



Scoil an Chlochair **Convent Primary School**



School Therapy Dog Policy

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School Therapy Dog Policy¹

1.0 Rationale

There is an increasing body of research to support the benefit of a dog in school. MCC have placed therapy dogs in schools around Ireland providing comfort and reassurance to children with anxiety and self-confidence issues. Dogs have proven to increase the wellbeing of staff and students. ***“School Therapy dogs, they simply put a smile on your face”***. They are an additional resource for the school that benefit students and staff.

Increasingly in schools, it is becoming recognised that children's emotional wellbeing is at the root of positive behaviour and success with socialising as well as in the classroom.

A dog can support children who are anxious about school and could be the reason that they want to come in every morning. Dogs can be beneficial to assist children with difficulty transitioning into the school. Reading to dogs can help boost children's confidence and fluency. Caring for an animal can teach children responsibility and how to treat animals safely and with compassion.

Dogs are great fun to have around and can bring a caring atmosphere to a school.

2.0 Preparations for having an MCC School Dog

School leaders have taken advice from My Canine Companion (MCC), who provide training and guidance about the necessary risk assessments and insurance must be in place, as well as practical guidance.

Sheila O'Connor (Handler), Jen Coughlan (Handler) and the Convent Primary school undertake training to ensure they are competent in handling the dog, they will also receive training and guidance in dog behaviour enabling them to understand the dog's temperament. The handler(s) will remove the dog to its designated chill out zone if the dog shows any signs of stress during interactions. MCC instructor will be notified.

Toilet area is designated within the school's grounds away from the children's play areas.

A designated chill out zone will be in place for the dog before its placement in school, this will be agreed by the handler in consultation with MCC instructor.

Parents/Guardians will be informed that MCC dog will become part of the school and Parents/Guardians who do not want their child to interact with the dog will inform the school authorities.

If a child has a phobia of dogs the dog handler may offer opportunities for the child to be slowly introduced to the dog, to reduce their fear.

A picture of the MCC school therapy dog will be placed prominently in school reception to inform everyone that there is school therapy dog working in the school. This will state the dog's name, i.e. MCC school therapy dog XXXXX and the name of the main handler.

¹ Any amendments to this policy must be forwarded to My Canine Companion for approval prior to publishing.

3.0 Interactions

Interactions with children will be very carefully monitored to avoid children being hurt by play scratches and nips, and to avoid undue stress to the dog. All school therapy dogs undergo the MCC School Dog Therapy Program and receive ongoing aftercare and support for the duration the dog is in school. There will always be a responsible adult in charge of the dog during interactions with children. Children and adults are required to adhere to the following:

- Always approach the MCC school dog calmly and slowly.
- Dogs should always be encouraged to keep 4 paws on the ground.
- All interactions must remain calm with the authorised adult in control at all times.
- Children must wash their hands before and after they have been handling the dog.
- Interactions with the school therapy dog will not happen in corridors (this encourages undesirable dog behaviour) interactions will only occur in controlled environments as set out by the handler in consultation with MCC instructor.
- The number of interactions the dog can have will be dependent on the length and quality of these interactions on any given day. The handler will decide this in consultation with MCC instructor.
- Timetables for the dog are discouraged by MCC, if the school do put a timetable in place, ensure the timetable is totally flexible one agreed by the handler and MCC instructor with the welfare of the dog being the primary consideration.

All interactions are subject to approval of the main handler who is responsible for the dog's welfare while they are working in the school.

4.0 Dog Welfare

The welfare of the dog shall remain the primary concern. All school therapy dogs although allocated to the school remain under the ownership of My Canine Companion. MCC will remove a dog where they feel the welfare of the dog is not adequately catered for.

A dog that is unwell should preferably be left at home, if this is not possible the dog can remain in their chill zone. The dog shall not have any interactions with students when they are unwell.

5.0 Consultation

All staff were consulted and regard was given to their views in the preparation of this policy and plan. Students and parent/guardian representatives were also consulted and asked for their comments.

6.0 Implementation and Review

6.1 Implementation

This plan will be implemented in September 2026

6.1 Review

This policy was reviewed by staff in September 2026. The plan will be monitored and evaluated at regular Staff meetings. It will be reviewed in Term 2 in the 2029/2030 School Year.

