THORNS COLLEGIATE ACADEMY

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Dear Family

School dogs

I am writing to inform families that we have a school dog generally on site each day. Many of you will have already met a school dog on Open evening. This decision was made having looked at the outcomes of other schools having such a dog. We know many primary school pupils have benefited, as a dog can:

- Have a calming effect on students, particularly those with behavioural or learning difficulties
- Increase the enjoyment of being in the school environment leading to improved attendance
- Improve behaviour and concentration, reduce stress and improve self-esteem
- Encourage expression and participation in more withdrawn students
- Increase enthusiasm for, and enjoyment of, animals which will motivate the students to think and learn
- Help students who suffer bereavement or who are upset in any way and in need of calm, comfort and space before being able to tell an adult what has upset them.
- Increase knowledge of dogs and how to behave safely and appropriately around them, thus reducing anxiety and fear of dogs generally.
- Initial results from a recent study seems to indicate that a few minutes of stroking an animal prompts a release of several "feel good" hormones in humans, including serotonin, prolactin and oxytocin

We will have three school dogs who will be in school on different days; this is because each brings a slightly different personality. Kaya is a 8 year old labrador who is quiet and loving, Saskia is a friendly 8 year old husky who is more active and Stanley is a loving 6 year old cockapoo. These dogs will be based with Miss Baker in the Student Support Service area and will always be supervised and will not be free to roam the main academy. All Year 7 student classes have been visited and students are told how to interact safely and appropriately with Kaya, Saskia and Stanley.

We completely understand that interacting with animals is not appropriate for all students. I have an allergy to fur and understand that for some students contact may be worrying. Any parent/carer who does not wish their child to interact with the dogs is invited to contact Miss Baker (jbaker@tca.shirelandcat.net) to inform her of their concerns and wishes. Permission for your child to have some contact with the school dog will be presumed if no communication has been made to Miss Baker.

If you have any questions, please do make contact. Please also see the Frequently Asked Questions at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

Ms Jones
Principal

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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q: Who is the legal owner of the dog and who pays for its costs?
A: The legal owner of the Kaya and Saskia is Miss Baker and of Stanley, Mr Fletcher; they will bear the costs associated with owning their dog(s); the school budget will support insurance, along with staff and dog training costs where appropriate.

Q: Will the dogs be a distraction?
A: The dogs will be kept in the Student Support Service area and will also have access to an outside area that is separate to students. This space is separate from the classrooms and playground to minimise accidental student contact. The dogs may also attend meetings with staff to support their further socialisation.

Q: Has a risk assessment been undertaken?
A: Yes, a full risk assessment is in place which will be reviewed regularly. We have carefully considered having a dog in the academy and sought advice from many sources, including other schools that have successfully introduced a school dog.

Q: How will the dog be toileted to ensure hygiene for all?
A: In the interest of health and hygiene, our school dogs will have an area on the school site that has no access to students; this will be the dog's own outside area. The staff in charge of the dog will ensure that this is cleared away appropriately. If the school dog toilets when out on the school site, staff members will clear this away appropriately leaving no trace on the ground, cleaning the area with disinfectant if needed.

Q: How will the dog's welfare be considered?
A: The dog will be walked regularly and given free time outside. The dog will have its own space in the Student Support Service area where it will not be disturbed by students. The dog will be carefully trained over a period of time and will have access to food and unlimited water. We will work carefully to ensure the dog's welfare is always considered and remove the dog from the school environment if we do not feel they are happy.

Q: How will this be managed where students have allergies?
A: Students will not need to touch the dog, which will relieve the possibility of allergic reactions. We already manage a number of allergies at the academy and this will be no different for students 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. Any students with allergies to dogs will be built into the risk assessment as they are made known to the school. The Inclusion area and Lunch and Brunch will always be areas where dogs will not be allowed.

Q: My child is frightened of dogs; how will you manage this?
A: Access to a dog will be carefully managed and supervised and students do not need to have close contact with it if this has been expressed by parents. We hope to work closely with parents of students who are fearful of dogs to alleviate their fear and to teach them how to manage this.

Q: Will other school dogs be allowed in school?
A: Allowing a dog onto the school site can only be approved by the Principal and for educational purposes. This will be considered on a case-by-case basis.