



# The Winterton Federation School Pet Policy



## **Introduction**

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance for staff, pupils, parents/carers and visitors regarding dogs and other animals on the school site for educational purposes. The value of pet 'therapy' is widely accepted as a powerful aid to stimulation and communication. Studies have shown that the presence of companion animals can improve the well-being of children and lower the rate of anxiety, simply by making the environment happier, more enjoyable and less forbidding. The Federation therefore recognises that children can benefit from contact with pets and other animals, increasing their understanding of responsibility and developing empathy and nurturing skills. The development of these skills is a fundamental part of the Federation's personal, health and social education curriculum. In addition to these benefits children take great enjoyment from interaction with pets and other animals.

With dogs being one of the UK's most popular pets, children are likely to have considerable exposure to dogs, in particular, outside school. Developing children's awareness of how to behave safely around dogs is therefore important. Dogs may also be brought into either school site by outside agencies, e.g. Guide Dogs for the Blind or animal rescue charities such as the Dogs Trust. The Federation seeks to offer teaching sessions from external agencies such as the Dogs Trust.

## **Risks of dogs and other animals on the school site**

The Federation recognises that there are risks allowing dogs and other animals on the school site, including biting incidents and barking which may frighten children. Parents may understandably have concerns regarding dogs on the school site. It is the Federation's aim to maximise the benefit of children's contact with dogs and other animals, and control risks, by asking staff, parents/carers and visitors to follow some simple rules, exercise common sense and encourage the sensible behaviour of pupils around dogs and other animals. As a result, in order to minimise the risk to children in school, animals are not allowed on Federation premises. The definition of animals includes all pets including insects, fish and birds. The only exceptions to this rule are assistant animals, (dogs for the blind etc.) animals that have permanent residences on either school grounds, (ie the school 'Therapy' dog) or those that form part of an educational visit (eg. Hedgehog Sanctuary visit).

## **Legislation**

The Federation is required to comply with all legislation including, but not limited to, the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. These pieces of legislation establish the standards that must be met to ensure the health and safety of all employees and others (pupils, parents/carers and visitors) who may be affected by any school activity and are enforced by the Health and Safety Executive.

## **Animals in School**

The Winterton Federation team considered, very carefully, the possibility of obtaining animals as school pets and following both discussion and research it was decided that school pets would be allowed to aid the learning of all our pupils,

The rationale behind this decision was as follows:

1. For the school/s to have a pet that was able to live as naturally as conditions would allow.
2. For the animal to be properly cared for outside of the school day.
3. To have a pet that the children could interact with and also be of benefit to the children's social and emotional development.

A risk assessment is undertaken prior to any animal being brought into the classroom. Parents are notified by the Executive Head teacher via a letter sent to parents explaining about the pet, and asking families to advise the school of any allergies, or fears the children may have. Children do not have unsupervised access to any animal and are taught how to behave around the animal and handle it safely. The school informs pupils that:



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- They should not make sudden movements.
- They must ensure that they approach animals and stroke them gently and calmly.
- They should never stare into a dog's eyes as this could be interpreted as threatening by the dog.
- They should not put their face near animals.
- They should always approach animals standing up.
- They should never go near or disturb an animal that is sleeping or eating.
- They should not feed or eat close to animals.
- They should wash their hands after handling animals.
- Gaining permission before interaction with any animal should be instilled in children for all times.

Staff ensure that all animals are in good health and are well cared for. All animals are kept in a suitable habitat, in consultation with pet providers. Should any student or adult be scratched or bitten by an animal at school, first aid is administered immediately and in the case of a child, parents are notified.

### **Children with medical concerns**

Health issues must be considered when assessing the appropriateness of animals in the classroom. Prior to the consideration of the introduction of an animal to the classroom, the teacher reviews the medical notes of the children in their class to ensure there is no conflict. Where the school has been notified that a child has an allergy to an animal, they are kept away from the animal as appropriate. Children are required to wash their hands after handling any animals. Feedback from parents/carers regarding this policy is encouraged. It is the policy of the Federation to consider the safety, health and well-being of every child when making decisions regarding the introduction of animals to the classroom. When there is a conflict in this area, the Executive Head teacher will confer with the staff member to find an agreeable solution to the issue.

### **Responsibility**

The class teacher is responsible for the animal at all times and will take responsibility in the event of any harm accidentally or otherwise that befalls a child. Animals within the school are handled, treated, and cared for in a humane manner. Enclosures are appropriate to the animal and it is the responsibility of the staff member to ensure that the animal has sufficient food, water and a comfortable environment to reduce the stress for the animal. Habitats are maintained and the cleaning of them supervised by staff at all times. A staff member will be nominated to care for animals at home during school holidays.

***Policy reviewed by Cheryl Baxter and Cathy Logan: Summer 2019***

***Policy agreed by Staff: Summer 2019***

***Policy agreed by Governors: Summer 2019***

***Policy Review Date: Summer 2022***