



Dog in school rationale and Risk assessment

Activity: Dog on school site to support children 1:1, in groups and as part of the whole school community.

Name of Dog: Barney

Site: Great Totham Primary School

People at risk: All children, staff and visitors. All site users.

Owner of the dog: Sarah Vass, Headteacher

Date of risk assessment: September 2025

Rationale

There is an increasing body of research to support the benefit of a dog in school. Reading dogs are being used to help children develop fluency in reading and the therapeutic benefit of animal contact to children and adults with anxiety and self-confidence issues can be significant.

At Great Totham we recognise that children's well-being is at the root of positive behaviour, success with social skills, learning and confidence. A dog can support children in many different ways to develop their well-being and subsequent resulting behaviours. Dogs are useful in de-escalating anxious and angry feelings, where this is safe for the dog and person in question. Children who are struggling readers often feel far more relaxed and comfortable reading to a dog, who does not pass judgement. Dogs have been reported to improve confidence and fluency with reading.

Children can be supported to learn how to care for animals and develop their responsibility. Having this experience in school can help children to understand how to treat animals safely and with compassion. This relationship building can give children an enormous sense of belonging; something we value highly. Dogs, for most, are fun to have around and can form part of the school community.

We know that there are adults and children who are anxious and/or scared of animals or dogs specifically. We never want any child or adult to feel uncomfortable in what should be a safe space for them – work or school. Parents are asked for their specific consent for the child to be in the presence of the dog and as such, parents of children who are scared may wish to deny consent. However, we would welcome conversations with these children and parents to devise a plan for a child-led approach to gradual familiarisation. We feel this is a beneficial approach to support children with the inevitable passing and contact with dogs in their community, in a safe and structured way. This will not be possible or appropriate for all children and families.

The intention is that Barney will spend time with children 1:1 and in small groups. He may also spend time in the classrooms where all children have written consent from parents.

Information will routinely be given to children about how to be safe and considerate when having contact with the dog including during class and whole school assemblies.

Risk assessment

Hazard/Risk	Control measures	Additional Action required
Dog scratching or biting site user	Reminding all site users, particularly children – in an age appropriate manner, of appropriate handling strategies. Adult always present (often the owner, Sarah Vass) Adults always vigilant when dog in vicinity.	None
Dog toileting inside the building	Good toileting habits already established within the dog's home environment. Owner, or adult designated with responsibility, remains vigilant for toileting and pre-cursor behaviours. Children made aware that they should seek immediate adult attention/support should the dog be noted to toilet inside. Cleaning procedure engaged if dog does toilet inside (including thorough use of child and pet friendly disinfectants).	Appropriate clean up materials on hand to deal with incidents. All cloths disposed of after dealing with a clean-up.
Dog defecating outside the building	Owner to establish good toileting habits – praise for using designated area will encourage dog to use this area. Owner to carry materials at all times to deal with a clean-up (nappy/poo bags).	Nappy/poo bags available at all times.
Reduced cleanliness/hygiene	All children to be advised to wash their hands after touching the dog. Adults are assumed to handle their own hygiene needs. Surfaces to be cleaned if food is to be eaten in the room following a visit from the dog. Dog not to enter the main school hall during lunch time or when food is being served or prepared here.	None
Site users who are anxious or scared of dogs	Site users informed of Barney's presence on site and parents invited to send details of their child's concerns about animals/dogs. Staff make owner aware of any of their own concerns/feelings. Informal plans created for these identified children – this may involve a complete avoidance of contact or a carefully devised plan which is led by the child, they have gradual contact on their terms. Parents can withdraw consent at any time. When moving around the site between spaces, the dog is to be kept on a lead. This will mean that no child is unnecessarily 'spooked' by the presence of the dog. *NB the dog will at times be off lead while children are on site.	Consent form for all children, including as part of induction procedure for all new children.

Hazard/Risk	Control measures	Additional Action required
Site users who are allergic to dogs/animals	<p>Site users informed of Barney's presence on site and parents invited to discuss concerns.</p> <p>At present there is 1 child identified as having allergic tendencies and 1 adult.</p> <p>Parent of child has requested notification when her child will have contact so she may administer once a day antihistamines in the morning. The parent has consented to contact.</p>	Notification of contact with 1 identified child.
Children harming the dog physically.	<p>Children reminded of careful handling strategies.</p> <p>Adult remains vigilant for the safety of site users and the dog.</p>	None
Emotional harm/distress to the dog	<p>Owner knows the dog well and understands changes in behaviour may be a result of distress.</p> <p>Owner, or designated adult in charge, looks for signs in the distress in the dog.</p> <p>Dog will only attend site occasionally as it is recognised, although enjoyable, that the days will be very stimulating</p> <p>Headteacher's office will have a gate on days Barney visits.</p>	No child to enter Headteachers office with adult consent and presence.
Illness/infection passed from the dog	<p>Only the owner, or designated adult in charge, will clean up faeces or urine.</p> <p>The dog will be routinely vaccinated and treated for worms and fleas as per vet advice.</p> <p>The dog will not be brought onto site if he is unwell or has recently been unwell.</p>	