

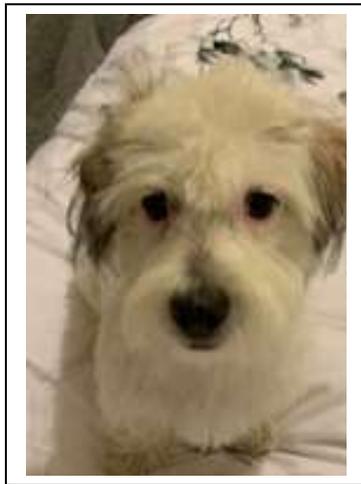
17<sup>th</sup> May 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

### **VISITING DOG**

As part of our ongoing journey in promoting and prioritising Wellbeing and good mental health, we are writing to let you know that we will be welcoming a very special dog to Heronsgate who will be in school on a regular basis.

Meet Mabel...



She is a 12 month old Jack Russell Terrier. She has already spent lots of time with young children and has made a few short visits to Heronsgate. She is a very gentle dog who is as happy to play and chase a ball as she is to sit calmly on the floor or snuggle up on a lap and enjoy human company. She is well known for having a friendly personality and an intelligent and inquisitive nature. She loves lots of attention (and treats). Mabel has received regular puppy training. Penny Dent who is involved with the school through her work with Dogs as Therapy and Canine Concern has been bringing her dogs into school for a number of years now and this has benefitted many children, particularly with their wellbeing and communication skills. Penny has supported Mrs Edwards in preparing Mabel to be ready to come into school and recently, in her role as assessor for Canine Concern, she has now fully assessed and approved Mabel as a canine carer.

### **What are the benefits of having a dog in school?**

Numerous research studies have shown the benefits of dogs in schools and there are several reasons why we are choosing to trial this. Dogs have been working in schools for the past 8 years across the UK. However, this has been commonplace in schools in the USA and Australia for many years. Evidence indicates that some of the benefits are:

- 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 moods, often provoking laughter and fun. Dogs can also teach compassion and respect for other living things as well as relieve anxiety.
- Physical – interaction with a furry friend reduces blood pressure, provides tactile stimulation, assists with pain management, 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

The Plan at Heronsgate is that Mabel will come into school two to three times a week. There will initially need to be a period of integration for both children and dog. This means that she will only spend short periods of time with individual children or groups of no more than 3 until she is comfortable and familiar with the school. All children will be taught and guided in how to approach Mabel and they will also be instructed to wash their hands before and after spending time with her. The reason for washing hands before is due to the use of hand sanitiser which after stroking Mabel may leave traces on her coat which she may be sensitive to.

She will have plenty of time to adjust. When Mabel is not working with children, she will be in one of the school offices where she can rest and will be exercised off site. Mabel will assist the children at Heronsgate in many ways – she may listen to children read, be the focus of a social skills group or be used for relaxation and de-stressing purposes.

### **Some concerns you might have...**

#### **My child is allergic to dogs**

It is understandable that some of you may be concerned about possible allergic reactions to a dog in school. However, Mabel is subjected to a thorough cleanliness and grooming regime. Mabel will also only be allowed in situations with pupils who voluntarily wish to work with her. You will be given the chance below to opt out if you wish your child's access to the dog to be restricted.

#### **Will Mabel be properly cared for?**

Mabel will be extremely well looked after and very well loved. She lives with Mrs Edwards and will stay safely in the offices when not with children. She will mainly work with individuals as required or small groups of children. She may, in time, work in classes but will always be accompanied by an adult that she trusts. This will be reviewed on an ongoing basis. Mabel will have access to her bed in the office where she can 'chill out' during the day! Mabel is fully vaccinated and has flea and worming treatments monthly. If Mabel is unwell for any reason, she will stay at home with Mr Edwards!

#### **My child is scared of dogs**

Some children may have had upsetting experiences and thus have a fear of dogs (or other animals). Mabel will not be in contact with any children who have opted out. However, Mabel 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 and dogs are not allowed anywhere on the school site. However, there is a risk assessment in place for our current therapy dog visits with Penny Dent and Mabel has her own risk assessment in place. The school has a policy specifically for her. Her medical records and insurance documents have been provided for the school. Mabel has undergone basic puppy training and will be on a lead at all times when moving around the school property. She will always be accompanied by an adult who knows her well and children's time with her will be carefully monitored and supervised.

We hope you will join us in welcoming Mabel to Heronsgate and embrace all that she can offer the school. More information about her progress will be in future newsletters.

As this is a trial, the impact will be monitored and reviewed regularly so that the safety and education of the children is not compromised. Your feedback will be welcome and considered.

If you do not wish your child to be in contact with the dog, please email the school office by Monday 24<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

Kind Regards



Jane Edwards  
Headteacher

**Headteacher:** Mrs J. Edwards B.A (Hons)

**Deputy Head:** Mrs C. Gardner-Potter B.Ed (Hons)

**Chair of Governors:** Mr K. Gowans  
**Business Manager:** Mrs V Jewell

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