7.0 Communication and Ratification

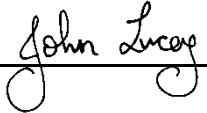
7.1 Communication

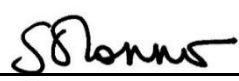
This policy is made available as part of the whole school plan. The whole plan is also available in the school office for viewing. This policy will be communicated to the school community by the following means:

- Board of Management/Other Staff members via hardcopy in office, email and SharePoint
- Parents/Guardians via hardcopy in School Development Plan in the Office

7.2 Ratification

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on 29th September 2026

Signed  Chairperson, Board of Management

Signed  Principal/Secretary, Board of Management

Appendix 1 Frequently Asked Questions

What will the MCC school dog do on a day-to-day basis?

The dog may visit different rooms around the school during a day but will have its own chill out zone designated where the dog can have downtime. This again will be designated by the handler in consultation with MCC instructor. The dog will always be kept under effective control.

How do I know that my child will be safe around the dog?

A risk assessment and policy will be in place and will be available on the school website. When moving around the school, the dog will always be under effective control. Children will receive instruction on how to interact safely with dogs.

Will my child pick up infections from the dog?

The dog will be fully vaccinated, treated regularly for worms and fleas and will not attend school if ill. Children will be required to wash their hands before and after handling the dog. There will be a dedicated dog toilet area away from areas that children access. There is also a dedicated bin for dog waste, which is labelled.

What if my child is allergic to dogs or afraid of them?

Parents/Guardians can request that their child has no contact, or restricted access to the dog in these situations.

Any amendments to this policy must be forwarded to My Canine Companion for approval prior to publishing

Appendix 2 Risk Assessment



Scoil an Chlochair Convent Primary School

Risk Assessment My Canine Companion (MCC) Dogs in School

Hazard	Who is affected/at risk	Risk rating (low, medium or high)	Actions/control measures	Person responsible
Bites and scratches	Staff, pupils and handlers	low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dogs will be under effective control at all times. Dogs must have a good temperament and be used to being around children. Dogs must be well trained not to bite, scratch or jump up. Handler will remain with dog at all times (Primary School, Units and Special Schools) Children are taught how to approach and interact with the dog. Training will be provided by MCC to all staff in relation to dog behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jen Long Sheila O'Connor
Poor hygiene and health risks	Staff, pupils and handlers	low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All dogs that visit are vaccinated, wormed, and treated for fleas All staff and pupils are required to wash their hands after contact with dogs Handlers take dog off site to toilet and safely dispose of any waste. A Dog waste bin is accessible. Dogs will be well groomed at all times and kept in good condition. Dogs will be fed food recommended by MCC only and fed treats only as advised by the handler. If a dog is unwell, they should be left at home. Interaction with a dog who is unwell 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jen Long Sheila O'Connor Caretaker

Hazard	Who is affected/at risk	Risk rating (low, medium or high)	Actions/control measures	Person responsible
			is not allowed. A dog who feels unwell may act out of character.	
Allergies	Staff and pupils	low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog breeds are hypoallergenic and low moulting. • If a parent objects to their child interacting with the dog, they should inform the school by a written document. • Alternative activities are provided in a separate room for those with allergies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jen Long • Sheila O'Connor
Phobias	Staff and pupils	low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We tell parents and children about the dog in advance • Contact with dogs is optional • Work can be done with the student to help overcome this phobia. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jen Long • Sheila O'Connor
Activities and games involving the dog	Staff, pupils, dogs and handlers	low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main handler remains with dogs at all times • Handler speaks to school staff in advance and ensure the area and activity is safe • We check with the handler and set a limit for the number of children who can interact with a dog at once. This is set by the handler. • School staff remove children who misbehave or upset dogs. • We set a time limit on activities as recommended by handlers, so dogs do not get tired. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jen Long • Sheila O'Connor
Children misbehaving	Pupils, dogs and handlers	low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are told in advance what to expect and how to behave. • School staff are present at all times (Primary School, Units and Special Schools). • The dog will be removed from a stressful situation or from children who misbehave. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jen Long • Sheila O'Connor
Damage caused to school materials,	Dogs	low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dogs remain under effective control at all times. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jen Long • Sheila O'Connor

Hazard	Who is affected/at risk	Risk rating (low, medium or high)	Actions/control measures	Person responsible
equipment and the school site			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dogs are kept in secured rooms, with closed doors. • Handlers bring suitable toys if necessary • Areas/classrooms are cleared as much as possible before dogs visit. 	
Off Site/School Grounds	Dogs, Public, handler and students		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jackets on at all times. • Dogs is under effective control, lead is on at all times. • All off site activities are risk assessed by the dogs handler 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jen Long • Sheila O'Connor