



John Ray Infant School

"learning together, aiming high, proud to be ourselves"

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Headteacher;
Mrs Kate Mills

Wednesday, 09 December 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am sure over the last couple of years you have heard of many schools introducing school dogs to support pupils in a number of areas including reading and helping to reduce anxiety.

I would like to introduce you to Casper who we are hoping will take on this new role in school. Casper is my one year old Cockerpoo who is more Spaniel than Poodle! He has a wonderful nature and I hope over time he will become a valuable asset to the school.

Although Casper is still young he has proved himself to be a fast learner and is generally well behaved! His introduction to school is going to be slow and steady. So, to that end I am going to start introducing Casper to school by having him sitting with me on the gate.



Casper will become increasingly familiar with the school environment as I will take him in at the weekend and during the holidays to get used to the smells and sounds. Then as part of his training I will introduce him slowly to the school. This letter is to inform you that over the coming months this will now be taking place. Casper will have no direct contact with the children at this stage but he will have walks around the building. Children will not be able to touch Casper without permission from an adult. If you do not wish your child to have direct contact with him please let us know via the school office. Equally if you think your child would benefit from meeting Casper in advance, with you present, I would be happy to accommodate that.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Will the school still have a 'no dogs' policy?

Our school continues with a 'no dogs' policy. Attending school dogs do not fall within the remit of this policy as they are, like the Pets as Therapy dogs, subject to rules as part of our risk assessment. Casper will be on a lead at all times when moving around the school property and will always be accompanied by an adult. We will make sure that he doesn't leave any mess on school property. He will also be fully insured to carry out his role thus allowing him to be on the school site.

What if my child is allergic to dogs?

It is understandable that some of you may be concerned about possible allergic reactions to a school dog. Casper is subjected to the most thorough cleanliness and grooming regime. He is treated with flea and worming medication as directed by the vet. He will only be allowed in situations with pupils who voluntarily wish to work with him and will not be in contact with any asthmatic or children with known allergies until contact has been with relevant parents. If your child has an allergy we are not aware of please let me know.

Is the dog properly cared for?

Casper is extremely well looked after. He will always be accompanied by an adult and stay on his lead walking around school. Whilst he is in school he will have access to a dog bed in my office where he can rest and have quiet time. If he is unwell for any reason he will stay at home.

What if my child is scared of dogs?

Some children may have had upsetting experiences and have a fear of dogs (or another animal). 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. We hope that children at JRI will be similarly helped. Parents have opportunity to ask that their children do not have contact with Casper but equally the child may like to meet Casper with the parents present.

What are the benefits of having a school dog?

Numerous research studies have shown the benefits of therapy dogs in schools. Therapy dogs have been working in schools for the past 5 years across the UK; they have been commonplace in schools in the USA and Australia for many years.

Research 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.

Children who have worked with a dog report that one of the most valued qualities is the unconditional love and attention it gives to everyone with whom it interacts.

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.

If you have any questions at all please ask.

A risk assessment will follow over the Christmas holidays and will be available to view on the website.

In the mean-time Casper and I look forward to seeing you on the gate before the end of term.

Yours sincerely



Mrs Darvill