



Standard Operating Procedure:

Therapy Dog Management

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STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE Therapy Dog Management



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Owner: Health & Safety Manager

Approved By: Head / Bursar

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1. Purpose

Portsmouth Grammar School may use a therapy dog to support pupil wellbeing, emotional regulation and pastoral provision. While this can provide significant benefit, it also introduces foreseeable risks including phobias, allergies, hygiene issues, inappropriate interaction, safeguarding concerns and animal welfare considerations.

The purpose of this SOP is to establish the School's governance framework for the safe management of the therapy dog on site, ensuring that risks to Pupils, Staff, Contractors and Visitors are reduced so far as reasonably practicable, while also protecting the welfare of the dog. The legal basis for this sits within the school's general duties under health and safety law, its duty to assess risk, its equality duties where reasonable adjustments may be relevant, and the welfare duties owed to the animal.

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2. Scope

This SOP applies to the management of **'Buster'**, the School therapy dog, when present on School premises or engaged in School-led activities. It applies to:

- pastoral and wellbeing sessions
- supervised interactions with pupils
- general presence on site as a calming influence
- movement through School buildings and grounds
- storage, rest and toilet arrangements
- incident response and record keeping

This SOP sits above the therapy dog risk assessment and any individual pupil-specific arrangements.

3. Legislative & Governance Framework

This procedure is informed by:

- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- Equality Act 2010
- Animal Welfare Act 2006

The School must assess and manage risks to employees and to others affected by its activities, including pupils and visitors. It must also consider reasonable adjustments where disability-related needs arise and ensure the needs of the dog are met through reasonable welfare provision.

External Provider, Training and Assurance

Buster's attendance in school is supported by participation in the PAWS Therapy Dog CPD Certification Programme. PAWS describes this programme as being intended for schools, educational establishments and other workplaces, and states that it includes structured training, an in-person workplace dog assessment, and access to guidance, templates and support materials relevant to therapy dog practice.

The school recognises the value of external assessment and training in supporting safe and informed practice. However, such involvement does not transfer responsibility away from the school. The school remains responsible for determining whether Buster is suitable to attend, what activities are permitted, what control measures apply, and whether continued attendance remains appropriate considering safeguarding, behaviour, welfare, medical, hygiene, operational or incident-related concerns.

Accordingly, the school shall ensure that:

1. Relevant provider documentation is retained on file, including participation records, any suitability or assessment outcome, and relevant insurance details where available.
2. This SOP, the associated risk assessment, and any pupil-specific arrangements are reviewed alongside any external guidance relied upon.
3. Any concerns regarding behaviour, welfare, handling, allergies, phobias, incidents or suitability are reviewed internally and acted upon promptly.
4. The school may suspend or withdraw approval for Buster to attend at any time if it considers this necessary for safety, welfare or operational reasons.

External advice and programme participation may inform good practice, but final authority for the use of Buster on school premises rests with the school.

4. Roles & Responsibilities

4.1 Board of Governors

Retain oversight of safeguarding, health and safety governance and resourcing.

4.2 Head / Bursar

Ensure suitable arrangements are in place for therapy dog management and that this activity is supported by appropriate risk assessment, supervision and review.

4.3 Health & Safety Manager

- maintain the overarching governance framework
- support preparation and review of the therapy dog risk assessment
- advise on allergy, hygiene, safeguarding and incident controls
- review incidents and escalate concerns where required

4.4 Designated Dog Handlers

The designated handlers for Buster are They are responsible for day-to-day control of the dog while on School premises, including supervision, behaviour monitoring, welfare, session suitability and removal from activity if concerns arise.

Name:	Role:
Amy Wilson-Smith	Head of the Junior School – Lead Handler
Richard Bristow	Senior Deputy Head
Graham Ryan	Head of Biology

4.5 Pastoral / Curriculum Staff

Where pupils engage with Buster, relevant staff must support safe participation, reinforce boundaries and escalate concerns regarding phobias, allergies, distress or behaviour.

4.6 Staff

Staff must follow School arrangements, not encourage uncontrolled interaction and report concerns promptly.

