



21st December 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

As you all know over the past twelve months the Team at Highfields Spencer Academy have been considering the possibility of getting a dog who would work in our school as part of the on-going provision for wellbeing and mental health.

I am writing to inform you that we will have a new member of our school community from after Christmas. We have found our new school therapy dog! The dog will belong to Miss North and will be living with her and her family on a full time basis.

There will be a long period of integration into the school and over the next few weeks he will not be in any contact with any children. The dog will be ready to be trained to be a PAT (Pets as Therapy) dog from January and ready to work fully with children from after February half term.

I understand there may be some questions:

What are the benefits of a school dog?

- ✓ A calming effect on pupils;
- ✓ Improved behaviour and concentration, reduced stress and improved self-esteem;
- ✓ Encouraging expression, participation and confidence for all children;
- ✓ Fostering a sense of responsibility;
- ✓ Motivating pupils to think and to learn, as most children have a high level of natural interest in, enthusiasm for and enjoyment of animals;
- ✓ Encouraging respect and thereby improving pupils' relationships with each other, parents and teachers;
- ✓ Teaching children to nurture and respect life;
- ✓ Helping work undertaken with the most vulnerable children;
- ✓ Helping children build confidence in reading;
- ✓ Improving attendance;
- ✓ Further promote our 'Well Being' agenda for pupils.

How has the school planned for this?

- A full risk assessment and policy has been written and will be available on the website
- When the dog begins working with children, consent will be sought for each child to have contact
- All contact will be carefully planned and children will not be left unsupervised with the dog
- When not working, the dog will be based in one of the school offices



What about allergies?

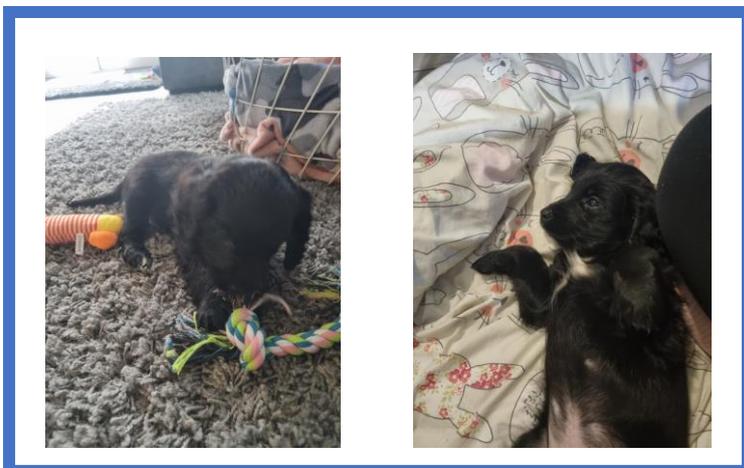
- Our dog is a cocker spaniel and the breed has low allergy and medium shredding qualities
- All areas of the school are vacuumed and surfaces are wiped down daily
- Movement around the school will be controlled
- Any child working with the dog will wash their hands

Cocker Spaniels make incredible companions. They range from lap size to medium size which makes them fairly easy to travel with and their gentle and jovial spirit that makes them great family pets. They are often trained as service dogs due to their gentle, people pleasing nature and love of companionship. Jet has been checked by our school vet, Highfields Vets and they love him! They are looking forward to supporting us as we move forward with integrating into our school community. Jet will have pet insurance and his behaviour training will be completed through Pawfect Dogs.

How can I find out more information?

We aim to put a regular blog onto our website to keep parents and children up to date on the progress of the school dog and will update families through Class Dojo and Twitter.

Let me introduce you.....This is Jet, our gorgeous new therapy puppy! Jet will begin to be introduced to the children after Christmas through assemblies and short visits to school. He will be always accompanied by Miss North and will be on his leash. We will use the information provided on forms from when we had our visiting therapy dog this half term to check allergies and anxieties around dogs and we have also booked in some workshops from The Dogs Trust to help pupils to learn about how to approach dogs.



This is going to be a gentle transition for pupils into us knowing how to own and care for a pet in our school community but something we know will benefit us all at Highfields. Thank you all for your support through our Friends of Highfields fundraising this term to make this dream turn into a reality for the benefit of our school.

Mrs Jones, Principal and Miss North, Interventions TA/ Senior Mental Health Lead
on behalf of the whole Highfields Team