



Tuesday 23 March 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

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. School pets also contribute towards our Poplar Promise of being loved and nurtured.

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, it has been agreed for us to have a dog in school. We have researched school dogs, and spoken with many schools who also have a school dog. A Cockapoo has the right temperament, is hypoallergenic and doesn't shed, which will support children who have allergies.

Miss Mason has recently bought a Cockapoo puppy, Lola, and after Easter, Lola will be coming into school for mornings. Eventually, once Lola is used to the environment, she will be introduced to more children. Children will also attend assemblies and receive training about how to care and behave safely around Lola.

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. We have discussed the practicalities, including everything from risk assessments and insurance to dealing with training, doggy toileting and children's allergies.

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 Lola.

IF YOU REQUIRE ANY LETTERS TRANSLATING, PLEASE CONTACT THE SCHOOL

Poplar Farm Primary School, Helmsley Road, Grantham, NG31 8XF. Telephone 01476 850680

enquiries@poplarfarmsch-cit.co.uk

www.poplarfarmsch-cit.co.uk/website



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 Lola arrives in school, which will give you some indication of the amount of thought that has gone into this decision.

I would be very grateful therefore if you could complete the Microsoft Forms link detailed in the email if your child has any relevant allergies or phobias, or if for any reason you would prefer them not to have contact with Lola.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Hodson
Head Teacher

Lola



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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?

In the mornings, where possible, Lola will be around at the school gate with Miss Mason to welcome children. All children will have the opportunity over time to have quality time with Lola and learn how to care for her. Lola will also be available to calm unsettled children, walk around the school on a lead with a member of staff at appropriate times of the day so that she isn't a distraction to children's learning, and to go out on a lunchtime walk with a member of staff and in the future a small group of children. Lola 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, Lola will be trained to sit and listen to children read.

Safety around Lola

A risk assessment will be in place and available on the school website.

The school will have additional insurance to cover having a school dog on site.

If Miss Mason is at a meeting, there will be a number of designated staff who have agreed to have responsibility to support Lola in her absence.

Children will only have contact with Lola with a supervised adult. When moving around the school, Lola will be on a lead.

Lola will be based in the Buzzard Classroom, or in an office and if an adult isn't in the room, Lola will be safely in her crate.

What about the children who have allergies around a dog?

The school has researched that the best breed of dog is a Cockapoo which is hypoallergenic, so that 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 doesn't have contact with it 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 for dogs by teaching them how to care and behave safely around them. If a child has a fear for dogs we will ask parents to inform us of this so that we can be aware and work with the parents / child to build up their confidence so that they feel safe.

Health and well-being of Lola

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

Hygiene

There will be a designated area for Lola to be toilet trained which will be away from the children. In the early stages of training if the dog was to have an accident this would be cleared up immediately by a member of staff who is happy to do so with suitable cleaning products. Children will never be asked to handle picking up poo in a bag.

If children have stroked the dog they will be taught to wash their hands afterwards.

What happens if Lola is ill?

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

Please don't hesitate to contact school if you have any questions that have not been covered above. Thank you in advance for supporting us in introducing a school dog at Poplar Farm School.

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