

THE CREDO SCHOOL

School Therapy Dogs Policy

Version 1

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Abbreviation /Acronym	Definition
DfE	Department for Education
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills
UK GDPR	United Kingdom General Data Protection Regulation
SEMH	Social, Emotional and Mental Health
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
DSL	Designated Safeguarding Lead
DBS	Disclosure and Barring Service
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CPOMS	Child Protection Online Management System

This Policy is for The Credo School.

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1. Purpose and Scope

1.1. Purpose

To set out Birchwood Community High School's approach to the safe, effective and inclusive use of a school therapy dog(s) to support students' wellbeing, social, emotional and educational outcomes in line with our core values of Aspiration, Knowledge and Kindness.

1.2. Scope

This policy applies to the school therapy dog(s), the accredited handler(s), all students, staff, governors, parents/carers, volunteers, contractors and visitors and activities on school premises and on school-led activities off-site where the therapy dog is present.

The Therapy dog(s) will predominantly work within The Credo School which consists of the Meliora and Consilium Centres (both SEND designated provisions). The dog(s) will also be able to support identified mainstream students through the Polaris Centre (Pastoral Support Provision). The dog(s) will only attend the centres specified and will not spend time in mainstream classrooms or other shared areas of school. The dog may also attend off-site trips as appropriate and may be transported via the school minibus if required.

2. Links to legislation, guidance and OFSTED framework

Must comply with UK statutes and guidance, including but not limited to:

- Animal Welfare Act 2006
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- Control of Dogs Order 1992
- Equality Act 2010
- Data Protection Act 2018 & UK GDPR
- Department for Education guidance on dogs in schools (where applicable)
- Local authority public health guidance and school insurance requirements

OFSTED (2025) Framework note: *This initiative will be aligned with OFSTED areas of Safeguarding, Inclusion, Curriculum & Teaching, Personal Development and Leadership & Governance. Evidence of risk assessment, inclusion planning, safeguarding and impact on student outcomes will be available during inspections.*

3. Rationale and aims

3.1. Rationale

- To provide therapeutic, motivational and social benefits to students, including reduced anxiety, improved attendance and engagement, and enhanced social skills — consistent with our emphasis on inclusion and wellbeing.
- To support targeted interventions for students with SEMH, ASD and other SEND needs, as well as universal opportunities for reading, mentoring, and pastoral contact.

3.2. Aims:

- Ensure safe, regulated interaction between students/staff and the therapy dog(s).
- Maximise therapeutic benefits while minimising risks (allergies, phobias, infection control, safeguarding). These include reading support, 1:1 mentoring, class calm presence within the Designated Provision classes and support staff wellbeing.
- Provide clear guidance on training, welfare, record-keeping, consent and review.

4. Definitions

Therapy dog: A dog assessed and trained to work in educational/therapeutic settings under the control of a trained handler. (Not a pet or assistance dog.)

Handler(s): A staff member or accredited person responsible for the dog at all times.

Student: All students at Birchwood Community High School.

Visitor: Any non-staff person on site interacting with the dog.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

5.1. Governing Body / One Community Trust:

- Approve implementation as part of school policy; ensure insurance and liability cover; provide oversight through governors' safeguarding/health & safety items.
- Link Governor- Stuart Nixon (SEND Governor)

5.2. Headteacher / Senior Leadership Team (SLT):

- Overall responsibility for ensuring compliance with this policy, securing resources, maintaining records and approving access arrangements for the therapy dog(s).

- Ensure dog therapy provision aligns with school improvement priorities and OFSTED expectations (safeguarding, inclusion, curriculum).
- SLT staff with day-to-day oversight -Samantha Rigby-White (Deputy Headteacher)

5.3. Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL):

- Ensure safeguarding considerations are embedded in risk assessments, manage any safeguarding incidents involving the dog and ensure staff know reporting routes.
- DSL: Matthew Taylor

5.4. Handler(s) (named staff/volunteer):

- Daily care, training compliance, maintain behaviour and welfare records, ensure dog is controlled and logged in/out, comply with hygiene procedures and ensure interactions follow agreed programmes.
- Must be DBS-checked to the level required by the school and academy trust.
- **Named primary handler(s) in school:** Emma Mills, Emma Dean, Samantha Rigby-White and Joanne O'Brien
- **Trained deputies:** Daniel Gibbons, Joanne Butler
- The home carers are Emma Mills and Emma Dean and are the responsible owners who will receive training and assessment through Therapy Dog UK

5.5. School staff:

- Support planned sessions, supervise students during interactions per guidance and follow school instructions on safety and boundaries.

