



**St Paul's Catholic
Primary School**

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RE: We are getting a school dog!

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am writing to inform you that we will soon be adding a new member to our school community. As of November 2020, we will be welcoming a school dog who will be within our school for part of the week, to work with our pupils.

After careful consideration, we have chosen a Cockapoo named Mabel. Mabel is 14 weeks old and will be ready to join our school community shortly! We have chosen this breed for the following reasons:

- The breed does not moult – their coat is non-allergenic, meaning there is a reduced risk of allergic reactions.
- The breed is known to be child-friendly, lively, gentle mannered and affectionate, yet sensitive.
- The breed is known to be highly intelligent and respond excellently to training.

Mabel will be undergoing training, to ensure she is well-trained for being around children. We wish to reassure parents that we have undertaken a significant amount of research into the advantages of having a school dog 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 development – building a companionship with a dog helps children stimulate their memory, problem-solving and game-playing skills. Having a school dog is known to increase enthusiasm for, and enjoyment of animals, which motivates children to think and learn.
- Social skills – dogs provide a mutual topic for conversation with others, and encourage responsibility, wellbeing and focussed interaction with others.
- Emotional skills – dogs improve self-esteem, acceptance from others and are known for improving moods. Dogs can also help children develop compassion and respect for other living things and can reduce children's anxiety. Building respect can improve children's relationships with each other, parents and teachers and shows them how to nurture and care for another living thing. If any children are suffering from bereavement or are particularly sad, dogs can provide children with comfort and friendship.
- Physical development – interaction with dogs is known to reduce blood pressure, provide tactile stimulation, assist with pain management and give motivation for children to move and walk.

- Reading – school dogs are known to help children with their reading and literacy skills, through their calming presence and ability to listen to children read without being judgemental or critical. Children can build their confidence to read aloud to others through having a school dog.
- School community – having a school dog builds the sense of a family environment and togetherness.

During the day, Mabel will be kept in my office – returning to my home once the school day is over. A suitable bed, food, water and cleaning supplies will be held for Mabel who is already trained with toileting. I must stress that pupils will not be expected to clean up any dog mess, and we will ensure that the school grounds are kept clean at all times.

Whenever Mabel is being walked around the school, she will have a short lead to ensure she is controlled at all times.

Within the restrictions of our bubble groups, pupils will be able to visit Mabel during break and lunch times in my office. Once her training is complete, Mabel will visit pupils in their classrooms, particularly for children to read to her.

Pupils in Years 5 and 6 will be able to walk Mabel around the school playground at specific times of the day – we have carefully considered pupils' ages and believe older pupils will be able to adequately control Mabel. Any pupils not in these years will not be able to walk Mabel – this is to ensure their safety. At all times, whether in classrooms or being walked by a pupil, an adult will supervise the activity.

I would like to reassure you that pupils will only be able to come into contact with Mabel if parental permission has been received.

We understand that many parents will have concerns regarding bringing a school dog onto the premises, and I would like to use this letter to provide some reassurance to parents. We are currently undertaking a full risk assessment to ensure that any hazards can be adequately controlled; Mabel will only be allowed to begin her contact with children once the risk assessment is approved by our Health and Safety providers. Below, I have listed some concerns which I believe parents may have.

My child is allergic to dogs and I don't want them to have an allergic reaction

As previously mentioned, we have chosen a Cockapoo breed, which has a non-allergenic coat and does not moult, meaning there is a significantly reduced risk of an allergic reaction. If, however, you would still prefer your child not to come into contact with Mabel, we will accommodate your request and ensure that arrangements are in place.

We have undertaken a thorough risk assessment, which details the hygiene practices that will be in place – such as cleaning of hands and the environment before and after coming into contact with Mabel.

Will the dog be properly cared for?

Mabel will be subject to a rigorous grooming process to prevent the risk of infection or disease. Mabel will be kept in my office during the day and will have adequate supply of food and water. You can find more information on these arrangements in our risk assessment.

My child is scared of dogs

We understand that some children may be fearful of dogs. Cockapoos are known for being extremely child-friendly and Mabel will provide the opportunity for children to overcome their fears, with their parents' permission. The training that Mabel will undergo will ensure that she is well-behaved, gentle and calm around children. If parents would prefer for their child not to come into contact with Mabel, we will accommodate your request and ensure alternative arrangements are in place.

Is the dog well-behaved?

As previously mentioned, Mabel is undergoing training to ensure she is well-behaved at all times. She will be kept on a short leash whenever walking around school.

Please refer to the attached permission slip, outlining whether your child is able to come into contact with Mabel or not. I would like to reassure you that a written list will be held of all children for whom permission has been received – this will be distributed to all staff members and only these children will be permitted to be around or touch Mabel. **Due to our current arrangements, rather than sending the consent form into school, we request that you select the option from the box on the attached permission slip and email your option to the school office - office@stpauls.bhcet.org.uk You must update us if your consent option changes.**

We hope you will join us in welcoming Mabel to our school and embrace all she has to offer to our community. I hope to have provided reassurance to any concerns you may have via this letter; however, if you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me at school by phone or email.

Yours sincerely,



Sheena Sinclair
Head Teacher

Please email your consent option to office@stpauls.bhcet.org.uk

A	My child is allergic to dogs and I would not like my child to be around, or touch, the dog.
B	My child is allergic to dogs, but I am happy for them to be around the dog, as long as my child does not touch the dog.
C	My child has a fear of dogs and I would not like my child to be around, or touch, the dog.
D	My child has a fear of dogs, but I am happy for them to be slowly introduced to the dog.
E	I would not like my child to be around, or touch, the dog for reasons other than those outlined above.
F	I am happy for my child to be around and touch the dog.

