



# Knockavoe School & Resource Centre

## Assistance Animals in School

### ***Ratification***

Position	Signed	Date
Principal	<i>Sharon Cassidy</i>	<i>5/12/24</i>
Chair of Board of Governors	<i>June Neill</i>	<i>5/12/24</i>

Date of Review: \_\_\_\_\_



## **Introduction**

At Knockavoe School we strive to provide our pupils with opportunities which will have a positive impact on their lives whilst they are attending school.

This policy is designed to set out to pupils, parents, staff and visitors the reasons for having a school dog and the rules and responsibilities to help ensure the safety of all. Although there is a risk in bringing a dog into a school environment, this can be mitigated against with a robust risk assessment to ensure the safety of all those who come into contact with the animal.

Knockavoe School is committed to inclusion and a process which enables our students to participate to their full potential in the school curriculum, including full participation in activities outside the school.

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 interactions with a dog.

Poga and Koko, the therapy dogs, will continue to interact with pupils boosting their wellbeing (The right to be with friends Article 15, The right to play Article 31 and the right to special care Article 23 UNCRC).

This policy is for all staff who support pupils daily in Knockavoe and to ensure that all staff are aware of the benefits of spending time with an Assistance dog.

At Knockavoe School we comply with the Health and Safety at Work Act 1994 and the associated regulations, as this is a legal requirement. In complying with the act, all staff must have read the Assistance Animal Therapy policy supported by the Education Authority guidance.

## **School Dog Definition**

For the purpose of this policy, we define a school dog, Poga, as a resident within the school for the majority, if not the whole school day. Poga will spend the majority of his time in the Sunshine Room accompanied by trained handlers Ciara Mc Laughlin and Ann Marie Mc Shane (ADNI trained).

Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI's) can:

- Teach empathy and appropriate interpersonal skills;
- Help individuals develop social skills;
- Be soothing;
- Improve a child's ability to pick up on social cues which are imperative to human relationships;
- Support emotional regulation through the positive impact on the autonomic nervous system;
- Help improve motivation for learning, resulting in improved outcomes;
- Support children with their social and emotional learning which can also aid literacy development.

Research into the effects of therapy dogs in schools is showing a range of benefits including:

- Increase in school attendance;
- Improved confidence;

- Decrease in pupil anxiety;
- Improved motivation to learn;
- Enhanced relationships with peers and teachers due to experiencing trust and unconditional positive interactions with a therapy dog;
- Helping children learn how to express their feelings and emotions and have trusting relationships;
- Increase social skills and self-esteem;
- Teach responsibility and respect to life.

### **Accident Prevention**

The latest guidance from the government regarding pets and animals in school are outlined below.

Chapter 8: Pets and Animal Contact- Gov.UK- Updated March 2021

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-protection-in-schools-and-otherchildcarefacilities/chapter-8-pets-and-animal-contact-3/5>

All staff are made aware of the EA guidance that refers to Keeping Animals in School;

<https://www.eani.org.uk/publications/health-safety/keeping-animals-in-schools>

### **Confidence Benefits**

“If children are partnered with a dog to read to, for example, the dog provides comfort, encourages positive social behaviour, enhances self esteem, motivates speech and inspires children to have fun and enjoy the non-judgemental experience”.

Bark and Read- The Kennel Club (<https://thekennelclub.org.uk/barkandread>)

### **SEND Benefits**

“Therapy Dogs Nationwide dogs have also been shown to help with special needs and autistic children and adults by giving focus and providing a calming environment”.

Therapy Dogs Nationwide (<https://www.tdn.org.uk/schools/>)

### **Mental Health and Wellbeing Benefits**

Studies have shown and outlined the possible benefits through time spent with a therapy dog:

- Some mental health challenges and psychiatric disorders are known to respond well to therapy dogs;
- Patients diagnosed with a range of issues, such as depression, bi-polar disorder, Autism, ADHD, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and Alzheimer’s disease, benefit from their interaction with therapy dogs and other companion animals;
- Sometimes emotional challenges are the result of physical health problems and therapy dogs can help those too. Research suggests that patients recovering from surgeries or accidents may experience less pain through time spent with AAT.

- Interactions with a therapy dog can increase the mood boosting hormone oxytocin and decrease the stress hormone cortisol.
- 92% of pupils in a recent study stated that they felt more relaxed during teaching and learning time when a dog was in the room.

### **Behaviour Benefits**

Researchers report many behaviour benefits such as pupils can identify with animals, they learn to show empathy and they better understand how classmates may feel. It was found that violent behaviour in participating pupils declined by 55% and general aggression fell by 62%.

