



Abbeyfield School

Dog Therapy & Welfare Policy

2025-2026

Policy owner	SENDCo
Approved by	Principal
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School: Abbeyfield School Therapy Dog & Welfare Policy

Effective: May 2025

Dog: Cookie

Programme: PAWS School Programme

1. Purpose and Scope

This policy outlines the standards and procedures for the safe, ethical, and effective use of a therapy dog (Cookie) in a mainstream school setting. It ensures the welfare of the dog, the safety of students and staff, and the educational and emotional benefits of the programme.

2. Core Principles

The welfare of Cookie is paramount. She is not a tool but a sentient being whose needs and preferences must be respected.

All interactions must be mutually beneficial for Cookie and the individuals she supports.

The policy applies to all staff, students, visitors, and volunteers involved in or affected by Cookie's presence.

3. Dog Welfare and Safeguarding

Positive Reinforcement Only: Cookie will only be trained and handled using positive, reward-based methods.

Stress Awareness: All named handlers are trained to identify and respond to signs of stress or discomfort in Cookie.

Right to Withdraw: Cookie will be withdrawn from any session if she shows signs of stress, fatigue, or disinterest. This decision can be made by the owner or any trained handler.

Health and Hygiene: Cookie must be in good health to work. She will not attend school if she is unwell, injured, or in season.

Veterinary Care and Insurance: Cookie will receive routine veterinary check-ups at least every 6 months. She is fully insured for her role as a therapy dog, including public liability cover.

Exercise and Breaks: Cookie must be exercised before sessions and given regular, non-negotiable breaks. A maximum of 4 hours on-site includes scheduled rest periods.

Hydration and Nutrition: Fresh water must be available at all times. Treats used during sessions must be appropriate and not excessive.

Safe Space: A designated, quiet rest area must be available where Cookie can retreat without interaction.

4. Session Management

Dog-Led Interactions: Sessions are guided by Cookie's willingness to engage. Commands like "sit" or "stay" may be used, but handlers must prioritise Cookie's body language and comfort.

Timetabling: Cookie's schedule will be carefully planned to avoid overstimulation and ensure adequate downtime.

Absence Communication: Cookie follows a structured timetable. If she is unable to attend school on a scheduled day, this will be communicated to the relevant staff team and school reception. Reception will display this information clearly to manage expectations.

Supervision: Cookie will always be accompanied by a trained handler. She will never be left unsupervised with students.

Boundaries: Handlers will set clear boundaries for interactions, including how and when Cookie can be approached or touched.

Visual Aids or Signage: Signage will be placed around the school to alert visitors and students with allergies or phobias about Cookie's presence. This will include clear instructions on how to interact with Cookie and the importance of hygiene protocols.

Communication with Parents/Carers: Parents and carers will be informed about the therapy dog programme through newsletters, consent forms, and the school website. They will have the option

to opt-out their child from participating in therapy dog sessions. Any concerns or questions can be directed to the central SEND email address: ABS-SENDCO@abbeyfieldschool.org.uk.

5. Student and Staff Safety

Allergies and Phobias: The school maintains an up-to-date register of students and staff with allergies or phobias related to dogs. This information is used to inform Cookie's timetable, location, and interactions to ensure everyone's comfort and safety.

Consent: Participation in therapy dog sessions is voluntary. No student or staff member will be required to interact with Cookie.

Hygiene Protocols: Handwashing or sanitising before and after contact with Cookie is mandatory.

Risk Assessment: A comprehensive risk assessment has been completed and is reviewed regularly to ensure the safety of students, staff, and Cookie.

Emergency Procedures: In the event of a medical emergency involving Cookie or a student during a session, the following steps should be taken:

- Contact the member of staff on first aid immediately.
- Ensure the safety and well-being of the student and Cookie.
- Follow the school's emergency protocols, including contacting emergency services if necessary.
- Document the incident as stated below.

Incident Reporting: Any incidents (e.g., bites, scratches, or signs of distress in students or Cookie) must be reported immediately and documented.

All incidents or accidents must be logged on Smartlog under the Incidents section, which is used for recording events such as intruders, lockdowns, and near misses.

If the incident or accident involves a student, it must also be logged on CPOMS using the appropriate safeguarding or behaviour category, and the SENDCo must be tagged in the entry.

The SENDCo will action the CPOMS entry and close the item once all necessary steps have been completed. This should be done within 24 hours of the incident wherever possible. Parents and carers may report any concerns via the central SEND email address: ABS-SENDCO@abbeyfieldschool.org.uk.

All records will be stored securely in line with the school's data protection policy. The risk assessment will be updated as appropriate and reviewed regularly as part of the ongoing safety and welfare monitoring process.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

Owner/Primary Handler: Responsible for Cookie's overall welfare, training, and suitability for work.

Named Handlers: Trained staff members who support Cookie during sessions and advocate for her needs.

School Leadership: Ensures the policy is implemented, reviewed annually, and that all staff are aware of their responsibilities.

7. Training and Support

All handlers must complete the PAWS School Programme and engage in ongoing training and reflective practice.

Regular assessments of both handler and dog will be carried out to ensure Cookie remains suitable and happy in her role.

The school will maintain contact with PAWS trainers for guidance and support.

8. Review and Evaluation

This policy will be reviewed annually by the school's leadership team in consultation with the therapy dog's owner and named handlers. The review will consider:

- Feedback from staff, students, and parents/carers.
- Cookie's ongoing welfare and suitability for the role.
- Updates or guidance from the PAWS School Programme.
- Risk assessment outcomes.
- Any incidents or safeguarding concerns.

Monitoring Impact: The school will monitor the emotional and educational impact of the therapy dog programme through surveys and feedback forms from students, staff, and parents/carers.

This feedback will be reviewed regularly to ensure the programme's effectiveness and make any necessary adjustments.

Cookie's Retirement or Absence Plan: In the event that Cookie retires, becomes unwell long-term, or is permanently unavailable, the therapy dog programme will be reviewed. The school will consider the introduction of another suitable therapy dog, ensuring that all welfare, training, and safety protocols are followed.

Next scheduled review: May 2026

Appendix A: Named Handlers for Cookie (Therapy Dog)

The following individuals are trained and approved to handle Cookie during school visits:

Name	Role	PAWS Training Completed
Neil Price	Owner / Teacher	In progress - May 2025
Emma Gother	SENDCo / Handler	In progress - May 2025
Rebecca Marr	Deputy SENDCo / Handler	In progress - May 2025
Jennifer Giles	Counsellor / Handler	In progress - May 2025
Emily Abraham	Counsellor / Handler	In progress - May 2025