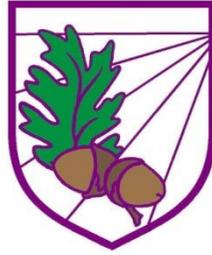


Oak View Primary and Nursery School

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AL10 8NW



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Headteacher: Yvonne Davis

18th March 2019

Dear Parents/Carers,

We have some exciting Oak View news to share with you. Please meet Bella, our new member of staff.

Bella was born on 1st February 2019 and she is a Kennel Club registered Beagle puppy. We selected a Beagle as they are known for their friendly, loving nature, are sociable and are good with children and other dogs.

Bella will be owned by Mrs O'Shaughnessy and live with her and her family. When she is at school she will be based in the school admin office which is secure and separate from the classrooms.



Bella is 6 weeks old. She will become a regular attender at the school from the beginning of the Summer Term as she starts her training to become our Educational Assistance dog as part of our on-going mental health and well-being provision.

'Schools have an important role to play in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of their pupils by developing approaches to the particular needs of their pupils' Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools (Nov 2018 DfE).

Having a School Dog has been common practice in Australia and America for some time and there are now a growing number of schools in the UK with a School Dog. However, there is currently no benchmark standard of training in order for a dog to come into school.

Having carried out a lot of research and to ensure that our school dog is safe to work in an educational environment we have registered with the charity Dogs Helping Kids (DHK). DHK are one of the only organisations in the country training and assessing dogs purely to work in an educational environment as both educational and therapeutic aids.

We shared DHK's belief that a dog should only be working with a child, in an educational environment, if it has been trained, assessed and certified to do so. You can find out more about school dogs from the Dogs Helping Kids website at:

<http://www.dogshelpingkids.co.uk>



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For her first year in school, Bella will be very much behind the scenes and will have little contact with the children. She will spend most of her time in the admin office getting used to her new surroundings. There may be times that she does venture out of the office and on these occasions please be reassured that she will be kept on a short lead and will always be with an adult.

We discussed the rules and expectations about having a school dog with the children in an assembly today and we will continue to re-visit these expectations in class sessions. One of these rules is that the children and staff will 'ignore her' if they see her around school so that she can become accustomed to the school environment and learn to 'love' her other home. We request that parents and other visitors to the school follow this rule.

During her first year she will attend weekly puppy training sessions and will also attend training and assessment workshops at the DHK headquarters as we work towards completing the Puppy Training Programme. This is followed by a two year training programme and once certified she will continue to undergo an annual assessment. This is to ensure the safety of the children, the staff, Mrs O'Shaughnessy and most importantly Bella.

As part of her role, Bella, will be trained to become a reading companion to children who find reading 'tricky'. It has been proven that struggling or emerging readers gain a higher desire to read and write to non-judgemental dogs who 'just listen' and do not make fun of them if they make a mistake. Children cannot fail in their relationship with a dog. Dogs do not judge them or make fun of them, they just offer unconditional affection.

It has also been proven that animals help with depression, anxiety and stress and promote happiness and wellbeing. Our belief is that having a School Dog will make the school feel a 'nicer' place to be for the whole school community. We are sure that her introduction will:

- Encourage positive behaviour
- Build self-confidence and increase self-esteem
- Encourage respect, responsibility and trust
- Improve reading skills by the children having fun and enjoying the experience
- Help with anger management and de-escalation of anger/frustration
- Improve attendance

We request that you complete the slip attached to confirm that you have read this letter. Only once Bella has completed her puppy training will she start to 'work' with children from Year 1 to Year 6 and we will inform you of this before it should happen.

Please also note that we will do everything we can to reassure children who are fearful or allergic to dogs. Under no circumstances will any child be forced to meet with Bella.

We hope that you join us in welcoming Bella to our school community. We will publish pictures of her regularly on our website so that everyone can enjoy seeing her development and progress.

Please see the FAQs attached which may answer any questions you have. If you have any further queries or questions then please do not hesitate to contact the school by emailing us at: admin@oakview.herts.sch.uk (please put School Dog on the subject line).

Mrs O'Shaughnessy



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Oak View School

Permission Return Slip for our School Dog Bella

Child's Name:Class:

Please tick as appropriate:

- I have read the letter regarding Bella our new School Dog
- I understand that Bella will have very limited contact with pupils in her first year at the school and that pupils and adults are requested to ignore her
- I give permission for my child to be involved in aspects of caring for the school dog (such as keeping water stations filled around the site)

Once Bella has completed the Puppy Training Programme:

- I give permission for my child to have supervised access to the School Dog
- I give permission for my child to go out of the school grounds on supervised walks with the School Dog during break times
- My child is not frightened of dogs
- My child is nervous of dogs but I would like them to have the opportunity to work with Bella to develop their confidence and understanding of dogs
- My child does not have an allergy to dogs

- I do not want my child to have direct contact with the School Dog
- My child is nervous of dogs
- My child is very frightened of dogs
- My child is allergic to dogs (please give details)

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Any Other Comments:

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Signed: Date:

Print Name:

Please inform the school if any of these details subsequently change



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