**St Levan Primary School**

**where all children SHINE-for life**

**Biophilia Policy**

*"No-one who looks at the evidence can doubt that animals in hand improve the quality of modern human life..."* The Biophilia Hypothesis, S.R.Kellert & E.O.Wilson

**Monitoring and review**

The Headteacher is responsible for monitoring the implementation of this policy and for seeking the views of staff, children and parents. The Headteacher will report to the governing body on the effectiveness of this policy.

This policy was approved by the full governing body in January 2019. It is due for review by September 2020.

**Aims**

The Biophilia philosophy, introduced by an eminent biologist Edward Wilson asserts that there is an innate need for humans to be in contact with animals and other species for positive mental well-being. Taking this basis, which we have built on from a wealth of other research, we believe that there are immense benefits for all children at St Levan Primary School in connecting with animals, plants and nature in general.

**Rationale**

The experience of nature and animals has been proved to provide considerable social and emotional benefit as well as opportunities for hands-on reality based learning to supplement the children’s curriculum. In brief, the experience of working alongside animals and nature has proven benefits in the following areas:

* Engagement with the curriculum as a whole
* Offering children learning experiences outdoors, in most cases an expressed preferred learning environment, providing fresh air among other benefits
* Reduced anxiety
* Purposeful activity
* Building relationships, trust and empathy
* Offering experiences of vulnerability
* Responsibility
* Opportunity to learn explicitly about emotional and physical safety
* Providing a forum for learning about sustainability and other such global issues

We recognize our responsibility to provide a safe environment and positive learning experiences for all pupils and a high standard of care and welfare to all animals involved. This policy sets out how this will be achieved. It has been written with reference to the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

Our aims in bringing a therapy dog into the school environment:

1. To help pupils develop increased respect, empathy and a sense of responsibility for living things and thereby improve their relationships with other pupils, parents and teachers.
2. To encourage pupils to consider the experiences and needs of other living things, including other pupils, school staff, and their families.
3. To motivate pupils to think and to learn, as children have a high level of natural interest, enthusiasm and enjoyment of animals.
4. To promote an interest in the natural environment and support hands-on learning across all areas of the curriculum.
5. To improve academic achievement.
6. To help pupils develop a calm, confident, and sensitive manner when interacting with animals.
7. To demonstrate best practice in the care of pets and other animals.
8. To encourage pupils to consider hobbies/careers working with animals.

Pets in schools also have social benefits for the school community; to enhance the learning environment, creating a sense of security and family warmth for the pupils.

**Opportunities for Biophilia**

At St Levan Primary School we fully embrace the importance of introducing children to animals and nature in a planned safe and supported way. Opportunities for Biophilia, are weaved throughout the curriculum as well as offering stand alone opportunities. The policy is integral to an approach of general emotional wellbeing and is therefore available for every child.

We do not wish to overwhelm our children with too much of anything, and children’s preferences, as well as health and safety considerations both for children and animals, is of paramount importance. We therefore plan developments in this area carefully, being cautious not to introduce any animal in particular for purposes other than direct impact and benefit to the children. All developments are considered with sustainability rather than novelty taking precedence.

St Levan School’s Biophilia Philosophy includes the following elements:

* Based in Class Two, is a registered Pets as Therapy dog. The dog is there for children to talk to, walk for de-escalation or reward, or to encompass within a lesson where felt appropriate. Some children express a preference for animal contact, and this offers those children a connection, which has been seen to relax, motivate, enthral, distract, support and encourage children.
* The School is fortunate to have considerable grounds including a forest school campfire area, sandpit area, greenhouse, gardening beds, outdoor classroom, lawned garden, planted borders and an enclosed vegetable garden. These grounds are managed by the Head Teacher and a parent Governor, who oversee the development and access opportunities for children in each of the following areas:
	+ Resources and maintenance
	+ Nature activities throughout the school
	+ Garden craft projects
	+ Vegetable Growing
	+ Flower Growing
	+ Forest School sessions
	+ Garden Curriculum Development
	+ Enrichment Programme
* Classes have overall responsibility for the school gardens and grounds. The purpose of this is to offer transition based activities and analogy alongside continual opportunities to practice skills of care and nurture and represent children at this stage as the mentors, leaders and responsible pupils throughout the school. What children plant maybe something of a legacy for children moving on from the school, allowing children to feel continually remembered and emotionally held.
* Classes also participate weekly in Forest School. This has widely researched benefits for children with emotional challenge (Knight, 2008) and offers opportunities for bush craft & survival skills as well as a range of nature-based activities. Children learn about the world immediately around them, and engage in a number of ‘risky’ activities using knives, saws and fire. This offers the children a position of trust and responsibility. Each subject area can be taught using the forest school as a learning environment.

