



ASHGATE SPECIALIST SUPPORT PRIMARY SCHOOL
January 2019

Introduction

Since April 2018 the school have been working with Red Rock Ponies to provide pony experiences to our pupils with profound and multiple learning needs and other class groups in school. Red rock ponies are able to provide our children with the opportunity to care for and ride Shetland ponies in the supportive, safe and therapeutic environment of their own school setting. Jacqui and her team have a flexible approach and are willing to look at individual solutions to help each pupil gain maximum benefit from their pony experience. The ponies are trained to work alongside wheelchairs, will stand whilst pupils are moved onto their backs and wait patiently at a block whilst children are supported to move onto the pony as independently as possible.

Pupils can ride on a conventional saddle or ride using a vaulting roller with a saddlecloth. The roller enables children to achieve a more stable sitting position. The large handles are easier to hold enabling pupils to support themselves and begin to learn to balance when riding.

For pupils who are unable to ride opportunities to interact with, groom and lead the ponies are provided and the children respond positively to the calm and positive approach shown by Jacqui and her team during these interactions.

The benefits of caring for animals

The opportunity to interact with animals can help improve confidence and self-esteem. The emotional and physical benefits of companion animals are now accepted. There is clear evidence to show that spending time with animals can have a direct calming influence. Animals respond positively to the warmth and affection shown and this can provide children with a real sense of achievement.

The benefits of riding

Riding is an excellent form of physical exercise that challenges gross and fine motor skills and core balance. A structured pony experience can provide the following benefits:

Physical

- The opportunity to learn a new physical skill.
- Improved balance and coordination (both supported and independent)
- Increased muscle control and core strength.
- Opportunities to practice a skill in a different context e.g. transferring independent sitting on a static bench to sitting on static and then a moving animal.

Sensory

- Smell, touch and auditory experiences.
- The opportunity to experience working outside with animals.
- Calming interactions through stroking or brushing the animals.
- Experiencing the movement of the pony.

Cognitive and communication

- Opportunities to interact with new people.
- Following a routine.
- Making the link between a picture/photograph and a real life experience.
- Following instructions
- Understanding of cause and effect e.g. the pony responds to aids given by the rider or supporter.
- Hearing language related to riding and animal care, for example, saddle, bridle, stirrups, mane, and tail.
- Experiencing and learning directional language and language related to speed, for example, stop/go, fast/slow, up/down.

Personal, Social and Emotional

- Increasing confidence and raising self-esteem

- Conquering fears
- Building up trusting relationships
- Fun and enjoyment
- Learning to wait and take turns.

Participation

Sessions are planned with the aim that every child in class will have the opportunity to access the session through:

- Interaction with ponies by touching, stroking, grooming.
Or
- Opportunities to experience riding.

At regular intervals during blocks of sessions, a café area will be set up in class and parents will be invited to take part in activities with their child.

Pony related sensory activities e.g. sensory bins with straw, hay nets, grooming kits might also be available to explore during parental involvement weeks along with the opportunity to sit on a saddle and experience the skills required to maintain balance on our simulated static 'pony'!

These are new initiatives and teaching resources will be developed during the 18/19 academic year.

Health and Safety

- Redrock Pony staff will lead the ponies during all riding experiences with class staff providing the physical support needed.
- Junior helpers may also be involved in leading younger riders holding a longer length lead rope alongside Red Rock Pony staff.

- All staff must maintain safe behaviour around the ponies and model this to pupils e.g. no shouting, not walking behind the ponies or kneeling down behind the pony to groom the tail, appropriate use of touch.
- If a pupil is unable to maintain safe behaviour during sessions participation will be reviewed and the class team and Red Rock Pony staff will work together to plan an appropriate way forward.

Curriculum Links

Early communication skills

(Items in black are taken from Ashgate Specialist Support Primary School Curriculum– My Communication: A programme of learning for communication and literacy for pupils working from P1 to P4, items in blue denote potential pony specific skills progression)

Awareness of social events and activities

Children will show awareness of the Red Rock Pony staff /the pony in their environment through behavioural change.

Responding to social events and activities

- Respond when basic needs and desires are met (e.g. relax when wheelchair is pushed outside)
- Respond to stimuli presented in on/off pattern (burst-pause) e.g. still, widen eyes, smile, increased movement.

