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Comprehensive School

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Date 12/07/2021

Dear Parent(s)/carer(s),

Re: School Therapy Dog

We are very excited to introduce you to a new member of staff who we will be welcoming to our school this week. Jessie was born on 20th September 2019 and she is an 18 month old Cream English Retriever who has been trained to become our school therapy dog. She will become an integral part of our community here in Porthcawl Comprehensive School.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, children and young people have faced many challenges that have, in some cases, had a profound impact on their emotional wellbeing, resilience and confidence. Throughout the media, we hear significant stories about the increase in adverse childhood experiences and heightened anxiety. Jessie is joining the school to help support these pupils and will be based within Ty Enfys, our support base. She will be available to all pupils in our school who may benefit from her help.

There are many benefits of having a school therapy dog. Therapy and wellbeing dogs have been working in schools for a number of years across the UK. However, they have been commonplace in other parts of the world for much longer. Evidence indicates that benefits include:

- Cognitive – companionship with a dog stimulates memory, problem-solving and game-playing;
- Social – a dog provides a positive mutual topic for discussion, encourages responsibility, wellbeing and focused interaction with others;
- 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;
- Physical – interaction with a 'furry friend' reduces blood-pressure, provides tactile stimulation, assists with pain management, gives motivation to move, walk and stimulates the senses;
- 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; and
- Reading – reading to dogs has been proven to help children develop literacy skills and build confidence, through both the calming effect the dog's presence has on children as well as the fact that a dog will listen to children read without being judgemental or critical. This comforting environment helps to nurture children's enthusiasm for reading and provides them with the confidence to read aloud.

While there are numerous benefits to Jessie joining our school, we recognise there are some concerns you may have. Please be assured that the school has been working with external agencies to ensure these have been considered. A few of these are listed below:

My child is allergic to dogs

It is understandable that some of you may be concerned about possible allergic reactions to a school dog. However, Jessie will be subjected to the most thorough cleanliness and grooming regime. She will also only be allowed in situations with pupils who voluntarily wish to work with her. Your permission will of course be sought in advance of Jessie having access to, and working with, your child in school.

Will Jessie be properly cared for?

Jessie will be extremely well looked after. She will live with Mrs Rowberry (Ty Enfys) and her family and will come to school most days from September, where she will be supervised by a member of staff at all times during pupil contact time. Although Jessie, will be joining us for a few days this week, we will have a 'hands off' policy in place to ensure covid restrictions are adhered to and so that she is eased in gently to our school. Jessie has completed rigorous training and has been assessed by Cariad Pet Therapy to carry out this specific role, so will be extremely well-behaved. Whilst Jessie is in school she will have access to a "safe space" away from pupil areas where she can rest during her non-contact time. Jessie will visit the vet regularly for all her injections as well as regular check-ups. If Jessie is unwell for any reason she will stay at home with a babysitter!

My child is scared of dogs

Some children may have had upsetting experiences and/or have a fear of dogs (or other animals). Jessie will only be in contact with children whose parents are happy for their child to work with her. However, Jessie's training will help her to be calm and gentle around children; she has a very loving and gentle nature. Experience and research have shown that, with proper guidance and handling, children can learn to overcome their fear of animals and grow in respect and appreciation for them.

The school has a 'no dogs' policy

Our school does have a 'no dogs' policy. However, as Jessie is a trained and qualified Therapy Dog, specific rules will apply to her, as a member of staff. She will be on a lead at all times when moving around the school site and will always be accompanied by a trained adult. Jessie will also be fully insured to carry out her role thus allowing her to be on the school site. Jessie will not be allowed to roam the site freely so there will be no issues with toileting etc. We have a full risk assessment in place for Jessie.

We hope you will join us in welcoming Jessie to our family and embrace all that she has to offer. While Jessie will be introduced to the school very soon, should you not wish your child to come in to contact with our school dog then please do let us know. You can do this by getting in touch with Mrs Mahoney via email (rhaea.mahoney@porthcawlschool.co.uk).

I do hope you will see the benefits of this new addition to our school and we are certain Jessie will provide excellent support to our students.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Slade

Headteacher