

The Vale Academy
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July 13th 2016

Dear Parents and Carers

RE: School Assistance Dog

I am writing to tell you that the decision to get a school assistance dog has been approved and that the dog will be starting its training after the summer holidays. I invite you to read the details below and return the slip attached.

With the support of all the Academy staff and governors, the primary purpose of an Animal Assisted Intervention activity at The Vale Academy is to motivate, inspire and engage pupils in learning.

Dennis is a Cockapoo. We have carefully selected the cross breed as these dogs are of medium size, have a gentle and sensitive nature but are highly intelligent making them easy to train. Another consideration was the Cockapoo coat, it is more fleece like than fur and is better for allergy sufferers. Dennis will be gradually introduced to the Academy environment from 11 weeks old and start obedience training from 10 weeks. Mrs Howe will be Dennis's main carer and live at home with her, however Mr Hooft and Mr Monahan will carry out the main nurture work with Dennis and both will be recognised as one of the Academy primary dog handlers whilst on school ground.

Our long-term goal is to meet the criteria set by the 'Pets as Therapy' association based in High Wycombe. On completion of his training Dennis will be assessed by a member of the organisation. This consists of a series of tests, the focus being on the dog's temperament and ability to work as a therapy dog in a variety of environments and people of all ages. The intended interventions that we will pilot include the following:

- Working on social skills and direction within nurture group sessions and workshops
- Providing a calming presence with pupils in crisis and/or in 1:1 nurture sessions
- Providing motivation for pupils working on gross and fine motor skills
- Participating in small group lessons
- Providing an incentive for pupils who meet individual goals in behaviour, social skills, and academic achievement
- Providing companionship and 'mindfulness' activities to pupils in need of stress relief
- Additional specific tasks will be identified as the program develops and the dog becomes accustomed to school life.

There is a broad range of research that supports trained dogs in educational settings. The benefits of dogs in schools include increased oxytocin (bonding) and dopamine (happiness), while lowering cortisol (stress). Benefits from working with an assistance dog include, but are not limited to, having

access to a non-judgmental listener, nurturance, increased focus, confidence and decreased levels of stress and anxiety. Individuals who have worked with a dog report that one of the most valued qualities is the unconditional love and attention it gives to the clients with whom it interacts.

At all times our staff will implement rules that support pupils around the assistance dog. These rules include, but are not limited to:

- When at The Vale, the assistance dog will always be on a leash. The exceptions to this would be when the assistance dog is in his base (head teacher's office) or taking part/ involved in planned training sessions.
- When at The Vale, the assistance dog will always be with a competent adult.
- Pupils will not work with the assistance dog alone.
- Pupils who have allergies or are afraid of dogs will be identified and the school assistance dog will not interact with these pupils.
- We will be following recommended measures for clean-up and allergen exposure and reduction.

Whilst we are at a very early stage in this process of introduction, it would be helpful to know whether we have any children who are allergic to dogs' hair or who have a particular phobia concerning dogs, so consideration can be given to everyone's needs. The risk assessment will be available on our website shortly and will give you some indication of the amount of thought that has gone into this pilot programme.

I would be very grateful therefore if you could complete the slip below if your child has any relevant allergies or phobias, or if for any reason you would prefer them not to have contact with a somewhat adorable Cockapoo puppy.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Howe
Principal

RE: School Assistance Dog

Name of child:

Class next year:

I would like my child to have supervised sessions/access to the school assistance dog, Dennis ()

I would not like my child to have supervised sessions/access to the school assistance dog, Dennis ()

Signed:
(parent/carer)