Old Park Primary School & Nursery

School dog policy

Reviewed: **September 2026**

Next Planned Review: **September 2027**

Person responsible: **Headteacher**

Background/research

Why Have a School Dog? (Taken from the School Dog Alliance 2025)

There is a growing amount of research that supports the idea that a carefully planned school dog programme can bring benefits to many learners. These benefits can include:

1. **Emotional Support:** School dogs can help reduce anxiety and stress among children (and teachers and parents), providing a calming presence by providing emotional support and comfort. Stroking an animal can decrease levels of cortisol, the hormone responsible for stress, in humans. Dogs bring a comforting presence and unconditional acceptance, making students feel safe and secure.
2. **Improved Learning Environment:** Dogs can motivate reluctant readers and improve focus during lessons. For example, children often feel more comfortable practicing reading skills with a non-judgmental audience like a dog and may better regulate their behaviour in the presence of a dog.
3. **Encouragement of Positive Social Behaviour:** Interacting with dogs can promote communication skills, empathy, compassion, and responsibility in children, fostering positive peer interactions. Dogs provide companionship and offer positive social interactions between individuals who struggle to find friends in traditional classroom settings
4. **Mental Wellbeing:** Dogs can help reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, and support overall mental and emotional wellness in both children and staff.
5. **Increased confidence:** Dogs can help some children build confidence in themselves and their academic/ social abilities
6. **Physical Benefits:** Dogs encourage physical activity, which can have a positive effect on children's overall well-being, from regular walks to simple interactions that keep both children and dogs active and engaged.

Children can benefit educationally and emotionally, increase their understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills, through contact with a suitable, calm dog. In addition to these benefits, children take great enjoyment from interaction with animals.

By having a school dog, we want to encourage those children who are vulnerable, need support to regulate, or those less confident at reading to have a friendly audience and look forward to reading as a treat. We want to ease the transition into school, for those who find it difficult each morning, by having a friendly, furry friend to calm them.

The breed of a goldendoodle has been carefully selected as suitable for this type of environment due to being:

1. **Hypoallergenic and allergy friendly:** Otis is a F1B goldendoodle which means that he is more hypoallergenic than a traditional F1 cross.
2. **Friendly:** Known for their friendly and outgoing personalities, they love to play and make great companions for adults and children.
3. **Intelligent:** They are quick learners, smart and easy to train.
4. **Adaptable:** They can adapt to a range of environments and settings.

An introduction to Otis

Otis is owned by Mr Foster and his family. He is a goldendoodle and was chosen for the reasons that have been outlined above. Both parents have been tested and are clear of potential hereditary conditions. All paperwork for this has been shown to Mr Foster. Otis was born on 1st June 2025, he has been microchipped, vaccinated and is registered with a veterinary practice for regular health checks and treatments.

Context

Mr Foster is responsible for all ownerships costs associated with the school dog including; the purchase of dog, veterinary costs, pet insurance, food and resources etc.

Otis works with the PAWS therapy dog team, and you can find more information about this at the following website.

PAWS Therapy Dog Certification | Train & Certify Your Therapy Dog

Day to day Management

Visitors and new pupils will be informed of the dog on arrival via a sign placed in the main reception window. Information about Otis can be viewed on our website.

Otis will:

- Not be allowed in school if he is unwell.
- Be kept on a lead when moving between classrooms or on a walk where children are present.
- Be always under the full control and supervision of an adult/handler.
- Be crate trained.
- Have a safe space where he can rest away from children and the busy environment of the school.
- Have had all injections and these will be maintained annually.
- Be up to date with flea and worming treatments (the schedule to which is informed by the vet).
- Have rest days away from school.

Guidelines to interaction with the School Dog

Under no circumstances will children have close interaction with the school dog if parents/carers have revoked permission for their child to interact one to one with the school dog.

No child shall be forced into interaction with the school dog if this makes them feel unhappy or uncomfortable in anyway.

At all times interaction with the school dog must be controlled and safe for adults, children and the school dog himself. If the following guidelines are not followed interaction with the school dog will be cancelled.

At all times of interaction there must be an authorised adult/handler who takes the leading role when interacting with the school dog. If children, or visiting adults, do not abide by the guidance given by the authorised adult the interaction will be cancelled.

The following guidelines must be followed when interacting with the school dog. These guidelines will be shared regularly with all pupils and staff.

These **guidelines** apply to all adults and children.

- Never enter the school dog's room without an authorised adult
- If the door to the school dog's room is shut make sure you knock and wait for the authorised adult to let you in. Never let yourself in as the school dog might not be ready.
- There must be an authorised adult present during all interaction.
- Always approach the school dog calmly and gently (voice and movement).
- Always approach the school dog slowly.
- Never run up to the school dog.
- Keep noise levels low during interaction with the school dog.

- All interaction must remain calm with the authorised adult staying in control at all times.
- Only the authorised adult can move any of the school dog's resources, including food and treats.
- Visiting children and adults can only handle equipment if the authorising adult gives permission.
- No visiting adult or children will give him any food/treats.
- There must not be any interaction with the school dog whilst he is eating or sleeping.
- Children should not kneel or lay down when interacting unless guided to by the authorised adult.
- Children when walking the dog (under supervision of an adult) must stay calm and quiet and walk behind/alongside the school dog at all times.

Otis will be trained to follow non-verbal as well as verbal cues. These are shared with the adults and children he comes into contact with.

Hygiene

- After all interaction with the school dog, hands must be washed with soap and water.
- When interaction takes place outside no children will ever be asked to pick up faeces.

Concerns

Our school does have a 'no dogs' policy, however Otis will be the school dog and will be in school for a specific purpose. He will be on a leash at all times when moving around the school property while children are present and will always be accompanied by an adult. Otis will also be fully insured to carry out his role thus allowing him to be on the school site.

Some children may have had upsetting experiences and thus have a fear of dogs (or another animal). Otis will be calm and gentle around children; he has a very loving and gentle nature. Experience and research have shown that, with proper guidance and handling, children can learn to overcome their fear of animals and grow in respect and appreciation for them. As part of Otis initial therapy training, she has been trained to not engage with someone unless they engage first with him. He has also been trained to follow a non-verbal command to disengage if needed. It is understandable that some of you may be concerned about possible allergic reactions to a school dog. Otis is a goldendoodle which is known to be none to low shedding breed. Otis will be subjected to a thorough cleanliness and grooming regime. We have asked parents who are concerned to make the school aware if their child has an allergy. Any parent who does not wish their child to interact with the school dog has been asked to inform us of their wishes.

Monitoring

This policy and risk assessment will be reviewed annually. This policy will also be reviewed if it deemed necessary prior to agreed review date.

The impact of having a school dog will continue to be monitored by the SLT and pupil welfare team.