

## Why have a school therapy dog?

Over the years, numerous research studies have been undertaken to validate the benefits of animal assisted activity and in particular the contribution of therapy dogs. Empirical evidence has shown that therapy dogs can enhance children's psychological development, improve social skills, and increase self-esteem among other benefits. Dogs can also teach responsibility, compassion, and respect for other living things. Dogs in the classroom can be used to calm fears, relieve anxiety, and teach skills. Here is a summary of potential benefits

- **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
- **Social** – a visit with a dog provides a positive mutual topic for discussion, promotes greater self-esteem and well-being, and focused interaction with others
- **Cognitive** – companionship with a dog stimulates memory, problem solving and game playing
- **Emotional** – an adorable four-legged visitor improves self-esteem, acceptance from others, and lifts mood often provoking laughter
- **Environmental** – a dog in a facility decreases the feeling of a sterile environment, lifts mood and this continues after visit

Research has demonstrated that therapy dogs properly managed in the school setting can not only make a measurable difference in terms of gaining various skills such as reading enhancement, but also in contributing critically to

emotional and relational development. School counsellors are finding that the presence of a therapy dog can decrease anxiety and enable students to work through issues such as anger management, bullying tendencies and others psycho/social problems. The introduction of a non-threatening therapy dog can serve as a catalytic vehicle for forming adaptive and satisfactory social interactions. Guided activities and group discussions help teach students how to handle interpersonal conflicts and develop constructive responses.

## Frequently Asked Questions

- **Legal liability.** The school has informed their insurers that there will be a Therapy Dog within school so that our Insurance includes this aspect of need.
- **Allergic reactions.** Understandably, families may be concerned about potential allergic reactions to dogs within the school environment. Australian Labradoodles are a breed specifically used because they do not moult. Families are asked to let school know if there are allergy concerns. Children who handle the dog will be asked to use hand sanitiser or wash their hands after this contact. The dog will be regularly groomed off site. The dog is only put in situations where children choose voluntarily to participate thus avoiding risky contact. Individual needs will be planned for and monitored.
- **Animal Welfare.** Our Therapy dog will have regular veterinarian checks. This is provided very kindly by who sponsor the welfare of our dog. Ability Dogs for Young People, an island based

charity who regularly place therapy dogs with families have assisted in the selection of the school dog and maintain the training and support of our dog. This provides support for the school and the experience and understanding of what the needs of the dog is as well as the pupils. are trained to watch for potential harm to either a child or their own dog and are primarily responsible to manage the animal when on site.

- **Fear of dogs.** There is no doubt that some children have had very traumatic experiences with animals and thus have a severe fear of contact with a dog for example. The therapy dog is implemented by permission or voluntarily, and only in areas where unwanted contact with a dog can be avoided so that the fear issue can be minimized. Experience and research has also shown that with proper guidance and handling, children can learn to overcome their fear of animals and with it, grow in respect and appreciation of them. Families should let school know if your child is frightened of dogs. We will work with the child to support this need.



## Interacting with our dog

- We are calm in our approach asking to say hello to the dog.
- We are gentle with our hands
- We do not tease our dog
- We read to our dog who especially likes stories that we have written ourselves.
- If we are sad we can ask to speak to our dog about it.
- Our dog will always be on the lead and with an adult.
- We do not need to touch or talk to the dog unless we want to.

The school believes having a Therapy Dog is invaluable to the community. To have a dog does bring expenses with the benefits. The following companies and charities have helped support the dog being in

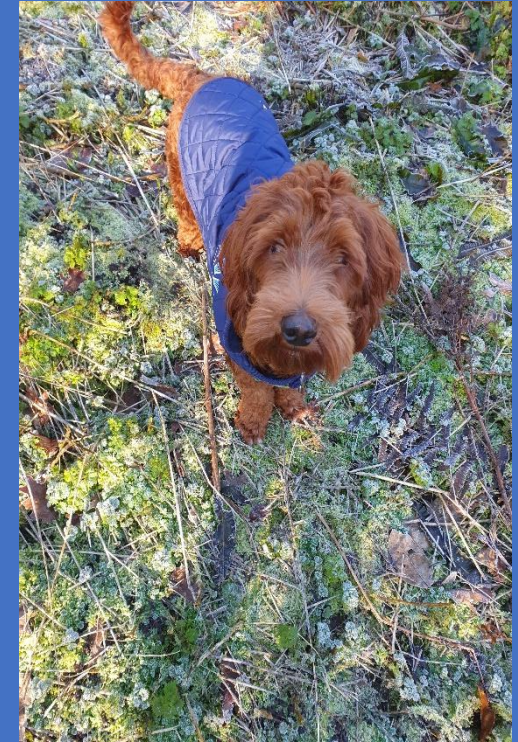
school. The school community is exceptionally grateful for this support without which we would not be able manage.

### **Ability Dogs for Young People.**

- This wonderful charity has guided and advised the selection of the puppy and the ongoing training support for the puppy. The School will reciprocate and raise funds for the Charity.

**Green, Roberts and Butler- The Carisbrooke Vets** – who have kindly donated the first year's care for our puppy.

**The Saint Vincent de Paul Society and Knights of St Columbia** - who each donated £100 from which equipment used at school was purchased.



St Thomas of Canterbury  
Catholic Primary School



## Cookie

# St Thomas of Canterbury's School Dog