



ST. STEPHEN'S JUNIOR SCHOOL

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Headteachers: Mrs Laura Cutts NPQH & Mrs Sarah Heaney NPQH

Dear parents / carers,

As you are all aware, we have been trialling having Kaia (my dog) in school every Friday since last term. We are pleased to report that this has been a real success and many of the children and their parents have reported that they look forward to Fridays, when they get to see her. She has also been instrumental in assisting some children with coming into school and supporting others during the school day. Equally, Kaia seems to enjoy being part of school life and has settled into her role very well!

School dogs have become much more prevalent in recent years and we thought it would be helpful for us to set out some of the benefits that have been reported:

What are the benefits of having a school dog?

Numerous research studies have shown the benefits of therapy dogs in schools. Therapy dogs have been working in schools for the past 8 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.
- Reading to dogs has been proven to help children develop literacy skills and build confidence, through both the calming effect the dog's presence has on children as well as the fact that a dog will listen to children read without being judgemental or critical. This comforting environment helps to nurture children's enthusiasm for reading and provides them with the confidence to read aloud.

Next Steps

On the 17th January, the education officer from the Dogs Trust has kindly agreed to come and spend 3 days with the children at SSJS, where he will be running 'Dog Smart' workshops for each class on how to behave safely around dogs both in the home and in social settings.



Upon completion of these workshops, Kaia would then start working with different groups of children across the school, as well as attending more ad hoc events, such as Golden Time on a Friday. If your child was placed into a group to work with Kaia, we would obviously write to inform you of this in advance to obtain your consent.

We would really like to hear your thoughts and are happy to address any concerns you may have. If you would like to contact us, please send an email to nrayner@ststephensjuniorschool.co.uk putting 'School Dog' as the subject. The consultation period will end on **Friday 19th January** so please send any email before then.

We do hope you will continue to support the school as you have done so far as we have seen how much having Kaia in school has done for our school community.

Yours sincerely,

Louise Jackson

Assistant Headteacher