

November 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

In the lead up to Christmas, we will be taking the first steps to introducing working dogs in school. We have researched this programme for a number of years and feel that this is the right time to start this. Initially, we have three dogs who will be assessed and trained as part of the Dog Mentor Programme and should they be suitable to work in school they will join us in school at different times in the future for special dog mentoring sessions with pupils.

Only dogs who have been assessed and trained to become working dogs will be allowed in the school grounds.

Research shows that there are many benefits to having dogs working in school and these include;

- having a calming effect on pupils, particularly those with behavioural or learning difficulties;
- improved behaviour and concentration, reduced stress and improved self-esteem;
- encouraging expression and participation in more withdrawn children;
- fostering a sense of responsibility;
- motivating pupils to think and to learn, as 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, and educational improvements with low achievers;
- helping children build confidence in reading;
- Improving attendance.

The dogs chosen to become mentors in school have been carefully selected because of their temperament and character and will undergo an in-depth assessment to ensure they are suitable for their role. A specialist dog trainer will work with the dogs and their handlers to provide specialist training, support and guidance. There is a full risk assessment in place to ensure our children, staff, visitors and dogs remain safe. Whilst working in school, the dogs will wear a high vis coat with their name on and will remain on a lead with their handler. They will be under control at all times and never be left unattended with a child.

### **Meet the dogs**

You will find pictures of the dogs on our website, and we are setting up an Instagram account, details of which we will share shortly, and where we will keep you updated on their work.

### **Gus**

Gus is a pedigree Tibetan Terrier and is a well-loved member of Ms Jones' family. He is almost two years old and is quite a lively character but very affectionate. Gus will be kept in Ms Jones' office when in school, but not working.

### **Stella**

Stella is six years old and a pedigree Staffordshire Bull Terrier. She is currently welcoming a new kitten into the family she shares with Mr Ayres. Whilst not working around school, Stella will stay in Mr Ayres' office.

### **Bonnie**

Bonnie is Miss Downey's dog. She is a six-year-old Sprocker (Cocker/ Springer Spaniel cross). She is very fond of sleeping but loves running around at high speed during her play times. Bonnie will rest in the office Ms Downey shares when she isn't working with children.

As part of the training programme and ongoing evaluation, we will teach children how to be safe around dogs, however, these are a few important points.

- Always ask the handler if you can stroke the dog;
- Approach the dog calmly - don't get too excited;
- Use quiet voices around the dogs;
- No screaming with excitement to see the dog;
- Try not to run close to the dog;
- No eating around the dog and please don't feed them;
- Always wash your hands after being with the dog;
- Always let the handler know if you are allergic to dogs or if you're worried about meeting the dog.

Children and young people will work with the dogs under supervision. This is an opt out programme and you can ask for your child not to be included in the work that will be done with the dogs. There is a form available on the school website for you to do so. If you do not complete and return the opt-out form, we will assume that we have permission for your child to take part in the programme.

### Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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

The nominated handler of the dog is the legal owner, and this member of staff has volunteered to bring their dog into school. The legal owner pays all costs associated with the dogs.

#### **Q Are the dogs from reputable breeders?**

Yes. Both Gus and Stella are registered with the Kennel Club and Bonnie has been bred by a reputable breeder.

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

The dog is kept in an office with the handler. This area is separate from the classrooms. We will be careful to ensure that time spent with the school dog is appropriate and supports learning in school.

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

Yes, we have carefully considered having a dog in school and sought advice from many sources, including other schools that have a school dog. A risk assessment has been completed and is available on the school website. This will be kept under ongoing review.

**Q Who is responsible for training?**

The nominated member of staff will be the legal owner of the dog and, as a result, will be responsible for its training. The school will be affiliated with the Dog Mentor Programme, which is a reputable organisation. The specialist trainers will assess the dogs, train both the owners and dog, and provide ongoing evaluation.

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

In the interest of health and hygiene our school dogs will be toileted in an area of the school site where children have no access. Thus there will be no chance of the children coming into contact with mess. The handler will clean up after the dog.

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

The dogs are up to date with vaccinations, flea and worming treatments. On a working day, they will be walked and allowed out several times each day. The dogs will have access to food and water.

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

We already manage a number of allergies at school, and this will be no different for children 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. An opt out form is available on the school website if you do not wish your child to take part in this programme.

**Q 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 if they prefer not to. Other schools have found that working with dogs in a supervised environment can support children who are fearful of dogs and help to alleviate their fear and to teach them how to manage this.

**Q Why can't I bring my dog onto the school site if the mentor dogs can be in school?**

The mentor dogs are working dogs who have been assessed as suitable to be around children and young people by a qualified and experienced trainer. They will be on a lead and wear a high visibility coat to identify them as working dogs.

No other dogs, with the exception of registered assistance dogs, will be allowed on site.

If you have any concerns or queries regarding this programme, please contact [info@appletonacademy.co.uk](mailto:info@appletonacademy.co.uk) in the first instance.

Yours faithfully



Ms H Jones  
Executive Headteacher