THERAPY DOG RISK ASSESSMENT

School Therapy Dog (Rufus)

Bishop Ullathorne Catholic School

Assessment Title: Therapy Dog (Rufus) on School Site

Date of Assessment: 19/11/2026

Assessor: Paul Carpenter and PAWS representative

Review Date: July 2027

Named Handler: Denise Durkan

Deputy Handler: Lauren Stundon

Introduction

This risk assessment has been developed to support the safe presence of Rufus, the school's therapy dog, on site. The purpose of the programme is to enhance pupil wellbeing, support emotional regulation, encourage positive relationships and contribute to a calm and nurturing school environment.

The school recognises that the presence of a therapy dog presents some potential risks. Through appropriate supervision, training, welfare arrangements and health and safety measures, these risks can be effectively managed and reduced to a low level.

Persons at Risk

- Pupils
- Staff
- Visitors
- Contractors
- Volunteers
- Rufus (therapy dog)

Risk Assessment

Hazard	Persons at Risk	Potential Harm	Control Measures	Residual Risk
Dog bites or scratches	Pupils, staff, visitors	Minor to serious injury	Rufus has been temperament assessed and is suitable for work within a school environment. All interactions supervised by the handler. No unsupervised access. Rufus removed immediately if signs of stress are observed.	Low
Allergic reactions to animal hair or dander	Pupils, staff, visitors	Allergic reaction, asthma symptoms	Information shared with parents and staff. Medical information reviewed. Dog-free areas available where required. Hand washing encouraged after contact.	Low
Fear or anxiety around dogs	Pupils, staff, visitors	Distress or anxiety	Participation is voluntary. Alternative arrangements provided. Students are not required to interact with Rufus.	Low
Slips, trips and falls	Pupils, staff, visitors	Minor injury	Rufus kept under control at all times. Leads managed carefully. Equipment stored safely away from walkways.	Low
Infection or illness from contact with dog	Pupils, staff	Illness	Rufus receives regular veterinary checks, vaccinations, flea treatment and worming. Hand washing encouraged after contact.	Low

Dog becomes stressed, tired or overwhelmed	Rufus, pupils, staff	Unpredictable behaviour, welfare concerns	Designated rest area provided. Access to water maintained. Working time monitored. Handler trained to identify signs of stress.	Low
Dog escapes from supervision	Rufus, pupils, public	Injury or safeguarding concern	Rufus supervised at all times. Leads used when appropriate. School gates and boundaries secured.	Low
Hygiene concerns due to accidents or contamination	Pupils, staff	Illness or unpleasant environment	Any incidents cleaned immediately using approved cleaning materials. Dog groomed regularly. Dog not allowed in food preparation areas.	Low
Disruption to learning	Pupils, staff	Reduced learning time	Therapy sessions planned carefully. Rufus only attends agreed activities and designated areas.	Low
Student provokes, startles or mistreats Rufus	Pupils, staff, Rufus	Injury or distress	Clear expectations shared with pupils. Interactions supervised. Incidents recorded and followed up.	Low
Emergency evacuation procedures involving Rufus	Pupils, staff, Rufus	Delays during evacuation	Rufus included within evacuation procedures. Handler responsible for safe evacuation. Deputy identified if required.	Low
Safeguarding concerns during interventions	Pupils, staff	Safeguarding risk	Sessions take place in appropriate locations following school safeguarding procedures. Records maintained where required.	Low

Lack of insurance cover	School, pupils, visitors	Financial liability	Appropriate public liability insurance maintained and reviewed annually.	Low
Failure to identify allergies or phobias	Pupils, staff	Distress or medical concerns	Parents informed of programme. Medical information reviewed before participation. Adjustments implemented where necessary.	Low

Control Measures

Veterinary Care

To minimise risks to health and wellbeing, Rufus will:

- Receive annual veterinary health checks.
- Remain fully vaccinated.
- Receive routine flea, tick and worm treatments.
- Be groomed regularly.
- Remain under the care of a registered veterinary practice.
- Not attend school if displaying signs of illness.

