



18th October 2019

Dear Parents and Carers,

We are very excited to introduce you to a new member of our team, who we will be welcoming to our schools over the coming weeks.

Twig was born on 19th November 2017 and is a 23 month old yellow Labrador who lives with Mrs Hall and is set to become an integral part of our school community.



You may have seen in the local press that the Paws for Pals (Selby group) received funding earlier in the year from the 'Selby Big Local' lottery grant to train a small number of dogs to become therapy dogs. Five local dog owners have completed the training run by the charity 'Pets as Therapy' and Twig is one of five fully qualified Pet Therapy Dogs. The dogs are out and about in the local area visiting the nursing home in Selby, Selby Library and Mencap in Selby. We are really pleased that Twig will become our new school federation dog and visit our three schools to offer therapeutic sessions.

What are the benefits of having a school dog?

Therapy dogs have been working in UK schools for the past five years but have been commonplace in schools in the US and Australia for many years. Research studies have shown the benefits of therapy dogs in schools which 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 moods, 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.

As you may be aware, there are already many 'Pets as Therapy' dogs working in schools. 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 dog listening 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.

Will Twig be properly cared for?

Twig will be extremely well looked after. She lives with Mrs Hall and her family and at first, will come into our schools but will stay safely in a crate in a quiet non-teaching area of school. Mrs Hall will introduce her to our environments and she will then work with some of our children but will always be accompanied by Mrs Hall.

She will be kept clean and well-groomed at home and children will have to wash their hands and use anti-bacterial gel after contact. All children coming into contact with the dog will brush their clothing using a lint roller to minimise hair transfer onto clothing.



Should the dog defecate on school premises it will be cleaned up by Mrs Hall using animal waste bags and a disinfectant used to clean the area. Waste will then be carefully and suitably disposed of.

How do we know Twig is ready to work in school?

Twig has undergone a programme of thorough and rigorous training so is extremely well-behaved. She has been assessed by a ‘Pets as Therapy’ Assessor and is ready to work with any children. Whilst Twig is in school, she will have access to a dog crate and this is where she will spend most of her time initially until she becomes used to our staff and our premises. She will also be taken home at a point during the day where she can ‘chill out’! Twig will visit the vet regularly for all her injections as well as regular check-ups. If Twig is unwell for any reason, she will stay at home.

My child is scared of dogs

Some children may have had upsetting experiences and have a fear of dogs (or another animal). Twig will only be in contact with children whose parents have given their permission. However, Twig’s training has taught her to be calm and gentle around children; she has 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 schools do have a ‘no dogs’ policy. Twig will be on a leash at all times when moving around the school property and will always be accompanied by Mrs Hall. Twig will also be fully insured to carry out her role in our schools. We have completed a comprehensive risk assessment, having considered the processes and risks in having a dog in school.

What do I need to do now?

We are requesting consent from parents for their child to interact and work with Twig and we request that you complete the permission slip below or email school with this information. Please also detail if your child is allergic to dogs.

We hope you will join us in welcoming Twig to the Federation family and embrace all that she has to offer the school.

Kind regards

Mrs S. MacDonald
Executive Headteacher

School Dog

I **give/ do not give** permission for my child(ren) to interact and work with our school dog, Twig. (Please delete as necessary).

My child..... is allergic to dogs.

Signed:

Date:

Parent name: