



**ST. HILD'S  
CHURCH OF ENGLAND SCHOOL**

**Policy Document**

**SCHOOL DOG POLICY**

**At St. Hild's Church of England School we aim to provide all of our pupils with a world class education in a Christian context. We expect to find God at work in our school.**

*The School is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.*

***"I have come that they may have life in all its fullness (John 10:10)"***

**Introduction**

*"A dog is the only thing on earth that loves you more than you love yourself"* – Josh Billings

Sir Anthony Seldon, Vice Chancellor of Buckingham University, educationalist and author, referenced the benefits of school dogs. Damian Hinds, former Secretary of State for Education, also recognised their role in helping children's mental health and wellbeing.

There is extensive research to show that children can benefit educationally and emotionally, increase their understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills through contact with a dog. In addition to this, children and staff can take great enjoyment from interacting with a dog.

However, we are fully aware that bringing a dog into our school is a significant commitment which must be fully understood and carefully planned for. The key considerations to ensure we "***get it right***" when planning to have our school dog are:

1. **Right reason** – a clear vision of why we want a school dog (see ***appendix 1***)
2. **Right commitment and support** – from St. Hild's pupils, staff, Governors and parents/carers
3. **Right place** – ensuring our choice of dog is appropriate for the school environment
4. **Right training** – having a suitable socialisation and training programme in place
5. **Right support for our dog** – having a dedicated and trained team of staff handlers in place as well as pupil advocates
6. **Right preparation** – a clear plan and procedures are in place for introducing our school dog

After carefully considering the research and the key questions above, we embarked on consultation with staff, children and parents and carers. Taking into account the feedback St. Hild's Church of England School decided to acquire a school dog to enhance the mental health and wellbeing of all in school.

As with having any animal on site, there is a risk. There are a variety of accidents, which can happen within the school environment, which far exceed the number of injuries or incidents caused by a dog. Therefore, it is another risk that needs to be managed. A thorough risk assessment has been carried out and this is included in this document (see **appendix 3**).

It must be noted that dogs are not allowed anywhere on the school site at any time unless specifically authorised by the Headteacher. This includes drop off and collection times. This policy outlines measures put in place to allow an identified school dog to be present on the school premises.

### **Choosing Hilda as our School Dog**

It is important that a suitable dog for school is chosen and we considered temperament and allergies before it was decided to have a Giant Schnauzer puppy; research tells us that this breed is super smart, devoted and affectionate, along with characteristics of calmness, gentleness, affection and tolerance are entirely suited to being a school therapy dog. Giant Schnauzers are also one of the most hypoallergenic of all dogs as they produce less dander than other dogs, and don't drool or shed as much as other dogs do.

### **Preparing our Pupils**

Assemblies and workshops about owning and looking after dogs will be provided for all pupils from both external providers experienced in advising schools about having a school dog such as the Dogs Trust, Dogs for Good, and The Blue Cross, as well as Hilda's Handlers, a team of dedicated staff who will help manage the work and wellbeing of our school dog.

The Student Council, representing the Pupil Voice of the school, researched the scientific benefits of having a dog and the risks, and presented their findings in assemblies. They will be known as "Hilda's Heroes" and will regularly update the school on Hilda's work and how we are responding.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

The dog will belong to the Headteacher who is ultimately responsible for the dog's welfare and who will incur all necessary expenses involved in having a dog such as suitable insurance, including Public Liability Insurance, vets expenses and accessories for the dog.

Hilda's main base will be in the Headteacher's Office. There is a dedicated toileting area as per guidelines at the rear of the school where children do not have access. All necessary risk assessments have been carried out.

We have identified several members of staff as official authorised adults known as "Hilda's Handlers" when Hilda is on the premises. All have extensive experience of dog ownership

and have taken a full and active role in Hilda's training. They will be able to quickly identify when the dog is stressed or worried and have a comprehensive understanding of canine behaviour to ensure the wellbeing of the dog and the safety of our pupils. Hilda's Handlers will be very clear on when an intervention might be required, and how to safely and effectively intervene.