5. General Management Principles

Buster must only be on site where:

- a designated handler is present
- the dog is fit, calm and suitable to work
- the planned activity is proportionate and supervised
- known pupil or staff sensitivities have been considered
- the dog's own welfare can be protected

The risk assessment reflects these principles by requiring close supervision, preventing unrestricted wandering, logging sessions, restricting access to the dog's rest area and requiring the dog to be removed where welfare becomes compromised.

6. Phobias, Anxiety and Allergies

The presence of a therapy dog must be managed sensitively. The School shall identify, so far as reasonably practicable, individuals with known dog phobias, anxiety reactions or allergies and plan arrangements accordingly. Risk management may include advance notification, familiarisation, restricted access, room choice, route planning and segregation.

7. Hygiene, Health and Infection Control

The School shall ensure proportionate hygiene controls are in place when Buster is on site. This includes ensuring the dog is appropriately groomed, vaccinated, wormed and flea-treated, discouraging licking, providing hand hygiene after contact, controlling waste disposal and cleaning contaminated surfaces appropriately.

The dog should be up to date with vaccinations and regular veterinary checks, have flea and worm treatment, have hand gel or wipes available after handling, discourage licking, dispose of waste safely, keep the toilet area away from the main school site or segregated, and disinfect affected surfaces.

8. Restricted Areas

Buster shall not enter unsuitable or incompatible areas. As a minimum, this includes:

- areas where a person with a relevant allergy is present
- areas where a person with a significant dog phobia is present
- any space where the risk assessment indicates exclusion is necessary.

Restricted Areas:
Canteen/Kitchen and Food preparation areas
Science Laboratories
Design and Technology Workshops
Toilets/Shower Rooms
Medical Treatment Rooms
Vehicle movement areas, loading/delivery points and contractor work zones

9. Safeguarding, Supervision and Pupil Interaction

All interaction between pupils and Buster must be supervised by a designated handler or other authorised adult. The dog must not be allowed to wander freely, and pupils must not be permitted unsupervised access.

This includes obtaining consent, allowing withdrawal, monitoring for distress, logging sessions, keeping the dog closely supervised, teaching dog-safety behaviours and stress signals, ensuring first aid access, recording incidents, keeping the dog's rest area restricted, and ensuring Pupils are always supervised.

Where individual pupils present additional needs or behavioural risks, a separate individual risk assessment should be completed. Your example assessment already anticipates this.

10. Dog Welfare

The welfare of Buster is a central control measure, not an optional extra. The dog must be physically fit, psychologically well, given access to water, rest, toilet breaks and a safe quiet space, and must be removed from activity where signs of stress, fatigue or compromised welfare are observed.

This aligns directly with the Animal Welfare Act 2006 duty to take reasonable steps to meet the needs of the animal, and it is already reflected in your example assessment through rest periods, walking breaks, a care plan, a safe space, maximum on-site time and removal if stressed.

11. Time on Site and Rest Periods

Buster's time on site must be planned and limited appropriately. Based on the current assessment, the School standard shall be that the dog is present on site for a maximum of **4 hours per day**, including passive presence as a calming influence, with mandatory rest, toilet and exercise periods incorporated.

The handler shall also avoid moving the dog through the site during peak congestion periods where reasonably practicable.

12. Movement Around Site

Movement of the dog around site must be controlled. Routes should, where reasonably practicable, avoid busy transition periods, high-density circulation areas and unsuitable spaces. Where walking with a pupil forms part of an activity, the dog must remain under handler control.

13. Insurance, Veterinary Care and Records

The School shall ensure that appropriate records are maintained, including as relevant:

- handler designation
- risk assessment and review dates
- veterinary checks and vaccinations
- insurance information

- session logs
 - incident records
 - individual pupil-specific assessments where required
-

14. Incident Response

Any bite, scratch, significant distress event, uncontrolled behaviour, contamination issue or near miss must be managed promptly. First aid must be sought where required, the incident must be recorded in accordance with School procedures, and arrangements must be reviewed before further sessions take place.

The uploaded assessment already requires first aid access, immediate response where a scratch or bite occurs, and logging of incidents in line with organisational procedures.

