

Friday 29th September 2023

Dear Parents and Carers,

Following previous successful experiences with school dogs, we are delighted to share with you a new addition to our community – Martha will be joining the team!

Martha is a Hungarian Vizsla, due to her affectionate and patient nature she is an ideal breed to play an important role in our community as our school pet. First and foremost, Martha is a family pet, and it is clear that her lovely, calm temperament and her friendly, intelligent nature, mean that she will be able to fulfil additional special roles and responsibilities in our school brilliantly well. The Hungarian vizsla is a loyal, gentle mannered and social breed often being referred to as a 'soft dog'. They seem to have the ability to meet us at our level and understand our emotions, Martha especially. We have put all the necessary safety checks in place and have ensured that Martha has had full vet checks, and we are of course keeping her up to date with vaccinations and other medical details such as worming to ensure she is fit and healthy to perform her duties.



A number of schools across the trust, and country, have introduced school dogs over the past few years and have seen great benefits from this, including ourselves. Children who do not have pets are able to experience the benefits of looking after a pet in school. They can be used for comfort for children who may be having a difficult time, it is well known that petting animals can help to calm us. Additionally, they have been used in many schools to develop confidence in reading, with great successes found in increasing reading engagement, enjoyment and fluency.

Research shows that dogs in schools can have many positive outcomes including:

- Increased empathy and responsibility in children towards others in their lives.
- Teaching children how to nurture, care and have respect for all life.
- Improving academic achievement by helping children to feel calm at school allowing greater focus and concentration in their learning environments.
- Helping pupils enter, move around, and leave the school calmly.
- Improved behaviour and concentration in class
- improved self-esteem and confidence in and beyond the classroom
- further promoting our well-being agenda for pupils and staff

While we are very excited for Martha to join us, it is important to note that Martha will not be based in the school full time. She will initially make visits and be introduced to individuals and small groups of children, always considering both the children's and Martha's welfare. No child will be unsupervised with the dog at any point, nor will any child be forced to spend time with the dog if they do not wish to. We hope Martha will give great enrichment opportunities for those who wish to engage with her, but we also appreciate that other young people may be less enthusiastic.

We are aware that although this is an exciting opportunity, there may be some concerns about introducing a school pet. We have therefore carried out a full risk assessment to address some of these concerns. Some of the main areas of concern may fall into the following categories.

1. Allergies

Some children in the school may have allergies which are aggravated by pet hair. As a Vizsla, Martha has a short, sleek coat with no undercoat. Because of this, they are an extremely low allergen dog reducing the risk of potential irritations.

Additionally, Martha has specific locations in which she will be able to be during the school day. We ask if this is the case for your child and you are concerned, that you contact us to discuss this.

2. Phobias

Martha is so soft in nature and the breed is known for their gentle temperament; we are aware that this may be of little reassurance to a child who has a genuine phobia of dogs. If we are aware of phobias, we will do all we can to ensure that the child is not in contact with Martha, again, restricting where in the school she is located. We absolutely do not want any child to be worried about encountering Martha. In addition, please rest assured that at no time will Martha be able to 'wander' around the school, she will always be supervised by an adult. If your child has a phobia of dogs, please also let us know if you would like to work with us to try to overcome the phobia, we will of course be guided by you on this.

3. The safety of our children.

No child will be left unsupervised with Martha at any time. Children will be taught how to interact with her, including how best to touch and if appropriate play with her, always supervised, and only if they wish to do so when it is judged to be an appropriate time to do so.

4. The welfare of our dog.

As stated, Martha will not be in school every day. When she is in school, an adult will always be supervising the safety of both children and the dog. If Martha is tired, then she will of course be able to rest, she has a safe space away from the school if she needs time to rest and recover away from the classroom and children. Additionally, all children will be spoken to about not feeding Martha, and about how to touch and interact with her in a kind and careful way.



We are sure that bringing our furry friend Martha into school will create a wonderful atmosphere for our young people. We are committed to supporting the social and emotional well-being of all the school community and this provides another opportunity for support and growth. Martha will be able to lend a floppy ear when children want to have a chat and will be a kind face to listen to our readers, she does love a good story!

If you have any further questions about our school dog, then please get in touch.

Please ensure that you complete the form below and return as soon as possible so that we can ensure everyone's safety and happiness as Martha is introduced to the school.

Yours sincerely

Miss H Hunter

L Garside



Please return by Monday 2nd October as Martha will be in school at the end of the week and we would like all arrangements in place by this date.

Child's name _____

Class _____

Please tick if appropriate

My child has an allergy to dogs

Please give details:

My child has a phobia / is scared of dogs

Please give further information about the phobia and if you would like us to work with your child to overcome the phobia: