



Animals in Academy Policy

Date policy reviewed: June 2026

Policy to be reviewed: June 2028

Signed by	Date
Principal:	
Trust:	

St Thomas' CofE Primary Academy

Jesus said 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.' John 10:10

Introduction:

At St Thomas' we strive to ensure that all children and families are provided with the highest level of support, nurture, academic and pastoral care. We are a fully inclusive and attachment aware school. We ensure that all children's needs are met and that we work with all parents and carers to ensure there is open and supportive communication to remove any potential barriers to enable all children and their families to flourish. The academy recognises that a visiting animal offers the potential for a very positive learning experience for children to learn about taking care and showing responsibility for animals as well as developing an understanding of the importance of the humane treatment of living creatures.

Aims:

St Thomas C of E Academy recognises that the presence of animals in our academy can provide a valuable learning experience, but animals cannot be allowed to endanger pupil safety or disrupt learning. For that reason, there should be a clear educational purpose for an animal to reside in or visit the academy.

It is the academy's policy to notify pupil's parents when an animal is being introduced into the classroom. The academy is particularly keen to support the introduction of service animals such as hearing dogs, therapy dogs or seeing dogs and this reflects the academy's ethos of celebrating diversity and promoting inclusion.

Procedures

Animals brought to academy for short term/day visits:

- Before bringing an animal onto the academy premises during academy hours, staff and pupils must seek prior authorisation. Pupils must obtain permission from their class teacher; staff will obtain authorisation from the Principal.
- Arrangements for animal visits should be made at least 48 hours in advance to ensure that parents are appropriately notified. A letter must be sent to parents explaining about the animal visit and asking families to advise the academy of any allergies, or fears the children may have.
- Staff or parents must ensure that the animals are in good health and have had all the necessary immunisations or vaccinations. Where possible, evidence should be provided.
- Any animal brought to academy must remain under control of the responsible adult at all times (member of staff the animal belongs to or the parent of the pupil who wants to bring an animal in). The animal should be restrained on a lead or in a suitable carrier. This applies to days when academy is in session, prior to the start of academy and for any time after the academy day, whenever the animal is on the academy premises.
- Transportation of animals to and from academy will be the responsibility of the parent/guardian or other adult.

- No wild animals or protected animals will be purposely brought to the building or on academy grounds by anyone other than an authorised or licensed animal handler.
- There will be no physical contact between the animal and pupils unless it is an integral part of the learning with prior approval received from the Principal. This does not include the trained therapy dog.
- Should any pupil or adult be scratched or bitten by an animal at academy, first aid must be administered immediately and in the case of a pupil, parents will be called.
- A copy of the incident report (signed by the Principal) will be sent to the involved family and the policy for animals in academy will need to be reviewed accordingly.

Children with Medical Concerns

Health issues must be considered when assessing the appropriateness of animals in the classroom. Prior to the consideration of the introduction of an animal to the classroom, the teacher should review the medical notes of the pupils in their class to ensure there is no conflict.

It is the policy of the academy to consider the safety, health and well-being of every pupil when making decisions regarding the introduction of animals to the classroom. When there is a conflict in this area, the Principal will confer with the staff member to find an agreeable solution to the matter in consultation with others, e.g. the parents and pupil, academy and others as appropriate. If pupils have petted an animal, it is essential that they wash their hands after the activity and that this is supervised to ensure that it is thorough.

Responsibility

The owner or handler of any animal, including a service animal, is responsible for the animal at all times and must take responsibility in the event of any harm accidentally or otherwise that befalls a child. All staff must complete a risk assessment form prior to the introduction of an animal in the classroom which must be signed off by the Principal.

The Care and Humane Treatment of Animals

- Animals within the academy will be handled, treated, and cared for in a humane manner.
- Enclosures must be appropriate to the animal and it is the responsibility of the staff member to ensure that the animal has sufficient food, water and a comfortable environment to reduce the stress for the animal.
- Habitats must be maintained and cleaned by staff, not pupils.

Guidance on Bringing Dogs into Academy

Children can benefit educationally and emotionally, increase their understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills through contact with pets. In addition to these benefits, children take great enjoyment from interaction with dogs and puppies. As dogs are one of the most popular pets, it is more than likely that children will have some exposure to a dog while still at academy.

Additionally, dogs are often brought into academies from outside agencies, e.g. Guide Dogs for the Blind, as well as animal rescue charities such as the Dogs Trust and occasionally by pupils, parents or teachers. Only rarely does a dog bite without warning.

From September 2026, there will be a trained and certified therapy dog at St Thomas'. This will not be every day. Hunter (The St Thomas' therapy dog) is being trained by 'The Dog Mentor' and will be certified as a trained therapy dog. There are 3 named handlers in school: Mrs Pierpoint, Mrs Buggy and Mrs Taylor. Hunter will be under the care or supervision of one of the three trained handlers when in school. When Hunter is working as a therapy dog in school, he will wear an orange collar, coat and lead so he can be easily identified.
(Mrs Pierpoint is the owner of Hunter)

Benefits of having therapy dogs in schools.

Numerous research studies have demonstrated how therapy dogs can help address school-age students' social and emotional learning needs. We have therapy dog programs with a proven track record of improving motivation for learning in children, resulting in improved outcomes.

Therapy dogs are increasingly used to support children in addressing their social and emotional learning needs in schools. This has also been found to help with literacy development. Some of the benefits recorded in school classrooms include:

- Increased school attendance
- Positive changes lead to better learning and enhanced motivation
- Growth in confidence levels
- Development of better and stronger relationships with teachers and peers due to the experience of trust and love with therapy dogs. Children learn ways to express their feelings and develop more trusting relationships
- Reducing learner anxiety behaviors causes improvement in learning outcomes like improved reading and writing skills and levels

Is there a risk in bringing a dog into a academy environment?

There are a variety of accidents which can happen within the academy environment which far exceed the number of injuries or incidents caused by dogs. Therefore, it is just another risk that can be successfully managed. We should not lose sight of the fact that 'nearly all biting accidents are preventable and very often depend on the behaviour of the child prior to the accident.'

Parents Bringing Dogs into Academy Grounds

Parents are asked not to bring dogs onto the academy grounds unless they are assistance dogs. (Also see Parent Code of Conduct Policy)

Stray Dogs on Academy Property

If there is a stray dog in your academy grounds, contact your local Council Dog Warden who will come and remove the dog from your academy. If you have a recurring problem with stray dogs on academy property, the Principal and Caretaker will look at how the site is secured. (EG - Remedial work to perimeter fencing.)

Dog Owner Walking or Exercising their Dog(s) in Academy Grounds

Academy playing fields and playgrounds are private property and should not be used for the purposes of exercising dogs. In the first instance, if it is safe to do so, a member of senior leadership will approach the dog owner and ask them to leave. If the practice continues or staff feel unable to approach the dog owner, a member of SLT will contact your Council Dog Warden or the police. If this is known to have happened, the caretaker will ensure that playing fields and/or the playground are inspected prior to use for evidence of dog fouling.

Roles and Responsibilities

- The Local Academy Committee have a responsibility to ensure that the academy has a written policy for pets and dogs in academy.
- The Principal is responsible for developing this guidance into an academy policy and implementing it.
- Teachers and staff are required to abide by this policy.