

4th November 2019

Dear Parents/Carers,

School dog

I am writing to let you know that we have decided to take on a school dog. This decision has been made following extensive research, discussion with other schools that have a School Dog and approval of the Governing Body. A full risk assessment has been completed which will be available on our website.

We have undertaken a significant amount of research and are aware of many benefits to having a school dog:

- A calming effect on students, particularly those with behavioural or learning difficulties
- A greater enjoyment of being in the school environment leading to improved attendance
- Improved behaviour and concentration, reduce stress and improved self-esteem;
- Encouraging expression and participation in more withdrawn students; fostering a sense of responsibility;
- Increasing enthusiasm for and enjoyment of animals which will motivate the students to think and learn;
- Encouraging respect and thereby improving students' relationship with each other, parents and teachers;
- Teaching students to nurture and respect life;
- Helping work undertaken with the most vulnerable students and educational improvements with low achievers;
- Helping students build confidence in reading;
- Helping students who suffer bereavement or who are upset in any way and in need of calm, comfort and space before being able to tell an adult what has upset them.
- Increased knowledge of dogs and how to behave safely and appropriately around them.
- Greater access to the community, with the presence of the dog giving students confidence to go out on short trips outside of the school.
- A better understanding of how to take responsibility for another living being, with potential better recognition of one's own responsibilities.
- Improvements in the way students interact with each other and with members of staff, with these effects extending into the home environment for some.

Additional benefits to the overall working environment of schools include:

- The presence of the dog in the classroom, around the school and in the staff room has a beneficial effect on students and staff.
- There is a 'shared interest' in the school, thereby encouraging communication, which has a positive impact on communication and relationships around the school.

Numerous studies have shown that dogs, one of the earliest domesticated animals, can help lower blood pressure. There is also new research from the University of Missouri-Columbia suggesting the hormonal changes that occur when humans and dogs interact could help people cope with depression and certain stress-related disorders. Preliminary results from a study show that a few minutes of stroking our pet dog prompts a release of a number of "feel good" hormones in humans, including serotonin, prolactin and oxytocin.

The puppy will initially be based in my office in the science department and as a young puppy will have very limited contact with students, as she grows more time will be spent getting her used to the classroom environment. We have chosen a Portuguese Water Dog for their temperament, size and trainability. In addition to this they are a hypoallergenic breed.

We have employed a fully accredited dog trainer and assistance dog trainer to work with us training myself, colleagues and students. Over the coming months all students will have assemblies on how to interact safely and appropriately with our dog.

It is accepted that interacting with animals is not appropriate for all students but that for some it has the potential to provide many positive benefits. Any parent / carer who does not wish their child to interact with the dog is invited to write to Lynne Oliver, via email or letter, to inform her of their wishes. In the meantime, please see the FAQs attached. Permission for your child to have some contact with the school dog will be presumed if no written communication to Lynne Oliver is received by Monday 18 November 2019. Contact email address: lol@bewdley.worcs.sch.uk

If you have any questions please do email.

Yours sincerely

Catherine McDougall
Deputy Headteacher

School Dog Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q: Who is the legal owner of the dog and who pays for its costs?

A: The legal owner of the dog will be Mrs McDougall; she will bear the costs associated with owning the dog; the school budget will support insurance, and staff and dog training costs where appropriate.

Q: Will the dog be from a reputable breeder?

A: Yes. The dog will be from a home where one or both parents will be seen and will be specifically chosen for its temperament.

Q: Will the dog be a distraction?

A: The dog will be kept in the science department and will also have access to an outside area that is separate to students. The office is separate from the classrooms / playground to ensure it only comes into contact with students who are happy to have contact, under strict supervision. The dog will also have a space to spend time in classrooms, the library, curriculum support and in the sixth form area where students can interact safely. The dog will also attend meetings with staff to support further socialisation.

Q: Has a risk assessment been undertaken?

A: Yes, a full risk assessment is in place, which will be reviewed regularly. We have carefully considered having a dog in school and sought advice from many sources, including other schools that successfully have a school dog.

Q: How will the dog be toileted to ensure hygiene for all?

A: In the interest of health and hygiene, our school dog will have an area on the school site that has no access to students – this will be the dog's own outside area. The staff in charge of the dog will ensure that this is cleared away appropriately. If the school dog toilets when out on the school site, staff members will clear this away appropriately leaving no trace on the ground, cleaning the area with disinfectant if needed.

Q: How will the dog's welfare be considered?

A: The dog will be walked regularly and given free time outside. The dog will have its own space in the science department where it will not be disturbed by students. The dog will be carefully trained over a period of time and will have access to food and unlimited water. We will work carefully to ensure the dog's welfare is always considered and remove the dog from the school environment if we don't feel it is happy. The dog will need lots of rest and sleep especially as a young puppy so a quiet space is imperative.

Head Teacher Dave Hadley-Pryce BSc MSc FRSA

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Q: How will this be managed where students have allergies?

A: Students will not need to touch the dog, which will relieve the possibility of allergic reactions. We already manage a number of allergies at school and this will be no different for students and adults that are allergic to dogs. Individual needs will always be met and we are happy to work with parents to put additional control measures in place for individual allergies. Any students with allergies to dogs will be built into the risk assessment as they are made known to the school. The breed of dog is known to be hypoallergenic so this issue is much reduced.

Q: My child is frightened of dogs; how will you manage this?

A: Access to the dog will be carefully managed and supervised and students do not need to have close contact with it if this has been expressed by parents. We hope to work closely with parents of students who are fearful of dogs to alleviate their fear and to teach them how to manage this.

Q: Will other school dogs be allowed in school?

A: Allowing a dog onto the school site can only be approved by the Headteacher and for educational purposes. This will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

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