18th November 2019

Dear Parents/Carers,

We are writing to let you know of some exciting news for Heathcote Primary School. From this month we will be meeting our new school dog, called Scribbles, who will be a regular attender at Heathcote Primary School. Scribbles is a Cavapoochon.

Cavapoochon’s are a breed of dog that are known for their mild temperament and he has a hypo-allergenic coat. Scribbles is Mrs Abernethy’s dog and will be only coming into school for short sessions initially. Mrs Abernethy obviously cares for Scribbles out of school; she will be taking full responsibility, but other staff may eventually take him for sessions.

In an assembly we will discuss with the children the rules and expectations about having a school dog but we will also talk about many of the benefits too. We have undertaken a significant amount of research and are aware of many benefits to having a school dog including.

**Benefits:**

* 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.

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 health benefits they bring are just so vast.

The dog’s main place of residence will be an office area, which is secure and separate from the classrooms. As Scribbles is still young he will slowly be introduced to the school community and we will begin by introducing him to small numbers of children. If your child is going to work in regular, close contact the dog we will request permission from parents to do so. Over the year all children will have the opportunity to interact with our school dog as he begins to visit more classrooms and moves around the school more. Whilst moving around the school, the dog will be kept on a short lead and will always be with an adult.

Please understand that we will do everything we can to reassure children who are fearful and that under no circumstances will they be forced to meet with the dog.

We have chosen a Cavapoochon as an appropriate breed of dog for the school. The breed has been carefully selected because of its ideal temperament

We will publish pictures of our school dog, Scribbles, via our Twitter feeds so that everyone can enjoy his development and our weekly newsletter will provide regular updates.

We hope the children will gain a great deal of enjoyment from having their school dog and that he becomes an established part of life at Heathcote Primary School. However, should you have any queries or questions on the matter then please do not hesitate to contact the school. In the meantime, please see the FAQs attached and the risk assessment which can be found on our school website.

Kind regards,

Mrs G Humphriss

Executive Head Teacher

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**Permission slip for working with school dog**

Please tick as appropriate:

* I am happy for my child to be involved with all aspects of caring for the school dog, including supervised walks at break time.
* My child is a little nervous of dogs but I am happy for him/her to be involved in all aspects of caring for the school dog, including supervised walks at break time.
* My child is fearful of dogs but, in time, I would like them to work with the dog to develop their confidence with and understanding of dogs.
* I do not give permission for my child to come into direct contact with the dog.

Child’s name:………………………………………………………………………

Class: ………………………………………………

Signed:……………………………………Print name:………………………

Date:……………………………………………………………………………

**School Dog**

**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

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

A. The legal owner of the dog will be Mrs Abernethy who will care for the dog out of school hours and will bear the costs associated with it; the school budget will remain unaffected.

**Q Is the dog from a reputable breeder?**

A. Yes. Mrs Abernethy researched breeders and chose a reputable breeder

**Q Will the dog be a distraction?**

A. The dog will be kept in an office area. We will be careful to ensure that time spent with the school dog is shared among the children fairly. We will also ensure that children who are not involved in regular, direct contact with the dog are still able to participate in a number of ways, should they wish to do so.

**Q Has a risk assessment been undertaken?**

A. Yes, we have carefully considered having a dog in school and sought advice from many sources, including other schools that successfully have a school dog. There is also a School Dog Policy available to view on the Website.

**Q Who is responsible for training?**

A. The nominated member of staff will be the legal owner of the dog and as a result, will be responsible for its training. Appropriate professional training will be obtained.

**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 toileted in a sectioned off area of the school site where children have no access. Thus there will be no chance of the children coming into contact with faeces. Our policy of no dogs in the playground is still applicable as we are unable to put effective control measures in place that guarantee temperament and safety when children come into unsupervised contact with unknown dogs.

**Q How will the dog’s welfare be considered?**

A. As the puppy grows he will be walked mornings and lunchtime by Mrs Abernethy. The dog will be kept in an Office area and will only have planned and supervised contact with children and visitors. The dog will be carefully trained over a period of time and will have unlimited access to water. We will work closely with other professionals to ensure the dog’s welfare is always carefully considered.

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

A. We already manage a number of allergies at school and this will be no different for children and adults that are allergic to dogs. The breed of dog has also been chosen for its hypoallergenic properties. Individual needs will always be met and we are happy to work with parents to put additional control measures in place for individual allergies.

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

A. Access to the dog is carefully managed and supervised and children do not need to have regular, close contact with it unless permission for this has been given. We hope to work closely with parents of children who are fearful of dogs to alleviate their fear and to teach them how to manage this.