Other Opportunities:

* Golden Time: As reward children are able to select an activity of choice; children may choose to go on a dog walk.
* Eco-Schools Award: As a school we are currently working towards our Bronze Award and children are encouraged to learn about aspects of becoming an Eco-friendly school; the school council leads this.
* After school and lunchtime clubs: Children expressing interest or genuine excellence for all things nature are supported to further their knowledge and understanding of a wide range of subjects including gardening, shelter building and bird spotting.

Development Plans:

This policy will be monitored for further impact and development ideas generated primarily by the children’s interest. It will be reviewed and updated annually.

**Appendix One – School Dog Policy**

Dogs are not allowed anywhere on the school site at any time unless specifically authorised by the Head Teacher. This includes drop off and collection times. This policy outlines measures put in place to allow the school dog to be present.

**Reasons to have a dog in school**

In summary, academic research has shown that dogs working and helping in the school environment can achieve the following:

1) Improve academic achievement

2) Increase literacy skills

3) Teach calming behaviours

4) Increase social skills and self-esteem

5) Increase confidence

6) Teach responsibility and respect to all life

7) Help prevent truancy

8) Motivate children who are often less attentive

The following information has been taken from a range of sources to provide further detail about the benefits of having a dog in school.

**Behaviour:**

Behaviour problems can occur in school and these can interfere with learning. In some schools, dogs are making a difference in the behaviour of pupils. Pupils can identify with animals, and with empathy for the dog, can better understand how classmates may feel.

Researchers report that violent behaviour in participating students declined by 55%, and general aggression went down by 62%. Students’ behaviour also improved toward teachers, and students showed more confidence and responsibility. Additionally, parents reported that children seemed more interested in school as a result of having a dog at school.

**Attendance:**

Case study: Mandy was a student with poor attendance and truancy. Mandy was encouraged back into school using caring for River, a dog, as an incentive. By telling Mandy that “if she didn’t come to school to care for him, he wouldn’t get walks, water or love,” Mandy came to school almost everyday for the rest of the year, only missing two days.

**Education:**

Reading programmes with dogs are doing wonders for some students. Children who might be embarrassed to read aloud to the class or even adults are likely to be less scared to read to a dog. *“It might be less stressful for a child to read aloud to a dog than to a teacher or a peer. After all, a dog won’t judge or correct you.”* Dogs are used to encourage struggling readers to practise reading aloud. With the presence of a calm and well-trained dog, students find social support and peer interaction. Dogs are incredibly calm and happy to have students read to them or join a group of children in the library whilst they are having a book reading session. Dogs give unconditional acceptance, as they are non-judgmental, which is especially crucial to struggling, emerging readers. The dogs also provide confidence to children as they do not make fun of them when they read, but above all they make amazing listeners, providing the children with a sense of comfort and love.

Research has proved that students who read to dogs show an increase in reading levels, word recognition, a higher desire to read and write, and an increase in intra and interpersonal skills among the students they mix with.

**Social Development:**

Dogs in school offer an opportunity for improving social development. They are especially useful for teaching students social skills and responsibility. Specifically, schools are using dogs to help students build self-esteem; learn about positive and negative reinforcement, responsibility, and boundaries. Students use dogs to help communicate, teach kindness, and empower students. With a dog in school, students have the opportunity to learn how to care for the animal. This includes walking and grooming.

Researchers report that involving students in the daily care of classroom dogs is a positive experience, promoting their own daily care. The students also learn about responsibility, caring, and sharing when helping each other take care of a dog at school.

**As a reward:**

Dogs will be gentle and loving, but at the same time full of fun and enjoyment for the students. Those students who have performed incredibly well during the week or those who have made progress in a certain subject, or those who have achieved tasks set for them, will be rewarded with spending time during lunch or break to interact with these dogs. Walking, grooming, playing and training are some of the responsibilities students will be allowed to undertake. It has been proved that working and playing with a dog improves children’s social skills and self-esteem. Therapy Dogs can work with students on a one-one basis and will especially help those students who have been bullied, abused, going through upsetting/difficult times or even scared/phobic of dogs. The dog will bring much joy and help to all the students they meet and are happy to provide plenty of hugs to the students they are spending time with. Students who struggle with social interaction can find a reassuring friend in a dog.

