



Heartwood Church of England VC Primary and Nursery School

White Cross Road, Swaffham, Norfolk, PE37 7RF
Tel 01760 721357

office@heartwood.norfolk.sch.uk | www.heartwood.norfolk.sch.uk

Headteacher Mrs Rebecca Starman
Deputy Headteacher Mrs Kelsey McKenna

Dear Parents/Carers,

I am writing to inform you that we will be adding a new member to our school community. We will be welcoming a school dog who will be within the school on a daily basis to work with our pupils. Our school dog is currently completing her therapy training and has passed 2 out of 5 parts so far with flying colours. As part of her training she needs to be in school. She will **always** be with Mrs Goacher and on a lead.

After careful consideration, we have chosen a cockapoo named Winnie who is currently 19 months old. We have chosen this breed for the following reasons:

- The breed does not moult – their coat is nonallergenic, 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.

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.



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- Social skills – dogs provide a mutual topic for conversation with others, and encourage responsibility, wellbeing and focussed 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.

Winnie will be in every morning until 10 and then this will increase over time. Her space will be in the Nest with Mrs Goacher. A suitable bed, food, water and cleaning supplies will be held for Winnie, and through training she is sufficiently toilet-trained.

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

Eventually, and after Winnie has completed all of her therapy training, pupils will be able to visit Winnie during break and lunch times in the Nest.

Once her training is complete, Winnie will visit pupils in their classrooms, particularly for children to read to her.

In the future, once all therapy training has been completed, pupils will be able to walk with Winnie around the school playground/field. When a pupil wants to walk with Winnie, another lead will be added to create a dual lead, with the supervising adults having control at all times. At all times, whether in classrooms or being walked by a pupil, an adult will supervise the activity and Winnie will be on a lead, under the control of the adult.



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We would like to reassure you that pupils will only be able to come into contact with Winnie if parental permission has been received.

We understand that many parents will 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 – we have published this risk assessment on the school website for you to view should you wish to access it. 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 moult, meaning there is a significantly reduced risk of an allergic reaction. If, however, you would still prefer your child not to come into contact with Winnie, 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 Winnie.

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

Will the dog be properly cared for?

Winnie will be subject to a rigorous grooming process to prevent the risk of infection or disease.

Winnie will be kept in the headteacher's office during the day and will have adequate supply of food and water. You can find more information on these arrangements in our risk assessment.

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 Winnie will provide the opportunity for children to overcome their fears, with their parents' permission. The training that Winnie 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 Winnie, we will accommodate your request and ensure alternative arrangements are in place.

Is the dog well-behaved?

As previously mentioned, Winnie is undergoing training to ensure she is well-behaved at all times. She will be kept on a short lead whenever walking around school.



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Please complete the permission slip, outlining whether your child is able to come into contact with Winnie or not.

[Winnie School Dog Permission – Fill in form](#)

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 Winnie.

Please return the slip to your child's class teacher or school office by Friday 25th September 2026.

We hope you will join us in welcoming Winnie 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.

Kind regards,

Rebecca Starman
Headteacher