



**St. Louis Girls'  
National School**  
Park Road, Monaghan

### **Introduction:**

St. Louis Girls' National School would like to introduce the use of a therapy dog into our school community. Research has shown many benefits to therapy and reading dogs in school settings. This policy is designed to set out to students, staff, parents and visitors the reasons for having a school dog and the rules and responsibilities to ensure the safety of students, staff, visitors and the school dog. While there is a risk in bringing a dog into the school environment, this can be mitigated against with a risk assessment to ensure the safety of all student, staff and visitors.

### **The benefits of a school dog:**

School dogs have been proven to help develop students' reading skills, improve behaviour, attendance and academic confidence, as well as increasing student's understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills.

## **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 & Read – The Kennel Club <https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/barkandread>

## **SEN Benefits**

‘Therapy Dogs Nationwide dogs have also shown to help with children with additional needs by giving focus and providing a calming environment’ Therapy Dogs Nationwide <https://www.tdn.org.uk/schools/>

## **Behaviour Benefits**

‘Researchers report that students can identify with animals, and with empathy for the dog, can better understand how classmates may feel. It was found that violent behaviour in participating pupils declined by 55% and general aggression went down by 62%. In a controlled study, students were found to have fewer disciplinary referrals in schools with a dog than schools without. Students’ behaviour improved toward teachers and students showed more confidence and responsibility.

### **Code of Conduct:**

- Mrs Reynolds will know the whereabouts of the dog and which staff are supervising at all times.
- If the dog is ill, he will not attend the school.
- The therapy dog will be kept on a lead when moving around the school.
- Pupils must never be left alone with the dog and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times
- Pupils will be reminded of what is appropriate school behaviour before any interaction with the school therapy dog.
- As our Therapy dog is a working dog in St Louis GNS, all staff and pupils will be reminded of not distracting the dog while it is working, supporting children or in training.
- If the dog is surrounded by a large number of children, the dog could become nervous and agitated. Therefore the adult in charge of the dog must ensure that they monitor the situation. If the dog displays any warning signs such as growling or flattening of her ears then she will be immediately removed from that situation.
- Any dog foul will be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately.
- Records and anecdotal evidence of work and impact of the school dog will be maintained.



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## **Therapy Dog - Risk Assessment for St. Louis GNS**

The value of pet therapy is widely accepted as a powerful aid to stimulation and communication. Studies have shown that therapy dogs improve the well-being of students and reduce anxiety, creating a happier and more relaxed environment, which supports social and emotional development. The following risk assessment is a working document and will be reviewed annually by key staff and the governing body.

### **HAZARD: Bites and Scratches**

- **Who is Affected:** Staff and students
- **Risk Rating:** Low
- **Actions/Control Measures:**
  - The dog is vaccinated, wormed, and treated for fleas.
  - All staff and students wash their hands after contact with the dog.
  - Staff in charge will promptly clean up and safely dispose of any urine or feces.
  - The dog is kept away from food preparation areas.
- **Person Responsible:** Mrs. Reynolds

### **HAZARD: Students Misbehaving**

- **Who is Affected:** Students and dog
  - **Risk Rating:** Low
  - **Actions/Control Measures:**
    - Students are instructed on how to behave around the dog.
    - The dog is always supervised by an adult during interactions.
    - School staff will remove any students whose behaviour poses a risk to the dog.
  - **Person Responsible:** Mrs. Reynolds
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### **HAZARD: Damage to School Materials, Equipment, and Site**

- **Who is Affected:** School property
- **Risk Rating:** Low
- **Actions/Control Measures:**
  - The dog is kept on a lead at all times.
  - The dog remains in the Principal's office most of the day.
- **Person Responsible:** Mrs. Reynolds