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School Dog

Dear Parents and Carers,

'Pet therapy' is widely accepted as benefiting children's well-being and communication skills. 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 and less forbidding. Dogs are increasingly being used in schools with great success and some of you may have seen in the media that they are now being used in some hospitals as the emotional benefits they bring are so vast.



Springdale children will now get to enjoy the benefits from having a school dog – Bobby. He is owned by Mrs Lowe, he has grown up and been trained in the school environment to become fully accustomed to the routines of the day and to support children in the school. The safety and wellbeing of children and adults on site will be absolutely paramount, as will Bobby's well-being.

Bobby is a Labrador which is a breed of dog that are well known for their gentle and loving temperament, ability to learn and low shedding, lower allergen fur.

There will lots of opportunities for children to engage with Bobby as a group and as individuals. **This can only happen for children whereby parents/ carers have given consent for their child to interact with Bobby.** If the consent is not returned we will assume that consent has NOT been given and your child will not access Bobby. This is to ensure we are respecting the wishes of all parents and children.

The benefits of having a school dog include:

- Emotional – spending time with an animal, a school dog improves self-esteem, acceptance from others and lifts mood, often provoking laughter and fun. Dogs can also promote 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 improve fitness and stimulates the senses.
- Social – a dog provides a positive mutual topic for discussion, encourages responsibility, wellbeing and focused interaction with others.
- Learning – companionship with a dog stimulates memory, problem-solving and game-playing.
- 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.

- 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.

Some questions you might have:

My child has/I have allergies

Bobby will be subjected to the most thorough cleanliness and grooming regime. He will also only be allowed in situations with persons who voluntarily wish to work with him. Your permission will of course be sought in advance of Bobby having access to, and working with, your child in the school. We will be sending out an online consent form for your child/children to have permission to access Bobby.

Will he be properly cared for?

Bobby will be loved and extremely well looked after. He will live with Mrs Lowe and will come to the school on selected days each week. He will remain on a lead and under the control of an adult at all times. He will visit the vet regularly for all his injections as well as regular check-ups. If he is unwell for any reason, he will stay at home with a dog sitter.

When at school, Bobby will have access to a quiet office area where he can relax during the day. We have completed a thorough risk assessment and have created a clear set of rules for both staff and children to follow. We will share the rules with all children via assemblies, and some in class work, in preparation for Bobby working with the children. All staff and children will work together to ensure the rules are always strictly adhered to.

If I give my consent, what work will the dog do with my child?

Subject to parent/carer consent, Bobby will listen to our students read and will take part in sessions where the focus is on emotional and mental wellbeing. The work he does will develop and evolve as he grows and matures.

For the first few weeks Bobby will not work directly with children. This time in school will be used to familiarise Bobby with his new school so he's ready to carry out his school duties when the time is right. The children will be taught how to respond to Bobby when he is out and about onsite, on his lead, as part of his training. This will support his socialisation and familiarisation.

My child is/I am scared of dogs

Bobby will only ever be in direct contact with persons whose permission has been given.

Some people may have had upsetting experiences and thus have a fear of dogs (or another animal). Bobby's training will help him to be calm and be gentle - with proper guidance and handling, you/your child can learn to overcome a fear of animals and grow in respect and appreciation for them. Some people may never learn to love animals, but to learning to accept them in our environment is an important skill in this day and age, where people come across dogs everywhere within our community.

Bobby is always on his lead and with an adult, at no point is he free to roam the school site.

The school has a 'no dogs' policy

Bobby, our nurture dog, will be regarded as having a similar impact to a member of staff when supporting students. For this reason, he would be an exception to our "no dogs" rule.

His documents and qualifications will be held on file in the office in the same way as staff members' documentation is kept. These would include:

- Full and up-to-date vaccination and professional health records
- Personal pet insurance including public liability
- Full risk assessment (toileting is covered within this document – the dog has a designated area that is not accessed by children or staff)

Bobby will be kept on a lead when moving around the school site.

If you have any further queries regarding Bobby please email the school enquiries@springdaleprimary.co.uk and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have, alternatively I am on the school gate every morning and evening for you to come and see me.

We will obtain consent from parents via Schoolcomms as to whether your child can have contact with Bobby. Please respond by Friday 29th September 23. Please remember, non-completion will be taken as a NO to consent.

We hope you will join us in welcoming Bobby to the Springdale community and embrace all the benefits that he has to offer.

Yours Sincerely

Z. Lowe

Mrs Lowe
Headteacher