15. Information, Communication and Signage

The School shall ensure proportionate communication so that staff, pupils, parents and visitors can anticipate the presence of the therapy dog where necessary. This may include signage, pastoral communication, familiarisation activities and staff briefing.

16. Training

Designated dog handlers will have received training including:

- familiarisation with this SOP and RA
- understanding of dog stress signals - PAWS
- understanding of safeguarding boundaries - PAWS
- incident response expectations - PAWS
- hygiene / cleaning arrangements - PAWS
- when to remove the dog from activity - PAWS

17. Monitoring & Review

This SOP and the associated therapy dog risk assessment must be reviewed:

- annually
- following any incident or near miss
- following any significant change in handler arrangements
- where new allergy, phobia or safeguarding information arises
- where the dog's behaviour, health or suitability changes

18. Risk Assessment: Therapy Dog

Hazard	Who can be harmed & how?	Risk	Controls	Residual Risk
Animal phobias	Pupils, Staff and Visitors - distress, anxiety, avoidance of areas, reduced wellbeing	Med	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents/caregivers asked to identify Pupils known to have a phobia or fear reaction to dogs. All Pupils will have familiarisation sessions before the support begins to ensure confidence and comfort levels. Where there are phobias of Pupils, dogs are not banned from attending but every effort will be made to segregate dogs from those with phobias. Staff that have phobias will be informed of dog's arrival and every effort will be made to separate dog and phobic staff members. There will be a whole school log of humans with phobias or anxieties of dogs. Display board/assembly created to set safety boundaries. Signs will be displayed in reception areas and on doors of rooms where the dog is present to make everyone including visitors aware there is a dog present. Plans will be created to support those with phobias. Phobia information should be reviewed periodically and shared with relevant staff on a need-to-know basis. 	Low
Allergies	Pupils, Staff and Visitors - allergic reaction, respiratory irritation, skin irritation	Med	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents/caregivers/staff are asked to identify those with allergic reactions to dogs. These people may have restricted access depending on their allergic trigger. On the rare chance an allergic reaction does not subside, medical attention must be sought. The therapy dog will be regularly groomed and bathed to remove dander and excess hair. The dog will not eat any food stuffs of known food allergic triggers 48 hours before attending school site. All known humans with allergies will be logged. Communication with School Medical Centre. Relevant medical information should be confirmed where appropriate. 	Low
Zoonotic diseases and pathogens	Pupils, Staff and Visitors – illness, contamination, infection risk	Med	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The therapy dog will be up to date with all vaccinations and will receive regular veterinary check-ups. They will have regular flea and worm treatment. Antibacterial hand gel / wipes will be available after handling the dog. Dog licking will be discouraged. All waste produced (accidental or routine) will be handled and disposed of safely. The dog's toilet area will be away from the main school site or separated to avoid potential contamination risks. All surfaces will be properly washed and disinfected in accordance with the school's health and safety standards. Communication with Cleaning Lead Supervisor. Written records of vaccinations, flea and worming treatment, and cleaning arrangements should be maintained. 	Low
Areas not accessible to the dog	Other service users, tenants, clients and caregivers – unwanted exposure to dog presence, allergens, or anxiety triggers	Med	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The dog will not enter any food preparation areas within the school. The dog will not enter any practical workshop/high traffic/medical or toilet areas within the school. The dog will not enter any areas where a phobic person is present. The dog will not enter any space where someone has allergies to pet hair, saliva or dander. Restricted areas should be clearly understood by handlers and relevant staff. 	Low

