



16<sup>th</sup> May, 2019

## **Learning Support Dog**

Dear Parents and Carers,

At St Paul's we are always researching good practice and areas for development for us to strive to be the best educational setting for your child. Soon, we will be welcoming our new dog Matilda into our family over the half term holidays. In addition, over the past few months, I have undertaken research into the possibility of introducing a School Dog. You may be aware that there is a growing movement in many schools to reintroduce the concept of school pets as a way of teaching all children responsibility and providing a source of pleasure and learning. Of particular interest, is the current move towards, 'Learning Support Dogs'.

Dogs are being used as a source of comfort and relaxation for children and adults who may need 'someone to talk to' or just someone who will accept them and offer comfort or a calming influence in their lives. There is much evidence that children who struggle with relationships or with managing their own emotions gain a great deal from spending time with a pet.

Introducing a school dog can have many benefits, including:

- learning to care for a pet and benefit children's social and emotional development
- calming effect on pupils, particularly those with behavioural or learning difficulties
- improved behaviour and concentration, reduced stress and improved self-esteem
- encouraging expression and participation in more withdrawn children
- fostering a sense of responsibility
- motivating pupils to think and to learn, as children have a high level of natural interest in, enthusiasm for and enjoyment of animals
- encouraging respect and thereby improving pupils' relationships with each other, parents and teachers
- teaching children to nurture and to have respect for life
- helping work undertaken with the most vulnerable children, and educational improvements with low achievers
- helping children build confidence in reading
- reducing children's anxieties if they have a fear of dogs.

With these ideas in mind, the staff and governors have agreed to the concept of introducing my new dog, Matilda in school. Matilda is a Cockapoo, so has an excellent temperament, is hypoallergenic and does not shed to support children who have allergies. Matilda, will attend puppy classes to ensure she is fully socialised and well-trained. She will be gradually introduced to the school environment and, eventually, once she is used to the environment,

introducing her to some of the children. Children will also attend assemblies and receive training about how to care and behave safely around dogs.

Obviously, bringing any animal into school is not something to be approached lightly, both for the animal's sake and for the sake of the children and adults in the school. I have visited and taken advice from Headteachers, who have School Dogs. We have discussed the practicalities, including everything from risk assessments and insurance to dealing with training, doggy toileting and children's allergies.

This Friday, we will share this exciting news with the children. It is our aim that all children across the school will have the opportunity to have contact and quality time with Matilda.

We are very mindful, that introducing a dog into the school setting should not be a distraction to the children's learning and for this to enhance our school ethos and the experiences we offer our children. I attach a copy of answers to a number of initial questions you may have. A risk assessment will also be available on our website before Matilda arrives in school, which will give you some indication of the amount of thought that has gone into this concept.

I would be very grateful therefore if you could complete the slip attached if your child has any relevant allergies or phobias, or if for any reason you would prefer them not to have contact with the school dog. If we do not hear from you by end of the Term, we will assume you are happy for your child to have contact with the School Dog. In time, I hope that the children will see the School Dog as part of the whole school team.

Kind Regards,



Chris Partridge  
Headteacher



# Matilda - School Dog

---

*If you are happy for your child to have contact with Matilda,  
please do not return this form.*

Name of Child: \_\_\_\_\_ Year: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please tick as applicable:**

- My child is allergic to dogs and I would prefer them not to be in contact with the School Dog.
- My child is allergic to dogs, I am happy for them to be in the same room but not touch the School Dog.
- My child has a fear of dogs and I would prefer them not to meet the School Dog.
- My child has a fear of dogs and I would like them to slowly be introduced to the School Dog  
in time to overcome their fear.

Additional information:

Signature of Parent / Carer: \_\_\_\_\_ Contact Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Parent / Carer: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Further information and answers to any initial questions or concerns you may have:-**

### **What will the school dog do on a day-to-day basis?**

Initially, Matilda will have minimal contact with the children and staff, until she becomes familiar with the school. All children will have the opportunity over time to have quality time with the dog and learn how to care for her. She will in time be available to calm unsettled children, walk around the school on a lead with the Head/ member of staff at appropriate times of the day so that she is not a distraction to children's learning, and to go out on a lunchtime walk. She will attend classes to support their learning where appropriate e.g. to writing instructions if learning about how to care for a pet etc. In the future, Matilda may be trained to sit and listen to children read.

### **Safety around the dog**

A detailed risk assessment will be in place and available on the website. Insurance will cover having a dog on site. If the Head is at a meeting, there will be a number of designated staff who have agreed to have responsibility to support the dog in his absence or she will not attend school during that time. Children will only have contact with the dog with a supervised adult. When moving around the school, the dog will be on a lead. Children will receive training workshops, from for example the Dog Trust before and when the dog is introduced into the school setting to teach them how to behave safely around a dog. The dog will be based in the Head's office.

### **What about the children who have allergies around a dog?**

After extensive research, one of the best breeds of dog to combat allergies is a breed which is mixed with a poodle. Matilda is a Cockapoo, a Show Cocker Spaniel and Poodle mix which makes her hypoallergenic. It also makes her very sociable, well-tempered and clever. In this way, we will aim to cater for all children to be able to have contact with the dog. However, parents and staff will be asked to inform the school if their child is allergic and if so we will work with the family to ensure that the child does not have contact with her if this is their wish.

### **What about the children/ staff who have a fear for dogs?**

One of the aims of introducing a dog into the school is to reduce the number of children who have a fear of dogs by teaching them how to care for and behave safely around them. If a child has a fear of dogs, we will ask parents to inform us of this so that we can be aware and work with the parents / child with advice and support from the Dog Trust to build up their confidence so that they feel safe.

### **Health and well-being of the dog.**

Matilda will receive all vaccinations, be wormed, groomed and cared for. The Head (the owner of the dog) will have pet insurance to insure if she is ill the dog will receive immediate medical attention.

### **Hygiene**

There will be a designated area for the dog to toilet if necessary which will be away from the children. Children will never be asked to handle picked up 'poo' in a bag. If children have stroked the dog, they will be taught to wash their hands afterwards.

### **What happens if the dog is ill?**

If Matilda were to be taken ill she would not attend school and would be cared for at home until it was fit to return to school.

*Please do not hesitate to contact the Head Teacher, if you have any questions that have not been covered above.*

Thank you



Chris Partridge

Head Teacher