

WELCOME TO INDIE - OUR SCHOOL THERAPY DOG



I am writing to inform you that from the middle of next week, we will have a new member of our school community, as we have decided to introduce a School Therapy Dog.

Indie is a Cockapoo puppy and is now living with myself, Mrs Plant, and my family, which includes children.

We are training Indie to become a certified 'Therapy Dog,' and she will be fully assessed for health, obedience and temperament. Indie will have to pass a strict programme of training and assessment to ensure she is suitable to be in school around children and to protect her welfare. Indie's training is being delivered by PAWS therapy who have successfully introduced many therapy dogs into UK schools. Helping Hands of Stalyhill have paid for Indie's therapy dog training costs, so a huge thank you to them for their generous support of this initiative.

Indie will be highly trained and socialised from an early age and is fully insured and risk assessed. The Cockapoo breed has been chosen specifically to fulfil this role, due to their hypoallergenic/low shedding coat, and they are known to have an exceptionally mild temperament and to be extremely loyal and intelligent. Research shows that Cockapoos are also patient, friendly, affectionate, love children and adapt well to new situations. Despite all this, Indie will never be alone with the children.

The value of pet therapy is widely accepted as a powerful aid to support communication, interaction and motivation in children. Research has shown that therapy dogs can improve the well-being of children, reduce their anxiety levels by making the school environment happier and a more enjoyable place to be. Dogs are a great comfort to children who are upset in any way and in need of calm, consolation, comfort, breathing space or a distraction from becoming overwhelmed or dysregulated. Children can benefit educationally and emotionally; a therapy dog can motivate and encourage their participation, increase their understanding of responsibility, develop empathy and nurturing skills and improve their behaviour and self-esteem. Children cannot fail in any way in their relationship with a therapy dog; they do not judge or condemn and offer unconditional affection. Children can also learn the principles of good pet ownership and be taught how to be around dogs safely and responsibly.

Although there are many benefits to having a school therapy dog, we have not taken this decision lightly and I have conducted extensive research over the past 6 months. Some additional points to share with you include;

- I have visited other Tameside primary schools where a school dog is already successfully in place. The school staff and children shared with me their experience about the positive impact their dog has had across the school.
- Prior to purchasing Indie, I visited the home of the breeder multiple times to ensure that her temperament and that of her parents, is suitable for interaction with children.
- She is a hypoallergenic, low shedding dog, chosen to minimise the chance of allergic reactions.
- Indie has received a full health check by a vet, immunised and wormed in line with the Kennel Club's stipulations and this will continue as necessary.
- Indie will be encouraged to use the toilet away from the school site and will be provided with regular opportunities for this. If this does occur, we will use a spray product, which will sanitise the area. Additionally, if Indie is unwell, she will not attend school.
- There will always be a designated member of staff present during any interaction with pupils.
- A policy is in place and a full risk assessment has been completed, and will be available to view on the website.
- Support from the Dog's Trust will be utilised to help educate the children around animal safety including an EY/KS1 and KS2 assembly.

Indie will have a clear purpose in school and a weekly timetable. She will spend time with all children who would like to, across both the Infant and Junior School, although initially she will mainly be based at the Infant School whilst she completes her therapy dog training programme.

It is important for parents to note that Indie has an elevated level of public liability insurance, which means that she is permitted to be on school grounds. **Please note that no dogs, other than assistance dogs, are permitted to be on school grounds for insurance reasons.** Indie will wear her therapy dog jacket so will be clearly identifiable in her role.

Any parent who does not wish their child to interact with Indie, please email or speak to the school office to inform us of your wishes. Also, if your child has any known allergies to dogs that we may not know of, then please inform us as soon as possible.

This is an extremely exciting time and we are very much looking forward to keeping you up to date with Indie's progress and news. We cannot wait to welcome Indie into our Stalyhill family!

Many thanks,

Mrs L Plant

Head of Infant School

Meet Indie...