Hilda's Handlers are:

Mrs T Gibson	Owner and Headteacher
Mrs J Huntington	Attendance Officer
Mrs W Muir	Attendance Officer
Mrs S Sotheran	Year Leader for Year 7 and Transition
Mrs N Porritt	Nurture Teacher
Mrs D Todd	Bridge Manager
Mrs S Wooldridge	Specialist Learning Support Assistant/ELSA
Mrs J Wilson	Specialist Learning Support Assistant/ELSA
Mrs D Wainwright	Premises and Finance Officer (Hilda's quiet space)

In the event of the fire alarm sounding, Hilda will be taken outside by her handler and will remain with the Headteacher's PA near the Fire Warden Assembly point.

*Other staff will be involved in training our school dog.*

Below is a list of guidelines for interaction with the school dog. The list is not intended to be exhaustive but is based on advice and common sense.

### **Guidelines to interaction with the School Dog**

Children will have supervised interaction with the school dog unless parents/carers have informed the school they do not wish their child to do so. No child shall be forced into interaction with the school dog if this makes them feel unhappy in anyway.

At all times interaction with the school dog must be controlled and safe for adults, children and the school dog. If the following guidelines are not followed interaction with the school dog will be cancelled.

At all times of interaction there must be an authorised adult who takes the leading role when interacting with the school dog. If children, or visiting adults, do not abide by the guidance given by the authorised adult the interaction will be cancelled.

The following guidelines must be followed when interacting with the school dog. These guidelines apply to all adults and children.

- Governors have the right to refuse the dog access to the school
- The school dog's room - The Headteacher's Office – must never be accessed without an authorised adult
- The door to the Headteacher's Office is generally closed with no access to children, however, make sure you knock and wait for the authorised adult to let you in if necessary. Never let yourself in as the school dog might not be ready.
- There must be an authorised adult present during all interaction
- Always approach the school dog calmly (voice and movement)
- Always approach the school dog slowly
- Never run up to the school dog
- To start interaction the back of a hand will be offered for the school dog to sniff
- Keep noise levels low during interaction with the school dog
- If the school dog is in the classroom, all children must remain seated unless otherwise directed and authorised by the responsible adult
- All interaction must remain calm, with the authorised adult staying in control at all times
- Visiting children and adults can only handle equipment if the authorising adult gives permission
- Whilst the school dog is new to the school no visiting adult or children will give him any food/treats
- There must not be any interaction with the school dog whilst he is eating
- After all interaction with the school dog, hands must be washed and there must be use of the hand gel provided
- When interacting with the school dog all children must remain on their feet and not kneel or lay down unless guided to by the authorised adult
- The school dog will be on lead at all times during interaction with children

As the school dog becomes more established there will be times when interaction will take place outside. On these occasions the following guidelines apply in addition to the guidelines outlined above;

- No children will ever be asked to pick up faeces
- If walking the school dog, an authorised adult must be present at all times. Children may hold the school dog's lead if they are confident to do so. The authorised adult remains in charge of the situation at all times and will take back the school dog's lead if necessary.

### **Further reading**

- Pets as Therapy: [www.petsastherapy.org](http://www.petsastherapy.org)
- Dogs for Good: [www.dogsforgood.org](http://www.dogsforgood.org)
- The Dogs Trust: [www.dogstrust.org.uk](http://www.dogstrust.org.uk)
- Dogs Helping Kids: [www.dogshelpingkids.co.uk](http://www.dogshelpingkids.co.uk)
- RSPCA: [www.rspca.org.uk](http://www.rspca.org.uk)
- The Book Trust: [www.booktrust.org.uk](http://www.booktrust.org.uk)
- PDSA: [www.pdsa.org.uk](http://www.pdsa.org.uk)
- Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT): [www.apdt.co.uk](http://www.apdt.co.uk)
- Institute of Modern Dog Trainers (IMDT): [www.imdt.uk.com](http://www.imdt.uk.com)
- Puppy School: [www.puppyschool.co.uk](http://www.puppyschool.co.uk)
- Victoria Stilwell Positivity Dog Training (VSPDT): [www.positivity.com](http://www.positivity.com)

