

# Federation of Tiverton Schools

## School Dog Policy

4<sup>th</sup> February 2019

### Introduction

For some time now the leadership of the federation have wanted to introduce a 'school dog' to support the cognitive and emotional development of pupils/students across the settings. We have tried a dog at THS within the support centre when current year 9 were in year 7 and the results based on that one day only were incredible. Students' attention to reading increased as well as their social interactions and development.

There is extensive research in to the benefits of school dogs and many schools in the country, both primary and secondary, now 'employ them';

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

### ***Is there a risk in bringing a dog into a school environment?***

Yes there is, although there are a variety of accidents which can happen within a school environment which far exceed the number of injuries or incidents caused by a dog. Therefore, it is just another risk that needs to be managed. A thorough risk assessment has been carried out and is included in this document (see appendix 3)

Dogs are not allowed anywhere on the school site at any time unless specifically authorised by the Head Teacher. This includes drop-off and collection times. This policy outlines measures put in place to allow the school dog to be present.

### School Policy

The dog will be owned by Mrs Crook.

- Only the school dog is allowed on the premises. All other dogs must not come on site unless they are a known therapy or assistance dog and the Head Teacher has been informed beforehand.
- The dog is a Border Terrier, chosen because it is an intelligent breed that responds well to training and which is known to be good with children, sheds little hair and is very sociable and friendly. They are also small so less likely to knock smaller children over.
- The Chair of Governors, Flora Wood and Jason Cox and the governing board agree that a school dog will benefit the children and staff of The Federation of Tiverton Schools.
- Staff, parents and children will be informed that there will be a dog in the schools. Mrs Crook, Head of Federation will produce a risk assessment and this will be reviewed annually.
- The leadership team of the Federation will ensure that risks to staff, visitors and children known to have allergic reactions to dogs is minimised. All visitors will be informed on arrival that there is a dog in school.
- If the dog is ill, it will not be allowed into school.

- The dog will be kept on a lead when moving between classrooms or on a walk and will be under the full control and supervision of a trained adult.
- Children will never be left alone with the dog and there will be appropriate adult supervision at all times.
- Children should be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dog. Children should remain calm around the dog. They should not make sudden movements and must never stare into a dog's eyes as this could be threatening for the dog. Children should not put their face near a dog and should always approach it standing up.
- Children should never go near or disturb the dog when it is sleeping or eating.
- Children must not be allowed to play roughly with the dog.
- Everyone must wait until it is sitting or lying down before touching or stroking her.
- If the dog is surrounded by a large number of children, it could become nervous and agitated. Therefore the adult in charge of the dog must ensure that s/he monitors the situation.
- Dogs express their feelings through their body language. Growling or baring of teeth indicate that the dog is feeling angry or threatened. Flattened ears, tail lowered or between their legs, hiding behind their owner, whining or growling are signs that the dog is frightened or nervous. If the dog is displaying any of these warning signs it should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment.
- Children should not eat close to the dog.
- Children should be careful to stroke the dog on its body, chest, and back and not by its face or top of head.
- Children should always wash their hands after handling the dog using soap and water and/or hand sanitiser.
- Any dog foul should be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately.
- Parents will be consulted on allowing their child access to the dog.
- All visitors will be informed about the dog and related protocols on arriving and office staff will relay visitor issues to the Head Teacher as soon as possible.
- Appropriately trained staff will maintain records and anecdotal evidence of the work and impact of the school dog.
- The Head's PA will know the whereabouts of the dog and which staff are supervising at all times.
- The dog will be included in the fire evacuation procedure under the supervision of Mrs Crook or Mrs Hepworth.

### **Actions**

If someone reports having an issue with the dog, this information must be reported to the Head Teacher or Deputy Head as soon as possible. All concerns will be responded to by the Head Teacher.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

The Governing Body has a responsibility to ensure that the school has a written policy for dogs in school.

The Head Teacher is responsible for implementing this policy.

Teachers, staff, pupils, parents and visitors are required to abide by this policy.

The curriculum will support learning about dogs and how best to behave around our dog. This will include highlighting that not all dogs are well trained and caution must be used around unknown dogs outside school.

