students. With a dog in school, 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: Dogs 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, will be rewarded with spending time during lunch or break to interact with these dogs. Walking, grooming, playing and training are some of the responsibility's students 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 students on a one-one basis and will especially help those students who have been bullied, abused, going through upsetting/difficult times or even scared/phobic of dogs. The dog will bring much joy and help to all the students they meet and are happy to provide plenty of hugs to the students they are spending time with. Students who struggle with social interaction can find a reassuring friend in a dog.