

The background of the central section is a blurred photograph of a school building. A large, glowing yellow cross is superimposed on the building's facade. The image is divided into vertical color bands: purple, red, orange, green, and blue.

THOMAS BECKET CATHOLIC SCHOOL

DOGS IN SCHOOL POLICY

2025 - 2026

Approved by:

Local Academy Committee

Date: September 2025

Next review due by:

Local Academy Committee

Date: September 2026

Introduction

A variety of animals, including dogs, are becoming an ever popular and worthwhile addition to schools across the country. 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 these benefits, children take great enjoyment from interaction with a dog. We value the development of children's well-being along with their spiritual, moral and social education as highly as we value academia. We believe a school dog will be a unique way to enrich all areas of the children's wider education, skills and well-being. Is there a risk in bringing a dog into a school environment? Of course there is, though 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 trained, accompanied dog. Therefore, it is just another risk that needs to be managed.

School Policy

This policy applies to the regulated school dog only. It does not affect the school's right to prohibit other dogs on school property.

The dog/s is owned staff and parents/carers will be informed of the intention to have a school dog before it comes to school. They will receive copies of the dog policy and risk assessment.

Parents/carers have the right to withhold consent for their child to have any direct contact with the dog. Any such wishes will be respected and upheld by the school. Staff, visitors and pupils known to have allergic reactions to dogs should not go near the dog. Anyone with a fear of dogs will be respected and never be forced to interact with the dog. They can receive coaching in a controlled environment with the dog to help them overcome their fears if they so wish. The dog's health and well-being is prioritised along with that of the children and staff. The dog will be insured. All vaccinations, worming treatments and vet checks will be up-to-date. If the dog is ill, he will not be allowed into school. The dog will be kept on a lead when moving between classrooms or on a walk and will be under the full control and supervision of an adult. Children will never be left alone with the dog and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times when the dog is present with pupils. Notices will be displayed to inform children, staff and visitors of the dog's presence. Pupils should be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dog. Children should remain calm around the dog. They should not make sudden movements and must never stare into a dog's eyes as this could be threatening for the dog. Children should not put their face near a dog and should always approach it standing up. Children should never go near or disturb the dog that is sleeping or eating. Students must not be allowed to play too roughly with the dog. If the dog is surrounded by a large number of children, the dog could become nervous and agitated. Therefore, the adult in charge of the dog must ensure that s/he monitors the situation. Dogs express their feelings through their body language. Growling or baring of teeth indicate 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. Children should not feed or eat close to the dog. The dog will not be allowed to enter the school kitchen or go into the hall during mealtimes. Children should always wash their hands after handling a dog. Any dog foul will be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately by an adult. The dog will be trained to use a designated, external toileting area that is out-of-bounds to the children. If any 'accidents' occur in areas where children have access to, appropriate measures will be taken to disinfect the affected site.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Governing Body has a responsibility to ensure that the school has a written policy and risk assessment for dogs in school. The Headteacher is responsible for implementing this policy. The Headteacher may delegate this responsibility to the Deputy Head. Teachers and staff are required to abide by this policy. The Health and Safety Officer is responsible for providing information, advice and guidance as and when required.

Reasons to have a dog in school

Below, are listed numerous benefits to having a dog in school.

- A school dog enables children to put our school values into practice: from friendship to patience, respect, love and happiness; each one of our values can be developed through and alongside a dog.
- Children with low attendance can be encouraged to come to school with the incentive of a meet and greet from the school dog.
- With the UK dog population reaching 8.5 million, children and adults are bound to come in to contact with dogs at various points in their lives. Children without pet dogs have the opportunity to learn valuable life skills at school about how to safely interact with dogs when they are out and about.
- With a dog to care for, children are more mindful of their behaviour. Incidents of running in corridors and shouting unnecessarily are reduced; they are generally more aware of the impact of their behaviour and choices.
- One of our current school priorities is to help children to develop a growth mindset: to be resilient learners who aren't afraid to make mistakes and persevere to acquire new skills. A dog is an excellent role model for this as training dogs takes time and repetition.
- 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 and reluctant writers to read aloud what they have written. With the presence of a calm and well-trained dog, students find social support and peer interaction.
- As a focus or context for learning, the school dog can provide an excellent resource and tangible motivation for children in all subject areas.
- Dogs provide confidence to children as they make amazing listeners, providing the children with a sense of comfort and love. Dogs can work with students on a one-one basis and will especially help those students who are feeling vulnerable, 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.

- Dogs in school offer an opportunity for improving social development. They are especially useful for teaching social skills and responsibility. Researchers report that students can identify with animals, and with empathy for the dog, can better understand how classmates may feel. Specifically, schools are using dogs to help students build self-esteem; learn about positive and negative reinforcement, responsibility, and boundaries. Schools can use dogs to help communicate, teach kindness, and empower students.
- With a dog in the 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 school 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, can be rewarded with spending time during lunch or break to interact with the dog. 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.
- Dogs can be a great way for to help students to interact with members of the wider community. For example, students may take the dog to visit other schools, hospitals or care homes and help others to benefit from