

28th April 2023

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am writing to inform you of some very exciting news for Broomgrove Junior School. We are delighted to announce that we have a new member of our school community joining us this term, our School Dog, *Woody*. We have spent time carefully considering the introduction of a school dog and have undertaken research that conclusively proves the benefits for children of having this opportunity.

The value of pet therapy is widely accepted as a powerful aid to stimulation and communication in both children and adults. Studies have shown that the presence of companion animals can improve the well-being of children and lower rates of anxiety, simply by making the environment happier, calmer, more enjoyable and less forbidding.

- **Dogs teach children responsibility**

Having to remember to feed, provide water and show support for a dog can give children a sense of importance and satisfaction that they can't otherwise get from school or other environments. The relationship that develops can be life-changing for a child and provide a great support system as they continue to grow and develop.

- **Dogs teach children patience and the value of patience in learning**

Dogs don't always do as they are told the first time! Teaching a dog a new command or encouraging one to act on a command it knows requires patience and calmness, but seeing the dog achieve this creates a great sense of success.

- **Dogs teach children compassion**

Just like humans, dogs feel emotion and pain but are unable to express it in words. Having a dog to interact with builds empathy and thereby develops the child's sense of self.

- **Dogs teach children about socialisation**

Like most of us, dogs are social animals, who enjoy and need attention and affection. By learning how to interact with a dog, children can learn how to better socialise with each other. If they can learn the social cues of a dog, then interacting with humans who can talk will be a walk in the park! (pun intended)

- **Dogs are a non-judgemental audience**

For children who have emotional or social challenges a dog provides a listening ear, someone who will be attentive and calm, who won't comment or suggest and who will love them unconditionally regardless of circumstances. A dog is a quiet reading partner, confidante and friend.

- **Dogs are fun**

Last, but certainly not least, dogs are a lot of fun. They greet you with a wagging tail and can cheer you up on even your worst day.

Our Broomgrove Junior School Dog, Woody, lives with our headteacher, Mrs Wright and her family. Mrs Wright and her family have undertaken a range of conditioning training with Woody, to prepare him for visiting school. He has very much enjoyed visiting many noisy, busy places, such as cafés, coffee shops, markets etc. He has even been on the train! This means he is well prepared for the busy, dynamic environment of Broomgrove.

Woody is a very caring, gentle and generally well behaved dog who was specifically selected for having the right breeding and temperament to be a school dog. He is a cockapoo, a breed known for their low/non-shedding. He is vaccinated and microchipped and attends the vet for regular check-ups. His health, well-being, training and insurance will be the responsibility of Mrs Wright and Woody will not attend school in the event of him being unwell. Woody has been added to Essex County Council's school liability insurance so that he is able to interact with children, staff and visitors. Additional pet insurance has also been obtained by Mrs Wright.

Woody is four years old and will be introduced slowly to the school community. He will begin by visiting school after hours so that he becomes familiar with the school environment. We will then introduce him to small numbers of children in the first instance. Interactions with Woody will be strictly supervised by Mrs Wright and he will be based in her office in school. A pet gate has been built to prevent Woody from leaving the office without an adult. He also has a crate in the office where he may rest in peace and also where he may be kept should anyone entering the office not want to interact with him. If children or the dog become anxious, Woody's visits will be stopped instantly and reviewed over a period of time to consider whether to try again. He will be kept on a lead when taken to the school field for exercise and toileting and there will be a constant supply of poo bags to ensure this is always cleared up immediately.

All children will be involved in training before interacting with Woody. Class lessons on his welfare and safety will be undertaken, so that children know how to behave around dogs, including specifically around dogs that they don't know. Children that will have more involvement in Woody's life at school, for example helping with exercising him, will be older and have additional training including learning about risk assessment. We will also be inviting The Dogs' Trust in to deliver an assembly and workshops.

It is accepted that interacting with animals is not appropriate for all children, but for many it has the potential to provide a wide range of positive benefits. We know that some children may be cautious of dogs or have allergies. A full risk assessment has been undertaken, the final part of which will be completed based on the needs of our children. We also have a policy about the school dog. All of these documents have been ratified by our governors.

Children who do not wish to interact will not have to. The dog will not enter classes where a child has an allergy and the dog will not be loose in the school at any time.

