

## RESOURCE 2. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



### Why do I need to prepare my dog for visiting school?



Schools are potentially quite an intimidating and frightening environment for a dog. Most dogs are used to having a close bond in a secure environment (family home) with a relatively small number of people, so the sights, sounds and smells of a school is going to feel very unfamiliar. This can cause anxiety in many dogs.

We want to minimise stress in the dog when they encounter such a very different environment and ensure we do everything possible to support their wellbeing. This is also important to ensure the safety of the children and staff. An anxious dog is an unpredictable dog and that poses a danger to the children and staff. The best way to ensure everyone's safety and the wellbeing of the dog is to prepare the dog for coming into the school very carefully.

### Should I bring my puppy into school?



We recommend that dogs should not be working regularly within a school environment until they are at least 12 months old. Most dogs are just not mature enough to deal with such an environment on a regular basis.

If you have a puppy that you plan to take into a school, focus during the first 12 months on supporting their general socialisation. This will help them become familiar with a range of environments, including being around children and in noisy, busy places. Gradually introduce the dog to a wider range of environments – that way a school will feel less intimidating.

Remember to take things slowly, and at the dog's pace. Socialising experiences can be positive and negative, so it is very important to introduce new things gradually, and to make these experiences pleasant.

## RESOURCE 2. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



### What training does my dog need before it comes to school?



Before a dog comes into school, we recommend that the dog is socialised and trained so that he/she:

- Is comfortable walking around on a loose short lead.
- Shows good recall skills.
- Can display the “stay,” position and remain so for 2 minutes.
- Can return to the handler in a timely manner following a distraction.
- Does not bark, mouth, lick, jump up at, or paw people unless asked to do so.
- Is adaptable to new environments and unexpected stimuli, such as smells, objects, sudden noises.
- Is socially confident, enjoys human interaction, and is relaxed and calm in the company of children, even when the environment is noisy.
- Does not display any evidence of guarding.
- Is comfortable with appropriate physical interaction e.g. grooming.
- Is comfortable engaging with children that may have physical/learning disabilities, and around mechanical aids e.g., wheelchairs, where relevant.

### How should I train my dog?



There are different ways to train dogs, but we fully recommend that only positive reward-based training should be used in both the preparation for their role and while they are present in the school. Positive reinforcement training uses a reward (treats, praise, toys, anything the dog finds rewarding) for desired behaviours. Because the reward makes the dog more likely to repeat the behaviour, positive reinforcement is a very powerful tool to help shape your dog’s behaviour. It is the same approach that schools generally use to encourage students. Punishing dogs is pointless as in most cases they don’t understand what the punishment is for, and this is likely to increase anxiety in the dog. This can lead to aggression.

## RESOURCE 2. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



### Are there training courses available to me?



To ensure the safety and wellbeing of the dog, we recommend that the handler and dog work to the minimum standards required by the Kennel Club Silver Good Citizen Award, or to an equivalent standard. This standard offers a useful guide to whether the dog and handler are working together effectively. This is very important if the dog is going to thrive in the school.

### How do I prepare the school to receive a dog?



If you are going to bring a dog into a school, it is important that there is a clear plan for how the dog will work within the school and all staff and pupils must be aware of the dog, the role it plays and understand what they need to do to ensure the dogs welfare.

You must make sure you have an appropriate public liability insurance policy in place. As part of your insurance planning, you will need to have an appropriate risk assessment and policy document signed by all teaching staff to say that they have understood the emergency procedures and dog-related protocols. This includes knowing who has primary responsibility for the dog.

The dog may require emergency veterinary treatment at some point, so the number of a local vet, the dog's microchip number and emergency contact number should be displayed in the school office, along with a well-equipped canine first aid kit.

## RESOURCE 2. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



### How do I create the right environment for the dog within a school?



Given the busy school environment, there will be times when the dog needs to find a quiet space and a crate or safe and secure place for the dog to go to in an emergency needs to be identified. Dogs will find sessions quite tiring and potentially stressful, so they need time to rest between sessions. The handler of the dog needs to be available to take the dog to the toilet as and when required, so this needs to be someone other than a person who has sole responsibility for the children. handler must not have sole responsibility of the children. Obviously, a suitable toileting place must be identified, that is away from where the children play and learn. Likewise, the dog must eat in a quiet place away from staff and children. Realistically, a busy staffroom is not a suitable place for the dog to go at break and lunch times.

Plans need to be made to deal with extreme weather events as these will be difficult for the dog – they will not thrive in excessive heat or cold. The dog should be easily identifiable as a dog providing a clear role within the school.

### What skills and knowledge does the dogs handler need to have?

Given that working in a school environment is potentially stressful and the dog is required to work in a concentrated way, sessions that involve the active participation of a dog should last no longer than 45 minutes. Again, to protect the wellbeing of the dog, no more than 3 active sessions a day should be planned where a dog is required to engage with the child(ren).

If a dog is showing signs of stress or tiredness, s/he should be taken back to their quiet base until suitably rested. If a dog is showing signs of stress in multiple sessions s/he should be removed from the school and re-assessed as to the level of support required to continue their role as a school dog.


If a dog is showing signs of illness s/he should not enter the school and not return to the school until recovered. Likewise, if any children with open cuts they must have a covering over the wound if working alongside a dog.



## RESOURCE 2. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS




### How do I support a dog's welfare and wellbeing?



The obvious starting point is to ensure that a dog is in good health to undertake the role they are required to do with this being followed-up by regular assessments. A school dog must have flea and worming treatment prescribed by a vet and dogs must be up to date and compliant with vaccinations, in line with current WSAVA guidelines and/or Titer testing.

You will need to make sure that the dog has access to water all the time, stored in a place that does not cause a hazard.

### What skills and knowledge does the dogs handler need to have?



The handler of the school dog should have training and experience in dog handling and be able to read and act on communication from the dog. This includes being able to recognise subtle stress signals and know what action to take in response.

It is important that the handler acts as the advocate for the dog to ensure working practices are maintained in the best interests of the dog.

Ideally, the handler should understand the principles of animal assisted intervention and education in the context of a school and have a good knowledge of the needs of the children at the school.