



Trent CE Primary School

Having a Reading Dog in School

Policy and Rationale

June 2016



Meet Fin! I'm a Maltipoo

Maltipoos are not a "breed" of dog as such; they are the result of crossing a Maltese with a Toy or Miniature Poodle. Since they first appeared on the scene, they've earned themselves the reputation of being affectionate, fun-loving little dogs that boast very kind natures. They are active, charming and easily fit in to a home where there are children, elderly people and other pets. They are often used as therapy dogs because they have such gentle personalities. Maltipoos are hypoallergenic dogs.

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. By having a 'Reading Dog' we want to encourage those children specifically who are vulnerable, or those who are less confident with reading, to have a friendly audience and to look forward to reading as a treat! The breed, Maltipoo, is carefully selected as suitable for this type of environment. The dog is well cared for and responsibly owned by a staff member.

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 Ring
- Veterinary costs will be paid by the owner
- The dog is a Maltipoo chosen for its very mild temperament and non- molting coat. It is hypoallergenic.
- The Headteacher and Governors, along with the London Diocese Board for Schools have agreed that a Reading Dog would bring many benefits to Trent CE Primary School.
- The vast majority of pupils are very keen to have a small dog on site; most parents are delighted. Where there are any concerns or fears expressed by individuals, a care plan will be set up.
- The risk assessment (attached) is reviewed annually.
- Visitors and students will be informed of the dog upon arrival

Management day to day

The dog will:

- not be allowed into school if unwell.
- be carried or kept on a lead when moving between classrooms or on a walk
- be under the full control and supervision of an adult at all times
- be fully trained to a cage and a mat
- have had all injections prior to joining Trent
- 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 a group of no more than 3 children
- 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 stare into a dog's eyes as this could be interpreted as a threat
 - do not put your face near a dog
 - always approach the dog standing up
 - do not disturb the dog that is sleeping or eating
 - 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 the 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 be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment.
- The following health and safety principles:

Health and Safety Principles

Children will always wash their hands after handling the dog.

Any dog foul will be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately by the dog's owner. 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 a medical attention**
- 4. all staff will be informed**
- 5. a full investigation into the circumstance will be lead by the Head**
- 6. the suitability of the dog will be re-assessed by the Governors.**

Appendix 1: Reasons to have a dog in school: some anecdotes from other schools

Attendance

A student with poor attendance and truancy was encouraged back into school using caring for River, a dog, as an incentive. By telling the student that "if she didn't come to school to care for him, he wouldn't get walks, water or love," The student came to school almost every day for the rest of the year, only missing two days. Some schools are using dogs to improve behaviour problems by promoting positive behaviour in students.

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 practice 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, emerging 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 the classroom, 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 responsibilities 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.