

Windmill Hill Academy

Inspiring Passionate Life-Long Learners

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Monday 18th July 2022

Re: Bertie: our school well-being dog

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am very pleased to inform you we have a very special member of our school community. We have our very own school dog who is in school on a daily basis and works with our pupils.

We have a Labrador Retriever named Bertie who is 16 months old. We chose this breed for the following reasons:

- The breed is known to be child-friendly, lively, gentle mannered and affectionate, yet sensitive.
- The breed is known to be highly intelligent and respond excellently to training.

We wish to reassure parents that I undertook a significant amount of research into purchasing a school dog and believe the positive effects of such demonstrably outweigh any negatives. Some of the many benefits of having a school dog include the following:

- Cognitive development – building a companionship with a dog helps children stimulate their memory, problem-solving and game-playing skills. Having a school dog is known to increase enthusiasm for, and enjoyment of animals, which motivates children to think and learn.
- Social skills – dogs provide a mutual topic for conversation with others, and encourage responsibility, wellbeing and focussed interaction with others.
- Emotional skills – dogs improve self-esteem, acceptance from others and are known for improving moods. Dogs can also help children develop compassion and respect for other living things and can reduce children's anxiety. Building respect can improve children's relationships with each other, parents and teachers and shows them how to nurture and care for another living thing. If any children are suffering from bereavement or are particularly sad, dogs can provide children with comfort and friendship.
- Physical development – interaction with dogs is known to reduce blood pressure, provide tactile stimulation, assist with pain management and give motivation for children to move and walk.



- Reading – school dogs are known to help children with their reading and literacy skills, through their calming presence and ability to listen to children read without being judgmental or critical. Children can build their confidence to read aloud to others through having a school dog.
- School community – having a school dog builds the sense of a family environment and togetherness.

Bertie is owned by myself. I chose him at four weeks old from a reputable breeder and was able to collect him on the first day of the summer holidays last year when he was nearly 9 weeks old. We had a wonderful summer holiday together and it meant that I was able to begin training him, establish good routines and visit school on a number of occasions to get him used to a new space. During the day, he is kept in my office and returns to my home once the school day is over. A suitable bed, food, water, toys and cleaning supplies are held for Bertie and he is fully toilet trained. I must stress that pupils will not be expected to clean up any dog mess, and we will ensure that the school grounds are kept clean at all times.

Whenever Bertie is being walked around the school, he will be on lead to ensure he is controlled at all times. In the early days, Bertie spent his time acclimatising to the hustle and bustle of school life and his time with the children has been gradually increased. He comes on playground duty with me, visits classrooms, sees children on an individual and group basis, has 'Bertie time' (a reward for the Stars of the week) with the children, spends lunchtimes in the garden with the children and he has even started listening to children read like Misty does (our visiting Therapy dog).

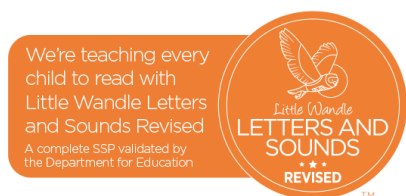
At no time will children be forced to interact with Bertie or Bertie forced to interact with the children and I would like to reassure you that pupils will only be able to come into contact with Bertie if parental permission has been received.

We understand that parents may have concerns regarding bringing a school dog onto the premises, and I would like to use this letter to provide some reassurance to parents. We have undertaken a full risk assessment to ensure that any hazards can be adequately controlled – we have published this risk assessment on the school website for you to view should you wish to access it. Below, I have listed some concerns which I believe parents may have.

My child is allergic to dogs and I don't want them to have an allergic reaction

As previously mentioned, we have chosen a Labrador Retriever breed, which means that he is a short-haired breed. This helps to significantly reduced risk of an allergic reaction. If, however, you would still prefer your child not to come into contact with Bertie, we will accommodate your request and ensure that arrangements are in place. We have undertaken a thorough risk assessment, which details the hygiene practices that will be in place – such as cleaning of hands and the environment before and after coming into contact with Bertie. More information is detailed in our risk assessment which is available for you to download via our school website.

Will the dog be properly cared for?



Bertie will be subject to a rigorous grooming process to prevent the risk of infection or disease. Bertie will be kept in my office during the day and will have adequate supply of food and water. Bertie has passed a health check from the vets, is fully vaccinated, wormed and has had flea treatment in line with current expectations. He is under a Pet Health Care Plan which will ensure future treatments will continue. You can find more information on these arrangements in our risk assessment.

My child is scared of dogs

We understand that some children may be fearful of dogs. Labradors are known for being extremely child-friendly and Bertie will provide the opportunity for children to overcome their fears, with their parents' permission. The training that Bertie has and continues to undergo ensures that he is well-behaved, gentle and calm around children. If parents would prefer for their child not to come into contact with Bertie, we will accommodate your request and ensure alternative arrangements are in place.

Is the dog well-behaved?

Bertie has learnt the routines and expectations and he is doing exceptionally well. He can sit on demand, shake paw, give a hi five, fetch a ball and recalls when called. Bertie is still a puppy at 16 months old so has undergone and will continue to undergo training to ensure he is well-behaved at all times. He will be kept on a short lead whenever walking around school. There are times, as long as all of the children are happy, when he will be left off the lead in the garden and playground.

Please complete the attached permission slip, outlining whether your child is able to come into contact with Bertie or not. I would like to reassure you that a written list will be held of all children for whom permission has been received – this will be distributed to all staff members and only these children will be permitted to be around or touch Bertie.

We hope you look forward to meeting Bertie and embrace all he has to offer to our community. I hope to have provided reassurance to any concerns you may have via this letter; however, if you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs A Bassett
Head of School



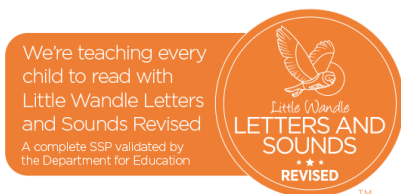
Consent Form: Bertie (School well-being dog)

Please complete the following permission slip, providing a tick next to the condition which reflects your consent. Your consent will be valid until your child leaves this school. Should you wish to amend your permission, please contact the school immediately.

Name of pupil: _____ Class: _____

Please only tick one.

I am happy for my child to be involved with all aspects of caring for the school dog, including supervised lunchtime walks. ☐



My child is a little nervous of dogs but I am happy for him/her to be involved with all aspects of caring for the school dog, including supervised lunchtime walks. ☐

My child is fearful of dogs, but in time, I would like them to work with the dog to develop their confidence with and understanding dogs. ☐

My child is allergic to dogs, but I am happy for them to be around the dog, as long as my child does not touch the dog. ☐

My child has an allergy which means they must not come into contact with the dog. ☐

I do not give permission for my child to come into direct contact with the dog. ☐

I, _____ (name of parent) have fully read and understood the conditions of this letter. I agree that I have provided the correct consent above and will inform the school in writing if my permission changes at any stage.

Signature of Parent/Carer: _____

Date: _____

