



School Therapy Dog Policy

2025-2026



Introduction

This policy outlines the framework and guidelines for the safe and effective use of therapy dogs within Rutherglen High School, in line with Scottish legislation and best practices supporting Additional Support Needs (ASN) education. Therapy dogs can provide emotional, social, and therapeutic benefits to students, particularly those with additional support needs, helping to improve wellbeing, reduce anxiety, and support learning.

This policy ensures that the welfare of both students and dogs is safeguarded and that all relevant legal requirements, including the Equality Act 2010 and Education Scotland's guidance on dogs in educational settings, are fully met. It also reflects the school's commitment to inclusivity, respect, and providing reasonable adjustments to support the diverse needs of our learners.

The use of therapy dogs will be carefully managed through risk assessments, consultation with families and staff, and appropriate training and accreditation of the animals involved.

We have worked hard to establish a strong partnership with Cathkin High School, enabling us to benefit from the use of their therapy dog, Gus. Therapy sessions with Gus take place every Friday from 13:25 to 13:55, providing valuable emotional and therapeutic support to our students. Sessions will be conducted on a rotation basis with pre-identified pupils to ensure that all students who can benefit from the support have equal access to time with the therapy dog.

About Gus

Gus is a gorgeous Border Terrier who was born on 9th June 2021 on a farm in Hexham. His Mum, Isla, and Dad, Moss, are the proud parents of Gus, brothers Leo and Grubster and sister Indie. He is a full pedigree Border Terrier and is registered with the Kennel Club. Gus moved to Glasgow to live with his new family on 3rd August 2021. Gus loves all people, all dogs, slippers, socks, sticks, the beach, snoozing and all fruit and vegetable that dogs are allowed to eat. His favourite thing is to play with a ball. Below are some Gus highlights.

His legal owner is Mrs Lynn Blair, Depute Head at Cathkin High School. Mrs Blair has full responsibility for the welfare of Gus ensuring that he is vaccinated, wormed and flea treated. The day-to-day care and welfare of Gus is overtaken by a team of staff who ensure that Gus is fed, watered, taken for toilet breaks, given play time, appropriately trained and is well rested throughout the day. Cathkin High's liability insurance covers the school for risk related to a working dog on site. Training for Gus to be a Reading and Therapy dog will be ongoing. Team Gus staff will receive dog handling training by a trainer fully qualified and approved by The Institute of Modern Dog Trainers (IMDT), The Dog Training College, Licenced Canine Body Language

and Pet First Aid. Only named staff trained to handle Gus in pupil sessions will have permission to do so.



Benefits

The benefits of a school dog have been proven to help develop learners' reading skills, improve behaviour, attendance and academic confidence, as well as increasing learner understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills. Gus will support our staff team in bringing all of these benefits to our learners. Gus will be trained as a therapy dog and a reading dog. The plan is to register Gus as an Emotional Support Animal and once he has passed through adolescence and completed accredited behavioural trainings. Animal assisted therapy can:-

- Teach empathy and appropriate interpersonal skills
- Help individuals develop social skills
- Support emotional regulation through the positive impact on the autonomic nervous system
- Increase motivation for learning, resulting in improved outcomes
- Support children with social and emotional learning needs, which in turn can assist with literacy development.

Research into the effects of therapy dogs in schools is showing a range of benefits including:-

- Increase in school attendance
- Gains in confidence
- Decreases in learner anxiety behaviours resulting in improved learning outcomes, such as increases in reading and writing levels
- Positive changes towards learning and improved motivation
- Enhanced relationships with peers and teachers due to experiencing trust and unconditional positive regard from a therapy dog. This in turn helps students learn how to express their feelings and enter into more trusting relationships.

National Guidance

Education Scotland has acknowledged the growing interest in integrating dogs into educational settings for therapeutic purposes. Their guidance emphasises the importance of conducting thorough risk assessments, ensuring appropriate insurance coverage, and considering the welfare of both pupils and animals. They also highlight the need for adequate training for the dogs and their handlers.

Additionally, the Scottish Government's statutory guidance on additional support for learning outlines that support may include non-educational provisions such as assistance animals, provided they are necessary for meeting a learner's additional support needs.

Success Stories

Bannockburn Primary School – “Reading with Dogs” Program

Bannockburn Primary School has implemented a "Reading with Dogs" pilot project in partnership with Canine Concern Scotland Trust. Over the past two years, dogs Dylan and Scruffy have worked with over 20 pupils to enhance their confidence and reading abilities. Students reported feeling calmer and more confident, with one pupil noting, "I love reading with the dogs because if I make a mistake, they don't judge me or try to correct me, they just let me read." The program has been so successful that it has been extended to include daily visits from Riggs, another TheraPet, to support learning across literacy and health and wellbeing.

Alness Academy – Project Paws

At Alness Academy, "Project Paws" was introduced to help students ease back into school life post-lockdown. Bru, a Border Collie and registered TheraPet, has been providing wellbeing support for pupils with additional support needs. Students can talk

to their guidance teacher while petting Bru or take him out for a walk to enjoy a change of scene and some fresh air. The initiative has been praised for reducing anxiety and promoting a sense of calm among students.

Fettes College – Fidra the Cockapoo

Fettes College in Edinburgh introduced Fidra, a two-year-old Cockapoo, as their first therapy dog to help improve student wellbeing and reduce anxiety levels. Fidra was assessed and qualified by TheraPet, a service run by Canine Concern Scotland Trust. She has been working with students to provide emotional support, particularly during stressful periods such as exams.

Further Reading and Resources

Education Scotland – Dogs in Educational Settings

This resource provides guidance on the benefits and practical considerations of having dogs in educational settings. It includes information on risk assessments, insurance, and dog welfare.

<https://education.gov.scot/resources/dogs-in-educational-settings>

Canine Concern Scotland Trust – Schools & Education

Canine Concern Scotland Trust offers a TheraPet service where assessed and registered dogs and owners provide pet therapy to schools. They also provide educational materials for teachers and students.

<https://www.therapet.org.uk/who-we-are/canine-concern-scotland-trust#:~:text=Provide%20an%20educational%20service%20to%20promote%20responsible%20dog,manage%20a%20service%20to%20be%20known%20as%20TheraPet>

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