

October 2017

Dear Parents and Carers

Meet Hector!

We are very excited to introduce you to a new member of staff who we will be welcoming to Ickleford Primary School.

Hector was born on 6th August 2017. He is an 8 week old Cocker Spaniel who is in training to become a School Dog and is set to become an integral part of our school community.

Below we have set out the benefits of a school dog, and tried to address concerns you may have.

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, assists with pain management, gives motivation to move, walk 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.

Reading to dogs has been proven to help children develop literacy skills and build confidence, through both the calming effect the dog's presence has on children as well as the fact that a dog will listen to children read without being judgemental or critical. This comforting environment helps to nurture children's enthusiasm for reading and provides them with the confidence to read aloud.

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 school dog. However, Hector will be subjected to the most thorough cleanliness and grooming regime. He will also only be allowed in situations with pupils who voluntarily wish to work with him. Your permission will of course be sought in advance of Hector having access to, and working with, your child in school.

Will Hector be properly cared for?

Hector will be extremely well looked after. He will live with Mrs Hart and will come to school most days but will stay safely in the offices until satisfactory training has been completed. He will then, in time, work in classes but will always be accompanied by a trained adult. He will undergo thorough and rigorous training (beginning with puppy classes) so will be extremely well-behaved. Whilst Hector is in school he will have access to a dog crate in the offices where he can 'chill out' during the day! This is where he will spend most of his time initially. Hector will visit the vet regularly for all his injections as well as regular check-ups. If Hector is unwell for any reason he will stay at home with a babysitter!

My child is scared of dogs

Some children may have had upsetting experiences and thus have a fear of dogs (or another animal). Hector will only be in contact with children whose parents have given their permission. However, Hector's training will help him to be calm and gentle around children; he is already showing signs of 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, however because Hector is training to be a School Dog, he will be fully insured to carry out his role thus allowing him to be on the school site. He will be on a leash at all times when moving around the school property and will always be accompanied by a trained adult.

We hope you will join us in welcoming Hector and embrace all that he has to offer the school. More information about his progress will be in future newsletters and a ParentMail to seek your permission regarding contact with Hector will be sent home soon.

Yours sincerely

S Dury

Mrs S Dury

Headteacher