5.6. Parents/carers:

- Provide informed, written consent for their student to engage with the therapy dog. Inform school of allergies, phobias or cultural concerns.

5.7. Students:

- Follow behaviour expectations and instructions when interacting with the dog. Consent and respect boundaries.

5.8. School Health & Safety Lead:

- Manage insurance, local vet arrangements, first aid supplies (e.g., for minor bites/scratches), and ensure maintenance of dog welfare resources.

5.9. School First aid lead:

- Support medical response plans (allergic reactions, injuries), keep records and advise on infection control.

5.10. External providers (if used):

- Provide evidence of relevant qualifications, insurance, DBS checks and adherence to school procedures.

6. Eligibility, selection and training of therapy dog and handler

6.1. Dog selection criteria:

- Suitability for school environment: calm temperament, good tolerance of noise and unpredictable behaviour, confidence around equipment and small spaces.
- Up-to-date vaccinations and parasite control, microchipped, neutered/spayed (recommended).
- A documented history of training and temperament assessment from an accredited body: Dog(s) have been selected from Cheshire Doodles. This is a well-respected breeder who provides dogs with a “doodle” heritage meaning they are hypoallergenic/low shedding. Cheshire Doodles has provided several therapy and assistance dogs in the Northwest region.

6.2. Handler requirements:

- Must be an employee or approved volunteer, DBS-checked, trained in dog handling, school safeguarding, first aid and basic infection control.
- Undertake accredited therapy dog-handler training and maintain repeat CPD.

6.3. Training & accreditation:

- Therapy dog and handler must hold evidence of assessment by a recognised organisation. School will keep records of training, assessments and refresher dates.
- The school uses; Therapy Dog Training UK for assessment. The dog(s) will also complete specific training externally through accredited trainers. Handlers will all complete the accredited training through Therapy Dog training UK once the dogs are over 18 months old.

7. Health, Welfare and Biosecurity

7.1. Health and welfare checks

- Regular veterinary checks at least annually; maintain vaccination record (rabies not required in UK but kennel cough, distemper, parvo where relevant), flea/tick control, worming and general health log.
- Dogs showing signs of illness, distress or aggression will not attend school.

7.2. Welfare on site

- Provide a quiet rest area out of students' pathways; ensure access to water, breaks and non-contact time. The dog(s) will be crated when not providing support or when on rest breaks, in the primary handler's office. There is also a rest area in the staff office in the Consilium Centre.
- Maximum daily sessions/time limits are set to prevent fatigue. The dog(s) will have a time limit of one hour with students before a 10-minute rest break. The dog(s) will have a **maximum** of 5 hours contact/intervention time per day.

7.3. Biosecurity & hygiene

- Handwashing or hand sanitiser required before and after all interactions.
- No students to feed the dog without handler permission. Food allergies and dietary controls enforced.
- Clean-up plan for any fouling incidents and designated cleaning materials.

8. Safeguarding, risk assessment and consent

8.1. Safeguarding

- Comprehensive risk assessments will be carried out and recorded before the dog attends site and updated termly or after any incident/change.
- All interactions supervised by the handler(s) and an appropriate staff member.
- Therapy dog sessions must not prevent safe supervision ratios for students, particularly those with SEND.

8.2. Consent

- Obtain written, informed parental/carer consent for each student participating. This will be included within consent forms sent for all children in the Credo School. Any students in the main school will be referred for specific intervention through the school inclusion panel and consent sought before sessions begin.

- Obtain staff consent for staff-led interactions; record any staff allergies or concerns.
- Maintain a register of students/staff with no contact or limited contact (e.g., due to phobia, health condition, cultural reasons).

8.3. Risk assessment items

- Allergies, zoonosis risk assessment, trip/fall hazards, behaviour management, emergency removal procedure, insurance/liability, off-site travel arrangements.
- Risk assessments must be signed off by the Headteacher.

9. Operational Procedures (*daily management and routines*)

9.1. Arrival & departure

- Dog(s) signed in/out via reception; daily checklist will be completed by handler (health check, waste supplies, water, leads, registration).

9.2. Access control

- Dog(s) will be kept on a lead or in a secure area unless in a controlled session where off lead is permitted.
- Signage at school entrances and rooms indicating presence of dog; clear routes to avoid accidental contact.

