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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. Since the inception of The Limes, the staff, governors and I have been discussing the benefits of a school dog for our children. There are a number of school dogs already in post locally and around the country and we firmly believe that having a school dog can only enhance and extend the children's opportunities for learning – both academically and socially.

At the end of June my family welcomed a cockapoo puppy we have named Bramble and she will be regularly attending school. A cockapoo is a cocker spaniel/poodle cross. Cockapoos are extremely good with children, intelligent, easy to train and are extremely low shedding and therefore classed as a hypoallergenic breed of dog.

What are the benefits of 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 5 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. Encouraging expression, participation and shared attention.
- **Social** – a dog provides a positive mutual topic for discussion, encourages responsibility, wellbeing and focused interaction with others. Encouraging respect and thereby improving pupils' relationships with each other, parents and teachers.
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-47655600>
- **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. Improved behaviour, attendance and concentration, reduced stress and improved self-esteem
- **Physical** – interaction with a furry friend reduces blood pressure, provides tactile stimulation, gives motivation to move and stimulates the senses



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- **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.
- **Helping children build confidence in reading** – <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2011/feb/28/dogs-listen-to-children-reading>

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 taken advice from fellow 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. Children would never be left alone with Bramble and they would be taught about how to be around a dog before she remained in a classroom.

As she will be very small when she first visits, Bramble will have limited contact with the children but this will increase as she grows and is trained. We will send you a link to an 'electronic slip' to complete, particularly if your child is allergic to dogs or needs to be introduced to her slowly. If you do not inform school otherwise, we will assume you are happy for your child to eventually interact with Bramble.

How has school planned for this?

Bramble's role in school will be varied. Research studies in both Britain and America have concluded that having a dog in a school classroom can have many positive benefits – these include helping to calm children down, improve academic achievement, motivate those children who are often not that attentive, teach responsibility and encourage children to respect all life. Also, it has been shown that when children share the affection and care of a 'school' dog, a bond forms among them and strengthens their team ethics.

Bramble will also hear children read. Dogs give unconditional acceptance, as they are non-judgmental, which is especially crucial to struggling, emerging readers. She will provide confidence to children as she will not make fun of them when they read, but above all she will make an amazing listener, providing the children with a sense of comfort and love. In America, the 'Read' Dogs, as they are known, have proved through research that children who read to these dogs show an increase in reading levels, word recognition, a higher desire to read and write and an increase in intra and interpersonal skills among the children they mix with.

Initially, Bramble will spend a proportion of her time in the office areas and will slowly be introduced into school life at The Limes. We will show her where she can go, when she can play, when she needs to be calm and quiet and what to chew (and what not to chew!). Whilst this process continues over the coming months, she will be visiting classrooms, sitting in assemblies and getting used to school routines.

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. I can assure you that Bramble will not be able to 'roam' around the school and will only have access to restricted areas but it is sensible to be aware of everyone's needs.



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 Bramble comes into school regularly, which will give you some indication of the amount of thought that has gone into this provision.

I would be very grateful therefore, if you could complete the 'electronic slip' (link to be texted to parents) if your child has any relevant allergies or phobias or if for any reason you would prefer them not to have contact with Bramble.

In summary,

- A full risk assessment has been completed and will be available on our website
- All contact with children will be carefully supervised and children will not be left unsupervised with Bramble
- Bramble will be on a lead when she is not in an office.
- When not 'working', Bramble will be based in an office.
- No child will ever be made to interact directly with Bramble.

If you have any concerns, please contact me.

Yours faithfully



Mrs Kate Cracknell
Headteacher