

What are the benefits of having a school dog?

Numerous research studies have shown the benefits of dogs in schools. Dogs have been working in schools for the past 5 years across the UK. However, they have been commonplace in schools in the USA and Australia for many years.

Evidence indicates that benefits include:

- 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.
- 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.

Some concerns you might have:

My child is allergic to dogs

It is understandable that some of you may be concerned about possible allergic reactions to a school dog. However, our school dog will be subjected to the most thorough cleanliness and grooming regime. He/she will also only be allowed in situations with pupils who voluntarily wish to work with him. Your permission will of

course be sought in advance of a dog having access to, and working with, your child in school.

Will the dog be properly cared for?

Our school dog would be extremely well looked after. He would live with Mrs Jeffries and her family and will come to school most days but will stay safely in the offices until satisfactory training has been completed. He/she will then, in time, work in classes but will always be accompanied by a trained adult. He will undergo thorough and rigorous training (beginning with puppy classes) so will be extremely well-behaved. Whilst the dog would be in school he would have access to a dog crate in the offices where he can 'chill out' during the day! This is where he will spend most of his time initially. He/she would visit the vet regularly for all his injections as well as regular check-ups

My child is scared of dogs

Some children may have had upsetting experiences and thus have a fear of dogs (or another animal). Our dog would only be in contact with children whose parents have given their permission. However, training would help the dog to be calm and gentle around children; we choose a breed known for a gentle temperament. Experience and research have shown that, with proper guidance and handling, children can learn to overcome their fear of animals and grow a respect and appreciation for them.

We hope you see the benefits of having a dog join our school and look forward to your feedback. I truly believe the children would gain an awful lot from this experience.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Lara Jeffries