



Caldecote Church of England Academy
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4.1.22

Dear Parents and Carers,

We're getting a school dog!

I am writing to inform you that we will be adding a new member to our school community. As of December 2021, we have begun welcoming a school dog who will be within the school on a regular basis to work with our pupils.

After careful consideration, we have chosen a cockapoo named Xela. She is 13 weeks old. Her journey with us will begin with becoming acclimatised to the environment and the noises in school. We have chosen this breed for the following reasons:

- The breed is not known to malt – their coat is believed to be non-allergenic, meaning there is a reduced risk of allergic reactions.
- The breed is known to be child-friendly, lively, gentle mannered and affectionate, yet sensitive.
- The breed is known to be highly intelligent and respond excellently to training.
- Mrs Campbell researched the breed prior to purchase, to support therapy dog training for her own family.

Xela will be undergoing specific training shortly, to ensure she is well-trained for being around children. We wish to reassure parents that we have undertaken a significant amount of research into purchasing a school dog and believe the positive effects of such demonstrably outweigh any negatives. Some of the many benefits of having a school dog include the following:

- Cognitive development – building a companionship with a dog helps children stimulate their memory, problem-solving and game-playing skills. Having a school dog is known to increase enthusiasm for, and enjoyment of animals, which motivates children to think and learn.
- Social skills – dogs provide a mutual topic for conversation with others, and encourage responsibility, wellbeing and focused interaction with others.
- Emotional skills – dogs improve self-esteem, acceptance from others and are known for improving moods. Dogs can also help children develop compassion and respect for other living things and can reduce children's anxiety. Building respect can improve children's relationships with each other, parents and teachers and shows them how to nurture and care for another living thing. If any children are suffering from bereavement or are particularly sad, dogs can provide children with comfort and friendship.
- Physical development – interaction with dogs is known to reduce blood pressure, provide tactile stimulation, assist with pain management and give motivation for children to move and walk.
- Reading – school dogs are known to help children with their reading and literacy skills, through their calming presence and ability to listen to children read without being judgemental or critical. Children can build their confidence to read aloud to others through having a school dog.

- School community – having a school dog builds the sense of a family environment and togetherness.

During the day, Xela will be kept in the headteacher's office – returning to the headteacher's home once the school day is over. A suitable bed, food, water and cleaning supplies will be held for her, and through training she will be sufficiently toilet-trained. I must stress that pupils will not be expected to clean up any dog mess, and we will ensure that the school grounds are kept clean at all times.

Whenever Xela is being walked around the school, she will have a short lead to ensure she is controlled at all times.

Pupils will be able to visit Xela during break and lunch times with strict rules in place. Once her training is complete, Xela will be available to work with children, particularly for them to read to her.

We understand that many parents may have concerns regarding bringing a school dog onto the premises, and I would like to use this letter to provide some reassurance to parents. We have undertaken a full risk assessment to ensure that any hazards can be adequately controlled. Below, I have listed some concerns which I believe parents may have.

My child is allergic to dogs and I don't want them to have an allergic reaction

As previously mentioned, we have chosen a cockapoo breed, which has a non-allergenic coat and does not molt, meaning there is a significantly reduced risk of an allergic reaction. If, however, you would still prefer your child not to come into direct contact with Xela, we will accommodate your request and ensure that arrangements are in place.

We have undertaken a thorough risk assessment, which details the hygiene practices that will be in place – such as cleaning of hands and the environment before and after coming into contact with Xela.

More information is detailed in our risk assessment which is available for you to download from our website.

Will the dog be properly cared for?

Xela will be subject to a rigorous grooming process to prevent the risk of infection or disease. She is a much loved family dog and is well cared for at home as well as at school. She will have regular vet checks to ensure that she is healthy and fully vaccinated, the groomer is well known to the family and already works with Mrs Campbell's other dog. The chosen trainer is also well known to the family and we believe, has the best interests of the dog at heart. In acclimatising Xela to the world outside of her own home from a very early age, the aim is to reduce any anxiety she may feel when out and about and to learn that some people won't wish to interact with her and for her to accept that.

My child is scared of dogs

We understand that some children may be fearful of dogs. Cockapoos are known for being extremely child-friendly and Xela will provide the opportunity for children to overcome their fears, with their parents' permission. The training that she will undergo will ensure that she is well-behaved, gentle and calm around children. If parents would prefer for their child not to come into contact with her, we will accommodate your request. If you would like to meet Xela with your child, this can be arranged.

Is the dog well-behaved?

As previously mentioned, Xela will undergo therapy dog training to ensure she is well-behaved at all times. She has already been seen by the trainer and her puppy training is well underway. She will be kept on a short leash whenever walking around school. Mrs Campbell is training the dog as a therapy dog to support her own child and the dog will be familiar with children from her arrival at the family home, aged 8 weeks. If for any reason the trainer highlights any

concerns surrounding Xela becoming a therapy dog or visiting school, her visits to school will cease until the trainer is satisfied.

Please complete the attached permission slip, outlining whether your child is able to come into contact with Xela or not. I would like to reassure you that a written list will be held of all children for whom permission has been received – this will be distributed to all staff members and only these children will be permitted to be around or touch Xela. Please return the slip to the school office by 12th January 2022.

We hope you will join us in welcoming Xela to our school and embrace all she has to offer to our community. I hope to have provided reassurance to any concerns you may have via this letter; however, if you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you for your continuing support.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Campbell and the Caldecote Team

Permission slip

Please complete the following permission slip, providing a tick next to the condition which reflects your consent. Your consent will be valid until July 2022. Should you wish to amend your permission, please contact the school immediately in writing.

Name of pupil:		Class name:	
My child is allergic to dogs and I would not like my child to be around, or touch, the dog.			
My child is allergic to dogs, but I am happy for them to be around the dog, as long as my child does not touch the dog.			
My child has a fear of dogs and I would not like my child to be around, or touch, the dog.			
My child has a fear of dogs, but I am happy for them to be slowly introduced to the dog.			
I would not like my child to be around, or touch, the dog for reasons other than those outlined above.			
I am happy for my child to be around and touch the dog.			

I, _____ (name of parent) have fully read and understood the conditions of this letter. I agree that I have provided the correct consent above and will inform the school in writing if my permission changes at any stage.

Signature of parent: _____ Date: _____