### Appendix 1: Reasons to have a dog in school

In summary, academic research has shown that dogs working and helping in the school environment can achieve the following:

1. Improve academic achievement
2. Increase literacy skills
3. Calming behaviours
4. Increase social skills and self-esteem
5. Increase confidence
6. Teach responsibility and respect to all life
7. Help prevent truancy
8. Motivate children who are often less attentive
9. [Reduce litter around the school site.](#)

The following information has been taken from a wide range of sources to provide further detail about the benefits of having a dog in school.

#### **Behaviour**

In some schools, dogs are making a difference in the behaviour of pupils. 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 students declined by 55%, and general aggression went down 62%. Behaviour problems occur in school and these can interfere with learning. Some schools are using dogs to improve behaviour problems by promoting positive behaviour in students. In a controlled study, students were found to have fewer disciplinary referrals in schools with a dog than schools without. Students' behaviour improved towards teachers, and students showed more confidence and responsibility. Additionally, parents reported that children seemed more interested in school as a result of having a dog at school.

#### **Attendance**

Case study: Mandy was a student with poor attendance and truancy. Mandy was encouraged back into school using caring for River, a dog, as an incentive. By telling Mandy that "if she didn't come to school to care for him, he wouldn't get walks, water or love". Mandy came to school almost every day for the rest of the year, only missing two days.

#### **Education**

Reading programmes with dogs are doing wonders for some students. Children who might be embarrassed to read aloud to the class or even adults are likely to be less scared to read to a dog. "It might be less stressful for a child to read aloud to a dog than to a teacher or peer. After all, a dog won't judge or correct you." Dogs are used to encourage struggling readers to practice reading aloud. With the presence of a calm and well trained dog, students find social support and peer interaction.

Dogs are incredibly calm and happy to have students read to them or join a group of children in the library while they are having a book reading session. Dogs give unconditional acceptance, as they are non-judgemental, which is especially crucial to struggling, emerging readers. The dogs also provide confidence to children as they do not make fun of them when they read, but above all they make amazing listeners, providing the children with a sense of comfort and love. Research has proved that students who read to dogs show an increase in reading levels, word recognition a higher desire to read and write, and an increase in intra and interpersonal skills among the students they mix with.

### **Social Development**

Dogs in school offer an opportunity for improving social development. They are especially useful for teaching students social skills and responsibility. Specifically, schools are using dogs to help older students build self-esteem; learn about positive and negative reinforcement, responsibility and boundaries. Older students use dogs to help communicate, teach kindness and empower students.

With a dog in school, students have the opportunity to learn how to care for the animal. This includes walking and grooming. Researchers report that involving students in the daily care of classroom dogs is a positive experience, promoting their own daily care. The students also learn about responsibility, caring and sharing when helping each other take care of a dog at school.

There is clear evidence of students taking greater responsibility for their environment where a school dog works – see appendix 4 – in Rolo’s example litter around the school site has disappeared.

### **As a reward**

Dogs will be gentle and loving but at the same time, full of fun and enjoyment for the students. Those students who have performed incredibly well during the week or those who have made progress in a certain subject, or those who have achieved tasks set for them will be rewarded with spending time during lunch or break to interact with the dog. Walking, grooming, playing and training are some of the responsibilities students will be allowed to undertake. It has been proved that working and playing with a dog improves children’s social skills and self-esteem.

Support dogs can work with students on a one-to-one basis and will especially help those students who have been bullied, abused, going through upsetting/difficult times or even scared/phobic of dogs. The dog will bring much joy and help to all the students they meet and are happy to provide plenty of hugs to the students they are spending time with. Students who struggle with social interaction can find a reassuring friend in a dog.