9.3. Session management

- Pre-booked sessions with student lists; staff to follow agreed student behaviour guidance and hygiene procedures.
- No unsupervised contact. Students always sit at handler's invitation and follow handler/staff instructions.

9.4. Off-site activities

- Additional risk assessment for trips; permission sought in advance from the academy trust and parents for dog presence off-site.

9.5. Timetabled slots

- The dog(s) will always be available for morning meet and greet when students arrive in the centres.
- The dog(s) will have an intervention timetable reviewed half termly that will be displayed in the centres, pastoral area and the school office- this will include mentoring time and reading sessions.

- The dog(s) will spend part of lunchtime with students, once they have eaten, as a calming presence during unstructured time.

10. Inclusion, SEND and Reasonable Adjustments

10.1. Access and equity

- Programmes to be designed to support students with SEND (ASD, SEMH) as part of targeted interventions and whole-school wellbeing strategies.
- Reasonable adjustments will be made for students unable to be present in spaces where the dog is.

10.2. Specific considerations:

- For students with sensory issues, individual plans clarify whether contact is appropriate and set clear boundaries.
- For EHCP students, relevant professionals (SENCO, therapists etc) to be involved in planning as required.
- The timetable will identify which students have contact when. Individual plans will be available for all students in the Credo School and will be available on Arbor.

11. Behaviour, confidentiality and boundaries

11.1. Behaviour expectations:

- Clear conduct rules for students when interacting with the dog: calm approach, no shouting, no rough play, wash hands before and after, follow instructions immediately.
- Consequences for misuse are covered within the behaviour policy; incidents may lead to withdrawal of access.

11.2. Confidentiality:

- Personal data and sensitive notes arising from dog-supported therapeutic sessions to be recorded in line with Data Protection Act and school record-keeping practice.
- An intervention log will identify outcomes for personalized sessions

11.3. Boundaries:

- Dog is not to be used as a substitute for specialist therapy; records will specify intended outcomes and pathways for escalation to CAMHS/SEND professionals as needed.

12. Incident Reporting, Medical & Allergy Responses

12.1. Incident Reporting:

- All incidents (bites, scratches, aggressive behaviour, near-misses, student distress) must be recorded on the school's incident reporting system (CPOMs) and reported to SLT, DSL and the health and safety manager.
- Notify parents/carers and log any required actions.

12.2. Medical & allergy response:

- Students with known severe allergies (e.g., anaphylaxis) to dogs must be kept in separate areas; ensure their emergency care plans are known and situated.
- List of students and staff with any known allergies and treatments kept in school office
- First aiders to manage minor injuries; ambulance to be called for severe reactions. Notify public health if zoonotic concern arises.

13. Staff, Parent and Community Engagement and Communications

13.1. Consent & communications:

- Provide parents/carers with clear information (including FAQ). Keep records of consent stored securely.
- Inform staff and governors prior to implementation; provide training and an opt-out route for staff with concerns.

13.2. Volunteer/community access:

- Volunteers must meet the same standards as staff (DBS, training) and be approved by SLT and One Community Trust as needed.

13.3. Publicity:

- Media requests or photos including students must have explicit consent; comply with school photography and safeguarding guidance.
- The policy will be made available on the school website and will be sent to all parents at the implementation stage.

14. Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

14.1. Monitoring:

- Regular monitoring of therapeutic aims and impact (attendance, behaviour, engagement, wellbeing metrics) by named lead.
- Maintain logs of sessions, attendance records, incidents, dog welfare and training records.

14.2. Evaluation:

- Annual review of impacts involving SLT, SENDCo, pastoral leads, student voice, parent feedback and governor oversight.

14.3. Review:

- Formal policy review at least annually or sooner after an incident, changes in legislation, or trust/insurance requirements.
- Review of success will be analysed termly by the Credo School Lead and shared with SLT/Governors. Measures will include attendance, behaviour development and an engagement tracker.

15. Equality statement

Birchwood Community High School will ensure that the therapy dog(s) provision is deployed in an equitable way and that students are not excluded from learning opportunities because of the presence of the dog. Reasonable adjustments will be made and alternative provision offered where necessary to respect health, cultural or other concerns.

Insurance and legal compliance

We maintain up-to-date copies of insurance documents and ensure compliance with public liability and employer's liability expectations.

Record keeping and data protection

Records of consent, session logs, incident reports, vet and training certificates, and risk assessments are kept within the school secure drive.