Any parent who does not wish their child to interact with Woody is invited to contact us to discuss concerns and to inform school of their wishes, which will always be respected. If any families have any questions, not already covered, please do not hesitate to contact Mrs Wright or Miss Bonner.

We have no doubt that Woody will have a very positive impact on the whole school community. Please have a look at the following pages to start getting to know him!

Kindest regards,

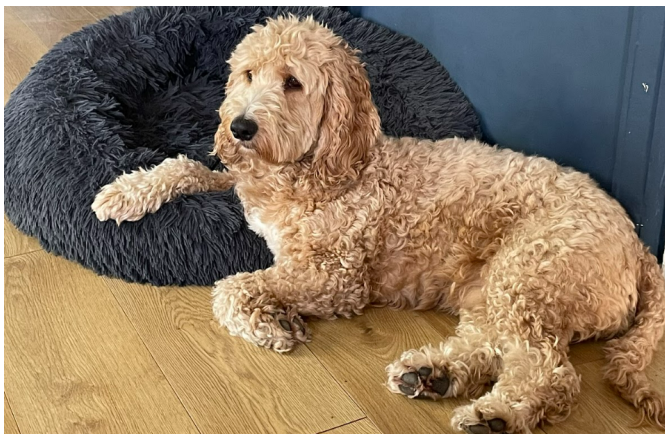


Mrs K Wright
Headteacher

A day in the life of...Our School Dog

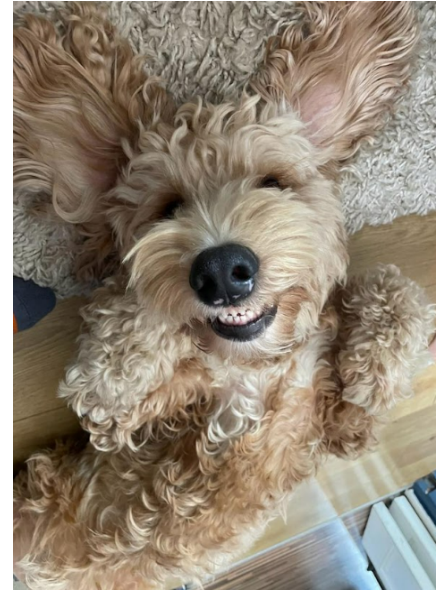


Hello my name is Woody and I can't wait to meet all the children, staff and parents at Broomgrove Junior School! My usual day starts early because my human mum is off to school by 7:15am. When it's really dark in the mornings, I have to wear my flashing light collar! At home, as well as the humans, I live with four chickens and they are my good friends. When they are let out in the garden, I try to play with them sometimes, but they prefer to ignore me! Sometimes my humans' relatives bring their dogs to ours so I can play with them and I love visiting their homes, too. I just want to be everyone's friend! I am good at coming back when mum calls me or uses her whistle and I sit patiently because sometimes she gives me a treat! I love meeting people and being stroked. I also love going out for walks - both on and off my lead. One of my favourite places of all is the beach!



I get lots of love and attention wherever I go because I am so friendly and because people tell me I'm a very handsome boy. Mum has taken me to lots of interesting and exciting places to prepare me for going into school. I am friendly at all times and this means I can have lots of love and fuss from people. My favourite time of the day is dinner time. I have learned to wait patiently for my dinner and afterwards, I go for a run about in the garden. After such a busy day being cute, I love nothing more than lounging on one of my comfy beds.

When I come into school I will be based in mum's office. I will be there for anyone who wants to talk to me, I am really good at listening and I am always pleased to see everyone. Children will be able to come and read to me if they want some quiet time or if they're feeling worried about reading out loud. I can't read so I love hearing stories and I don't mind if children make mistakes. I will help the children to learn about animals and how to care for them. I will be available if someone is sad, or when they need a cute face and a wagging tail to brighten their day. I will also get to spend time with children who have done amazing things, they will be able to come and show me their fabulous learning or talk to me about an amazing thing they have achieved.



I will help children to learn about emotions and how to express them, as well helping them to be empathetic. I will also help the children to learn about being patient and that it's OK to make mistakes. I am learning some new tricks and I don't always get it right the first time so the children will help me with these things too.

I can't wait to be a member of the school community!