

Risk Assessment for a dog in school – September 2026

The value of pet ‘therapy’ is widely accepted as a powerful aid to stimulation and communication. Studies have shown that the presence of companion animals can improve the well-being of children and lower the rate of anxiety, simply by making the environment happier, more enjoyable and less forbidding. Murphy our school dog has been at Leighton Middle School since January 2023.

The rationale behind this decision was as follows:

- For the school to have a pet that was able to live as naturally as conditions would allow.
- The dog will belong to and to be properly cared for outside of the school day by Miss Black and her family.
- To have a pet that the children could interact with and also be of benefit to the children’s social and emotional development.

It is accepted that interacting with animals is not appropriate for all children but for some it has the potential to provide many positive benefits. The dog has been vaccinated appropriately. Regular health checks and necessary treatment will be carried out. Murphy will also be insured both privately and through Public Liability with the school. Murphy will not be able to ‘roam’ around the school and will only have access to restricted areas but it is sensible to be aware of everyone’s needs. Murphy has received training from the Dog Mentor and continues to be trained through the programme. Murphy is well integrated into school life and has started to go into classrooms and works with many pastoral groups.

The risk assessment below is a working document and will be checked annually by key staff and the governing body.

Risk 1-5 1=low 2/3=medium 4=major 5 high
Likelihood 1-5 1=improbable 2=remote 3=possible 4=probable 5=likely

Hazard	Risk	Risk 1- 5*	Likelihood	Controls in place	Review Date and Signature
Dog getting over excited when interacting with children.	Child knocked to the ground.	1	1	The dog will always be in the care of a responsible adult and will never be allowed to roam freely around the school premises. The dog will receive appropriate training in and out of school. The humans will also receive appropriate training about being around the dog.	
	Child scratched by dog.	2	2	Children will not be left unsupervised with the dog.	

				Children will be taught and have it explained that they must ask before approaching the dog, especially as young puppies are excitable and like to jump up when they are excited.	
	Child bitten by dog.	3	1	The dog will always be on a lead around school, except when he is undergoing structured training with his primary trainer, two named handlers or a trainer from The Dog Mentor or is interacting in a contained environment with pupils and his handler. Pupils will receive training about how to interact with the dog and will continue to be taught about the consequences of their actions. Education of this nature is continually given to children, and often to the whole school through assemblies. The dog has undergone formal training from the age of 12 weeks with an experienced ability dog trainer. No sessions with children will take place at times when he is particularly excitable. The dog has weekly walks with other dogs to familiarise him with different people and animals. The dog will also undergo conditioning to the school classroom environment, this training will aid future therapy or reading sessions – no session will take place if the dog is showing any signs of distress. Involving the school dog can be done in a calming/therapeutic manner. Risk of scratching and biting will reduce and the risk assessment will be reviewed as he progresses through his weekly training. All staff will have been introduced to the dog and expectations of having a school dog. He will attend the vets regularly to ensure he is in good health and that his claws are kept short. The dog will not be used to ‘calm’ children down if they are in a heightened state of emotion. The dog lives at home with children. The dog will have continued positive reinforcement strategies during the week.	

The dog gets loose from his sleeping area or lead.	As above	1	1	The dog's sleeping area is big enough for him to be happy and safe during the school day and the children are taught not to tease him, there is a stairgate on the door to the office where Murphy stays. The dog will have 'bolt holes' around school where he can have quiet and calm time so he does not become overwhelmed.	
The dog causing allergies.	Children or staff have allergic reactions	2	1	Parents are asked to inform school of known allergies regarding the dog. Parents of children who will have the opportunity to work with the dog will be informed before any children have contact with the dog so they can opt out if necessary. The breed has been chosen for its increased probability of no-shedding. Children will be taught to wash their hands after active participation with the dog.	
Children getting germs from the dog.	Children or staff will contract diseases that can be carried by dogs.	1	1	Should the dog defecate on the school site a member of staff will clear this up immediately and dispose of it in a safe manner. He will be trained to toilet in an area of the grounds that children have limited access to. The area will be disinfected as required. All immunisations are kept up to date in accordance with vet recommendations at yearly check up's. Vaccination requirements and a record will be kept of this. Flea and tick treatment is carried out at monthly intervals. The dog will not be allowed in the school dining hall at meal times; and never in the food preparation area.	
Dog becomes anxious or tired	Dog becomes irritable or distressed	1	2	The dog has safe spaces where he can go for quiet time. The dog is not to be disturbed when in his safe space. When the dog is sleeping he will not be woken up unless in emergency.	
Fire alarm	Dog being left in building	1	1	Dog will practise the fire alarm procedure and be taught to recognise the alarm sound. One of his handlers will be responsible for removing the dog from the building, or a designated member of staff. The dog will be signed in and out of school so the fire marshal will know when the dog is on site.	

Financial cost of the dog's upkeep.	Financial considerations for the school.	1	1	The dog is the responsibility of Miss Black both in a well-being and financial aspect. Murphy will be insured through the school's Public Liability. He will also be privately insured with Miss Black. The Dog Mentor training for school was funded by the school. Private dog training is financed by Miss Black.	
Claim is made against school about the dog.	School not adequately covered financially	1	1	The dog will be insured through the schools public liability insurance which will cover any claim. Certificate will be kept in office and renewed annually. The dog will also have private insurance.	