



THE KENNEL CLUB
EDUCATIONAL TRUST

Bark and Read

Standards of Practice for providers of
animal assisted interventions in schools



Foreword



The Bark and Read Foundation, supported by The Kennel Club Educational Trust, was set up to provide financial and practical support for the amazing work of individuals and charities, big and small, who bring dogs into classrooms and libraries to assist children and young people to become confident and happy readers. The idea is very simple – reading with dogs helps children to develop their reading skills, encourages positive behaviour and helps build self-confidence and self-esteem. Reading with dogs inspires children to have fun and enjoy the experience of reading.

In recent years, awareness of the benefits such programmes can bring to schools has grown amongst educators and amongst the dog-loving public at large. Canine-assisted reading programmes can now be found nationwide. In order to ensure that these programmes are carried out with the safety, welfare, comfort and enjoyment of both people and dogs in mind, all the Bark and Read partners and The Kennel Club Educational Trust have come together to draw up these Standards of Practice for providers of animal assisted interventions in schools.

Through these standards of practice, we aim to improve understanding of what these programmes are all about and what they can achieve, and to provide clear guidance to organisations providing these services, to individual volunteer handlers and to schools regarding their responsibilities towards the dogs and the children and young people who take part in these programmes. By putting clear, consistent and credible practices at the heart of everything we do, we can ensure that everyone who takes part, human and canine, has a safe and rewarding experience. These standards of practice are under ongoing review and this current revision reflects our greater understanding of animal assisted interventions and what these can do for people.

All of our Bark and Read partners have participated in drawing up and approving these standards and have undertaken to adopt them.

We are proud to launch these standards of practice and we extend our thanks to Peter Gorbing, CEO of Dogs for Good, for his chairmanship of the standards of practice workshop meetings and to all the Bark and Read partners for their support in making them possible and for their ongoing commitment to helping children learn to love reading with the support of some amazing canine companions.

Gerald King

Chairman

The Kennel Club Educational Trust

Why standards are important to the Bark and Read Alliance

- To build understanding of the benefits dogs can bring in schools and build credibility for the practice based on clear standards
- To highlight the importance of people and dogs who plan to work in schools being appropriately trained and suitable for their role in school; and to help guard against poor practice
- To promote quality and consistency among practitioners working in schools to deliver the best possible outcomes for people and dogs and to ensure there are clear expectations of the practice from all involved

1. Dog welfare and wellbeing standards

- 1.1** Dogs should be in good health to undertake the role they are required to do
- 1.2** Handlers must use only positive reward-based training methods and equipment
- 1.3** Dogs must travel confidently and comfortably in any mode of transport
- 1.4** Handlers must have a policy covering procedures in extreme weather conditions, which is implemented when appropriate
- 1.5** Each active session with the dog must be no longer than one hour and dogs should work for no more than three active hours during a day. They should have access to a quiet, safe and comfortable place to rest for a proportionate break between sessions. During this time, only the dog's handler should be allowed access to the dog
- 1.6** Dogs must have access to fresh drinking water at all times
- 1.7** Dogs must be given the opportunity to toilet when required, in an appropriate place provided by the school
- 1.8** If a dog shows signs of stress, anxiety, discomfort or fatigue, they must be taken out of the situation and only brought back into the session if fully recovered and the issue causing the stress has been identified and addressed
- 1.9** Enough space must be provided in the working area for the dog to be able to move about comfortably and lay down
- 1.10** Dogs must be re-assessed regularly to confirm that they are in good health, both physically and emotionally and have the appropriate temperament to continue working. Ideally, this assessment should be conducted once a year, and no less than once every two years, or after a period of significant absence. Organisations must have a clear policy on approval and assessment
- 1.11** The handler is responsible for ensuring that the dog is not put into any potential situations which may compromise the dog's health and wellbeing
- 1.12** Dogs must not be expected to mix with unfamiliar dogs
- 1.13** Dogs must only wear items of uniform designed for dogs, such as jackets, leads and bandanas, as specified by the service provider's own uniform code or policy. Fancy dress or clothing not appropriate for dogs are not permitted

2. General health, hygiene, safety and legislative standards

- 2.1** Sensible precautions must be in place to minimise the risk of the spread of infectious disease e.g. hand washing before and after each session, for the handler and child
- 2.2** Dogs with wounds must not be allowed to participate in a session
- 2.3** People with open wounds must not be allowed to participate in a session, although dressed wounds are acceptable
- 2.4** Dogs must be free of disease or infection. AAI sessions must be postponed at the first sign of any illness and only resumed once the dog is back to normal good health. If the illness has required veterinary attention and treatment, clearance to resume work should be given by a vet
- 2.5** Humans or dogs that are immunosuppressed due to illness and/or certain types of medication must not be involved in AAI sessions without medical approval
- 2.6** Dogs must be up to date and compliant with vaccinations, in line with current WSAVA guidelines and/or Titer testing
- 2.7** Dogs must be free of parasites and receive regular worm/flea treatments
- 2.8** Bitches in season must not be involved in any AAI work
- 2.9** Dogs must be discouraged from licking people and handlers should manage excessive salivation
- 2.10** Service providers and schools must ensure that risk assessments are carried out, specific to the AAI programmes taking place, and that all relevant parties have access to them. Schools must take into account any relevant and specific risks in relation to people interacting with a dog (e.g. allergies; health issues, such as immunosuppression; fear of dogs) and ensure the handler is fully aware of these risks and any necessary policy or action associated with them
- 2.11** Service providers and schools must ensure that appropriate liability insurance is in place in relation to the programmes taking place, with copies available to all relevant parties
- 2.12** Schools and service providers are expected to be up to date with current legislation and policies regarding working with dogs and dog health and welfare, safeguarding of animals and children, GDPR standards and procedures

