



STATION ROAD
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HEADTEACHER: MRS. E. PEARSON

21 April 2024

Dear Parents and Carers,

We hope that you all had an enjoyable Easter break. We are always looking at how we can provide positive experiences for our pupils and I am delighted to introduce you all to Mabel, our new School Therapy dog. We are looking to introduce Mabel to the school community after the Easter holiday and we hope that she will become an integral part of the school and play an important part in our commitment to ensuring the mental well-being of our students.



We plan to train Mabel to become a fully qualified Pet Therapy Dog for all students within the school. Her handler will be Mrs Butler who as well as being our SENCO is also our Assistant Head. I am sure that many of you will be incredibly supportive and enthusiastic about this development and may even have experience of therapy dogs in other schools, however, we also appreciate that some of you may have concerns about this and we would like to put your minds at rest if this is the case.

I absolutely understand the concerns that some of you may have. In preparation for this we have liaised very closely with schools within our area that have already successfully introduced therapy



dogs into their environment and will continue to work with them to share and develop best practice. To answer questions that you may have we have set out the benefits of a school therapy dog below:

What are the benefits of having a School Therapy 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.
- Physical – interaction with a furry friend reduces blood pressure, provides tactile stimulation, assists with pain management, gives motivation to move, walk 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.
- Reading – reading to dogs has been proven to help children develop literacy skills and build confidence, through both the calming effect the dog's presence has on children as well as the fact that a dog will listen to children read without being judgemental or critical. This comforting environment helps to nurture children's enthusiasm for reading and provides them with the confidence to read aloud.

Some concerns you might have include:

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, our dog will be subjected to the most thorough cleanliness and grooming regime. They will also only be allowed in situations with pupils who voluntarily wish to work with him. Your permission will of course be sought in advance of the dog having access to, and working with, your child in school. A letter to seek your permission regarding contact with the dog will be sent via email at the appropriate time before contact with occurs in a reading or therapy setting. There may be times before then when the dog is introduced to forms or in assemblies without physical contact. Mabel has a non-shedding coat, she has regular visits to the Dog Groomer where she has her coat clipped, to remove excess coat and help shed, this help keeps her clean and her skin healthy. In the winter she wears a coat which is washed daily to keep her warm and prevent her becoming covered in mud... she likes to roll in mud!

Will the dog be properly cared for?

The dog will be extremely well looked after. Mabel lives with Mrs Butler and her family and will come to school once a week initially, but will stay safely in the SENCO office until satisfactory training has been completed. She will then, in time, listen to pupils read in a controlled setting, support during talking and restorative sessions, she will help during transitions into the school and be an integral part of the team. She will always be accompanied by a trained adult. She will undergo thorough and



rigorous training and has so far proved to be extremely well-behaved. Mabel will be assessed by a Canine Concern Assessor when her probation finishes. Whilst the dog is in school, she will have access to a dog crate in the office where she can relax during the day. This is where she will spend most of her time initially. Mabel will visit the vet regularly for all their injections as well as regular check-ups. If Mabel is unwell for any reason she will stay at home with a dogsitter!

My child is scared of dogs...

Some children may have had upsetting experiences and thus have a fear of dogs (or another animal). The dog will only be in contact with children whose parents have given their permission. However, the dog's training will help them to be calm and gentle around children. She is believed to be a Pulli cross and 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 on site' policy...

Our school does have a 'no dogs on site' policy, however because the dog will be training to be a Therapy dog, specific rules will apply to them and them alone. She will be on a lead at all times when moving around the school property and will always be accompanied by a trained adult. The dog will also be fully and appropriately insured and risk assessed to carry out her role, thus allowing her to be on the school site. We will post copies of the risk assessment and associated documentation on the school website in the parents section for your information.

We hope you will agree that welcoming Mabel, to Teynham Primary School, will be a positive addition to our school family. If you continue to have any concerns regarding this then please do contact office@teynham.kent.sch.uk with the heading "School Dog". I hope you enjoy the rest of your break.

Your Sincerely,

Mrs E Pearson