### **Appendix 2: School Dog Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

<b>Q</b>	<b>Who is the legal owner of the dog and who pays for its costs?</b>
<b>A</b>	The legal owner of the dog will be Mrs Crook; she will bear the costs associated with owning the dog; the school budget will support insurance and staff training costs where appropriate.
<b>Q</b>	<b>Is the dog from a reputable breeder?</b>
<b>A</b>	Yes. The dog is from a home where both parents were seen and has been specifically chosen for her temperament.
<b>Q</b>	<b>Will the dog be a distraction?</b>
<b>A</b>	The dog will be kept in Senior Team corridor. This is separate from the classrooms/playground area to ensure that it only comes into contact with children who are

	<p>happy to have contact and have parental permission for this, under strict supervision.</p> <p>The dog will also have a space to spend time in classrooms, the library, the SEN department and the Peace Garden, where students can interact safely.</p> <p>The dog will also attend meetings with staff to support further socialisation, following consultation with staff beforehand.</p>
<b>Q</b>	<b>Has a risk assessment been undertaken?</b>
<b>A</b>	Yes, we have carefully considered having a dog in school and sought advice from many sources, including other schools that successfully have a school dog and a reputable dog behaviourist.
<b>Q</b>	<b>Who is responsible for training?</b>
<b>A</b>	Mrs Crook will be the legal owner of the dog and as a result will be responsible for its training. Appropriate professional training will be obtained and the dog will work towards being trained as a school dog.
<b>Q</b>	<b>How will the dog be toileted to ensure hygiene for all?</b>
<b>A</b>	<p>In the interest of health and hygiene our school dog will be toileted when taken out for short walks in the grounds. The island by the car park will be the designated area for toileting as this is not accessed by staff or students. Only staff members will clear this away appropriately leaving no trace on the ground, cleaning the area with disinfectant if needed.</p> <p>Our policy of no dogs in the playground is still applicable as we are unable to put effective control measures in place that guarantee temperament and safety when children come into unsupervised contact with unknown dogs.</p>
<b>Q</b>	<b>How will the dog's welfare be considered?</b>
<b>A</b>	The dog will be walked regularly and given free time outside. Parents will be able to give permission in advance to allow their child to be able to walk with a member of staff and the dog during that time. This will also be used as a behaviour reward, in line with our behaviour policy. The dog will have planned and supervised contact with students and visitors.. The dog will be carefully trained over a period of time and will have unlimited access to food and water. We will work very carefully to ensure the dog's welfare is always considered.
<b>Q</b>	<b>How will this be managed where children have allergies?</b>
<b>A</b>	Students will not need to touch the dog, which will relieve the possibility of allergic reactions. We already manage a number of allergies at school and this will be no different for children and adults that are allergic to dogs. Individual needs will always be met and we are happy to work with parents to put additional control measures in place for individual allergies. The breed of dog we have chosen is known for minimal moulting, it is given a high quality food and is regularly groomed to reduce any possibility of allergens.
<b>Q</b>	<b>My child is frightened of dogs; how will you manage this?</b>
<b>A</b>	Access to the dog is carefully managed and supervised, and children do not need to have close contact with her unless permission for this has been given. We hope to work closely with parents of students who are fearful of dogs to alleviate their fear and to teach them how to manage this.

Appendix 3: Risk assessment

<b>Area: Interaction with students and staff</b>
<b>Reason: to ensure the school dog acts appropriately at all times</b>

Hazard	Who might be harmed and how?	What are you already doing?	Risk rating (trivial/low/medium/high/stop)	Is anything further needed?
School dog biting a student or adult	Child or adult could be hurt if the school dog bites	The school dog is being trained not to bite. When the dog is approached in the correct way there is very limited danger. The school dog lives with Mrs Crook who handles it all the time to ensure that it is used to interactions with people.	Low	Ensure that students and adults do not interact with the school dog without supervision. Ensure that all interaction with the school dog is completed in the agreed way.
Jumping up / scratching	If the school dog becomes excited there is a danger that it could jump up and knock a child over or leave a scratch mark.	The temperament of the school dog and the agreed training programme has involved not jumping up with praise/rewards given when successful. The school dog has been selected as it is small. A letter was sent home asking parents 'opt-out' if they are unwilling for their child to have contact with the school dog. Parents were asked to explain their wishes to their son/daughter and ask them not to approach the school dog if they do not want any contact.	Medium	Ensure that students and adults do not interact with the school dog without supervision. The school dog will be under lead control by an authorised adult when people come to interact with her.
Running loose	If the school dog was to run loose it could hurt students /staff and/or damage property	The school dog will be contained at all times either in an office with a clear sign on the door or	Low	Monitor that the equipment that is used to contain the school dog is appropriate and

