St Patrick's College Dungannon

Hope Therapy Dog Policy

St Patrick's College is committed to creating a nurturing, inclusive and supportive environment where all young people can flourish socially, emotionally and academically. As part of our whole-school wellbeing and nurture provision, Hope, our trained Therapy Dog, supports pupils in developing confidence, emotional regulation, communication skills, resilience and positive relationships.

The therapy dog programme complements the school's pastoral, wellbeing, nurture and special educational needs provision and reflects our commitment to the Six Principles of Nurture.

This policy outlines the purpose, management and operation of the Therapy Dog Programme.

Aims of the Therapy Dog Programme

The programme aims to:

- Promote emotional wellbeing and positive mental health.
- Support pupils experiencing anxiety, emotional dysregulation or low confidence.
- Develop communication and social interaction skills.
- Improve engagement with school and learning.
- Support transition from primary to post-primary education.
- Encourage positive relationships between pupils and staff.
- Contribute to a calm, nurturing and inclusive school environment.
- Provide a therapeutic and non-judgemental source of support for pupils.

Educational and Therapeutic Benefits

Research demonstrates that interaction with trained therapy dogs can:

- Reduce anxiety and stress.
- Improve emotional regulation.
- Increase motivation and engagement.
- Support communication development.
- Enhance social interaction.
- Promote self-esteem and confidence.
- Improve attendance and participation.
- Support relationship building and trust.

Within St Patrick's College, Hope provides opportunities for pupils to access emotional support in a calm, safe and nurturing environment.

Role of Hope in School

Hope may be used in a variety of ways, including:

Nurture Provision

- One-to-one nurture sessions.
- Small-group wellbeing activities.
- Emotional regulation interventions.

- Confidence-building exercises.
- Social communication activities.

Transition Support

- Summer Scheme activities.
- Primary transition visits.
- Year 8 induction activities.
- Targeted support for pupils experiencing transition anxiety.

Wellbeing Support

- Planned wellbeing interventions.
- Anxiety reduction activities.
- Emotional literacy programmes.
- Self-regulation strategies.

Social Skills Development

- Social Club activities.
- Friendship and communication groups.
- Confidence-building opportunities.
- Relationship-development work.

Selection of Pupils

Access to Hope may be provided through:

- Nurture referrals.
- Pastoral referrals.
- Wellbeing referrals.
- SEN referrals.
- Safeguarding referrals where appropriate.
- Staff recommendation.
- Parental request.
- Student self-referral where appropriate.

Participation will be based on identified need and professional judgement.

Staff Responsibilities

The Therapy Dog Programme is coordinated by the Nurture Lead.

Responsibilities include:

- Ensuring Hope's welfare at all times.
- Supervising all interactions.
- Maintaining appropriate records.
- Conducting risk assessments.
- Gaining parental consent where appropriate.
- Liaising with pastoral, SEN and safeguarding staff.

- Monitoring and evaluating impact.

No pupil may interact with Hope without appropriate supervision.

Safeguarding

The welfare of pupils remains the highest priority.

The programme will operate in line with:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.
- Positive Behaviour Management Policy.
- Health and Safety Policy.
- SEN Policy.
- Data Protection Policy.

All concerns arising during therapy sessions will be managed using normal safeguarding procedures.

Health and Safety

To ensure the safety of all members of the school community:

- Hope is fully vaccinated.
- Hope receives regular veterinary care.
- Hope is regularly groomed and maintained to high hygiene standards.
- Hope is assessed as suitable for working with children and young people.
- All interactions are supervised.
- Handwashing or sanitising facilities are available before and after contact.

A separate risk assessment is maintained and reviewed annually.

Allergies and Phobias

The school recognises that some pupils and staff may have allergies or concerns regarding dogs.

Therefore:

- Information regarding allergies will be gathered before participation.
- Participation is always voluntary.
- Alternative arrangements will be provided where required.
- Pupils will never be compelled to interact with Hope.
- Therapy sessions will be carefully planned to minimise any impact on others.

Expectations for Pupils

Pupils interacting with Hope are expected to:

- Treat Hope respectfully.
- Follow staff instructions.
- Approach calmly and quietly.
- Use appropriate handling techniques.
- Respect the wellbeing and comfort of the dog.

Support will be provided to help pupils understand these expectations.

Parent and Carer Partnership

Parents and carers play an important role in the success of the programme.

The school will:

- Share information about the programme.
- Obtain consent where appropriate.
- Seek parental feedback.
- Communicate significant outcomes.
- Work collaboratively to support identified wellbeing goals.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The impact of the Therapy Dog Programme will be evaluated through:

- Student voice.
- Parent feedback.
- Staff observations.
- Boxall Profile outcomes where appropriate.
- Attendance information.
- Behaviour and engagement data.
- Nurture records.
- Wellbeing indicators.

Findings will inform future developments of the programme.

Confidentiality

Information relating to pupils participating in the programme will be managed in accordance with the school's Data Protection and Confidentiality Policies.

Information will only be shared on a need-to-know basis, except where safeguarding concerns arise.

Equality and Inclusion

The Therapy Dog Programme is available to all pupils regardless of:

- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Religion
- Disability
- Additional learning needs

Provision will be adapted to ensure equitable access wherever possible.

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Principal, Nurture Lead and Safeguarding Team.

Policy Lead: Hannah Campbell, Nurture Lead
Approved By: Board of Governors
Review Date: September 2027