Welfare Arrangements

The welfare of Rufus remains a priority.

The following measures will be implemented:

- Access to fresh water throughout the school day.
- Designated quiet area for rest and recovery.
- Opportunities for exercise and comfort breaks.
- Scheduled rest periods.
- Removal from activities if signs of stress or discomfort are observed.

Possible signs of stress include:

- Excessive panting

- Trembling
- Repeated yawning
- Lip licking
- Withdrawal from interaction
- Avoidance behaviours
- Vocalisation

The handler has authority to end any session immediately if deemed necessary.

Parent and Carer Information

The school will:

- Inform parents and carers of the therapy dog programme.
- Share appropriate information regarding Rufus through school communications.
- Invite parents to notify the school of:
    - Allergies
    - Asthma
    - Phobias
    - Medical concerns
    - Requests for alternative arrangements

No pupil will be compelled to interact with Rufus.

Dog-Free Areas

For the purposes of hygiene, inclusion and safety, Rufus will not routinely enter:

- Kitchen facilities.
- Food preparation areas.
- Areas identified as unsuitable due to pupil medical needs.
- Any location determined by school leadership to be inappropriate.

Student Code of Conduct

All pupils will be taught the following expectations:

Pupils should:

✅ Ask permission before approaching Rufus.

✅ Approach calmly and quietly.

✅ Stroke Rufus gently when invited.

✅ Follow adult instructions at all times.

✅ Wash hands after interaction.

Pupils must not:

❌ Run towards Rufus.

❌ Pull his tail, ears, collar or lead.

❌ Attempt to feed Rufus.

❌ Crowd around him.

❌ Disturb him when resting, eating or drinking.

❌ Tease or deliberately startle him.

Failure to follow these expectations may result in withdrawal of interaction opportunities.

Responsibilities of the Named Handler

The designated handler will:

- Supervise Rufus at all times.
- Monitor his health and welfare.
- Ensure veterinary treatments remain up to date.
- Maintain records relating to insurance and vaccinations.
- Ensure compliance with this risk assessment.
- Make decisions regarding attendance and participation.
- Remove Rufus immediately if concerns arise regarding welfare or safety.

Incident Reporting

The school will record, investigate and review:

- Bites
- Scratches
- Allergic reactions
- Escapes
- Near misses
- Welfare concerns
- Behavioural incidents involving Rufus

Incidents will be logged in accordance with the school's normal accident reporting procedures and reported to senior leaders where appropriate.

Emergency Procedures

In the event of:

Fire Alarm or Evacuation

The named handler will safely evacuate Rufus to the designated assembly point.

Medical Emergency

Rufus will be removed to a safe and secure location away from emergency responders.

Loss of Control or Unexpected Behaviour

The handler will immediately remove Rufus from the situation and notify a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

Benefits of the Therapy Dog Programme

The school anticipates that Rufus will contribute positively to:

- Emotional wellbeing
- Student confidence
- Attendance and engagement
- Social interaction
- Reading interventions

- Mental health support
- Anxiety reduction
- Positive relationships across the school community

Monitoring and Review

This risk assessment will be:

- Reviewed annually.
- Reviewed following any significant incident.
- Updated if circumstances change.
- Monitored by the Senior Leadership Team.

Overall Risk Assessment Outcome

Risk Level After Control Measures: LOW

The identified risks associated with the presence of Rufus on site are considered low provided that the control measures outlined in this assessment are implemented consistently and monitored regularly.

The educational, pastoral and wellbeing benefits of the therapy dog programme are judged to outweigh the residual risks.

Approval

Headteacher: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Named Handler: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Chair of Governors (if required): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Therapy Dog: Rufus
Assessment Status: Approved / Pending Approval
Next Review Date: _____