		in a cage or on a lead.		effective
Direct interaction with students/staff	If the school dog is allowed to interact when not in the correct frame of mind, students/staff could be scratched	No interactions allowed without authorisation. Interactions will be cancelled if the school dog shows signs of incorrect behaviour. Rewards/praise will be given to reinforce the desired behaviours	Medium	Ensure that the dog is approached in the agreed manner
Destruction of materials	If allowed, the school dog may chew/destroy some school materials/resources	The school dog will be contained at all times. The school dog will have its own toys to play with and normal school resources will be removed.	Low	Monitor that the equipment used to contain the school dog is appropriate and effective.

<b>Area: Students and staff's interaction with the school dog</b>				
<b>Reason: To ensure the school dog is effectively supported to interact appropriately at all times</b>				
<b>Hazard</b>	<b>Who might be harmed and how?</b>	<b>What are you already doing?</b>	<b>Risk rating (trivial/low/medium/high/stop)</b>	<b>Is anything further needed?</b>
Incorrect/inconsistent interaction with dog	If a student/adult interacts with the school dog in the incorrect or inconsistent way this will affect the school dogs training and have a negative impact on the future interaction	Agreed guidelines that must be followed at all times when interacting with the school dog. There cannot be any interaction with the school dog without authorisation.	Medium	If there are inconsistencies in approach with the school dog the adult/student will have the interaction stopped
Use of rewards/treats	Children and adults could be harmed if the school dog is over excited when receiving a reward/treat. Students/adults	Alcohol gel will be available to adults (and students with permission from parents). Treats will only be given to the school dog with	Low	Reminders to students to wash their hands/use alcohol gel after handling treats. Treats to be locked away to ensure they can

	must clean their hands after handling pet treats.	authorisation.		only be used after authorisation.
Students/staff knowledge of interaction with a puppy/dog	If adults and students have limited knowledge of how to interact correctly this could result in harm to the school dog or themselves	Our chosen charity will visit regularly to conduct sessions with students	Medium	There will be an agreed format for how to interact with the school dog

<b>Area: Hygiene / health</b>				
<b>Reason: to ensure that students, staff and the school dog do not have an increased risk of illness as a result of the school dog being in school.</b>				
<b>Hazard</b>	<b>Who might be harmed and how?</b>	<b>What are you already doing?</b>	<b>Risk rating (trivial/low/medium/high/stop)</b>	<b>Is anything further needed?</b>
Worms/fleas	If the school dog is not treated for worms there is a danger that germs can be transferred to people	The school dog will be treated monthly at a local vets to ensure that it is correctly treated for worms and fleas	Low	Monitor that vet visits happen promptly and take actions suggested by the vet.
Faeces	If a child/adult comes into contact with the school dog's faeces some germs could be transferred	The school dog will only be walked under supervision. No child will pick up the dog's faeces, this will always be undertaken by the adult in supervision	Low	If a child finds faeces on the school field/ playground they will report it to an adult
Allergies	If a child is allergic to dogs they could become unwell	Students will not be in contact with the school dog if we have received a negative response form from parents/guardians. If a student/member of staff has an allergy the school dog will not carry out tasks near that	Medium	



		student/member of staff		
Student's access to the school dog's resources	If a student has access to the school dog's treats/food and eat some, they could become unwell	All of the school dog's resources will be locked away. No child will be allowed to enter the dog's area without authorisation.	Low	Remind students not to enter the area
Contact with food preparation areas	If the school dog enters a food preparation area this could be unhygienic	The school dog will be in a contained area or on a lead at all times around the school. The school dog will never enter the school kitchen.	Low	Remind students and adults to clean their hands.
Cleaning hands after interacting with the school dog	If hands are not cleaned students/adults could become unwell	All adults and students will clean their hands after interaction with the school dog	Low	Remind students and adults to clean their hands

