



Therapy Dog Policy and Risk Assessment - Chester

Policy Drafted: April 2026

Review of Policy: April 2027

Therapy Dog Policy and Risk Assessment - Chester

1. Introduction

Chester is a friendly and experienced cockapoo with over 5 years of service in schools and care settings for both adults and children. He joins our Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) to support the emotional and social development of our students. Chester has attended dog obedience classes and though he can be naughty (the students love this side of Chester), he has no history of aggression and has been socialised around children and adults with learning difficulties in multiple settings for over five years. These include at least two different schools, multiple care homes and an adult care home.

2. Objectives

- Enhance student well-being and emotional regulation through co-regulation.
- Reduce anxiety and stress through therapeutic interaction.
- Encourage positive social behaviours and communication.
- Provide comfort and companionship in a safe, structured environment.
- Education around Small Animal Care.

3. Guidelines for Interaction

- Chester will always be accompanied by a staff handler, who is confident and trained in how to support Chester.
- Chester will always be on a lead/harness.
- Student interaction with Chester is voluntary.
- Students must wash hands before and after contact. Anti- bacterial gel will be available for use.
- Any known allergies or phobias must be reported to staff.
- Any allergic reactions to spending time with Chester must be reported to staff.
- Chester will not be present in food preparation or eating areas.

4. Health & Safety

- Chester receives regular veterinary check-ups and is fully vaccinated.
- A designated rest area with food, water, and bedding is maintained for Chester. This will be in the Deputy Headteacher's Office. Food will be dry as not to create any sensory issues of smell.
- Chester is groomed regularly to maintain hygiene and reduce allergens. Chester's breed is considered hypoallergenic as a non-shedding breed with low dander.
- Chester will follow his morning toileting routine which will minimize his need for toileting in the school session.

- Chester has completed an external temperament assessment report on 09.06.2025 scoring 80%. Chester's overall score is a culmination of their points scored across all of the five individual categories. A score of 75% or over is an excellent result.
 1. Temperament: 100%
 2. Behaviour toward other dogs: 100%
 3. Training: 100%
 4. Behaviour: 60% (Very low-level behaviours for which Chester is undergoing extra training are risk assessed below mitigated against to eradicate them happening)
 5. Health: 100%

5. Staff Training & Supervision

All staff involved in Chester's care and student sessions are trained in:

- Animal-assisted therapy protocols
- Safeguarding and risk assessment
- Managing student-dog interactions safely
- Sessions are supervised at all times.

6. Monitoring & Evaluation

Feedback will be collected from students, staff, and parents/carers. The impact of Chester's presence will be reviewed termly to ensure continued benefit and safety.

7. Risk Assessment and Mitigation (Specific to Chester)

Potential Risk	Mitigation Strategy
<i>Allergies to Dogs</i>	Identify students with allergies and ensure they do not come into contact with Chester. Maintain hygiene and grooming. Chester's breed is considered hypoallergenic as a non-shedding breed with low dander.
<i>Fear of Dogs</i>	Ensure all interactions are voluntary with permission from parents/carers. Provide alternative spaces for students who are uncomfortable.
<i>Hygiene Concerns</i>	Regular grooming and health checks. Handwashing before and after contact. Chester does not generally give licks/kisses and is actively discouraged to do so. No student or adult should invite this behaviour and will be briefed beforehand.
<i>Distraction from Learning</i>	Schedule Chester's visits during appropriate times. Supervise interactions.

<i>Aggressive Behaviour from Dog or Student</i>	Chester is trained and supervised. Staff are trained to manage interactions safely. Chester has no history of any aggression and has been well socialised with students over 5 years. If a student is escalated, <i>Chester will not be used as a 'tool' to deescalate students</i> who are emotionally dysregulated and will be removed from such presentations for his own safety.
<i>Jumping up to take food (Specific to Chester and identified in Assessment)</i>	Chester likes to take any opportunity to take food. He does this very gently, but as an added risk measure, students are not to have food around Chester.
<i>Separation Anxiety (Specific to Chester and identified in assessment)</i>	Chester has separation anxiety as a result of being around people all of his life. As a risk measure, Chester will not be left alone when onsite. This is to eradicate any distress to Chester while onsite.

8. Chester's Timetable and Wellbeing

Chester, like any valued member of staff, will follow a structured timetable that includes regular rest breaks. His schedule will be designed to ensure he is not overworked and has ample time to relax and recharge between sessions. Chester will not be expected to work full school days and will have designated quiet areas where he can rest undisturbed.

Chester's wellbeing is of paramount importance. His handler will monitor his behaviour and energy levels throughout the day, and adjustments will be made to his schedule as needed. If Chester shows signs of fatigue, stress, or discomfort, he will be immediately removed from duties and given time to rest. Regular veterinary check-ups and grooming will also support his physical health.

Staff and students will be educated on recognising signs that Chester needs space or rest, and his needs will always take priority. By ensuring Chester's welfare is safeguarded, we maintain a safe and positive environment for everyone involved.

9. Legislation and Guidance

1. Equality Act 2010

Protects individuals with disabilities from discrimination, including the right to be accompanied by an assistance dog.

While therapy dogs are not legally classified as assistance dogs, schools must consider reasonable adjustments.

2. Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974

Schools must ensure the health, safety, and welfare of staff, students, and visitors.

Risk assessments and mitigation strategies are required for animals on site.

3. Department for Education (DfE) Guidance

Schools should obtain parental consent, maintain clear policies, and provide staff training.

4. Local Authority and School Policies

Many schools have developed their own policies outlining benefits, responsibilities, and conduct.

5. Best Practice Recommendations

Therapy dogs should be trained, insured, and health-checked.

Designate safe spaces and supervise interactions.

Restrict access in food preparation or private areas.

Parent/Carer Consent Form:

Interaction with Chester the Therapy Dog

Chester is a friendly and experienced cockapoo with over 6 years of service in schools and care settings for both adults and children. He joins our Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) to support the emotional and social development of our students. Chester has attended dog obedience classes and though he can be naughty (the students love this side of Chester!), he has no history of aggression and has been socialised around children and adults with MHD in multiple settings for over five years. These include at least two different schools, multiple care homes and an adult care home.



Chester

All interactions with Chester are entirely voluntary and will always be supervised by trained staff. Students will never be required to interact with Chester if they do not wish to, and appropriate hygiene and safety measures are in place.

Please complete the form below to indicate your consent for your child to interact with Chester and return to kim.harmsworth@pathwayslearningcentre.org via email or leave at Reception..

.

Student Name: _____

Parent/Carer Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Medical Conditions or Allergies (including pet allergies):
