



17 January 2019

Dear Parents & Carers,

School Working/Therapy Dog

During the course of this term, we are planning to introduce a Labrador puppy to The King's (The Cathedral) School, with the hope that, should the introduction go according to plan, it can become a working dog in School for the benefit of those pupils who would like to have contact with it.

The value of pet 'therapy' and the presence of companion animals can improve the well-being of children and lower the rate of anxiety, simply by making the environment happier, more enjoyable and less forbidding. A well-trained and well-behaved dog could function as:

- a reading companion for less confident readers;
- a welcoming companion for those for whom school can be, at times, daunting;
- a member of the community on field trips;
- a focus of interest for those who would like to learn the skills of dog handling and training;
- a familiarisation and training opportunity for those children who may be dog phobic.

Your sons and daughters may have already shared accounts with you of the positive contribution that dogs have made in School assemblies. To minimise the risk to children in School, animals are not usually allowed on School premises. This would continue to be the case in all but the most controlled of circumstances, and where a risk assessment has taken place.

There are a number of organisations who provide guidance about the successful introduction of such therapy dogs in schools, including some DfE guidance for Headteachers. The 'Dogs Helping Kids' charity has a more detailed 'Guidance for Schools' sheet called 'Get it Right' whose best practice we shall be following. The outline risk-assessment included in this letter for your information, has been drafted with this best practice guidance very much in mind. In keeping with such guidance, at all times, the animal's owner and handlers must ensure that the animal is not a nuisance and that it does not interfere with the School environment.

If parents, or pupils, would rather *not* have direct contact with the dog, they are encouraged to write to the Headteacher, who will make sure that such wishes are respected. Please also write in with details if your child has a *severe* allergy to dogs, or a phobia of them. The best email address to send this, and any other comments, to is headteacher@kings.peterborough.sch.uk.

School Dog Risk Assessment – January 2019

In keeping with the recommended guidelines:

- the dog will be regularly groomed and checked for signs of infection or other illness;
- when ill, the dog will be diagnosed and treated by a vet and will not be allowed on the school premises until its health is restored;

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EMAIL: admin@kings.peterborough.sch.uk

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- the dog will have received relevant inoculations;
- the dog will be wormed regularly;
- the dog's claws will be kept trimmed to reduce the risk of scratches;
- the dog will have been exercised before being allowed to work with children;
- the dog will have its coat cleaned regularly.

The dog's owner/handler has the responsibility to ensure that:

- the dog is physically fit before visiting the school environment;
- the dog is kept on a lead throughout the visit/work;
- they remain with the dog at all times;
- the dog is discouraged from jumping, scratching and licking;
- pupil anxiety and cultural sensitivities are taken into consideration when moving around the School with the dog;
- the dog is of an acceptable hygienic standard, i.e. not wet, muddy etc;
- natural relief for dogs is taken into account prior to visiting.

Background

Governors have been briefed about the planned introduction and have given their support for the proposal, subject to the following agreed approach:

- The dog and breed selected would be specifically chosen, and temperament tested, and specifically trained to work with children.
- All costs associated with the purchase, training and care of the dog would be met by the Headteacher.
- Plans will be in place regarding toileting and hygiene standards.
- A full risk assessment for the introduction of the dog will be written and will be publicly available.
- Should the project not go according to plan, there will be a scaling back of the introduction of the dog and a clear alternative plan that could, if required, remove all child engagement with the dog.

The Dog's Welfare

- The dog's temperament, and breeding, will be assessed as suitable for introduction into a school environment.
- The dog will be trained to work with, and respond appropriately to, children.
- The dog will be kept, when not formally working, away from pupils (in the Headteacher's, or his PA's, Office).
- Its exposure to large numbers of children will be phased and moderated by the Headteacher, or relevant handler, and informed by the welfare of children, and the dog, at all times. Both the Headteacher, and relevant handlers, will be trained in supervising the dog in a school context.
- The dog will have rest periods away from children.
- The dog will never be left alone with younger children, and only ever in very limited circumstances with trained and reliable senior pupils.
- Advice on training the dog will be sought from specialists in dog behaviour and training such as, the following:
 - The Bark and Read Foundation supported by the Kennel Club Charitable Trust
 - The Association of Pet Dog Trainers
 - The Institute of Modern Dog Trainers
 - The Puppy School
 - Victoria Stilwell 'Positively Dog' Training

Prior to purchasing the puppy, Mr and Mrs Ayling will visit the home of the dog's parents to ensure that the temperament of the parents was likely to result in a dog suitable for interaction with children. The puppy would live with Mr and Mrs Ayling, at their home, and be introduced to the School environment, and the children, gradually.

A recommended veterinarian practice will thoroughly check the puppy for any illnesses and be responsible for its vaccination programme. There are no diseases that could be caught from the puppy, as it will be kept up to date with immunisations, including rabies. The dog's worming treatment will be in line with European vet guidelines. Both the School and the vets' surgery will keep a register of the dog's health checks and treatments.

This risk assessment will be reviewed annually.

Next Steps

The puppy, whose name is Scout, will arrive shortly towards the end of January. During the course of this half term, we will be considering any feedback from parents and any amendments that are required to the introduction plans. The process of training the dog, and its formal deployment as a working dog, is likely to take between one and two years. A 'controlled introduction' of the School community to the dog, while it is still a puppy, will be arranged so that those pupils who would like to get to know it, and to share in the dog's training and development, are able to do so.

If you would like further information, have any suggestions, or if you would like to discuss the plans for introducing a school dog in more detail, please feel free to contact me at the email address listed above.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Darren Ayling".

Mr D Ayling
Headteacher