**Area: Activities involving the school dog, including walking**

**Reason: to ensure that the school dog has a meaningful and safe impact on the school community.**

<b>Hazard</b>	<b>Who might be harmed and how?</b>	<b>What are you already doing?</b>	<b>Risk rating (trivial/low/medium/high/stop)</b>	<b>Is anything further needed?</b>
Walking the dog on and off the site	Students could be harmed during a walk offsite if they are not focused. Students might be harmed if they do not interact correctly with the school dog is on a walk	If the school dog is taken off-site the normal risk assessment process will take place. No student will take the lead when the school dog goes for a walk unless authorised to do so by the accompanying adult. No student will be allowed to interact with the school dog when it is on a walk unless permission is given.	Medium	Careful consideration to be given to the amount of time the school dog is allowed to walk around the school site during break and lunchtimes

Visits to classrooms	If the school dog visits a classroom and the students do not follow the correct procedure then it may become overexcited	The school dog will initially only make classroom visits with Mrs Crook and other appropriate adults. The students in classrooms will follow the agreed procedure or interactions will stop.	Medium	Careful consideration to be given to when the school dog can visit classrooms and be under the control of the class teacher or teaching assistant
Being fed	If a student tries to interact when the school dog is eating it may respond aggressively	No student will be allowed in the school dog's contained area when it is eating. Students may prepare the school dog's food (washing hands afterwards). All feeding must be supervised	Low	Reminders to all students feeding the school dog not to interact while it is eating
School events	If the school dog is overwhelmed it may become aggressive or boisterous	The school dog will only attend school events if they are appropriate and it will be under the control of a supervising adult	Low	Monitor the school dog's reactions to school events. If the school events are too overwhelming the school dog might not attend school on that day.
Other dogs (on and off the site)	If the school dog is overwhelmed it may become aggressive or boisterous	No other dogs will be allowed on the school premises. At no time will the school dog be walked by a student and as a result if another dog is seen this will be dealt with by the supervising adult	Low	Monitor the school dog's reactions when out walking.

*Appendix 4: Rolo's impact on litter*

## Please, Sir – sit! The tale of a learning support dog (The Guardian)

When litter at Huntington school in York got out of control recently, staff managed to sort it out pretty much overnight – not by replacing detentions with a mass litter pick, but by deploying their newest, cuddliest colleague: Rolo, the school dog.

They made a short video for assembly, showing what a state the playground was in. “Rubbish, isn’t it?” ran the caption, followed swiftly by: “Do you know what would be really rubbish? If Rolo had to leave because of rubbish.” This masterstroke of emotional blackmail showed the five-month old chocolate labrador chomping innocently on a fizzy drink bottle lid and sniffing a discarded foil wrapper, looking up to the camera with big brown eyes.

“The difference was remarkable,” says the headteacher, John Tomsett. “Quite unbelievable really.” Within a week of Operation Rolo Says No, the school grounds were spotless as the 1,500 students worked together to clean it up. “No one wanted Rolo to go,” says Abbey Ratcliffe, 12. She spends much of her lunchtime every day with Rolo in the library, and has been teaching him to shake paws.

Just as a flag is raised when the Queen is at Buckingham Palace, a sign on top of one of the bookshelves indicates when the pup is in residence. The words “Rolo is in” prompt much excitement among the sort of pupils who would never normally be seen dead in the library. “People queue up to see him – he’s like a celebrity,” says Abbie Watson, 13. He has his own badge, “Mr Rolo”, as befits his senior status as a member of staff. Like all top dogs he is also on Twitter @HuntingtonRolo.

Rolo’s job title is “learning support dog” – an increasingly common addition to modern classrooms, according to Tracey Berridge, of the charity [Dogs Helping Kids \(DHK\)](#), which trains school dogs. “In the last two or three years the idea of dogs in schools has exploded in a really big way,” she says.

Though convinced of the benefits for pupils, particularly those with behavioural problems or special educational needs, she is worried that too many dogs are unprepared for classroom life and lack proper training. “It is not right for all dogs,” she cautions. “There must be hundreds and hundreds of dogs in schools now across the country, many not properly trained, which is a really scary concept.”