### **Education**

Programmes designed with AAT are doing wonderful work with pupils and we at Knockavoe have witnessed the great impact Poga has had on the entire school community from his arrival in January 2024. Children who may be embarrassed to read out loud to the class or to adults are likely to be more confident reading to the dog. Dogs can be used in many aspects of education to encourage pupils who are experiencing difficulties as they will not correct or judge the child. Dogs give unconditional acceptance, as they are non-judgemental.

### **Social Development**

Dogs in school offer an opportunity for improving social development. They are especially useful for teaching pupils social skills and responsibility. Schools are using dogs to help older pupils build self-esteem; learn about positive and negative reinforcement, responsibility and boundaries. Pupils can use dogs to help communicate and teach kindness. Working with dogs help to empower pupils. With a dog in school, pupils can learn how to care for the animal. This may include walking and grooming. Research reports that involving the pupils in the daily care of a school dog is a positive experience which may promote their own daily care skills. Through arranged visits and in line with our school development plan, organised events will take place to explore the inclusion of other schools and staff to share the experience of our school dog (shared education).

### **Pastoral Care**

Therapy dogs can work with pupils on a one to one basis and will especially help those pupils who may have been bullied, abused, going through upsetting/difficult times or even those who display fear of animals. The dog will bring much joy and help the pupils they meet. Dogs are happy to show love to the pupils they are spending time with. Pupils who struggle with social interaction can find a reassuring friend in a dog.

### **Responsibilities**

#### Pupils:

- whose parents have withdrawn consent are not allowed to attend dog therapy sessions. It is the responsibility of the teachers and classroom assistants to notify the handlers of this information immediately and on any occasion the dog may come into contact with the particular child;
- must use kind hands to stroke the animal;
- must be encouraged to wash their hands after contact with the animal;
- may not approach or disturb the dog whilst sleeping or eating;
- must not play roughly with the dog;
- must not eat around the dog unless supervised by the handlers;
- must not feed the dog unless supported by handlers;
- who display aggression or threatening behaviour towards the dog will be unable to attend sessions if the safety of the animal is too high of a risk.

#### Staff:

- Sunshine staff and handlers will be aware of the animal at all times;
- must follow and continue to seek guidance provided by ADNI;
- must ensure supervision of the animal with children at all times;
- will remind pupils of appropriate behaviour whilst with the dog;
- have the responsibility to be aware of anyone who has allergies or fears of the animal;
- must monitor the safety of the animal if and when with larger groups of pupils;
- must ensure that if any concerning signs are being displayed by the animal to remove them;
- all dog foul must be cleaned immediately, double bagged and disposed of appropriately;
- will monitor the dog's health and if unwell he will not attend the school;
- will maintain records and evidence of the impact of the therapy dog in our school.

#### Parents/Guardians:

- It is important that parents/guardians are aware of the role played by Poga in school and with their child.
- It is also essential that children are highly supervised outside school in relation to interaction with animals as not all animals will respond in the same way as our trained animal.
- Keep the school informed of any information they feel necessary regarding their child's interaction with animals.

### **Transportation of Assistance Dog**

All guidance will be followed by ADNI in regards to the safe transportation of the animal. It is recommended that the school car is often available for the safe transport of Poga and pupils if partaking in an activity off site.

### **Accident Reporting**

All incidents and accidents will be reported as per EA protocol and online proforma.

### **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) about our therapy dog Poga.**

Q- Who is the legal owner of the dog?

A The legal owner of the dog is Assistance Dogs Northern Ireland- Poga's foster carers are Ciara McLaughlin and Ann-Marie McShane (Sunshine Staff)

Q- Who will cover the cost?

A For the first year, ADNI provide the training, insurance and health care of the animal. The school are responsible to cover all costs following in relation to the life of the dog.

Assistance Dogs Northern Ireland has a wealth of experience supporting children with assistance dogs and has several Animal Assisted Therapy programmes throughout Northern Ireland.

For more information, call 028 7776 8761 or visit the website at adni.org.uk



School launches fundraiser to train Poga the assistance dog

BY EMMAS HAYES

STAFF at a primary school in Knockavoe have launched a fundraising campaign to help train Poga, a golden retriever puppy, to become an assistance dog. The school is currently raising money for the dog's training, which will cost over £2,000. Poga is a golden retriever puppy who was adopted by the school in October. She is currently being trained by Ciara McLaughlin and Ann-Marie McShane, who are foster carers for Poga. The school is currently raising money for the dog's training, which will cost over £2,000. Poga is a golden retriever puppy who was adopted by the school in October. She is currently being trained by Ciara McLaughlin and Ann-Marie McShane, who are foster carers for Poga. The school is currently raising money for the dog's training, which will cost over £2,000.



Poga with Rose Darcy and her former friend Pops.



Poga and Pops in Posing Pops the school dog.



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Poga sits quietly on Ruby Darcy for lessons.

