

## **Shelby: a dog to support the wellbeing of the Olavian Community**

Shelby is a Cockapoo. The school, alongside others nationally, has seen a dramatic increase in concerns surrounding young people's mental health. Curriculum changes, staffing restructures and recruitment as well as student-led initiatives have already been developed to ensure School provides effective support. Shelby is a natural progression from this point. Mental health issues affect resilience, determination and confidence; key Olavian characteristics. Shelby can help improve these areas for those he meets.



### **Possible concerns**

**Allergies:** Shelby is a hypoallergenic breed. No dog breed is totally non-allergenic but poodles and poodle crossbreeds (including Cockapoos) are low allergy risk. We do not have any pupils or staff in the school who have allergies or phobias that would mean they would be in danger but we would consider this if it became a concern.

**Cleaning up:** Shelby is already housetrained and the Pastoral team are happy to take him for walks and clear up any mess he makes. Pupils who take him for walks would need to understand that expectation as well. There will be bags in the school for him.

**Aggression:** It would be foolish not to consider this but Shelby's breed, training and the make-up of the pupils in our school mean this would be highly unlikely. Shelby will be on a lead when he is around the school and gates will be used to keep him in his area. Pupils would not be allowed in large numbers around him at once so he is not overwhelmed. The presence of a wellbeing dog or other animal is built in to normal risk-assessment procedures including Fire Safety plans.

**Whose dog?** Shelby is a member of staff's dog and he will be brought into school 2-3 times per week.

**Feeding:** Only Shelby's owner will feed him. Pupils who take him for walks will know that he cannot be fed.

### **What will Shelby do and how will he benefit the school and pupils?**

Shelby will be a wellbeing dog; this means he is with us for general therapeutic purposes. He has not been trained in a particular area and is not an Assistance Dog.

When Shelby is in school he will spend most of his time in the Pastoral and Administrative area of the School. Safeguarding, pupils with pastoral concerns and those with Special Educational Needs will be those that can have access to him. By pupils wishing to engage with Shelby it will give the team an opportunity to see pupils.

Dogs help pupils speak to counsellors. Wellbeing dogs have been shown to reduce symptoms of trauma in some situations with young people when used over time. Having Shelby in the room relieves the pressure for eye contact and means there is something to discuss if it is hard to get started talking about sensitive topics.

The DSL/SENCo will use Shelby when difficult disclosures are being discussed. Again, the feeling of safety and comfort that Shelby will bring can help these situations. Pupils might even be able to 'tell Shelby' something that is hard to say to another person.

If a student appears a little lost or is struggling with friendship issues, accompanying a staff member on a walk around the school with Shelby would be another good way to improve social isolation and allow that pupil a sense of improved confidence.

Shelby would go on lunch time walks with pupils. There would be a rota for taking him out. Pupils would be able to show responsibility to their school community in this way. At other times he can go with members of the team around the School grounds.

Having Shelby in school will raise spirits and keeps staff and pupils attached to 'the real world'. Teaching and learning can be demanding activities, it's hard to stay stressed when Shelby is around.

Some of our pupils with ASD would respond particularly well with Shelby around. He can be helpful in calming 'meltdown' behaviour.

The member of staff who is 'using' Shelby needs to understand the individual child, not demand a pupil tell Shelby something and keeps to the clearly communicated rules of confidentiality and safeguarding. Shelby being a dog may give some pupils a false impression of what they are discussing or disclosing.

Some pupils fearful of dogs might see him with friends and so reduce their worry about dogs in general.

Shelby would contribute to the creation of a climate of nurture and care at Olaves. Our school is already focussed on a positive approach to education and the presence of a wellbeing dog decreases any view of school as a separate institution that is not linked to the real world.