



OPERATIONAL DOCUMENT

# Comprehensive Risk Assessment

## Animal-Assisted Intervention in Schools & Community Settings

Document Reference	TBP-RA-001
Version	3.0
Approved by	David O'Driscoll, CEO
Last Reviewed	May 2026
Next Review	August 2026
Alignment	Animal Welfare Act 2006 · Dogs Trust Guidance (2025) · Health & Safety at Work Act 1974
Applies To	All school-based and community sessions involving companion dogs

**NON-COMPLIANCE:** Failure to follow the procedures outlined in this risk assessment may result in immediate session suspension and removal of access to The Baxter Project provision.

### Key Principles

- The welfare of companion dogs is given equal weight to the welfare of young people and practitioners.
- Dogs used in sessions are not “therapy dogs” — they are trusted companions who support and promote communication between young people and trained practitioners.
- Only dogs with suitable temperaments and consistent signs of comfort in school settings are involved.
- This document aligns with recommendations from Dogs Trust (2025), including ethical, behavioural, and insurance considerations.
- All risks are managed to residual Low level before any session takes place.

### Risk Rating Scale

Rating	Likelihood × Severity	Required Action
HIGH	Likely to occur & serious impact	Immediate action required. Session cannot proceed without controls in place.
MEDIUM	Possible & moderate impact	Controls must be in place before session begins.
LOW	Unlikely or minor impact with controls	Acceptable residual risk. Monitor and review.

### Dog Welfare Risks

Hazard	Who Affected	Risk Description	Initial Risk	Control Measures	Residual Risk
Overwork / Fatigue	Dogs	Tiredness, stress, behavioural changes	Medium	Structured session limits, mandatory rest periods, handler behaviour monitoring, immediate withdrawal if stress signs present.	Low
Inadequate Rest	Dogs	Fatigue, stress, illness	Medium	Private quiet rest areas; shaded outdoor and calm indoor spaces always provided.	Low



Hazard	Who Affected	Risk Description	Initial Risk	Control Measures	Residual Risk
Physical Illness	Dogs	Sickness, zoonotic transmission, reduced welfare	High	Regular vet health checks, up-to-date vaccination, flea/worm treatment; session cancelled if dog is unwell.	Low
Emotional Wellbeing	Dogs	Chronic stress, shutdown, behavioural regression	Medium	Termly behavioural reviews; early withdrawal on any stress signs; handler trained in canine stress signals.	Low
Inappropriate Handling	Dogs	Choking, discomfort, escape risk	Medium	Pre-session equipment checks, positive reinforcement training, leads used at all times in school.	Low
Extreme Weather	Dogs	Heatstroke, hypothermia	Medium	No outdoor sessions in extreme weather; shade, shelter, and water provided at all times.	Low
Aggression from Other Dogs	Dogs	Physical injury, long-term anxiety	Medium	Avoid public off-lead areas; scan ahead; route rerouting protocol in place.	Low
Unfamiliar Environments	Dogs	Stress response, refusal to engage	Medium	Gradual desensitisation process; advance visits to new settings; exposure reduced if signs of distress.	Low

### Pupil Safety Risks

Hazard	Who Affected	Risk Description	Initial Risk	Control Measures	Residual Risk
Dog Bite or Scratch	Pupils	Physical injury, trauma, safeguarding concern	Medium	Dog suitability assessment; handler supervision at all times; no unsupervised interaction ever.	Low
Allergic Reaction	Pupils	Asthma, rash, anaphylaxis	Medium	Consent and allergy documentation required; dog-free zones available; hand washing after sessions.	Low
Fear / Phobia of Dogs	Pupils	Emotional distress, avoidance	Medium	Opt-in/opt-out process; parental communication; exposure can be completely avoided.	Low
Behavioural Escalation	Pupils	Distress, risk to dog or self	Medium	Behaviour pre-assessment; de-escalation training for practitioners; session ended if required.	Low
Trip or Fall	Pupils	Physical injury around dog or on walk	Medium	Calm walking pace; clear path selection; lead management; appropriate footwear required.	Low
Deliberate Harm Towards Dog	Pupils, Dogs	Intentional harm or distress caused to companion dog	Medium	Behaviour pre-assessment; close practitioner supervision; immediate session termination if required; school behaviour procedures followed; welfare of dog prioritised at all times.	Low
Sudden Dog Illness or Death During Session	Dogs, Pupils, Staff	Unexpected health event or fatality involving companion dog during session	Medium	Practitioner trained to respond appropriately; school informed immediately; welfare procedures followed; emotional support offered where required; incident recorded and reviewed.	Low