## 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: -

- Improve academic achievement
- Increase literacy skills
- Calming behaviours
- Increase social skills and self-esteem
- Increase confidence
- Teach responsibility and respect to all life
- Help prevent school refusing
- 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 pupils can identify with animals, and with empathy for the dog, can better understand how classmates may feel. It was found that aggressive behaviour in participating pupils 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 pupils. In a controlled study, pupils were found to have fewer disciplinary referrals in schools with a dog than schools without. Pupils' behaviour improved toward teachers, and pupils 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:** Case study: Mandy was a pupil with poor attendance and anxiety. Mandy was encouraged back into school using caring for River, a dog, as an incentive. By telling Mandy that River was there waiting for her to take him for walks and give him love, Mandy came to school almost every day for the rest of the year, only missing two days.

**Education:** Reading programmes with dogs are doing wonders for 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 find social support and peer interaction. Dogs are incredibly calm and happy to have pupil 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 pupils 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 pupils they mix with.

**Social Development:** Dogs in school offer an opportunity for improving social development. They are especially useful for teaching pupils social skills and 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 school, pupils have the

opportunity to learn how to care for the animal. This includes walking and grooming. Researchers report that involving pupils 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 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 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-one basis and will especially help those pupils 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 pupils they meet and are happy to provide plenty of hugs to the pupils they are spending time with. Pupils who struggle with social interaction can find a reassuring friend in a dog.

## **Appendix 2: School Dog Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

### **Q Who is the legal owner of the dog and who pays for its costs?**

The legal owner of the dog will be Mrs Gibson; she will bear all costs associated with owning the dog; the school budget will support staff training costs where appropriate.

### **Q Is the dog from a reputable breeder?**

Yes. The dog is a Giant Schnauzer that is Kennel club registered. Hilda has clear hip and eye scores and is from a home where both parents were seen and has been specifically chosen for her temperament.

### **Q Will the dog be a distraction?**

The dog will be kept in Mrs Gibson's office area. The office is separate from the classrooms / playground area to ensure it only comes into contact with children who are happy to have contact and have parental permission for this. The dog will also have a space to spend time in classrooms, the library and a play area where children can interact safely. The dog will also attend meetings with staff to support further socialisation, following consultation with staff beforehand.

### **Q Has a risk assessment been undertaken?**

Yes, we have carefully considered having a dog in school and sought advice from many sources, including other schools that successfully have a school dog and a reputable dog behaviourist. The Risk Assessment can be seen in appendix 3.

### **Q Who is responsible for training?**

Mrs Gibson will be the legal owner of the dog and as a result, will be responsible for its training, along with the team of dedicated staff. Appropriate professional training will be obtained and the dog will work towards being trained as a school dog with advice from the Pets As Therapy charity. Hilda will also work towards her PAT assessment at 9 months when she will become a fully qualified PAT dog.

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

In the interest of health and hygiene our school dog will be toileted in a designated area of the school, away from all children, and when taken out for short walks outside of school. Only staff members will clear this away appropriately leaving no trace on the ground, cleaning the area with disinfectant if needed.

### **Q How will the dog's welfare be considered?**

The dog will be walked regularly and given free time outside when children are in lessons. Parents and carers will be able to give permission in advance to allow their child to be able to walk with a member of staff and the dog during lunchtime. This will also be used as a behaviour reward, in line with our behaviour policy. The dog will be kept in the Headteacher's office area and will only have planned and supervised contact with children and visitors. The dog will be carefully trained over a period of time and will have unlimited access to food and water. Regular health checks will be carried out by a reputable vet and all vaccinations will be kept up to date; evidence of this will be recorded on the dog's health check certificate. We will work carefully to ensure the dog's welfare is always considered.