The Department for Education has no idea how many dogs are currently working in classrooms and does not require schools to register or train their animals.

Just five dogs have passed DHK's three-year programme since it began in 2013, with three about to be certified and another 30 puppies going through the scheme. One of these is Rolo, who arrived at Huntington in January after Katrina Roberts, a higher level teaching assistant (TA), won a two-year battle with Tomsett and the governors. "I took a little bit of persuading," concedes Tomsett. "My little brother was bitten by a labrador retriever and required 52 stitches in his face when he was six, and I still see it in my mind's eye." He needed to be convinced that Rolo would not bite pose any other health and safety nightmares: "I didn't want a child to go into anaphylactic shock."

But Roberts eventually wore him down, pointing out [research](#) on the value of a four-legged TA. Classroom dogs not only improve literacy skills but also have a calming effect, DHK claims – something Roberts insists is true. Sometimes Rolo accompanies her to small classes and she settles him in a corner on his blanket. "He's fabulous. He just goes to sleep and the children don't want to wake him so they are really quiet – and these are children that do have a tendency to get a bit excited," she says.

The school consulted parents before Rolo's arrival. "There wasn't one objection," says Roberts, "Though a few said that their children were allergic to dogs, and I make sure that Rolo doesn't go near them." He was introduced to each year group during assembly. "Rolo was up on stage in front of 300 pupils, cool as you like," recalls Tomsett.

He belongs to Roberts and her family. They pay for his upkeep and do much of his training, though pupils are raising money for his DHK assessments – around £1,000, though Berridge says the true cost to the charity is nearer £5,000. Roberts spent many months researching online to find the right breed of dog, and settled on a labrador because they are very treat-orientated, which makes them easy to train.

Rolo is learning how to become a "listening dog", who will help children read aloud more confidently. He will put his head in their lap and listen without judgment, prompting them to turn a page with his paw. According to DHK, research has shown that children who read to listening dogs show an increase in reading levels, word recognition, a higher desire to read and write, and an increase in intra and interpersonal skills.

Roberts hopes that Rolo will learn to read himself. "It is possible," insists Berridge. "In America they've taught dogs to read up to 150 words." Like children, dogs learn to "read" by learning to recognise shapes. They begin by being shown a flashcard with the word "down", and are encouraged to sit down with a well-placed treat. Over time, they will learn that the shapes of the letters d-o-w-n mean they are to sit, says Berridge. Naturally, children are very impressed when a dog can "read" and are more inclined to want to read out loud to the dog, she adds.

Still a puppy, Rolo is at the start of his journey to becoming a certified school dog. "At the moment we are concentrating on helping him learn to love school," says Roberts. He has a cage in one of the staff rooms where he rests between classes, and the children have been told not to crowd around him. If children want to stroke him at break they must ask Roberts's permission first, and approach him slowly with their hands out for him to sniff.

At Cirencester Deer Park school, in Gloucestershire, Denzil the yellow labrador started coming into school 18 months ago on a trial basis. He spent time with some pupils who have had difficult life events to process, his calm manner and unconditional love helping to reduce levels of anxiety in pupils. He was such a hit that the assistant head, James Johnson, agreed to get a puppy – Denzil’s nephew, Cosmo – and train him up as a school dog.

Still only nine months old, Cosmo is still getting used to school life, but he has already had remarkable success in reducing truancy, says Johnson. “He has been working with some children who were quite poor attenders. If they come to school regularly they are allowed to take Cosmo for a walk with a teacher at break. It makes them feel quite special and their attendance has improved massively.”

There have been no downsides to having Cosmo – “apart from having to get up at 6.30am before school to walk him,” insists Johnson. “The kids have reacted universally positively. They treat him with total respect. I think they recognise that it is quite unusual for a school to have a dog, and they view it as a privilege to have him here.”

