

## Introducing our School Dog – ‘Teddy’

As you will know, over the last year we have been trialling the use of a school ‘Therapy Dog’, Monty, and I have strongly advocated the benefits of school dogs used for therapy. A large number of schools have introduced a school dog, long before we ran the trail here, and there has been a significant amount of research carried out about the benefits of having a school therapy dog.

The Dogs Trust is very clear about responsibilities for schools if they are considering introducing a school dog; from having an owner/handler without teaching commitments at the same time they are responsible for the dog, to ensuring the dog has a safe space and time away. All these things must be considered for the well-being of the animal. In addition, we have always known that a school dog at Connaught School would also need to be an assistance dog/ therapy dog, and as such, we have done research and undertaken the trial to find the best way to make this happen for the students at the school.

The first step was choosing the right breed and breeder. ‘Teddy’ is a Bernese Mountain Dog, the same breed as the therapy dog used at Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital. These breeds are commonly used as therapy dogs because they are true companion dogs: very friendly and particularly good with children, and have high intelligence levels. It is also a very calm and placid breed, making it a perfect school assistance/ therapy dog. Teddy comes from a family breeder who is also an animal behaviour trainer and has bred from the two parent animals used as assistance dogs. Of the litter, two dogs are now living in a boarding school in York, one is working with a play therapist, and one has gone to a family with children with ASD and ADHD. The puppy is growing up in a house with two young children and regular visitors. We have already started a puppy socialisation plan which I will continue all the way through the spring/ summer. Teddy will also undertake a certified dog training course to ensure he is fully trained to be around children and in school. This will be completed before beginning the advanced ‘Therapy Dog’ training course, which will begin in September.

The Dogs Trust advises that any dog working in schools must have a behaviour assessment carried out by a Certified Clinical Animal Behaviourist (CCAB). We have decided to affiliate with the organisation ‘**Pawsable**’ to help us train Teddy from a school puppy to an assistance and therapy dog. They will also do the initial assessment for us. The organisation Pawsable specialises in training Autism Assistance dogs, but has also trained dogs to be assistance dogs for other disabilities. After his initial assessment, he will be given an ID card, an ‘in-training’ lead and jacket. The organisation will come and deliver training to school staff and work through all risk assessments and paperwork. There are then four additional training sessions/ visits in school throughout the year and ongoing training support. There is a monthly fee to be affiliated with Pawsable, and this covers enhanced public liability insurance.

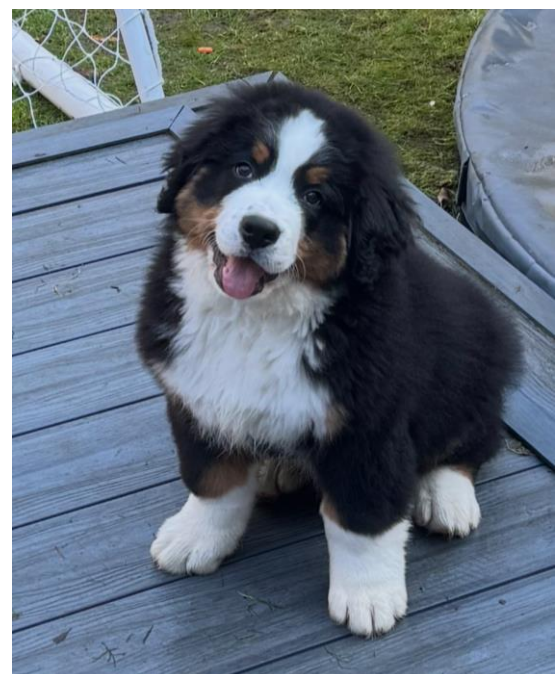
Before his training, he will come into school for familiarisation with the building, which is crucial from a young age to enable him to settle in the school and used to the noises and the smells etc. His socialisation (a key aspect of his training) will be going around the school with an adult when there are no students about. There will be opportunities for staff and some students to have a lead role in the training and socialisation of Teddy in the school. As Teddy will be our family dog, and to avoid the

financial impact on the school, all costs for looking after Teddy will be covered by the owner (Mr. Silk), apart from the school CPD and accreditation, which is specifically for the school work.

The school has been having the therapy dog visit for a year and children are now familiar with the dog in school every Thursday. We have a detailed and very thorough risk assessment in place. All parents will still be given the option to opt out of interactions with the school dog. The students will not be asked to go anywhere near the dog which will be in specific parts of the school, as per the detailed risk assessment on the school dog. There will also be a sign-up in the school window to alert any visitors to the presence of a school dog on the days when Teddy is in school, in the same way we have the notice on Thursdays currently, when Monty is in school. Alongside this, the expectation is that Teddy and I continue training with a puppy trainer throughout his training time, and the trainer will also support us in school if necessary. At the end of his training period, Teddy is assessed again and will eventually become a certified assistance dog, no longer needing his 'in-training' lead, and then he will 'work' for up to 2 hrs each day supporting our children most in need. It will be a 5x increase in the support we can currently offer with Monty who can only be in 1 day per week.

To look after Teddy's well-being, he will have a timetable which gives him plenty of down time during the school day. He will also go out with a named dog walker regularly during the day. All vet, insurance and equipment costs will be met by Mr Silk as the owner, so that he remains my puppy and he will not impact on the school budget. If at any point his temperament is not suited to the role, he will simply remain our puppy at home. Teddy will have his own timetable so children know when he is working and when he is resting. Curricula will be encouraged to incorporate work with Teddy into their planning, and he will also be used to provide emotional support and motivation to children and staff. Teddy will be task-trained, and the school will determine the best tasks for him to do after his training is completed. These will include providing support to children with sensory regulation, various mental health and well-being support, and working with readers who need additional support reading out loud and building confidence to do this in front of their peers.

Here are some pictures introducing Ted:





Alexander Silk  
Headteacher