



Beeston Primary School

Town Street, Leeds, LS11 8PN

“Engage, Enjoy, Enrich, Excel”

Wednesday 2nd October 2024

Dear Parents/Carers,

After many months of research and careful consideration, I am writing to let you know that the school has decided to take on a school dog. The children have previously been consulted through the weekly School Council sessions and we have shared this exciting news with all the children in our assembly today.

Mabel is our school dog; she is a 12 week old apricot cockapoo purchased from a registered breeder. Since the beginning of September, unknown to the children, she has been visiting school, spending time acclimatising to the unfamiliar sounds and smells and meeting our school staff team.

When deciding on a school dog, we chose a cockapoo as they have low-shedding coats which is important for children who have allergies, and their friendly disposition and eagerness to please make them easy to train. Cockapoos are also widely used in the field of therapy as they are by nature intelligent, gentle, sociable and have been successfully supporting children in other schools.

Mabel has settled well into school life. She is friendly and enjoys meeting new people. She attends puppy classes and her basic training is going well, she is doing well with her toilet training, will sit on command and is trying hard with her recall. As a puppy Mabel tires easily, so when in school she enjoys snoozing in Mrs Knowles' office which will be her main place of residence as it is secure and separate from the classrooms. A suitable bed, food, water and cleaning supplies will be held for Mabel and I must stress that pupils will not be expected to clean up after Mabel, and we will ensure that the school grounds are kept clean at all times.

At certain times of the week, children may have the opportunity to interact with Mabel under supervision unless parents have opted out of contact with the school dog by completing the consent form that is being sent home with your child today. It is important that the consent slip is completed and returned to school by Friday 11th October 2024. Mabel will not be given access to other visitors without supervision and mutual consent. We will do everything we can to reassure children who fear dogs that they will not be forced to meet with the dog. While moving around the school, Mabel will be kept on a short lead and will always be with an adult.

Eventually, when a little older, Mabel will undertake training to work with children who have special needs, or who are upset in any way and in need of calm, comfort and space before being able to tell an adult what has upset them. Once fully trained, Mabel will spend her days visiting the classrooms and listening to readers from across the school. Sometimes she will even help us out by looking after anyone who is feeling a bit sad - a little stroke is enough to make anyone feel happy again. Other schools have shared with us the many benefits to having a school dog including:

a calming effect on pupils, particularly those with behavioural or learning difficulties; improved behaviour and concentration, reduced stress and improved self-esteem for pupils; encouraging

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expression and participation in more withdrawn children; fostering a sense of responsibility; motivating pupils to think and to learn, as most children have a high level of natural interest in, enthusiasm for and enjoyment of animals and helping children build confidence in reading.

Please see separate article link below:

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2011/feb/28/dogs-listen-to-children-reading#:~:text=%22He%20doesn't%20judge%20them,to%20become%20a%20Read%20dog>

Mabel will also be available to work with children (and adults) who have had bad experiences with dogs or other animals. With parental permission, over a period of time children who react fearfully to dogs will be supported in approaching, handling and gaining confidence in managing their fear.

We will publish pictures of Mabel, as she grows up, on the school website and social media pages. 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 have a 'share' in a dog and gain from this relationship and contact on a regular basis.

We understand that many parents will have concerns regarding bringing a school dog onto the premises, and I would like to use this letter to provide some reassurance to parents. Please see the FAQs on the next page of this letter; if there are any further questions or enquiries, please do not hesitate to contact school. We have also undertaken a full risk assessment to ensure that any hazards can be adequately controlled. Before the end of the term, we will have created a school dog page on our website should you wish to access it for you to view all documents relating to Mabel.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs S Knowles
Pastoral Leader/ Designated Safeguarding Lead



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School Dog Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q. Who is the legal owner of the dog and who pays for its costs?

A. The legal owner of Mabel is Mrs Knowles who cares for the dog out of school hours and will bear the costs associated with it; the school budget will remain unaffected. Mabel is registered with a vet and has a wellness plan which means she has been fully vaccinated and receives monthly worming and flea treatment. Mabel is chipped and has pet insurance.

Q. Is the dog from a reputable breeder?

A. Yes. We have researched breeders and have chosen a reputable and licensed breeder.

Q. Will the dog be a distraction?

A. The dog will be kept in a school office area. The office is separate from the classrooms/ playground area to ensure it only comes into contact with children who are happy to have contact, under strict supervision. We will be careful to ensure that time spent with the school dog is shared among the children fairly. We will also ensure that children who do not have permission for direct contact with the dog are still able to participate in a number of ways, should they wish to do so.

Q. Has a risk assessment been undertaken?

A. Yes, we have carefully considered having a dog in school and sought advice from many sources, including other schools that successfully have a school dog.

Q. Who is responsible for training?

A. Mrs Knowles is the legal owner of the dog and as a result, will be responsible for its training. Appropriate professional training will be obtained.

Q. How will the dog be toileted to ensure hygiene for all?

A. Should the dog defecate on the school site this will be cleared up immediately using the appropriate hygienic materials and disposed of it in a safe way. Our policy of no dogs in the playground is still applicable as we are unable to put effective control measures in place that guarantee temperament and safety when children come into unsupervised contact with unknown dogs.

Q. Will the dog be allowed on the school playground?

A. The dog will not be unsupervised on the school playground. If the dog is taken outside it will be on a short lead and interactions with children will always be overseen by an adult.

Q. How will the dog's welfare be considered?

A. The dog will be walked at lunchtime; children whose parents have consented to contact with the school dog will have opportunities to walk her at lunch. This will also be used as a behaviour reward, in line with our behaviour policy. The dog will be kept in Mrs Knowles' office and will only have planned contact with children and visitors which will be overseen by a member of

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staff. The dog will be carefully trained over a period of time. We will work closely with other professionals to ensure the dog’s welfare is always carefully considered.

Q. How will this be managed where children have allergies?

A. Children will not need to touch the dog, which will relieve the possibility of allergic reactions. We already manage a number of allergies at school and this will be no different for children and adults that are allergic to dogs. The breed of dog has also been chosen for its hypoallergenic properties. Individual needs will always be met and we are happy to work with parents to put additional control measures in place for individual allergies.

Q. My child is frightened of dogs; how will you manage this?

A. Access to the dog will be carefully managed and always overseen by a member of staff. Children do not need to have close contact with it unless permission for this has been given. We hope to work closely with parents of children who are fearful of dogs to alleviate their fear and to teach them how to manage this.

Q. Will other dogs be allowed on site?

A. There will be opportunities for our children to work with therapy and reading dogs where this will benefit the needs of our children but this will be at the express permission of the Senior Leadership Team. No dogs other than assistance dogs will be allowed on the school site without the permission of the Senior Leadership Team with our School Dog Policy and Risk Assessment.

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