

**Roby Park Primary School**

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**Headteacher: Mrs K Allen**

Date: Monday 7th July 2024

**School Dogs**

Dear Parents/Carers,

I would like to introduce you to the newest members of our Roby Park family – Darcey & Isabelle, our new school dogs. Darcey is a 3.5 year old Beagle and Isabelle is an 11 month Patter-poo beagle cross. Darcey and Isabelle are both child friendly, gentle mannered, demonstrably affectionate yet sensitive and have good trainability.

Darcey and Isabelle will grow up in the school environment becoming fully accustomed to the routines of the day and supportive of students within the school. The dogs’ main place of residence will be the Headteacher’s and Deputy Headteacher’s office, which is secure and separate from the classrooms.

Children will be able to interact with the dog under strict supervision at certain times of the day/week as long as parental permission has been given. The dog will not be given access to other visitors without supervision and mutual consent. During the remainder of the Summer Term, the children will have limited contact with the dog as it becomes adjusted to its environment and continues its training. Thereafter we will make an assessment based on the dogs’ training and it is then our intention to introduce the dogs to the children during the Autumn Term. Our school dogs have already begun their training to work with the children in school through Hope’s Therapy Dogs. We are very fortunate to be working with an accredited and experienced dog trainer.

‘Pet therapy’ is widely accepted as benefitting children’s wellbeing and communication skills. Studies have shown that the presence of companion animals can improve the well-being of children and lower the rate of anxiety simply by making the environment happier, more enjoyable and less forbidding. Dogs are increasingly being used in schools with great success. We have undertaken a significant amount of research and are aware of many benefits to having a school dog:

* Cognitive – companionship with a dog stimulates memory, problem-solving and gameplaying
* 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 – 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.

The dogs will also be available to work with children (and adults) who have had bad experiences with dogs or other animals. With parental permission, over a period of time children who react fearfully to dogs will be supported in approaching, handling and gaining confidence in managing their fear.

Whilst moving around the school, the dog will be kept on a short lead and will always be with a member of staff. You will be able to see a full risk assessment (see appendix). This will be reviewed regularly and details the hygiene practices that will be in place – such as cleaning of hands and the environment before and after meeting Darcey and Isabelle.

We understand that it is not possible for all families to have a family dog and therefore we hope that this is an opportunity for children to gain from a relationship and contact on a regular basis and have a friend for life.

If you do not want your child to interact with the dog or have any concerns (e.g. allergies), then please contact the school by **Monday 15th July** otherwise it will be assumed you have given parental consent. We hope students will gain a great deal of enjoyment from having school dogs and that Darcey and Isabelle become an established part of life at Roby Park!

A signature on a white background

Description automatically generated with medium confidenceWarmest regards,

Kat Allen

Headteacher

**School Dog Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

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

The dogs were purchased by Mrs Allen and is the legal owner; she will bear the costs associated with owning the dogs including all veterinary bills and personal insurance. Insurance for the school dogs will be funded by school to cover staff as will any items required for in school usage.

**Will the dogs be a distraction?**

The dogs will be kept in the headteacher’s and deputy headteacher’s office and will also have access to outside areas. The office is separate from the classrooms / playground to ensure it only comes into contact with students who are happy to have contact and have parental permission for this, under strict supervision.

**Has a risk assessment been undertaken?**

Yes, a full risk assessment is in place, which will be reviewed regularly. We have carefully considered having dogs in school and sought advice from many sources, including other schools that successfully have a school dog.

**Who is responsible for training?**

Mrs Allen will be the legal owner of the dogs and as a result, will be responsible for its initial training. The school has decided to seek further training with Hope’s Therapy Dogs and so the school will be responsible for this specific training.

**How will the dogs be toileted to ensure hygiene for all?**

The dogs have access to outdoor areas. The staff in charge of the dogs will ensure that anything is cleared away appropriately. If the school dogs toilet when out on the school site, staff members will clear this away appropriately leaving no trace on the ground, cleaning the area with disinfectant if needed.

**How will the dogs’ welfare be considered?**

The dogs will be walked regularly and given free time outside. The dogs will have their own space in the headteacher’s and deputy headteacher’s office where it will not be disturbed by students. The dogs will be carefully trained over a period of time and will have unlimited access to food and water. We will work carefully to ensure the dogs’ welfare is always considered and remove the dogs from the school environment if we don’t feel it is happy.

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

Students will not need to touch the dogs, which will relieve the possibility of allergic reactions. We already manage a number of allergies at school and this will be no different for students and adults that are allergic to dogs. Individual needs will always be met and we are happy to work with parents to put additional control measures in place for individual allergies. Any students with allergies to dogs will be built into the risk assessment as they are made known to the school.

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

Access to the dogs will be carefully managed and supervised and children do not need to have close contact with them if this has been expressed by parents. 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.

**Will other school dogs be allowed in school?**

No other dogs are allowed on the site and especially when the school dogs are on site. The only exception are guide dogs only.