

The National School Dog Alliance recognises that there are a number of different models for how a dog can work in a school. In some cases, the person responsible for the dog may take the dog to school for short visits to undertake a clearly defined activity. Other dogs can spend longer and have a more established place in the school. Regardless of the model, we believe that one consistent person needs to be responsible for dealing with the dog, but should not have full responsibility for children. The following standards assume that this is the case.



01

Preparing a dog to come into a school

1.1. Up to the age of 12 months, the focus must be on supporting the general socialisation of a dog to help the dog become familiar with a range of environments, including being around children and in noisy places.

1.2. A dog must not be working in a school environment until they are at least 12 months old.

1.3. Specifically, before a dog comes into school, the dog must be socialised and trained so that he/she:

- Does not display any evidence of guarding.
- 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, and sudden noises.
- Is socially confident, enjoys human interaction, and are relaxed and calm in the company of children, even when the environment is noisy.
- 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.

1.4. Only positive reward-based training must be used in both the preparation for their role and while present in the school.

1.5. The handler and dog must work to the minimum standards required by the Kennel Club Silver Good Citizen Award, or to an equivalent standard.



02

Preparing a school to receive a dog

2.1. There must be a clear plan for how the dog will work within the school.

2.2. All staff and pupils must be aware of the dog, the role the dog plays and understand the core protocols to ensure the dog's welfare.

2.3. The school must have a public liability insurance policy in place.

2.4. The school must 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.

2.5. The number of a local vet, the dog's microchip number and emergency contact number must be displayed in the school office.

2.6. There must be a well-equipped canine first aid kit.

2.7. There must be a crate or safe and secure place for the dog to go to in an emergency.

2.8. Appropriate sanitation must be available for staff and children.

2.9. It must be clear who the named person responsible for the dog is at all times.



03

Creating the right environment for the dog within a school

31. If the dog will be in the school between sessions with children, a base for the dog must be established with a comfortable bed. This should be a quiet office away from the children and one which will not have many disturbances. However, the dog should not be isolated.

32. The dog must be given suitable rest time between sessions.

33. The handler of the dog must be available to take the dog to the toilet as and when required. The handler must not have sole responsibility of the children.

34. A suitable toileting place must be identified, that is away from where the children play and learn.

35. The dog must eat in a quiet place away from staff and children.

36. Access for the dog to the staffroom should be limited and is not a suitable place for the dog to go at break and lunch times.

37. The dog should be kept away from corridors during transition periods eg. getting coats on for playtimes etc...

38. In extreme weather conditions, the needs of the dog must be met and a clear policy outlined and followed.

39. The dog should be easily identifiable as a dog providing a clear role within the school.



04

Supporting a dog when working within a school

- 4.1. Sessions that involve the active participation of a dog must last no longer than 45 minutes.
- 4.2. No more than 3 active sessions a day should be planned where a dog is required to engage with the children.
- 4.3. If a dog is showing signs of stress or tiredness, s/he must be removed immediately from the situation and appropriate action taken, for example taken back to their quiet base until suitably rested. Dogs showing signs of stress in multiple sessions should be removed from the school and re-assessed as to the level of support required to continue their role as a school dog.
- 4.4. If a dog is showing signs of illness s/he should not enter the school and not return to the school until recovered.
- 4.5. Children with open cuts must have a covering over the wound if working alongside a dog.
- 4.6. Sensible precautions must be in place to minimise the risk of the spread of infectious disease e.g. hand washing after each session, for the handler, child and other staff involved.



05

Supporting a dog's welfare and wellbeing

51. A dog must be in good health to undertake the role they are required to do.
52. There must be access to water all the time, stored in a place that does not cause a hazard.
53. A school dog must have flea and worming treatment prescribed by a vet.
54. Dogs must be up to date and compliant with vaccinations, in line with current WSAVA guidelines and/or Titer testing.
55. Dogs must be assessed regularly to confirm that they are in good health, both physically and emotionally, to continue working. Ideally, this assessment should be conducted independently once a year, and no less than once every two years, or after a period of significant absence. Assessment of handler skills and knowledge should be included. Schools must have a clear policy on approval and assessment.



06

Handler skills and knowledge

6.1. 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. The handler should be able to recognise subtle stress signals and act in response.

6.2. The handler should take the time to develop a strong and trusting relationship with the school dog. They should know the dog's likes and dislikes and understand the situations they work in from the dog's perspective.

6.3. The handler acts as the advocate for the dog to ensure working practices are maintained in the best interests of the dog.

6.4. The handler should understand the principles of animal assisted intervention and education in the context of a school.

6.5. The handler should have skills of interacting with, and knowledge of the needs of the children at the school in which they are handling the school dog.

