



Longmeadow Primary School

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18th May 2018

Dear Parents and Carers,

You may be aware that there is a growing movement in many schools to reintroduce the concept of school pets as a way of teaching all children responsibility and providing a source of pleasure and learning.

Of particular interest, is the current move towards "Reading Dogs" and "Therapy Dogs". The former is based on research which shows that many children who find reading practice difficult are more willing and able to read to the non-judgmental audience of an animal than they are to a human being! Therapy dogs are similarly being used as a source of comfort and relaxation for children and adults who may need "someone to talk to" or just someone who will accept them and offer comfort or a calming influence in their lives. There is much evidence that children who struggle with relationships or with managing their own emotions gain a great deal from spending time with a pet.

With these ideas in mind, the governors have agreed to the concept of having a dog in school. Over the past few months we have been working with the charity 'Dogs Helping Kids', to find an appropriate breed of puppy with the right temperament, is hypoallergenic and doesn't shed to support children who have allergies.

On 30th May 2018, during half term, I will be going to collect 'Murphy'. He is a Labrador puppy, who in which in time will be trained to be a Therapy dog, whilst also living with me at home. From the start of Summer 2, I will be bringing the him into school and, eventually, once the dog is used to the environment, introducing him to some of the children. Children will also attend assemblies and receive training about how to care and behave safely around dogs, from the dog trainer and the charity 'Dogs Helping Kids'.

Obviously, bringing any animal into school is not something to be approached lightly, both for the animal's sake and for the sake of the children and adults in the school. I have visited and taken advice from Headteachers, who have school dogs. We have discussed the practicalities, including everything from risk assessments and insurance to dealing with training, doggy toileting and children's allergies. Also, I am very fortunate to be working with an accredited and experienced dog trainer, alongside the charity 'Dogs Helping Kids' who already have a number of dogs successfully working and training in schools. You can find more information about this on their website here: <http://www.dogshelpingkids.co.uk/>

Today, we have shared this exciting news with the children. It is our aim that all children across the school will have opportunities to have contact and quality time with our dog. From the start, we would like the children and whole school community to be given the opportunity to be involved and the children showed great enthusiasm and excitement when they heard about the dog coming to join us today.

To reassure you our dog will not be around the school off the lead while he is training and will be trained to an exceptionally high level across a two year training program alongside the charity. We are very mindful, that introducing a dog into the school setting should not be a distraction to the children's learning and for this to enhance our school ethos and the experiences we offer our children. I attach a copy of answers to a number of initial questions you may have. A risk assessment will be available on our website before the dog arrives in school, which will give you some indication of the amount of thought that has gone into this program.

If you have any questions or queries regarding the introduction of a school dog into our environment, please do not hesitate to contact the school office for an appointment with a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

Last of all, let me introduce you to Murphy. He will soon be a familiar face around school!



Kind regards

Mrs E Howley
Headteacher