

9th February 2017

Dear Parents and Friends of Castle Hill Primary School

Exciting News!

As many of you may be aware, for the past year and a half Ruffles, our school dog, has been working within our school community. The process of getting her was not quick and took a lot of time and research. Ms Willmouth, our Deputy/SENCo spoke to governors, parents, and our Student Senate about the idea and sought Health and Safety advice from 'County Specialists'. After all the discussions were over it was decided that to have a school therapy dog would be hugely beneficial for the children both educationally and emotionally.

Since her arrival as a 10-week old puppy, Ruffles has supported children at both sites with all sorts of emotional needs. These included coping with bereavement, exam pressures, anger management, anxiety and not to mention increasing the children's understanding of responsibility and developing empathy. Plus the sheer enjoyment they get from being around Ruffles is lovely to see! The feedback from the parents and children has been overwhelmingly supportive and if there has been criticism it has been that with two sites there is not enough of Ruffles to go around!

So we are writing to give you some more exciting news, we are planning to introduce a second therapy dog who will be situated at our Rooksdown Campus.

Callie is a female Cavapoo, she is four months old so has completed some of the basic puppy training. She lived with a family with children and has recently been homed with Miss Henderson one of our YR teachers. Cavapoo's are a cross between a Poodle and a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel. They are known to be playful, good-natured, loyal, friendly, affectionate and love people. Fantastic dogs to work with children! Behind the scenes we have been gently introducing Callie to our Rooksdown site; part of her induction was an introduction to Ruffles – we are pleased to say they got on really well!

We understand that it is not possible for all families to have a dog therefore we hope that having both Callie and Ruffles will be an opportunity for the children at both sites to have a 'share' in a dog and gain a relationship and contact on a more regular basis.

We have attached a photo of Callie for you to see and the FAQs that were covered when Ruffles arrived. If you think of any more questions, then please contact us.

Yours sincerely

The Castle Hill Team

Some Frequently Asked Questions?



Q. Who is the legal owner of the dog and who pays for its cost?

A. The legal owner of Ruffles is Ms Willmouth, the legal owner of Callie is Miss Henderson. They will care for them out of school hours and will bear the costs associated. The school budget will remain unaffected.

Q. Has a risk assessment been undertaken?

A. Yes, we sought advice from Health and Safety inspectors and created a risk assessment for Ruffles which has been updated to include Callie. We also used information from other schools that successfully had introduced a school dog. Key worries including toileting, aggression, allergies and many other considerations are addressed in the risk assessment.

Q. I thought the school had a no dog policy?

A. Yes it has, as we cannot ensure the safety of pupils with dogs that are not known to us we follow Hampshire guidance which advises no dogs on the school site. Ruffles and Callie are owned by staff members and therefore known by the staff. Their presence will be closely monitored and reviewed. Therapy dogs have always been welcome; we have been visited by guide dogs in the past.

Q. How will the dog be toileted to ensure hygiene for all?

A. In the interest of health and hygiene the dogs will be toileted off the school site. The dogs will also be taken off site during the day to be toileted. This is documented in the risk assessment.

Q. Have you considered that dogs can sometimes bite?

A. Obviously this is a concern that was raised initially and as we stated then it is extremely rare. Callie will be introduced to the school as a puppy we are sure that she and the children will grow together and develop a mutual understanding of each other. Educating the pupils about how to treat an animal is

important. Also, as with Ruffles, Miss Henderson will be training Callie and continuing the work already started. It is ultimately in the interest of everyone that the Callie, like Ruffles, is a happy, obedient and friendly animal that becomes part of our school family.

Q. How will children who have allergies be managed?

A. One of the reasons the Cockapoo breed was chosen, is that they do not moult as much as other breeds due to their poodle crossing. Cavapoo's have the same poodle cross breeding so are very similar. Children will not need to touch the dog, which will reduce the possibility of an allergic reaction. Children who do interact with the dogs will have to wash their hands afterwards. We already manage a number of allergies at school and this will be no different for children and adults that are allergic to dogs. Individual needs will always be met and we are happy to work with parents to put additional control measures in place for individual allergies.

Q. My child is frightened of dogs; how will you manage this?

A. When Ruffles started working at the school we had a few children, and parents who raised this as a concern. What we have noticed at our Greenbank site is that almost all of those children and families have reported that this fear has diminished since Ruffles arrived. We are sure the same will be seen with Callie. Access to the dogs will be carefully managed and supervised at all times. She will start school as a puppy so; hopefully as she grows so will the children's confidence. In addition children will not need to have close contact unless permission has been granted by their parents. We hope to work closely with parents of children who are fearful of dogs to alleviate their fear and to teach them how to manage it. Both the Cockapoo and Cavapoo breeds were chosen for their sunny dispositions and happy character.

Q. How will access to the dog be managed so it is fair for all?

A. As our parents and pupils will already know the staff of Castle Hill aim to be fair at all times and access to the dogs will be no exception. We already have a lot of rewards in place as part of the school's behaviour management strategy. We feel that access to the dogs will be linked to rewards and that the pupils will have a say as to how this might evolve.

Q. Will the dog be a distraction?

A. No, the dogs will not be on site all the times and will generally be kept in the office areas when class work is being done so that children's learning is not affected. That said there are also many learning opportunities that could involve the dogs so we are planning to develop their roles in school with time.

Q. How will you prepare the children for the dog?

The website and assemblies will be our main communication channel. We are keen that the pupils are as fully involved in the whole process as possible so with that in mind we aim to give the pupils as much information as we can. As part of the preparation we will talk to all the pupils about the expectation on them around the dogs for everyone's safety and well-being.