



ST MARY'S COLLEGE

12 January 2024

Dear Parents and Carers,

We are excited to introduce you to a new member of St Mary's College: **Brian**. Brian is a Cockapoo puppy who is in training to become our school dog and is set to become an integral part of our school community.

The puppy lives with Miss Holgate and Mr Johnston and is currently completing a course of puppy socialisation classes with an external trainer, who will also be conducting a temperament assessment. Brian will be slowly introduced to the school and students as part of his assessment process.

The dog's main place of residence will be in the SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) area, however, whilst moving around the school the dog will be kept on a short lead and will always be with a member of staff. Brian will be working with a select group of students to help with co-regulation, reward and to listen to the children read. It is accepted that interacting with animals is not appropriate for all children but that for some it has the potential to provide many positive benefits. Therefore, contact with the dog is voluntary.

When deciding on a suitable dog to have in school, advice has been taken from an experienced dog trainer who trains service dogs, such as guide dogs. We have chosen to have a Cockapoo for the following reasons:

- The breed is known to be child-friendly, gentle mannered, and affectionate, yet sensitive.
- The breed is known to be intelligent and respond excellently to training.
- The breed is hypoallergenic, meaning he does not moult, which greatly reduces the risk of allergies.
- Brian is a mix of poodle and a show cocker-spaniel, meaning he has a calm temperament.
- He is a size most appropriate to children who may be cautious of dogs.

We have also undertaken a thorough risk assessment and policy, which will be available upon request. We have been working closely with another school where a school dog is already successfully in place. This school shared with us their experience about the positive impact the dog has had across the school.

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Mrs M Stead



We want to re-assure parents and carers that we have undertaken a significant amount of research into bringing a school dog to join the St Mary's College community and believe the positive effects of such demonstrably outweigh any negatives. Some of the many benefits of having a school dog include the following:

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. If any children are suffering from bereavement or are particularly sad, dogs can provide children with comfort and friendship.

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.

School community- having a school dog builds the sense of a family environment.

To remain in line with our risk assessment, we will be collecting a list of all known students with a dog allergy. Please **only** complete the following link if your child has an allergy to dogs. Please can all responses be completed before the 19th January.

<https://forms.gle/SbVwbtsx65mQS1JJA>

We understand that parents and carers may have concerns regarding bringing a school dog onto the premises, and I hope this letter has provided some reassurance to parents and carers. We have listed some frequently asked questions to queries or concerns that you may have on the next page.

Kind regards,

M. Stead

Head of School





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Frequently asked questions

Q: Who is the legal owner of the dog and who pays for its costs?

A: The legal owners of the dog will be Miss Holgate and Mr Johnston; they will bear the costs associated with owning the dog; the school budget will support insurance.

Q: Will the dog be from a reputable breeder?

A: Yes. The dog was purchased from a reputable breeder. Miss Holgate and Mr Johnston visited the puppies in their home with their mum. This puppy was specifically chosen for its temperament.

Q: Has a risk assessment been undertaken?

A: Yes, a full risk assessment is in place, which will be reviewed regularly. We have carefully considered having a dog in school and sought advice from many sources, including other schools that successfully have a school dog. The risk assessment is available on request.

Q: Who is responsible for training?

A: Miss Holgate and Mr Johnston will be the legal owners of the dog and as a result, will be responsible for its initial training.

Q: How will the dog be toileted to ensure hygiene for all?

A: In the interest of health and hygiene, our school dog will be taken to a designated area outside. The staff in charge of the dog will ensure that everything is cleared away appropriately, cleaning the area with disinfectant if needed.

Q: How will the dog's welfare be considered?

A: The dog will be walked regularly and given free time outside. The dog will have its own space in the SEND area where it will not be disturbed by students. The dog will be carefully trained over a period of time and will have unlimited access to food and water. We will work carefully to ensure the dog's welfare is always considered and remove the dog from the school environment if we don't feel it is happy.

Q: How will this be managed where children have allergies?

A: Students will not need to touch the dog, which will relieve the possibility of allergic reactions. The dog is also hypoallergenic meaning allergies will be rare. We already manage a number of allergies at school and this will be no different for students and adults that are allergic to dogs. Individual needs will always be met and we are happy to work with parents to put additional control measures in place for individual allergies. Any students with allergies to dogs will be built into the risk assessment as they are made known to the school via the forms link.

Q: My child is frightened of dogs; how will you manage this?

A: Access to the dog will be carefully managed and supervised and children do not need to have close contact with the dog if they do not want to.

Q: What type of dog is the puppy

A: Brian, is cockapoo. This breed is known to be child friendly, gentle mannered, demonstrably affectionate yet sensitive and has outstanding trainability.

Q: I am worried the school dog could be aggressive if he is upset or agitated by something.

A: School dogs are intensively trained to be able to cope with excess stimulation and petting. The school will take every reasonable step to ensure that the dog is always under control and will manage this very carefully. Brian has a very gentle and friendly nature and will continue to receive expert training.

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