



St Osyth C of E Primary School

A member of the Diocese of Chelmsford Vine Schools Trust

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30th June 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

Some of our children have been fortunate enough to have benefited from dog therapy. More of our children are going to be able to benefit from dog therapy and other dog related well-being activities. This is because **we are going to be having our own school dog.**

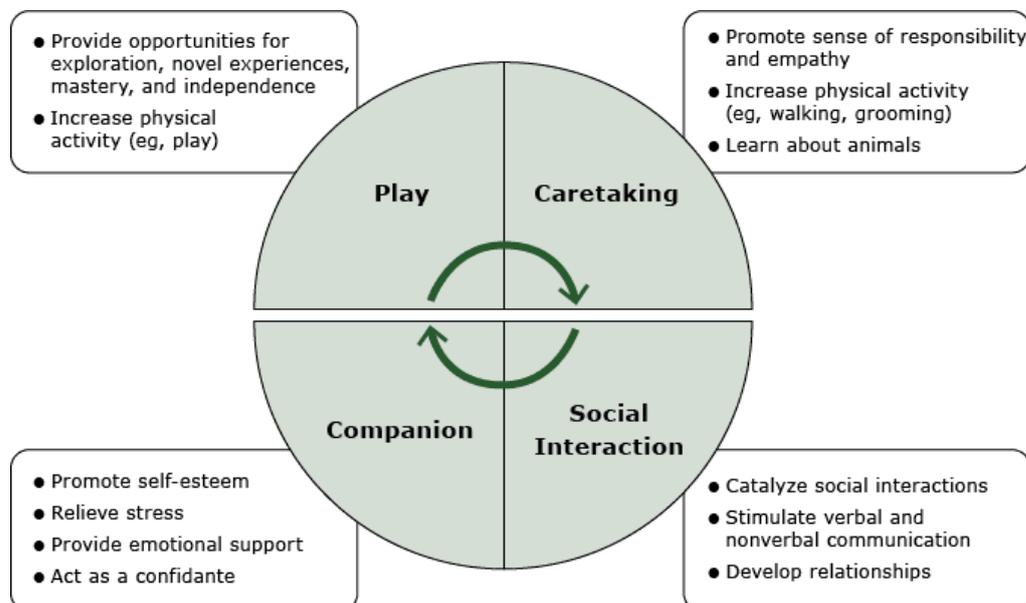
Our School Dog

Our school dog has yet to be officially named because we are in the process of working with our School Council to get suggestions for a name. Staff are also suggesting names. Once a name has been decided we will share this with the children and with you.



Summary rationale

Across the country, schools are beginning to realise the benefits of therapy dogs. At the moment, not all schools have entirely tapped into this extraordinary tool that can greatly serve its children. Anxiety levels are on the rise with school aged children. Social media, COVID19 and the pressure of academic performance have been identified as contributing factors. Many schools have found the introduction of a therapy/school dog helps reduce anxiety and helps to break down issues such as anger management. Interacting with dogs is proven to help reduce blood pressure and anxiety. We have seen that the presence of a school dog has been very beneficial in the schools that we have visited as we have considered having one ourselves.



Our school dog will have had some basic training before it works with children. Overtime, and as is appropriate for our dog and our children, our dog will support children in a range of ways. Below are some of the ways we are planning for our dog to support our children. Not all of these will happen straight away or every day – our dog will proceed through different training programmes and we must look after the welfare of our dog, for example, by giving it time out in a quiet place away from children.

Helping children to listen in the classroom

Our dog will demonstrate that they need to listen to understand what task they have been asked to do. As our dog models this, through a range of activities as the adult talks about this with children, it can help children to realise just how important active listening is.

Building confidence and trust

Dogs can also be used to build a child's confidence. When a child who lacks self-esteem works successfully with the dogs to teach them a new trick, it helps to build trust and gives them a sense of achievement. The process allows the child to feel listened too, through working with the dogs. As children work with our school dog it will help relationships with peers and teachers due to experiencing trust and unconditional love from our dog. This helps children learn how to express their feelings and be part of more trusting relationships.

