



## Introducing Abe (our School Dog)



Abe has recently joined our school team and is getting used to daily life in our school. He is a 12 week old Border Collie cross Labrador and looks set to become an integral part of our school family. He begins his first set of Puppy Classes on Sunday, 8<sup>th</sup> May, and, in time, we hope to train him to be a fully qualified Pet Therapy Dog.

### **What are the benefits of having a school dog?**

Over the years, numerous research studies have been undertaken to validate the benefits of animal assisted activity and in particular the contribution of therapy dogs. Empirical evidence has shown that therapy dogs can enhance children's psychological development, improve social skills, and increase self-esteem among other benefits. Dogs can also teach responsibility, compassion, and respect for other living things. Dogs in the classroom can be used to calm fears, relieve anxiety, and teach skills.

Some possible benefits include:

- 🐾 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
- 🐾 Social – a visit with a dog provides a positive mutual topic for discussion, promotes greater self-esteem and well-being, and focused interaction with others
- 🐾 Cognitive – companionship with a dog stimulates memory, problem solving and game playing
- 🐾 Emotional – an adorable four-legged visitor improves self-esteem, acceptance from others, and lifts mood often provoking laughter
- 🐾 Environmental – a dog in a facility decreases the feeling of a sterile environment, lifts mood and this continues after visit

Reading to dogs has also been proven to help children develop literacy skills and build confidence, though both the calming effect the dog's presence has on children as well as the fact that a dog will listen 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.

Research has demonstrated that therapy dogs, properly managed in the school setting, can not only make a measurable difference in terms of gaining various skills such as reading enhancement, but also in contributing critically to emotional and relational development. Many educationalists are finding that the presence of a therapy dog can decrease anxiety and enable students to work through issues such as anger management, bullying tendencies and others psycho/social problems. The introduction of a non-threatening therapy dog can serve as a catalytic vehicle for forming adaptive and satisfactory social interactions. Guided activities and group discussions help teach students how to handle interpersonal conflicts and develop constructive responses.



### **What concerns might people have?**

- 🐾 My child is allergic to dogs: It is understandable that parents may be concerned about possible allergic reactions to dogs. However, Abe will be subjected to the most thorough cleanliness and grooming regime. He will also only be put in situations with pupils who voluntarily wish to work with him.
- 🐾 Will Abe be properly cared for: Abe will be extremely well looked after. In the first instance, he will live with Mrs Baynes and her family. He will come to school every day but will stay in Mrs Baynes' office unless working in one of the classes. He will undergo thorough and rigorous training (beginning with Puppy Classes) so will also be extremely well behaved. Abe will visit the vet regularly for all his injections as well as regular check-ups.
- 🐾 My child is scared of dogs: There is no doubt that some children have had very traumatic experiences with a pet and thus have a fear of dogs (or another animal). However, because Abe will only be in contact with children who have given their permission, this fear element can be minimised. Abe's training will also help him to be calm and gentle around children; he is already showing signs of a very loving and gentle nature. Further, 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.

