

School Wellbeing / Therapy Dog

Dear Parents and Carers,

You may be aware that there is a growing movement in many schools to reintroduce the concept of having animals in school as another way of supporting children. There are a number of school dogs already in post locally and around the country and as a school, we firmly believe that having a dog within the school can only enhance and extend the children's opportunities for learning – both academically and socially.

What are the benefits of a school wellbeing dog?

Numerous research studies have shown the benefits of therapy dogs in schools. Therapy dogs have been working in schools for a number of years across the UK. However, they have been commonplace in schools in the USA and Australia for many years. Evidence indicates that benefits 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. They can help to reduce stresses of school life
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-47655600>
- *Physical* – interaction with a furry friend reduces blood pressure, provides tactile stimulation, gives motivation to move and stimulates the senses
- *Environmental* – a dog in a school increases the sense of a family environment, with all of the above benefits continuing long after the school day is over.
- Helping children build confidence in reading – <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2011/feb/28/dogs-listen-to-children-reading>

What we are going to offer

Mrs. West (Student Support Officer in TEAM Hub) has a registered Therapy dog called Teddy who is a Golden Retriever.

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 students and adults in the school. I have visited and taken advice from other schools in the area, who have school dogs. We have discussed the practicalities, including everything from risk assessments and insurance to dealing with training, doggy toileting and student's allergies.

Teddy will be based in TEAM Hub with Mrs West as she is the person that the dog is registered with through Pets as therapy.

Students will never be left alone with Teddy and they will be taught about how to be around a dog; for example, if Teddy is on his bed, then we leave him alone to rest.

We are hoping that Teddy will eventually join our school on a Monday, Wednesday and Friday, but this will be built up over time.

What is Teddy like?

Teddy is a Golden Retriever. The breed is renowned for their calm, gentle temperament and love of children. Belonging to Mrs. West and her family, Teddy has undergone strict training and assessment in order to prepare him for working with children. Teddy is certified as a 'Pets As Therapy' dog, meaning that he has been assessed as being healthy and of the right temperament to work within the local community, including children. Pets as Therapy dogs are recognised by the Royal College of Nursing and welcomed by medical authorities in many areas.



Mrs. West takes Teddy to the 'Campbell Centre' in Milton Keynes on a regular basis to help patients with their Mental Health.



What will Teddy do all day in school?

Teddy's role in school will be varied. He might 'chill out' in TEAM Hub whilst students are attending their lessons. For those students who access TEAM Hub, arrangements can be made to spend time with Teddy.

Research studies in both Britain and America have concluded that having a dog in a school environment can have many positive benefits – these include helping to calm children down, improve academic achievement, motivate those children who are often not that attentive, teach responsibility and encourage children to respect all life. Also, it has been shown that when children share the affection and care of a 'school' dog, a bond forms among them and strengthens their team ethics.

Teddy can also be used to hear students read. Dogs give unconditional acceptance, as they are non-judgmental, which is especially crucial to students who struggle to read. He will provide confidence to students as he will not make fun of them when they read, but above all he will make an amazing listener, providing the students with a sense of comfort and love.

In America, the 'Read' Dogs, as they are known, have proved through research that children who read to these dogs show an increase in reading levels, word recognition, a higher desire to read and write and an increase in intra and interpersonal skills among the children they mix with.

It would be helpful to know whether we have any students who are allergic to dog hair or who have a particular phobia concerning dogs. I can assure you that Teddy will not be able to 'roam' around the school and is always with a member of staff. We are very mindful, that having a dog in 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.

I would be very grateful therefore if you could complete the slip below if your child has any relevant allergies or phobias or if for any reason you would prefer them not to have contact with a Teddy.

Yours faithfully,



Mrs. Chloe Hankin
Assistant Headteacher
Safeguarding and Wellbeing.

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Further information and answers to any initial questions or concerns you may have

How will the school plan for Teddy?

- A full risk assessment will be written.
- Parents and Carers will have an option to 'opt out' of planned contact with Teddy.
- All contact with children will be carefully planned and children will not be left unsupervised with Teddy.
- When not working, Teddy will be based in one of the rooms in TEAM Hub

What about allergies?

- Teddy is a Golden Retriever.
- All areas of the school will be vacuumed and surfaces are wiped down daily.
- Movement around the school will be controlled for Teddy
- For any student that are either allergic to, or have a phobia of dogs, alternative arrangements to TEAM Hub can be made.

What other schools have school dogs?

Around the country there are many schools who have their own school dog including:

- Hope Primary, who have set up their own 'dog blog', which contains a very good video explaining the benefits: <http://dexter-hopeprimary.tumblr.com>
- John Stainer Primary school: <https://www.johnstainer.lewisham.sch.uk/School-Dog/>
- Green Ridge Academy, who have Barkley as part of the school staff. <https://www.greenridgeacademy.co.uk/meet-the-team/>

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, Teddy is subjected to the most thorough cleanliness and grooming regime. He is up to date with vaccinations. He will also only be allowed in situations with students who voluntarily wish to work with him.

Will Teddy be properly cared for?

Teddy is extremely well looked after. He lives with Mrs. West and her family and will come to school on planned days. He will work in TEAM Hub and will always be accompanied by an appropriate member of staff. Teddy visits the vet regularly for all his injections as well as regular check-ups. If Teddy is unwell for any reason he will not be brought into school.

My child is scared of dogs

Some children may have had upsetting experiences and thus have a fear of dogs (or another animal). Teddy will only have contact with students whose parents/carers are happy for their child to do so. However, Teddy's training has ensured he is calm and gentle around children; he has a very 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 Teddy has been trained appropriately to be around children and interact with them, he is permitted within the school grounds. He is always accompanied by a trained adult when moving between designated areas. Teddy is also fully insured to carry out his role thus allowing him to be on the school site.

Hygiene

There is a designated area for the dog to go to the toilet which will be away from students. If Teddy has an accident this is cleared up immediately by a member of staff who is happy to do so with suitable cleaning products. There will be a specific bin used that will be away from where students socialise or have access. Students will never be asked to handle picking up 'poo' in a bag.

Please don't hesitate to contact the school if you have any questions that have not been covered above.

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PLEASE ONLY RETURN THIS FORM IF YOU DO NOT WISH YOUR CHILD TO HAVE CONTACT WITH TEDDY

Name of child

Form

Please tick as appropriate:

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

Additional Information

Parent/Carer Name

Parent/Carer Signature