

Policy Document for Peata Therapy Dog



St. Kevin's College, Ballygall Road East, Dublin 11
Roll Number: 60581M
Patron: Edmund Rice Schools Trust
Ratified: 13th January 2025

Rationale

There is an increasing body of research to support the benefit of a dog in school. Peata have placed therapy dogs in care facilities around Ireland providing comfort and reassurance to those with anxiety and self-confidence issues. Dogs have proven to increase the wellbeing of staff and students. ***“School Therapy dogs, they simply put a smile on your face”***. They are an additional resource for the school that benefit students and staff.

Increasingly in schools, it is becoming recognised that children's emotional wellbeing is at the root of positive behaviour and success with socialising as well as in the classroom.

A dog can support children who are anxious about school and could be the reason that they want to come in every morning. Dogs can be beneficial to assist children with difficulty transitioning into the school. Reading to dogs can help boost children's confidence and fluency. Caring for an animal can teach children responsibility and how to treat animals safely and with compassion.

Dogs are great fun to have around and can bring a caring atmosphere to a school.

Preparations for having a School Dog

School leaders have established a risk assessment document.

Peata covers all insurance.

St Kevin's College's Dog Handler: Main handler = Sinead Mc Colgan

- Sinead Mc Colgan will know the whereabouts of the dog and which staff are supervising at all times.
- Miss Mc Colgan is responsible for ensuring the training of the dog which will be carried out by peata.
- The handler(s) will remove the dog to its designated chill out zone (guidance office) if the dog shows any signs of stress during interactions. Main handler will be notified.
- Toilet area is designated within reach of the schools' grounds away from the children's play areas.
- A designated chill out zone/office will be in place for the dog before its placement in school, this will be agreed by the handler.
- Parents will be informed that Peata dog will become part of the school and parents who do not want their child to interact with the dog will inform the school authorities.
- Pupils must never be left alone with the dog and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times.

If a child has a phobia of dogs the dog handler may offer opportunities for the child to be slowly introduced to the dog, to reduce their fear.

A picture of the Peata therapy school therapy dog will be placed prominently in school reception to inform everyone that there is a school therapy dog working in the school. This will state the dog's name, i.e. Peata school therapy dog **Phoebe** and the name of the main handler.

Interactions

Interactions with children will be very carefully monitored to avoid children being hurt by play scratches and nips, and to avoid undue stress to the dog. All school therapy dogs undergo the Peata training assessment. There will always be a responsible adult in charge of the dog during interactions with children. Children and adults are required to adhere to the following:

- Always approach the Peata school dog calmly and slowly.
- Dogs should always be encouraged to keep 4 paws on the ground.
- All interactions must remain calm with the authorised adult in control at all times.
- Children should wash their hands before and after they have been handling the dog.
- Interactions with the school therapy dog will not happen in corridors (this encourages undesirable dog behaviour) interactions will only occur in controlled environments as set out by the main handler in consultation with Peata.
- The number of interactions the dog can have will be dependent on the length and quality of these interactions on any given day. The handler will decide this in consultation with management.
- A flexible timetable will be provisionally allocated, subject to change, one agreed by the handler and management with the welfare of the dog being the primary consideration.
- All interactions are subject to approval of the main handler who is responsible for the dog's welfare while they are working in the school.

Dog Welfare

The welfare of the dog shall remain the primary concern. Handlers will remove a dog where they feel the welfare of the dog is not adequately catered for.

A dog that is unwell will stay at home, if this is not possible the dog can remain in their chill zone. The dog shall not have any interactions with students when they are unwell.

Frequently Asked Questions

What will the Peata school dog do on a day-to-day basis?

The dog may visit different rooms around the school during a day but will have its own chill out zone designated where the dog can have downtime. This again will be designated by the handler. The dog will always be kept under effective control.

How do I know that my child will be safe around the dog?

A risk assessment and policy will be in place and will be available on the school website. When moving around the school, the dog will always be under effective control. Children will receive instruction on how to interact safely with dogs.

Will my child pick up infections from the dog?

The dog will be fully vaccinated, treated regularly for worms and fleas. The dog will be kept clean and groomed regularly. Children will be required to wash their hands before and after handling the dog. There will be a dedicated dog toilet area away from areas that children access. There is also a dedicated bin for dog waste, which is labelled.

What if my child is allergic to dogs or afraid of them?

Parents can request that their child has no contact, or restricted access to the dog in these situations. A message will be circulated via the school app to inform parents/guardians.