**Measures in place**

* The Chair of Governors, the governing board and staff at St Levan School agree that a school dog will benefit the children and staff of St Levan School.
* Only the school dog is allowed on the premises. All other dogs must not come on site unless they are a known therapy or assistance dog and the Head Teacher has been informed beforehand.
* The dog is chosen because it is an intelligent breed that is well trained and which is known to be good with children, and is very sociable and friendly.
* A risk/benefit assessment has been undertaken and this will be reviewed annually.
* The dog will be kept on a lead when moving between classrooms or on a walk and will be under the full control and supervision of a trained adult.
* Children must never be left alone with the dog and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times.
* Children will be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dog e.g.

Children should remain calm around the dog.

Children should not make sudden movements or stare into a dog’s eyes. as this could be threatening for the dog.

Children should not put their face near a dog and should always approach it standing up.

Children should never go near or disturb the dog when it is sleeping or eating.

Children must not be allowed to play roughly with the dog.

Children should be careful to stroke the dog on his body, chest, back and not by his face.

* If the dog is surrounded by a large number of children, the dog could become nervous and agitated. Therefore the adult in charge of the dog must ensure that s/he monitors the situation.
* Dogs express their feelings through their body language. Growling or bearing of teeth indicates that the dog is feeling angry or threatened. Flattened ears, tail lowered or between their legs, hiding behind their owner, whining or growling are signs that the dog is frightened or nervous. If the dog is displaying any of these warning signs he should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment.
* Children should not eat close to the dog.
* Children should always wash their hands after handling a dog.
* Any dog foul should be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately.
* Parents will be consulted on allowing their children access to the dog.
* If the dog is ill he will not be allowed into school.
* Appropriately trained staff will maintain records and anecdotal evidence of the work and impact of the school dog.
* All visitors will be informed on arrival that there is a dog in school and related protocols on arrival and office staff will relay visitor issues to the Head Teacher.
* The office will know the whereabouts of the dog and which staff are supervising at all times.
* The dog will be included in the fire evacuation procedure under the supervision of Miss Finch.

**Appendix 2 School Dog Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

Q Who is the legal owner of the dog and who pays for its costs?

*A The legal owner of the dog will be Miss Finch; she will bear the costs associated with owning the dog; the school budget will support insurance and staff training costs where appropriate.*

Q Is the dog from a reputable breeder?

*A Yes. The dog is from a home where both parents were seen and has been specifically chosen for its temperament.*

Q Will the dog be a distraction?

*A The dog will be kept in a dedicated space in Class Two, where it will have its cage, bedding and bowls. It will be kept separate from the children unless working, to ensure it only comes into contact with children who are happy to have contact and have parental permission for this, under strict supervision.*

*The dog will also spend time in classrooms, the library and in the garden where children can interact safely under the supervision of an adult.*

*The dog will also attend meetings with staff to support further socialisation, following consultation with staff beforehand.*

Q Is there a risk in bringing a dog into a school environment?

*A Yes there is, though there are a variety of accidents, which can happen within the school environment which far exceed the number of injuries or incidents caused by a dog. Therefore, it is just another risk that needs to be managed. A thorough risk/benefit assessment has been carried out and this is included in this document.*

Q Has a risk assessment been undertaken?

*A Yes, we have carefully considered having a dog in school and sought advice from many sources, including other schools that successfully have a school dog and therapy dog owners, and the dog has been fully temperament tested by a registered veterinarian.*

Q Who is responsible for training?

*A Miss Finch will be the legal owner of the dog and as a result, will be responsible for it’s training. Appropriate professional training will be obtained and the dog will be registered as a school dog with the Pets As Therapy charity.*

Q How will the dog be toileted to ensure hygiene for all?

*A In the interest of health and hygiene our school dog will be toileted when taken out for short walks in the grounds and in a dedicated fenced area of the garden which pupils will not be allowed to enter. Only staff members will clear this away appropriately leaving no trace on the* ground, *cleaning the area with disinfectant if needed.*

Q How will the dog’s welfare be considered?

*A The dog will be walked regularly and given free time outside. Parents will be able to give*

*permission in advance to allow their child to be able to walk with a member of staff and the dog during that time. This will also be used as a behaviour reward, in line with our behaviour policy. The dog will be kept in Class Two and will only have planned and supervised contact with children and visitors. The dog will have unlimited access to food and water. We will work carefully to ensure the dog’s welfare is always considered.*

Q How will this be managed where children have allergies?

*A Children will not need to touch the dog, which will relieve the possibility of allergic reactions. We already manage a number of allergies at school and this will be no different for children and adults that are allergic to dogs. Individual needs will always be met and we are happy to work with parents to put additional control measures in place for individual allergies. The breed of dog is known for minimal moulting, he is given a high quality food and regularly groomed to reduce any possibility of allergens.*

Q My child is frightened of dogs; how will you manage this?

