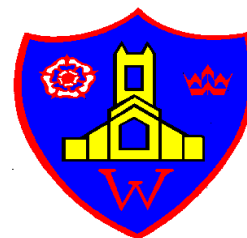


WALMSLEY CE SCHOOL

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HEADTEACHER: MRS DEBRA CARR

24th November 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

We're getting a school dog!



I am writing to inform you that we will soon be adding a new member to our school community. As of next week, we will be welcoming a school dog who will be within the school on a daily basis to work with our children.

We introduced Oscar during our whole school assembly on Friday, 5th November and the children were really excited about our new staff member.

About Oscar:

Oscar is a Cavachon (a cross between a Cavalier Spaniel and a Bichon Frise).

We have chosen this breed for the following reasons:

- The breed does not malt – their coat is hypoallergenic, meaning there is a reduced risk of allergic reactions.
- The breed is known to be child-friendly, lively, gentle mannered and affectionate, yet sensitive.
- The breed is known to be highly intelligent and responds excellently to training.

Oscar is a certified 'Pets as Therapy' dog. He has undertaken specific training and was assessed to ensure that he is suitable to be around children and vulnerable people. The significant amount of research we have carried out when finding a suitable school dog will hopefully highlight the positive benefits of his addition to our school family. We thoroughly believe the positive effects demonstrably outweigh any negatives.

Benefits of having a school dog include the following:

- Cognitive development – building a companionship with a dog helps children stimulate their memory, problem-solving and game-playing skills. Having a school dog is known to increase enthusiasm for, and enjoyment of animals, which motivates children to think and learn.
- Social skills – dogs provide a mutual topic for conversation with others and encourage responsibility, wellbeing and focussed interaction with others.
- Emotional skills – dogs improve self-esteem, acceptance from others and are known for improving moods. Dogs can also help children develop compassion and respect for other living things and can reduce children's anxiety.

Building respect can improve children's relationships with each other, parents and teachers and shows them how to nurture and care for another living thing. If any children are suffering from bereavement or are particularly sad, dogs can provide children with comfort and friendship.

- Physical development – interaction with dogs is known to reduce blood pressure, provide tactile stimulation, assist with pain management and give motivation for children to move and walk.
- Reading – school dogs are known to help children with their reading and literacy skills, through their calming presence and ability to listen to children read without being judgmental or critical. Children can build their confidence to read aloud to others through having a school dog.
- School community – having a school dog builds the sense of a family environment and togetherness.

During the day, Oscar will be kept in Mrs Carr's office or in the Deputy Head Teacher's office within the Year 6 block. He will then be cared for at Miss Browning's home once the school day is over. A suitable bed, food, water and cleaning supplies will be available for Oscar. He is sufficiently toilet-trained. School grounds will be kept clean at all times and only adults will be responsible for Oscar's physical needs.

Whenever Oscar is being walked around the school, he will have a short leash to ensure control is maintained at all times. Pupils will be able to visit Oscar during break and lunch times in the Head Teacher's office and he will visit pupils and work with groups of children in designated areas of school.

Pupils in Year 6 will be able to walk Oscar around the school playground – we have carefully considered pupils' ages and believe older pupils will be able to adequately control and respond to the dog's needs. Any pupils not in these years will not be able to walk Oscar – this is to ensure their safety. Adult supervision will be mandatory whether in classrooms or when Oscar is being walked by a pupil.

Pupils will only be able to come into contact with Oscar if parental permission has been received.

We understand that some parents will have concerns regarding bringing a school dog onto the premises and to reassure those with concerns that we have undertaken a full risk assessment to ensure that any hazards are avoided/adequately controlled. We will be publishing this risk assessment on the school website for you to view should you wish to access it.

Concerns may include the following:

My child is allergic to dogs and I don't want them to have an allergic reaction

As previously mentioned, we have chosen a Cavachon breed, which has a hypoallergenic coat and does not malt, meaning there is a significantly reduced risk of an allergic reaction. If, however, you would still prefer your child not to come into contact with Oscar, we will accommodate your request and ensure that arrangements are in place.

We have undertaken a thorough risk assessment, which details the hygiene practices that will be in place – such as cleaning of hands and the environment before and after coming into contact with the dog.

More information is detailed in our risk assessment which is available for you to download.

Will the dog be properly cared for?

The dog will be subject to a rigorous grooming process to prevent the risk of infection or disease. He has already undergone health checks in order to be accredited as a PAT dog and has regular professional grooms and veterinary nurse visits. The dog will be kept in the head teacher's or deputy head teacher's office during the day and will have adequate supply of food and water. You can find more information on these arrangements in our risk assessment. The dog will be given time-out to rest, have space and sleep.

My child is scared of dogs

We understand that some children may be fearful of dogs. Cavachon dogs are known for being extremely child-friendly and the dog will provide the opportunity for children to overcome their fears (with their parents' permission and adult supervision). The training and assessments that Oscar has undergone will ensure that he is well-behaved, gentle and calm around children. If parents still would prefer for their child not to come into contact with the dog we will accommodate your request and ensure alternative arrangements are in place.

Is the dog well-behaved?

Oscar has undergone training as a puppy and a mature dog to ensure he is well-behaved at all times. He will be kept on a short leash whenever walking around school. He is mild mannered and is able to respond to a variety of commands such as 'Wait, Sit, Stay, Come' in busy environments (as demonstrated in school last week during his introduction in our school assembly). His PAT assessment involved: taking treats gently; observation of his response to sudden noises; walking loosely on a leash; and being groomed and handled all over by a qualified veterinary practitioner in a veterinary surgery. His response was closely monitored and approved. He passed with flying colours.

A permission slip is coming home with the children tonight. Please complete and return by **Tuesday, 30th November**, outlining whether you are happy for your child to come into contact with Oscar, our school dog or not. A written list will be held of all children for whom permission has been received and will be distributed to all staff members and it is only these children who will be permitted to be around or touch the dog.

We hope you will join us in welcoming Oscar to our school and embrace everything he has to offer to our community and that we have provided reassurance, allaying any concerns you may have. However, ultimately it is your choice and we fully respect your decision around your child's specific needs in the same way we respect all health, emotional, dietary needs.

Thank you

Debra Carr and Kathryn Browning