<p>Safeguarding and protection of children (human behaviour)</p>	<p>Pupils - distress, discomfort, emotional harm, inappropriate or unsupported participation</p>	<p>Med</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Valid consent to be obtained from human participants/caregivers. Participants can withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. Vulnerable groups/participants should be monitored for signs of withdrawal, and the session should stop if this is observed. Sessions will be logged. The facilitator will monitor for signs of distress in the participant and end the session if necessary. Sessions should only take place in suitable supervised spaces. 	<p>Low</p>
<p>Safeguarding and protection of children (dog behaviour)</p>	<p>Pupils and staff - scratches, bites, distress, fear response</p>	<p>Med</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Checks are carried out by dog handlers and facilitators to ensure dogs are clean, healthy and suitable to work. Dogs and handlers have valid and appropriate insurance. Dogs will always be closely supervised by the handler. Dogs will not be allowed to wander unrestricted around the building. Participants will be closely supervised by the handler. Participants will be given dog safety training with regards to behaviour around dogs prior to interaction with the therapy dog. Participants will be taught to recognise dog stress signals both before and during sessions. Access to first aid will be available at the organisation. In the unlikely event a scratch or bite occurs first aid and medical attention will be sought immediately. Any incidents will be recorded according to organisational procedures and logged in incident books. If necessary medical attention will be sought. The dog's rest area will be only accessible by the dog handler and trusted staff members. Pupils will always be supervised. The dog will never be left on their own for any length of time. The therapy dog will wear their uniform to inform all that they are on duty. A clear escalation process should be followed for any scratch, bite, near miss, or behavioural concern, including immediate withdrawal of the dog pending review. 	<p>Low</p>
<p>The protection of the dog</p>	<p>The dog - stress, fatigue, poor welfare, overhandling</p>	<p>Med</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The dog handler is responsible for the dog and ensuring that their dog is physically fit and their psychological wellbeing is protected and not compromised. Dog first aid kits should be available and dog handlers are responsible for this. The Animal Welfare Act 2006 should always be adhered to. These laws apply to all dog owners/keepers, but it is every staff/adult member's responsibility to follow the 5 freedoms. Dogs will be monitored for signs of stress by the handler and removed should they consider the dog stressed. Dogs will be familiarised with the setting, given access to water and an appropriate place to rest, toilet and exercise. Only the handler will interact with them at these times. Dogs can be present on site for a maximum of 4 hours per day. This includes just being present and a calming influence. Mandatory rest times must be incorporated into the dog's day. Mandatory periods of time where the dog is taken for walks, toilet breaks and rest periods allowing them to meet their needs. If at any point the dog's welfare becomes compromised the session will end immediately and the dog removed and taken to their safe space. Dogs will have a care plan created by dog handler and PAWS trainer. The therapy space will be large enough for both dog, handler and child to move around and complete small activities. The therapy space will be within close proximity to an outside area. The handler will take the utmost care to avoid busy periods of the day when walking the dog around the school site, class change overs, breaks, and start and end of days. The care plan should be reviewed periodically and after any incident or change in behaviour. 	<p>Low</p>

Practical activities with dog on site	Pupils, Staff and Visitors - trips, slips, minor injury, loss of control while walking with dog	Med	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any equipment used should be monitored for signs of wear and tear. Trips and slips, first aid will be sought. When walking with a dog and child the dog will be on a double lead so the handler still has full control. If the young person has displayed strong dog handling skills, opportunities will become available for them to walk independently with close supervision. Individual risk assessments of participants will be created if deemed necessary and appropriate staff support allocated. Routes used for walking should be suitable and avoid busy circulation periods where possible. 	Low
Dog escape / loss of control	Staff, Pupils, visitors, the dog - collision, distress, bites, road or site hazard	Med	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The dog will always remain under the control of the handler. The dog will not wander unrestricted around the building. Double lead arrangements will be used where appropriate. A simple lost dog / escape procedure should be known by relevant staff. 	Low
Toileting accidents / contamination in school areas	Staff, Pupils, cleaners - slips, contamination, hygiene risk	Med	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All waste produced (accidental or routine) will be handled and disposed of safely. The dog's toilet area will be away from the main school site or separated to avoid potential contamination risks. Surfaces will be washed and disinfected. Spill response materials, PPE, and cleaning instructions should be readily available. 	Low
Visits / contact with visitors unfamiliar with the dog	Visitors, staff, Pupils - surprise, distress, anxiety, inappropriate interaction	Med	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signs displayed in reception areas and on doors where the dog is present. The dog remains supervised by the handler. Safety boundaries communicated through display board / assembly. Reception and relevant staff should be aware when the dog is on site so visitors can be informed where appropriate. 	Low

19. Document Control

Version	Date	Author	Approved By	Summary of Changes
1.0	23/03/2026	Tim Greaves		

Controlled Document – Do Not Amend Without Authorisation