

6th September 2024

Dear Parent/Carer,

Over recent years there has been a growing interest in the role of animals, in particular dogs, in the school environment and you may have heard that I have a dog that has spent the past year in school with me at St. Mary's in Jarrow, and he will be coming into St. Aloysius as the new school dog.

Last year, I spent much time deliberating and researched into the benefits of a dog. Findings all showed that children's reading, anxieties, well-being and behaviour is further supported. In our current climate, there is an added emphasis on well-being and mental health. Reading recent research has brought to the forefront the mental health of our children and it made us more aware of their well-being and the benefits a dog could bring to many. Children can develop empathy and nurturing skills through contact with pets as well as experiencing great enjoyment from interactions with dogs and puppies.

Research has shown that reasons to have a school dog include;

Social Development: Dogs in school offer an opportunity for improving social development. They are especially useful for teaching pupils' social skills and responsibility. A school dog may sometimes work with pupils on a one to one basis and can especially help those who have suffered trauma or been through difficult times or even scared/phobic of dogs.

Well-being: Children can have emotional and mental health benefits from having a school dog. Children will increase their understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills through contact with pets. The last survey, conducted in 2018, found that 1 in 8 children aged 5-15 had a mental health disorder (either emotional, behavioural, hyperactive, or other) and we know that this has risen since the pandemic. A dog can lift moods in the school and would be there to offer friendship and a shoulder to lean on for some pupils with social difficulties.

Reading: Reading to dogs has been proven to be extremely beneficial. Children who might be embarrassed to read aloud to the class or even adults are likely to be less scared or inhibited to read to a dog. Research has proved that pupils who read to dogs show an increase in reading levels, word recognition, a higher desire to read and write, and an increase in intra and interpersonal skills among the peers they mix with.

Behaviour: Sometimes behaviour problems do occur in school and these may interfere with learning. Some schools are using dogs to improve behaviour problems by promoting positive behaviour in pupils. The study showed pupil behaviour improved toward teachers and children also showed more confidence and responsibility. Additionally, parents reported that children seemed more interested in school as a result of having a dog at school.

Worries about having a school dog

We know that some children might be scared of a dog in case it bites or licks, or people might have had a bad experience with a dog. The dog will always have an adult supervising him and he will never be wandering around the school unsupervised, in addition, no-one will have to spend any time with the dog if they did not want to. All parents have the right to request that their child does not have contact with a school dog and this will be adhered to. We do hope that a school dog will help everyone to overcome their worries and fears.

The children will have to be calm and sensible around the dog so that the dog does not get frightened too. After any contact with the dog, all children will wash their hands properly and the school dog would not be allowed to lick anyone's face. Dogs Trust will be attending the school to deliver training to the children to further support this. There is no cost to the school to having a school dog as all costs are covered by the owner.

We understand that some families may have concerns about having a dog in school and I would like to reassure everyone that we have a policy and full risk assessments available for anyone who would like to get further information. I will be available to discuss this and talk to anyone about how it works in school.

I also understand that there is a school policy regarding no dogs on the school yard, this will continue, however the school dog is exempt of this, due to the stringent risk assessments that have been completed.

More information about the dog

Roscoe, is a Show Cocker Spaniel, and turned one in May, he has been a school dog since he was 16 weeks old so is used to young children and the school environment. I own Roscoe and he is well behaved and is very friendly although sometimes if he gets scared then he does bark. He is going to be in school 3 days a week and will be based in my office in both the infant and junior schools; but will be taken around to meet the children and will be out on the yard with the children. He is used to this and at my last school, he was only ever off lead in a totally secure area with children who were incredibly comfortable with dogs- this will be the same at St. Aloysius.

An adult will always have an adult in charge of Roscoe and no children will be required to touch him or spend time with him if they do not want to or if you do not want your child to.

We know that some children have allergies and he will be kept away from those children, but please inform us of this so that it can be added to the risk assessments.

Recently, Roscoe and I took part in a psychology study looking at the benefits of school dogs for pupils with Special Educational Needs and the results were very positive. I am sure that the psychologist that completed the study would share this information with you, if requested.

I know that the children will love Roscoe and will thrive from him being in school.

Thanking you

Mrs Tumelty
Executive Head Teacher

School Dog Response:

No response indicates that you give consent for your child/ren to be in contact with a school dog. You do not need to contact school.

Please respond by email to inform us of any of the following:

- I do not want my child to come into direct contact with a school dog.
- My child has allergies- please give us more information.

Please email info@st-aloysius.co.uk by Wednesday 11th of September.

