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St James CE Primary School

Executive Headteacher: Mrs. J Young (BA Hons, PGCE, NPQH)

7th September 2023

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am writing to let you know that the school, with support from the Governing Body, has decided to try at introducing a school dog to our community.

Mrs Roberts, who works at Parish CE as a Health and Wellbeing Champion, has been bringing 2-year-old Cocker Spaniel **Maddie** into Parish for the past 12 months and it has been a huge success. Mrs Roberts has approached us and would like Maddie to be the school dog for both Parish and St James! She even has her St James neckerchief at the ready!

Maddie has completed the Kennel Club Good Citizen Bronze, Silver and Gold Award and has proven to be a kind, gentle and comforting dog with so many children at Parish who, for whatever reason, have needed some extra support.

As a school we shall continue to invest in expert advice and training so that we can make this a real success at St James and ensure that Maddie is happy and her welfare catered for.



Maddie and Mrs Roberts will be in school on Friday afternoons starting this month and some children (and their parents!) may be asked if they would like to work more closely with Maddie during this time - but she will be available for cuddles from everyone!

Why a school dog?

Some of the benefits of having a school dog include:

Cognitive - companionship with a dog stimulates memory, problem-solving and game-playing.

Social – a dog provides a positive mutual topic for discussion, encourages responsibility, wellbeing and focused interaction with others.

Emotional – a school dog improves self-esteem, acceptance from others and lifts mood, often provoking laughter and fun. Dogs can also teach compassion and respect for other living things as well as relieving anxiety.

Physical – interaction with a furry friend reduces blood pressure, provides tactile stimulation, assists with pain management, gives motivation to move, walk and stimulates senses.

Environmental – a dog in school increases the sense of a family environment, with all of the above benefits continuing long after the school day is over.

Reading – reading to dogs has been proven to help children develop literacy skills and build confidence, through both the calming effect the dogs presence has on children as well as the fact that a dog will listen to children read without being judgemental or critical. The comforting environment helps to nurture children's enthusiasm for reading and provides them with the confidence to read aloud.

Maddie will initially stay in the intervention room with Mrs Roberts when she is in school. This means that she will be separate from the classrooms, and will only come into contact with the children during closely supervised times. Eventually, she may spend time in each class with small groups of pupils, enjoying a range of activities which will benefit both Maddie and the children.

Whilst moving around the school, Maddie will be kept on a short lead and will always be accompanied by an adult. Any children who are fearful of dogs will not, under any circumstances, be forced to meet Maddie, unless a parent/carer specifically requests this.

A risk assessment has been written, and this along with frequently asked questions can be found on our school website.

We understand that it is not possible for all families to have a family dog and therefore we hope that this is an opportunity for children to share in a dog and gain from a relationship and contact on a regular basis.

If you have any concerns about Maddie and WOULD NOT like your child to ever come into contact with school dog, then please speak to your child's class teacher. If you have any general questions or would like to discuss this matter with me, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards



Mrs J Young



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SOME CONCERNS YOU MIGHT HAVE

My child is allergic to dogs

It is understandable that some of you may be concerned about possible allergic reactions to a school dog. However, Maddie will be subjected to the most thorough cleanliness and grooming regime. She will also only be allowed in situations with pupils who voluntarily wish to work with her. Your permission will of course be sought in advance of Maddie having access to, and working with, your child in school.

Will Maddie be properly cared for?

Maddie is extremely well looked after. She lives with Mrs Roberts and her family and will come to school on some of the days she is here, but will stay safely with Mrs Roberts, mostly in the school library, until fully accustomed to school. She will then, in time, provide comfort for children accessing our wellbeing programmes, listen to pupils read in a controlled setting and even maybe join in with lessons – she will always be accompanied by a member of staff (mostly Mrs Roberts). Whilst Maddie is in school, she will have access to a calm, relaxed area which she can stay in should she wish. Maddie will visit the vet regularly for all her injections as well as regular check-ups. If Maddie is unwell for any reason she will stay at home with the babysitter!

My child is scared of dogs

Some children may have had upsetting experiences and therefore have a fear of dogs (or another animal). Maddie will only be in contact with children whose parents have given their permission. However, Maddie's training will help her to be calm and gentle around children; she has already received awards for her loving and gentle nature. Experience and research have shown that, with proper guidance and handling, children can learn to overcome their fear of animals and grow in respect and appreciation for them.

The school has a 'no dogs' policy

Our school does have a 'no dogs' policy, however because Maddie is specifically our school dog, specific rules will apply to her and her alone. Maddie will be on a lead at all times when moving around the school and will always be accompanied by a member of staff. Maddie will also be fully insured to carry out her role therefore allowing her to be on the school site.

We hope you will join us in welcoming Maddie to our St James Primary family and embrace all that she has to offer the school.

As we begin to introduce Maddie to school over coming weeks, there will be times when she is introduced to classes and assemblies without physical contact.



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