

**Headteacher**

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Cherry Tree Primary School

Thursday, 2 September 2021

WE'RE 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 Cherry Tree community. As of September 2021, we will be welcoming a school dog who will be within the school on a regular basis to work with our pupils.

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

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

Bonnie is undergoing specific 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 bringing a school dog to join the Cherry Tree family and believe the positive effects of such demonstrably outweigh any negatives. Some of the many benefits of having a school dog include the following:

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- **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, Bonnie will be kept in the headteacher’s office with me – returning to my home once the school day is over. A suitable bed, food, water and cleaning supplies will be held for Bonnie, and through training, she will be sufficiently toilet-trained. 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 Bonnie is being walked around the school, she will have a short lead to ensure she is controlled at all times.

Pupils will be able to visit Bonnie during some break and lunch times in the headteacher’s office. Once her training is complete, Bonnie will visit pupils in their classrooms, particularly for children to read to her.

Once Bonnie is more settled, older pupils will be able to walk Bonnie around the school playground – we have carefully considered pupils’ ages and believe older pupils will be able to adequately control Bonnie. Younger pupils will not be able to walk Bonnie – 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 if you do not want your child/ren to come into contact with Bonnie, please let me know, especially if they have any specific allergies.

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 have undertaken a full risk assessment to ensure that any hazards can be adequately controlled – we will be publishing this risk assessment on the school website for you to view should you wish to access it. 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 cavapoochon breed, which has a non-allergenic coat and does not malt, 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 Bonnie, we will accommodate your request and ensure that arrangements are in place.

As previously mentioned, 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 **Bonnie**.

Will the dog be properly cared for?

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Bonnie will be subject to a rigorous grooming process to prevent the risk of infection or disease. Bonnie will be kept in the headteacher's 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. Cavapoochons are known for being extremely child-friendly and Bonnie will provide the opportunity for children to overcome their fears. The training that Bonnie 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 Bonnie, we will accommodate your request and ensure alternative arrangements are in place.

Is the dog well-behaved?

As previously mentioned, Bonnie is already undergoing training to ensure she is well-behaved at all times. She will be kept on a short leash whenever walking around school. Bonnie will only come into contact with pupils once her training is complete and the trainer is satisfied that she can be around children safely.

Please ensure that you contact me directly if you do not wish for your child to come in to contact with Bonnie. I would like to reassure you that a written list will be held of any children this may include – this will be distributed to all staff members and we will ensure that these children do not come in to contact with Bonnie.

We hope you will join us in welcoming Bonnie to our school and embrace all she has to offer to our community. Once she is settled, we will be holding some parent sessions so that you may also become acquainted. 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 on head@cherrytree.herts.sch.uk .

Kind regards,

Cheska Tyler
Headteacher

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