

Dogs in Schools

Guidance for Education Establishments

Introduction

Dogs may require to be brought into schools to support pupils, staff, and visitors to access the school environment. The main categories are assistance dogs and therapy dogs.

Assistance dogs are trained to support people with disabilities and people with medical conditions in a variety of ways.

Therapy dogs are used to benefit people in a therapeutic way and are not considered to be assistance dogs.

Legal bases and duties

Under the [Equality Act 2010](#), schools have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for pupils with a disability, to avoid any substantial disadvantage compared with pupils who do not have a disability.

What is considered 'reasonable' depends on many factors, such as whether the school can accommodate the adjustment, and the impact on others within the school. (see Appendix A - Decision making flowchart - **Assistance Dogs**).

[Technical guidance for schools in Scotland | EHRC](#) states reasonable adjustments can include 'auxiliary aids and services for disabled pupils.' For some pupils, this may include assistance or therapy dogs.

The Equality Act does not override health and safety legislation. There are some circumstances where a reasonable adjustment may disadvantage other pupils or staff, e.g., if others are fearful of dogs or allergic to them. In those cases, all attempts should be made to mitigate against any negative impact on others. In very exceptional circumstances where a risk cannot be mitigated against, advice can be sought from a central officer and possibly Legal services if required.

At all stages of planning, consultation and implementation, the rights and needs of the dog must be prioritised in line with [the Animal Welfare Act 2006](#) and all other appropriate regulations and guidance.

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 covers the dog's need for:

- A suitable environment
- A suitable diet (food and fresh water)
- The opportunity to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- Being housed with, or away from, other animals
- Protection from pain, suffering and disease.

Communication

The parent/carers of pupils who will come into close contact with the dog, whether this be an assistance dog or therapy dog, must be informed and given time and opportunity to

advise the school, in writing, that their child should not be in close contact with the dog. (see Appendix B & C - exemplar parent/carers letters).

All staff within the school must be communicated with, including wider staff such as the cleaning and catering teams. Staff must be advised what to do if there is an incident involving the dog, this includes logging the incident on the [Aberdeenshire Corporate Accident and Incident Recording System \(CAIRS\)](#)

Expectations of staff, pupils and visitors in relation to their interactions with Assistance dogs should be clear.

(see Appendix D – exemplar information sheet).

Risk Assessments

A Risk Assessment must be undertaken by the school when planning for dog(s) to be in the school building. All risks must be carefully considered, and control measures put in place.

(see Appendix E – exemplar Risk Assessment).

How to assess risk

Potential risks to pupils, staff and visitors include:

- Allergies to dogs
- Fear or anxiety around dogs
- Disruption to learning
- Transmission of diseases is possible, especially for those with medical conditions meaning they are more susceptible to infections
- Unexpected behaviours can be exhibited, even in well-trained therapy or assistance dogs.

Mitigating factors

- Relevant staff, pupils, and dog handlers should be trained in dog behaviour and hygiene, including rules for petting, approaching the dogs, and respecting their space
- Implement hygiene measures like handwashing after interacting with dogs
- Any dog must be trained and certified by a recognised organisation, e.g. Canine Concern Scotland or Autism Assistance Dogs
- Ensuring the physical environment is suitable for a dog
- Ensuring the dogs are up-to-date on vaccinations, receive regular health check-ups, and are well-groomed to minimise the risk of allergies and infections
- Adequate supervision always
- Communication with pupils, staff, and parents/carers where relevant, and ensuring the school are aware of relevant allergies
- Risk assessment in place which fully considers the welfare of the dog, pupils, staff, and visitors.

Other considerations:

- A copy of the dog's vaccination records should be attached to the Risk Assessment
- Appropriate arrangements must be made for if the animal is unwell and therefore not at school, or becomes unwell at school, has an emergency, or is involved in an incident
- A clear process is needed for temporarily or permanently removing a dog if issues arise
- Where the dog is in school as part of a commissioned service, evidence of pet business insurance should be provided
- Any visitors accompanying the dogs may need to be checked for PVGs
- The provision of a suitable environment for the dog to rest and not be disturbed by other pupils
- Toileting arrangements for the dog
- Consideration may need to be given to excluding the animal from certain areas if there are allergy/fear implications, or if it is not a suitable physical environment for the dog
- For an assistance dog, the child/young person and parent/carers must be aware of their responsibilities in managing the dog's behaviours whilst in the school and surrounding grounds
- The assistance dog's owner must be involved in completing the Risk Assessment for the planned activities
- The assistance dog's owner and Head Teacher must sign the completed Risk Assessment
- Continuously assess the effectiveness of the therapy dog or assistance dog
- Gather feedback from pupils, staff, and parents/carers to identify areas of improvement
- Make necessary adjustments based on feedback and evolving circumstances.

Each school's situation is unique, so Risk Assessments will be tailored to the specific context.

Appendices

Appendix A – Decision Making Flowchart – Assistance Dogs

Appendix B – Parent/carers exemplar letter – Assistance Dogs

Appendix C - Parent/carers exemplar letter – Therapy Dogs

Appendix D - Interactions with Assistance Dogs exemplar information sheet

Appendix E - Risk Assessment exemplar