

9th November, 2019
Ref: 0855



SCHOOL DOG

Dear Parent / Carer,

We are looking to introduce a new member to our St Chad's school family who will become an integral part of our school community: Rosie Posie, our miniature school 'sausage' dog.

For a number of years, I have looked into the possibility of having a school dog. In my previous school in Birmingham, I was very fortunate to work in a setting where a dog played a key role in supporting our children with their emotional needs (in the form of nurture) and in their reading. The impact that the dog had to the children's well-being and learning was noticeable.

Over the past year, I have become aware of a number of schools across Derby City (including Firs Primary and Kingsmead) and Derbyshire (including some DDAT schools) who have successfully introduced a school dog. After visiting some of these schools and speaking to staff, I have been blown away by the positive impact that their dogs have had on the children and whole school community in their settings.

The value of pet 'therapy' is widely accepted as a powerful aid to stimulation and communication. Studies have shown that the presence of companion animals can improve the well-being of children and lower the rate of anxiety, simply by making the environment happier, more enjoyable and less forbidding.

The rationale behind my decision for St Chad's to have a school dog, put forward to governors, staff and the academy, was as follows:

- For the school to have a pet that was able to live as naturally as conditions would allow.
- For the animal to be properly cared for outside of the school day.
- To have a pet that the children could interact with and also be of benefit to the children's social and emotional development.
- To support the school's Christian values of love, friendship, compassion and respect, providing opportunities for the children to 'live out' these values in the context of caring for a pet.
- To support the school's ongoing commitment to creating a calming, loving and family-orientated environment.

Last week, governors upheld my decision to introduce a school dog to our St Chad's family.

The dog that I am looking into having is a female miniature dachshund (commonly referred to as a 'sausage dog'). This is a friendly and loyal breed, known for being intelligent, and makes a popular family pet. The breed is small in size (and therefore less threatening towards people who may be fearful of dogs) and can be easily handled by

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ST. CHAD'S CofE NURSERY & INFANT SCHOOL
Gordon Road, Derby DE23 6WR
Tele: 01332 345997

E-mail: admin@stchads.derby.sch.uk
Executive Headteacher: Mr J Gallimore
Head of School: Ms. K Leach

DDAT
Derby Diocesan Academy Trust



children. Dachshunds are considered to be hypoallergenic due to the breed's lack of heavy shedding and low dander production.



The dog will be mine (and my daughter's) and live with me but will accompany me in school as regularly as possible and (eventually) become a member of our school family. A puppy dachshund has been chosen because training an older dog can be more challenging as he/she has already developed some habits that may be undesirable to change. I will be undertaking puppy class training outside of school and will also be working with a dog trainer to support the puppy's transition to school. A thorough risk assessment has been completed and has been quality assured by our Health and Safety Chartered Practitioner through DDAT. As a parent myself, I understand that you may have some concerns around your child coming into contact with a dog in school. **Below, I have set out the benefits of a school dog, and tried to address concerns you may have.**

What are the benefits of having a school dog?

Numerous research studies have shown the benefits of dogs in schools. 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.

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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, as someone who suffers with pet allergies myself, I can assure you that care and thought has been given to the breed of dog. Our dog will be a dachshund: they are considered to be hypoallergenic and do not shed lots of fur. Our dog will be subjected to the most thorough cleanliness and grooming regime. Children will be taught to wash their hands after coming into direct contact with the dog. The dog will also only be allowed in situations with children who voluntarily wish to be in close proximity to her.

Will the dog be properly cared for?

The dog will be extremely well looked after. She will live with me and my family and will come to school most days but will stay safely in my office. She will undergo thorough and rigorous training (beginning with puppy classes) and a carefully planned induction programme to school. Whilst the dog is in school she will have access to a dog crate in my office where she can relax during the day. The top of my stairs will be fitted with a stair gate so that the dog can't escape. When walking through school, she will be supervised at all times and will be kept on a lead. The dog will visit the vet regularly for all their injections as well as regular check-ups. If the dog is unwell for any reason, she will stay at home.

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 direct contact with children who feel comfortable to do so. However, the dog's training will help her to be calm and gentle around children. The breed of dog that I have chosen is renowned for having a loving nature and an ideal family pet. She will be small in stature and will therefore look 'less threatening' than larger dogs. 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.

It is really important that we know if your child has an allergy to dogs or a serious phobia of dogs. We will be sending out a form that will need to be completed, signed and returned in due course.

We hope you will agree that welcoming a dog to St Chad's will be a positive addition to our school family, however if you have any concerns regarding this then please do not hesitate to speak with me.

Thank you, as always, for your ongoing support.

Yours faithfully,
K. Leach

Ms. K Leach
Head of School

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