Helping the perfectionist

Children can often find it hard to make mistakes. When we are working with our dog both he and the adult will make mistakes during training. This, practically shows it's ok and mistakes happen; that they are a natural part of the learning process. It helps to demonstrate that mistakes happen and we can try again and learn from what went wrong the first time. It's not the end of the world.

Speech and Language

Using simple commands when working with our dog like "Sit" "Spin" "Down" "Come" will help the children to understand how to form words properly. Our dog will not sit if it is not said properly, so the children will have to say the word clearly and accurately. We'll ensure that they emphasise the S sound and the T at the end when giving the command 'sit, for example. When the child says the word correctly they are rewarded by the seeing the dog successfully execute the command. This will re enforces the importance to the children to pronounce words properly.

Support good attendance

We expect our dog to help reduce the stress and anxiety some children feel and this help increase their school attendance

- We have already seen that for some children, looking after our chickens has been beneficial in making the transition into school in the morning. Having our school dog will add to our support for such children.
- When children are timetabled to see the dogs on a regular basis, they are likely to begin to look forward to coming to school.
- Our school dog will help children's social and emotional skills. Dogs can be seen as less threatening, non- judgemental and easier to talk to.
- Dogs can increase attachment responses (Oxytocin) a hormone that increases trust in humans.

Helping autistic (diagnosed) children

We hope that there may be times when our dog will encourage speech and conversation with autistic children. Sensory inputs, such as noise, can at times be challenging for some autistic children. Our dog will help to put these children at ease and enable them to feel comfortable maintaining eye contact with our dog. Research has found that children with autism are more social when playing with dogs as opposed to toys. The kindness and softness of the dogs help these children simply by being present. Our dog will sit next to the child ready to engage, without any judgement or expectations.

Emotional and environmental benefits

The interactions with our school dog will improve self-esteem, acceptance from others, as well as lifting mood and frequently provoking laughter. Animals in the school lift the mood for all those in the environment and bring warmth and security – we have already seen this with our chickens.

Reading

Our dog will support the reading development of children. Children will enjoy reading to the dogs. Here they will be able to practice reading out loud. Gradually, they will build confidence in their reading skills and begin to enjoy the art of reading.

We appreciate the parents and carers may have some questions about the practicalities of having a school dog. The information below, we hope, will answer any common ones.

Who will the dog belong to and where is it coming from?

Our school dog is part of the same family as the dogs which have been coming in for the dog therapy session which we have been running successfully this term. Currently, he is about nine weeks old. Our dog has been bred and brought up in a family home by a well-recognised and experienced breeder. We are very grateful that our breeder has been so helpful and supportive to us.

I will be the dog's owner and, ultimately, responsible for its safety, well-being and behaviour. No school money is being spent on purchasing our dog.

Allergic reactions.

Understandably, parents, carers and staff may be concerned about potential allergic reactions to animals within the school environment. Our dog and his surroundings will be kept clean and regular grooming will take place. This will minimise allergic reactions. Children and parents will be asked if they have any known allergies before coming into contact with our school dog. We can also check the medical information that parents and carers have given us about their children.

Fear of dogs.

There will be times where children may be afraid of dogs, for example, if they have had a traumatic experience with a dog in the past. All children will only have contact with the dogs after permission has been granted by a parent or a guardian. The dog will only be in areas where any contact is supervised at all times.

Welfare of our school dog

To support the welfare of our dog we will have appropriate pet insurance. Our dog will have appropriate times when they can be quiet and not be 'working'. Outside of school, our dog will be well looked after within a home setting and they will have some time to socialise with other dogs. Appropriate plans are in place in case there are times when our dog cannot attend all or some of the school day.

Insurance

In addition to pet insurance, we are making the necessary arrangements to have appropriate insurance arrangements for when our dog is in school.

If you have any comments or questions about this initiative, please arrange a time to speak to me or Mrs Levett.

Yours sincerely,

Mr M Carter-Tufnell
(Headteacher)