

# HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Headteacher  
Mrs S Stace

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Westfield Primary School  
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Dear Parents and Carers,

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 "Reading Dogs" and "Therapy Dogs". The former is based on research which shows that many children who find reading practice difficult are more willing and able to read to the non-judgemental audience of an animal than they are to a human being! Therapy dogs are similarly 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.

With these ideas in mind, the governors have agreed to the concept of having a dog in school. Over the past few months we have been working with a dog trainer to find an appropriate breed of puppy with the right temperament, is hypoallergenic and doesn't shed to support children who have allergies.

I have recently bought a Cockapoo puppy, which in time will be trained to be a Therapy dog, whilst also living with me at home. From September, I will be bringing the dog into school and, eventually, once the dog is used to the environment, introducing it to some of the children. Children will also attend assemblies and receive training about how to care and behave safely around dogs, from the dog trainer and the Dogs Trust.

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. Also, I am very fortunate to be working with an accredited and experienced dog trainer, who used to be a Deputy Head of a Junior school, so is very aware of what life is like in a school setting.

Today, we have shared this exciting news with the children. It is our aim that all children across the school will have opportunities to have contact and quality time with our dog. From the start, we would like the children and whole school community to be given the opportunity to be involved by suggesting names for our school dog. See more information regarding this in this week's bulletin.

Whilst we are at a very early stage in this process of introduction, it would be helpful to know whether we have any children who are allergic to dogs' hair or who have a particular phobia concerning dogs. I can assure you that our dog will not be around the school off the lead and will only have access to restricted areas, but it is sensible to be aware of everyone's needs. 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 be available on our website before the dog arrives in school, which will give you some indication of the amount of thought that has gone into this pilot programme.

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 Cockapoo puppy.

Yours sincerely,

Suzanne Stace  
Head Teacher



**School dog -**

Name of Child: \_\_\_\_\_ Year group \_\_\_\_\_

**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 dog.

My child has a fear of dogs and I would prefer them not to meet the dog.

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:**

Signature of parent/ carer: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact number: \_\_\_\_\_