



Hiltingbury Road
Chandlers Ford, Eastleigh
Hampshire, SO53 5NP

Telephone: 02380 261808
Facsimile: 02380 273401
adminoffice@hiltingbury-jun.hants.sch.uk

Headteacher Miss Zoe Loosemore



Dear Parents and Carers,

We are excited to introduce you to a new member of Hiltingbury Junior School, Hugo.

Hugo is a yellow Labrador and he will progress through his training and various assessments on his journey to becoming our school dog. The training will include socialisation and gentle exposure to the school environment, in addition to assessments for puppy foundation bronze, silver and gold working up to public access.

We have shared our exciting news with the children in assembly today when they also had the opportunity to meet Helpful Hound Hobi, so you might have already heard about him! The Helpful Hounds charity will be supporting us throughout Hugo's training journey to becoming a school therapy dog and Hugo will be owned by Helpful Hounds and Mrs Batten, our Business Manager, who is appointed as Guardian. To support the charity we will be leading some whole school events next year that we hope you will support us with.

We have undertaken a thorough risk assessment, which details the hygiene practices that will be in place and shared with parents on our school website in the Autumn term. We have also worked alongside our two feeder schools Thornden and Toynbee, as both schools have a school dog, and we have used their experiences to develop this opportunity for children at school.

Why have we chosen a Labrador?

When deciding on a suitable dog to have in school, we have chosen to have a Labrador for the following reasons:

- The breed is known to be child-friendly, lively, gentle mannered and affectionate, yet sensitive.
- The breed is known to be intelligent and respond excellently to training.

What are the benefits of having a school dog?

Over the past two years an integral part of our School Improvement Plan has been to provide children with effective pastoral support through a variety of interventions and curriculum developments. Through Hugo's training he will become experienced at working with children to support their emotional and social development.

Numerous research studies have shown the benefits of therapy dogs in schools with links to social, emotional, physical and environmental benefits. Therapy dogs have been working in schools for the past 5 years across the UK, however, they have been commonplace in schools in the USA and Australia for many years.



Benefits:

- a calming effect on pupils;
- improved behaviour and concentration, reduced stress and improved self-esteem;
- encouraging expression, participation and confidence for all children;
- fostering a sense of responsibility;
- motivating pupils to think and to learn, as most children have a high level of natural interest in, enthusiasm for and enjoyment of animals;
- encouraging respect and thereby improving pupils' relationships with each other, parents and teachers;
- teaching children to nurture and respect life;
- helping work undertaken with the most vulnerable children;
- reading – 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 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;
- improving attendance;
- companionship with a dog stimulates memory, problem-solving and game-playing
- a dog provides a positive mutual topic for discussion, encourages responsibility, wellbeing and focused interaction with others;
- 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.

Staff and Governors have been very supportive of the decision for the addition of a school dog and strongly agree with the benefits that the dog will bring to the school community.

Hugo's main place in School will be in Mrs Batten's or Miss Loosemore's office area, which is secure and separate from the classrooms. Whilst moving around the school, Hugo will be kept on a short lead and will always be with an adult.

The school site will continue with a 'no dogs' policy (except for guide dogs) and this will remain in place with the exception of Hugo.

Addressing some concerns you may have:**My child is allergic to dogs**

It is understandable that some of you may be concerned about possible allergic reactions to a school dog. However, Hugo will be subjected to the most thorough cleanliness and grooming regime. He will also only be allowed in situations with pupils who voluntarily wish to work with him. Your permission will of course be sought in advance of Hugo having access to, and working with, your child in school.

Will Hugo be properly cared for?

Hugo will be extremely well looked after. He will live with Mrs Batten; he will come to school during the days and will stay safely in the offices until satisfactory training has been completed. He will then, in time, listen to pupils read in a controlled setting and will always be accompanied by a trained adult. He will undergo the thorough and rigorous training, so will be extremely well-behaved. In the coming months, Hugo will have an assessment in school by a fully qualified dog trainer from Helpful Hounds to ensure he is suitable to be a school dog. Whilst Hugo is in school, he will have access to a bed and a quiet space in Mrs Batten's office, where he can relax during the day. This is where he will spend most of his time initially. Hugo will visit the vet regularly for all his injections as well as regular check-ups. If Hugo is unwell for any reason, he will stay at home.

My child fears dogs

Some children may have had upsetting experiences and thus have a fear of dogs (or another animal). Hugo will only be in contact with children whose parents have given their permission. However, Hugo's training will help him to be calm and gentle around children; He is already showing signs of 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.

A letter to seek your permission regarding contact with Hugo will be sent home at the appropriate time before contact with Hugo occurs in a reading or therapy setting.

We hope you will join us in welcoming Hugo to the Hiltingbury Junior School Community and embrace all that he has to offer the school. We believe Hugo is set to become an integral part of our school community for everyone.

Yours sincerely,

Zoe Loosemore

Headteacher



Helpful Hounds is a charitable organisation dedicated to providing support for families, adults and schools; Owner Trained Assistance Dogs, Charity Trained Assistance Dogs and School Based Therapy / Assistance Dogs. Together with their qualified trainers they work in partnership with Schools on the preparation, breeder selection, choosing a puppy and continuing to support through the training and assessment process.