Interacting (with others)

- ***Interact*** with familiar people (e.g. smiling, turning, giving eye contact)
- Show they can work co-actively with familiar people (*e.g. allow themselves to be supported to explore the pony safely*)
- ***Show anticipation*** of familiar social activities and events (e.g. anticipate being lifted onto the pony to ride)
- Show they have had enough of a social interaction (e.g.: by turning away, closing their eyes or looking down)
- ***Engage actively*** in familiar social activities and events (e.g. reaching out to the handles on the vaulting roller)

Communicating Pre intentional

- Adults recognize and respond to children's expressions of likes, dislikes, wants, rejection e.g. changes in breathing patterns, facial expression, vocalization and limb movements. (Reference: Coupe and Goldbart 'Communication before Speech')
- Recognition of the familiar and unfamiliar.

Intentional

Children will:

- Show preferences, likes and dislikes, in an intentional way
- Communicate a choice
- Learn to express a range of functions using informal communication systems (e.g. gesture, facial expression etc.) including gaining and maintaining attention, indicating 'more' and 'no more', protesting, rejecting and responding.
- Use their voices to join in a 'conversation' (e.g. babbling)
- Imitate a few single words to initiate interaction with staff and encourage the pony to move or stop (e.g. hiya, go, more, finish, bye, stand, whoa/stop)
- Use a few words spontaneously and appropriately (e.g. more, names of adults, children or ponies)

Physical Development

Reaching and holding

- Reaching out to touch and stroke/scratch the pony with full physical support from an adult.
- Reaching out to touch and stroke/scratch the pony with a gradual reduction in physical support from an adult.
- Holding the lead rein whilst the pony is stationary/ grazing.
- Holding the lead rein and moving alongside the pony.
- Reaching out to hold the handles on the vaulting roller with hand over hand or hand under support from an adult.

- Reaching out to hold the handles on the vaulting roller independently.
- Reaching out to hold the reins initially with and then without the need for physical support.
- Reaching out to hold the handles on the vaulting roller independently.
- Holding brushes and attempting to groom the pony with support.
- Holding brushes and grooming the pony independently.

Stretching

- Stretch legs sufficiently to be able to sit safely on the pony with support.
- Sit on the pony with bent legs (heels may point up and toes point to the floor in this position)
- Sit on the pony with long legs.
- Sit on the pony with long legs and relaxed feet without tipping forward or back.

NOTE For some pupils there may be medical reasons why they are unable to ride. To enable pupils to be safe in school staff should be informed of any pupil who has hip or back issues or is at increased risk of bone fractures. Class Staff can access advice from the Physiotherapist or School's Moving and Handling Coordinators as required with the final decision as to whether a pupil is safe to ride resting with those who are supporting the child during the activity.

Static Balance

- Sit on a pony with **full physical support** from two side walkers to maintain balance whilst the pony is stationary.

- Sit on a pony with **a gradual reduction in the physical support** provided by two side walkers to maintain balance whilst the pony is stationary.
- Sit on a pony without **any physical support** maintaining balance for one minute whilst the pony is stationary (two side walkers to be in position for safety reasons in case needed)
- Sit on a pony without **any physical support** maintaining balance for up to five minutes whilst the pony is stationary (two side walkers to be in position for safety reasons in case needed)
- Sit on a pony without **any physical support** maintaining balance whilst the pony is stationary (one side walker to be in position for safety reasons in case needed)
- Sit confidently on a pony whilst the pony is stationary without the need for any physical support or prompting.

Becoming responsible for your own body and developing dynamic balance

- Sit on a pony with **full physical support** from two side walkers to maintain balance whilst the pony is walking.
- Sit on a pony with **a gradual reduction in the physical support** provided by two side walkers to maintain balance whilst the pony is walking.
- Sit on a pony without **any physical support** maintaining balance for one minute whilst the pony is walking (two side walkers to be in position for safety reasons in case needed)
- Sit on a pony without **any physical support** maintaining balance for up to five minutes whilst the pony is walking (two side walkers to be in position for safety reasons in case needed)
- Sit on a pony without **any physical support** maintaining balance whilst the pony is walking (one side walker to be in position for safety reasons in case needed)
- Sit confidently on a pony whilst the pony is walking without the need for any physical support or prompting (one adult to walk alongside the pony for safety reasons)

- Sit on a pony with **a gradual reduction in the physical support** provided by two side walkers to maintain balance whilst the pony is trotting.
- Sit on a pony with **a gradual reduction in the physical support** provided by one side walker to maintain balance whilst the pony is walking.

Washing Hands

Pupils should have opportunities to:

- Show awareness of being washed and (e.g. by eye or limb movement)
- Be helpful when being washed and dried (e.g. hold out hands)
- Put hands spontaneously into a bowl of water and splash.
- Put hands spontaneously into a bowl of water and rub hands together.
- Hold a towel when an adult hands it to them.
- Dry hands with a gradual reduction in physical prompts.