### **Q How will this be managed where children have allergies?**

Hilda is a Giant Schnauzer and so produces less dander than other dogs. She sheds less and does not drool so is a good choice for those with mild allergies. However, children will not need to touch the dog, which will relieve the possibility of allergic reactions. We already



manage a number of allergies at school and this will be no different for children and adults that are allergic to dogs. Individual needs will always be met and we are happy to work with parents to put additional control measures in place for individual allergies. The breed of dog is known for minimal moulting, he is given a high quality food and regularly groomed to reduce any possibility of allergens.

**Q My child is frightened of dogs; how will you manage this?**

Access to the dog is carefully managed and supervised and children do not need to have close contact with Hilda. We hope to work closely with parents and carers of children who are fearful of dogs to alleviate their fear and to teach them how to manage this.

**Q Will my child pick up infections from the dog?**

The dog will be fully vaccinated, treated regularly for worms and fleas and will be kept away from school if she is ill. Children will be required to wash and sanitise their hands after they have been in contact with the dog. There will be a dedicated dog toilet area away from areas that children access and no child will be asked to clean up after the dog.

Appendix 3

St. Hild's Church of England School  
**DOG IN SCHOOL RISK ASSESSMENT**

Hazard	Who is affected/at risk	Risk rating	Actions/control measures	Person responsible
Bites and scratches	Staff, pupils and handlers	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dogs must have a good temperament and be used to being around children</li> <li>• Dogs must be well trained not to bite, scratch or jump up</li> <li>• Handler(s) will remain with dogs at all times</li> <li>• Children are taught how to approach and interact with the dog</li> </ul>	School dog handlers
Running loose	Staff, pupils and handlers, the dog	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school dog will be contained at all times either in the designated office or on a lead</li> <li>• The harness and lead will be regularly checked</li> </ul>	
Poor hygiene and health risks	Staff, pupils and handlers	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School dog is vaccinated, wormed, and treated for fleas</li> <li>• Dog is groomed regularly</li> <li>• All staff and pupils are required to wash their hands after contact with dogs</li> <li>• Handlers clear up dog urine and faeces promptly and dispose of this safely - pupils are told to stay away</li> <li>• Dog are not taken anywhere near food preparation areas</li> </ul>	Authorised adults
Allergies	Staff and pupils	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No children/staff with dog allergies to interact with dog</li> <li>• Parents to inform school if they do not wish child to interact with dog</li> </ul>	HT and School Office

Hazard	Who is affected/at risk	Risk rating	Actions/control measures	Person responsible
Phobias	Staff and pupils	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact with dog is optional</li> </ul>	HT
Activities and games involving the dog	Staff, pupils, dogs and handlers	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handler(s) remain with dogs at all times</li> <li>• Handlers ensure activity and place is safe and appropriate</li> <li>• We check with the handler and set a limit for the number of children who can interact with a dog at once</li> <li>• Handler(s) clean up urine and faeces</li> <li>• School staff remove children who misbehave or upset dogs</li> <li>• We set a time limit on activities as recommended by handlers, so dog does not get tired</li> </ul>	HT and authorised handlers
Children misbehaving	Pupils, dogs and handlers	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children are told in advance what to expect and how to behave</li> <li>• School staff are present at all time during any interaction</li> <li>• School staff are ready to remove children who misbehave or upset dogs</li> </ul>	Authorised adults
Damage caused to school materials, equipment and the school site	Dogs	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dog supervised at all times and will remain on a lead at all times when in main body of school if necessary</li> <li>• Dog kept in secured room, with closed doors – the Office</li> <li>• Handlers bring suitable toys if necessary</li> </ul>	HT authorised adults