*A Access to the dog is carefully managed and supervised and children do not need to have close contact with it unless parental permission for this has been given. We hope to work closely with parents of children who are fearful of dogs to alleviate their fear and to teach them how to manage this.*

**Appendix 3 School Dog Risk/Benefit Assessment**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| What is the **Task/Activity**or**Environment** You Are Assessing? | What **Risks**Are Present or May BeGenerated? | What **Benefits** Are Present or May Be Generated? | What **Precautions** are Already in Place to Either Eliminate or Reduce The Risk of an Accident Happening**(Existing Controls)?** | What **Likelihood/****Probability** is there of an Accident occurring?*(Risk Rating Matrix Table 1)* | What is The **Risk Level** when precautions are observed*(Risk Rating Matrix Table 2*) |
| Dog being present in… **Classrooms** | Possibility of provoked aggression from dog through mistreatment | Learning to be respectful of living things, to read body language,to understand cause and effect. | Dogs tested for temperament and registered with Pets as Therapy after testing by provocation. | **Remote** | **Low Risk** |
| Possibility of unprovoked aggression from dog | Learning to be respectful of living things, to read body language. | No known history of aggressive response.Dogs always supervised during interaction with children. Children’s interaction with dogs supported.Temperament of dogs tested before allowing into school. As above, plus close & careful supervision by owners who are fully aware of temperament/ mood changes of animals. | **Improbable** | **Low Risk** |
| Danger of tripping over (obstruction) | Learning to be aware of risk and making appropriate choices.Improved concentration. | Dog to be moved when in areas of potential obstruction. | **Possible** | **Low Risk** |
| Issues of hygiene | Learning a thorough hand-washing routine that eliminates germs.Improved hygiene standards. | Dogs own hygiene/ cleanliness carefully monitored. Children encouraged and reminded to wash hands after contact with animal. | **Improbable** | **Low Risk** |
| Children/adults with fear of animals (contact, fear of barking etc) | Learning that animals can provide great joy and comfort and how to interact with them in an appropriate manner.Improved confidence. | Awareness of children who are less confident around dog. Effort given to explaining the feelings, mood, temperament, and changes in the dog. Dog contained on a lead when around people with fear of animals. | **Possible** | **Low Risk** |
| **Shared areas indoors e.g. corridor** | Obstruction from dog | Learning to be aware of risk and making appropriate choices.Improved concentration. | Dog to be moved when in areas of potential obstruction. | **Possible** | **Medium Risk** |
| Dogs response to visitors ringing the doorbell - barking/visual aggression | Learning that animals behave in reaction to different stimuli and whyLearning that there is a responsibility for others when an animal owner | Dogs kept away from visitors. Reassurance to visitors of guarding instinct only.If present, dog to be introduced to visitors whilst secure (on lead/held) | **Possible** | **Low Risk** |
| Hazards as present in classrooms |  |  |  |  |
| **Stairs** | Danger of tripping due to obstruction from dog | Learning to be aware of risk and making appropriate choicesImproved concentration | Dog to be supervised on stairs at all times. Where planning allows, avoid times of high traffic flow. | **Possible** | **Medium risk** |
| **Transition times** | Hazards as present in classrooms |  |  |  |  |
| **Playground/****Driveway** | Danger to vehicles | Learning that there is a responsibility for others when an animal owner. | Dog not to be in school driveway during arrival/ departure. | **Improbable** | **Low Risk** |
| Risk of accidents during play with the dog (tripping/ bites) | Learning to be respectful of living things, to read body language,to understand cause and effect. | Dog to be on lead and supervised at all times during playtimes.Children educated to understand limits of play/ danger of teasing/ over-enthusiastic play with dog. | **Remote** | **Low risk** |

**Table 1**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Likelihood/Probability** | **Meaning** |
| Likely/Frequent | Occurs repeatedly/event only to be expected |
| Probable | Not surprised/will occur several times |
| Possible | Could occur sometimes |
| Remote | Unlikely, though conceivable |
| Impossible | So unlikely the probability is close to zero |

**Table 2**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Risk Level** | **Action Required** |
| High Risk | Reasonable steps must be taken as soon as possible to reduce the risks and before the activity is allowed to continue. |
| Medium Risk | Risks to be reduced if the benefits outweigh the costs. If it is easy and the cost to make the risk safer it is not prohibitive – do it! |
| Low Risk | Risk is regarded as acceptable. There is no more risk than is likely to be encountered in normal life. |