



CONCORDIA ACADEMY

Union Road, Romford, RM7 0HG
School contact number: 01708 932710
School email: info@concordiaacademy.co.uk

Tuesday, 28 January 2020

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. This is something that we have been keen to do at Concordia Academy for some time and so we will be gradually introducing a Learning Support Dog into the school. There are a number of school dogs already in post locally and around the country and we firmly believe that having a Learning Support Dog can only enhance and extend the children's opportunities for learning – both academically and socially.

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





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What will we offer?

Ms Black has a dog called Jet who is a toy poodle. He has undergone training and has proven to be very friendly with children. He has a calm and gentle temperament and a hypoallergenic coat.

We appreciate that 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. As such, we have discussed the practicalities at length, including everything from risk assessments and insurance to dealing with training, doggy toileting and children's allergies.

Children will never be left unsupervised with Jet and will be taught how to interact safely and calmly with a dog.

What will Jet do in school?

Jet's role in school will be varied and may change over time. Initially, Jet's main role will be to listen to children read. Dogs give unconditional acceptance, as they are non-judgmental, which is especially crucial to struggling, emerging readers. He will provide confidence to children as he will not make fun of them when they read, but above all he 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.

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 Jet is not be able to 'roam' around the school and will always be with a member of staff. We are very mindful, that having a dog in 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.

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 Jet.





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Learning Support Dog

Name of child _____ Class _____

Please tick as appropriate:

- My child is allergic to dogs and I would prefer them not to be in contact with Jet.
- My child is allergic to dogs and I am happy for them to be in the same room but not touch the dog.
- My child has a fear of dogs and I would prefer them not to meet Jet.
- My child has a fear of dogs and I would like them to slowly be introduced to the dog in time to overcome their fear.

Additional Information

Parent/Carer name _____

Parent/Carer signature _____





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Learning Support Dog

Further information and answers to any initial questions or concerns you may have.

How will the school plan for Jet?

- A full risk assessment and policy has been written.
- Parents and Carers will have an option to 'opt out' of planned contact with Jet.
- All contact with children will be carefully planned and children will not be left unsupervised with Jet.
- When not working, Jet will be based in one of the school offices.

What about allergies?

- Jet is a toy poodle and as such as a non-shedding hypoallergenic coat.
- All areas of the school will be vacuumed and surfaces are wiped down daily.
- Movement around the school will be controlled for Jet.

What other schools have school dogs?

Around the country there are many schools who have their own school dog including:

- Hope Primary, who have set up their own 'dog blog', which contains a very good video explaining the benefits: <http://dexter-hopeprimary.tumblr.com>
- Green Ridge Primary Academy: <https://www.bucksherald.co.uk/news/therapy-dog-proves-big-hit-aylesbury-schoolchildren-177643>
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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, Jet is subjected to the most thorough cleanliness and grooming regime. He is also only be allowed in situations with pupils who voluntarily wish to work with him.

Will Jet be properly cared for?

Jet is extremely well looked after. He lives with Ms Black and will come to school on planned days. He will always be accompanied by an appropriate member of staff. Jet visits the vet regularly for all his injections as well as regular check-ups. If Jet is unwell for any reason he will not be brought into school.

My child is scared of dogs

Some children may have had upsetting experiences and thus have a fear of dogs (or another animal). Jet is only in contact with children whose parents are happy for their child to do so. However, Jet's training has ensured he is calm and gentle around children; he has a very loving and gentle nature. Experience and research have shown that, with proper





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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, because Jet has been trained appropriately to be around children and interact with them, he is permitted within the school grounds. He is always accompanied by a trained adult when moving between designated areas. Jet will also be fully insured to carry out his role, thus allowing him to be on the school site.

Hygiene

Jet will be taken off site to go to the toilet. If Jet has an accident it will be cleared up immediately by a member of staff who is happy to do so with suitable cleaning products. Children will never be asked to clean up after the dog.

We will be holding a meeting in the school hall on **Tuesday 4th February at 2.45pm** where we will discuss the benefits of having a school dog and give you the opportunity to ask any questions that you feel may not have been answered above.

Yours sincerely,

Raheel Akhtar
Headteacher