Hazard	Who Affected	Risk Description	Initial Risk	Control Measures	Residual Risk
Lost Pupil (Off-Site)	Pupils	Safeguarding incident	High	1:1 staffing at all times; mobile phone carried; school notified of route; behaviour pre-screened.	Low

### Staff, School & Operational Risks

Hazard	Who Affected	Risk Description	Initial Risk	Control Measures	Residual Risk
Lack of Role Clarity	Staff, School	Dual supervision burden, liability gaps	Medium	Clear protocol: dog handler vs school staff roles always defined in advance. Written agreements with schools.	Low
Insurance Gap	Organisation	Liability for injury or incident	High	Specialist public liability cover for staff and dogs in their working roles. Verified annually.	Low
Equipment Failure	All	Escape, injury (lead/collar)	Medium	Daily kit checks; high-quality equipment; secondary restraint used if required.	Low
Outdated Risk Assessment	All	Unknown hazards, legal exposure	Medium	This document reviewed annually and after any incident. Live version held centrally.	Low
Inadequate Staff Ratios	Pupils, Dogs	Unmanaged behaviour or welfare issue	Medium	Minimum 1:1 practitioner-to-pupil ratio. Additional staff for high-risk off-site activity.	Low
Handler Taken Ill Mid-Session	Dog, Pupils	Unsupervised dog, session disruption	Medium	School notified immediately; session suspended; backup handler/cancellation policy in place.	Low
Fire Alarm / Evacuation	All	Confusion, injury, dog distress	Medium	Designated fire exit procedure for dog teams; trained in evacuation with dog.	Low
Incident Reporting Failure	Organisation	Safeguarding or reputational harm	Medium	ODISSYS used for all incident logging; clear escalation routes; DSL notified.	Low

### Hygiene & Environmental Risks

Hazard	Who Affected	Risk Description	Initial Risk	Control Measures	Residual Risk
Faeces/Urine Indoors	Pupils, Staff	Contamination, illness	Medium	Emergency clean-up protocol; dog toileted before entry; excluded from food preparation areas.	Low
Parasite Transmission	Pupils, Dogs	Infection, illness	Medium	Flea and worm treatment protocol; vet records maintained and reviewed.	Low
Cultural/Religious Concerns	Pupils, Staff	Distress, complaint, exclusion	Medium	Consent and pre-session communication; opt-out always available; no child required to interact.	Low
Slips, Trips, Falls (General)	All	Physical injury	Medium	Clear walkways; leads managed; calm movement; appropriate session environments selected.	Low
Other Animals on Site	Dog, Others	Aggression, territory stress	Medium	Introduction protocols; no shared spaces with other animals without prior risk assessment.	Low



## Community-Based & Off-Site Session Risks

The Baxter Project may offer community-based sessions involving off-site walks and public engagement. These require the following additional controls to be in place before any off-site session proceeds:

Hazard	Who Affected	Risk Description	Initial Risk	Control Measures	Residual Risk
Child Absconding	Pupils	Safeguarding incident	High	1:1 supervision; behaviour pre-assessment; walk route logged; practitioner carries phone and contact list.	Low
Traffic Accident	Pupils, Dogs	Injury or fatality	High	Safe route planning; dogs on leads at all times; road safety briefing given prior to departure.	Low
Unknown Dog Encounter	Dogs, Pupils	Injury, stress	Medium	Avoid off-lead areas; change route; practitioner monitors body language; retreat if necessary.	Low
Unexpected Public Approach	All	Anxiety, misinterpretation	Medium	Clear The Baxter Project branding on uniform; professional boundaries maintained.	Low
Environmental Hazards	Pupils, Dogs	Cuts, contamination	Medium	Route pre-checks; avoid unknown or unsafe terrain.	Low
Dog Overheating/Fatigue	Dogs	Distress, long-term impact	Medium	Limit duration; water provided; avoid hot weather; monitor signs of distress.	Low

## Monitoring, Review & Sign-Off

This risk assessment is reviewed annually, after any incident, or when the nature of sessions changes significantly. The reviewing officer is responsible for ensuring all controls remain adequate and proportionate.

Reviewed by	Role	Signature	Date

**For questions about this risk assessment contact:** [hello@thebaxterproject.com](mailto:hello@thebaxterproject.com) · 07999 229837