3. Dog training standards

- 3.1** The handler and dog must work to the minimum standards required by The Kennel Club Silver Good Citizen Award, or to an equivalent standard
- 3.2** Dogs must walk calmly on a loose lead at all time
- 3.3** Dogs must be appropriately socialised and specifically oriented to be familiar and comfortable in the school environment before engaging with children

4. Dog behaviour standards

4.1. Dogs involved in active sessions in schools must:

- a) Be a minimum of 12 months of age
- b) Not bark, mouth, jump up at, or paw people
- c) Be adaptable to new environments and unexpected stimuli, such as new smells, objects, and sudden noises
- d) Be socially confident, enjoy human interaction, and be relaxed and calm in the company of children, even when there is a level of noise and erratic behaviour around
- e) Be comfortable with appropriate physical interaction e.g. grooming, and not respond unduly negatively to unexpected lively behaviour from children
- f) Be comfortable engaging with children that may have physical/learning disabilities, and around mechanical aids e.g. wheelchairs, where relevant
- g) Exhibit no guarding of resources e.g. food/toys or avoidance behaviour
- h) Take treats gently when offered and not snatch toys from hands
- i) Be easily identifiable as a dog performing a clear role in the school



5. General standards for handlers working in schools

5.1 Handlers:

- a) Handlers must be able to supply references and a parent/guardian/staff member must be in attendance with the children at all times. Handlers must also, where specifically required by the school's policy and insurance arrangements, be prepared to undergo DBS clearance (PVG in Scotland)
- b) Must be covered by appropriate public liability insurance
- c) Must ensure they are aware of the child protection and safeguarding procedures within the school
- d) Must know the dog well and have passed an assessment for working with that dog
- e) Must be in control of the dog at all times, with the dog on a static lead
- f) Must be competent in understanding that dog's behaviour/body language and their health and wellbeing needs. Only use positive reward-based dog training methods. Be able to recognise initial signs of stress, anxiety, discomfort, illness and fatigue in the dog they are working with, and act suitably, including ending the session early if necessary
- g) Must be equipped with the necessary training and knowledge to ensure sessions are effective and safe and should be prepared to withdraw from the classroom or school if the school is not meeting the standards required of it to ensure safe and effective sessions for the children, dog and handler
- h) Must identify with the school an appropriate place for toileting the dog that meets the health and safety needs of the dog and the school. Dog waste must be picked-up, bagged and disposed of in an agreed manner
- i) Must ensure that the dog is groomed and clean before going to the school
- j) Must be aware of relevant risk assessments and associated procedures, including fire evacuation, and assist in their development if necessary
- k) Must be aware of the appropriate expectations on them in relation to confidentiality. At a minimum, they should seek permission in relation to the following:
 - Having access to personal data on pupils if appropriate, e.g. name, medical information etc
 - Taking and using photographs
 - Posting photographs/information on social media
 - Identifying pupils on social media or other forms of publicity
 - Discussing and identifying pupils outside of the school environment

6. General standards for schools

- 6.1 The Bark and Read philosophy is that it is not in a dog's best interests to be in a school unless there is a dedicated handler working with the dog who has no other responsibilities except to look after the dog and to put the dog's well-being first in all instances. Where a dog is working in a school on a longer-term basis, the school must agree a named person who is responsible for the dog's welfare and wellbeing as part of their documented job role/description. The dog must have a legally identified owner who is ultimately responsible for the lifetime wellbeing of the dog. A dog must not be owned by a school. Dogs belonging to teachers, teaching

assistants or anyone whose job is primarily pupil-facing cannot join a Bark and Read programme unless they are part of an employee volunteering programme on a strictly extracurricular basis, outside of their working hours when they have no supervisory responsibilities. Dogs working hours must conform to those specified at point 1.5

6.2 Schools:

- a) Schools must ensure that a parent/guardian/staff member must be in attendance with the children at all times when the handler and dog are present. Where specifically required by the school's policy and insurance arrangements, handlers must also, be prepared to undergo DBS clearance (PVG in Scotland)
- b) Must ensure that the handler is covered by appropriate public liability insurance
- c) Must ensure that handlers are aware of child protection and safeguarding procedures within the school
- d) Must ensure that there is an appropriate adult/guardian or staff member present at all times while the handler is working with the children and should supply resources as required
- e) Must ensure handlers are aware of the establishment's Health and Safety policy, including fire drill arrangements
- f) Must provide a suitable environment for the dog and handler to operate in. This should be discussed and agreed between the school and the handler/service provider prior to work starting in the school
- g) Must identify with the handler an appropriate place for toileting the dog that meets the health and safety needs of the dog and the school
- h) Should provide handlers with useful background information about the school, the working day etc.
- i) Should supply any appropriate resources that are required, such as reading materials, hand sanitisers etc. Where resources are provided by the handler/service provider, this must be agreed in advance with the school
- j) Must take responsibility for all communication regarding the scheme with parents, including obtaining consent for sessions. Where a handler/service provider wishes to communicate with parents, this must be done through the school. Schools must ensure the handler is fully aware of any relevant and specific risks in relation to people interacting with a dog (e.g. allergies; health issues, such as immunosuppression; fear of dogs) and any necessary policy or action associated with them
- k) Must provide and agree with the handler, a suitable and consistent area for a dog to rest, where he will not be disturbed and has access to fresh water
- l) Outcomes being worked towards should be agreed between the school and the handler
- m) Must ensure handlers/service providers are aware of the expectations on them in relation to confidentiality
- n) Must work with the handler to provide a suitable education programme for children and staff on how to behave around and interact with a dog, e.g. The Kennel Club 'Safe & Sound' or equivalent. This should take place before the dog is introduced into the school



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