#### Appendix 5: The rise of reading dogs

### **Dogs all over Britain are helping children to grow their confidence, particularly with reading aloud (Country Life)**

Picture the scene. In a primary school in south-east England, a small boy is reading aloud. He sits on his own, his only audience the dog on his knee. A neatly groomed pug, with characteristic dark mask and black-tipped ears, the dog is falling asleep, burrowing deeper into the boy’s lap.

Unexpectedly, the boy begins to cry. The dog’s handler is at his side immediately. ‘Doug the Pug’s bored,’ offers the boy by way of explanation. ‘He’s gone to sleep.’ The handler denies it. ‘But his eyes are closed.’ She tells him that Doug has closed his eyes to envisage the wonderful story the boy is reading. Upset, the boy is implacable: ‘He’s snoring.’ ‘He’s purring with pleasure, just as pugs do.’ Uncertain at first, the boy is reassured; he reads to the end of the story.

The pug in question is five-year-old Doug, a therapy dog that, for the past three years, has accompanied his owner, Cate Archer, to schools in London and Buckinghamshire as part of a nationwide initiative to tackle literacy problems among British children. The bulk of Doug’s work is as a ‘reading dog’: he provides a friendly audience for children to read to. Some of Doug’s children have learning difficulties or attention disorders; some lack confidence. Others are kinaesthetic learners: instead of fiddling in their seats, they stroke Doug’s ears and hug the bid- dable little dog. For these children, acquiring basic literacy skills isn’t only challenging, but stressful. The presence of a dog alters the classroom atmosphere. ‘Doug encourages children to think school is a lovely place to be,’ says Mrs Archer. ‘He goes on school trips and, in one case, has a stall at the school’s summer fair.’ The impact on pupils’ progress academic, social and behavioural can be marked.

On the surface, it’s an eccentric-sounding idea, but a growing body of research indi- cates the correlation of stress and inhibited learning. In the USA, the Human-Animal Bond

Research Initiative Foundation recently announced the funding of a research project at Yale University to examine the effect of dogs on children's stress.

Here in Britain, Doug's work with school- children is coordinated by the charity Pets As Therapy, as part of its Read 2 Dogs project. So successful have this and similar projects proved that Pets As Therapy currently has some 200 schools on its waiting list for therapy dogs like Doug. The charitable arm of the Kennel Club provides an umbrella for this and related initiatives, called the Bark & Read Foundation. Other participating organisations include Caring Canines, Dogs Helping Kids, Building Understanding of Dogs and Reading Education Assistance Dogs.

Mrs Archer explains that Pets As Therapy discourages dog handlers from involving themselves too closely with a child's education. Instead, the dogs' role is to help children regain a love of learning in a safe, unthreatening environment. To this end, Bark & Read charities consider dogs of all breeds as potential reading dogs: canines on their lists range from pugs and whippets to golden retrievers and labradors. What matters is the predictability and trustworthiness of a dog, so that handlers, teachers and staff can be confident of its reaction to different sounds and behaviour.

Google is a golden retriever belonging to Sandy Childs, Head of Outreach for the Secondary Behaviour Support Service of the London borough of Enfield. He's the second dog that Mrs Childs has worked with in schools. So notable was the effect Google had on some of the children he encountered that Mrs Childs decided to build a learning programme around him, encouraging children not only to read, but also to develop their creative writing skills and emotional and social intelligence.

Google has even been mentioned in an Ofsted Report. About Enfield's Chace Community School, inspectors wrote in 2013: 'Google the dog through the Bark & Read scheme has been especially successful in motivating boys to read and write.'

At the age of seven, Abbie Cavill from Brightlingsea was diagnosed with brain cavernomas. The operation necessary for treatment of the condition was frightening for the little girl and she became withdrawn and subsequently angry. Happily, Abbie's headmistress Claire Claydon was a Pets As Therapy volunteer with her own therapy dog, Spike. Part of Abbie's rehabilitation included time spent with him and he became Abbie's reading dog.

As Mrs Archer has discovered, an advantage reading dogs have over hard-worked teachers is their ability to persuade children that they're always interested. 'Doug tilts his face and cocks his head. He looks as if he really loves his work. A relationship forms between Doug and the children; he becomes a great motivator, sitting beside the child, encouraging him or her.'

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_