



# Harriers Banbury Academy

an Aspirations Academy

Alex Pearson – Executive Principal

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Dear Parents/Carers,

We are writing to share some exciting news with you about a new member of staff joining us, although he is a bit unusual as he has four legs and is covered in fur... as he's a dog!

It has long been a dream of mine to have a dog in school for the children to read to and be comforted by when they are distressed. Dennis is my dog, he was named Dennis by his breeder as he was the first puppy born on the night of Storm Dennis in 2020 and the name has stuck. He is a big yellow lab and he will be 2 years old next week. He is nearly 40kg, so a bit of a gentle giant! He loves people and loves being around them, he is very calm and loves attention. Over the past two years, Dennis and I have been completing training in the hope he may be able to come into school. We have completed puppy socialising classes; during lockdown, an Absolute Dogs 20 day obedience course and in June 2021 he achieved his Kennel Club Good Citizen Bronze Award. At home we have completed all the tasks for the Silver Award and we will rejoin classes to achieve this in the next month or two. Dennis has also grown up in a loud house with 3 little boys, so is used to being pushed, pulled, laid upon and cuddled!

At Harriers, we have extensively researched the benefits of having a dog in school and we are very excited about sharing the benefits with our pupils. Evidence indicates that having a dog in school can:

- have a calming effect on pupils;
- improve behaviour and concentration, reduce stress and anxiety and improve self-esteem;
- encourage expression, participation and confidence for all children;
- foster a sense of responsibility;
- motivate pupils to think and to learn, as most children have a high level of natural interest in, enthusiasm for and enjoyment of animals;
- encourage respect and thereby improving pupils' relationships with each other, parents and teachers;
- teach children to nurture and respect life;
- stimulate memory, problem-solving and game-playing;
- help work undertaken with the most vulnerable children;
- help children build confidence in reading;
- improve attendance;
- further promote our wellbeing agenda for all pupils, which is at the heart of everything we do at Harriers.

We have a risk assessment in place for Dennis to be in school, we are covered by our insurance and Dennis is covered by his own insurance. He has been castrated and all his worming and flea treatments are up to date. We have also taken guidance and advice from other schools, including Dashwood, who introduced a school dog 18 months ago.



**ASPIRATIONS**

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Dennis has been into school three times already, including spending the November inset day with the staff. To begin with, Dennis will just spend time with myself, Mrs Agate and Mrs Pamplin in our office, getting used to the sights, sounds and smells of a busy school. He will walk the site and the children will get the chance to see him as part of his initiation. Gradually he will be introduced to specific pupils on a 1:2:1 basis, then small groups and eventually potentially whole classes.

We hope the children will gain a great deal of enjoyment from seeing and meeting Dennis and that she becomes an established part of life at Harriers. There will be absolutely no expectation that all children will have contact with Dennis and if you have any queries or questions then you can check the FAQ section at the end of this letter (they will also be posted on our website). Hopefully, your child will be excited by Dennis' arrival, but I appreciate some of our pupils may not like dogs. Class teachers will speak to their classes about this and introductions will only be made with pupils' consent. Equally, one of the many benefits of having a dog in school is that it can help people overcome their phobia... it worked on my eldest son!

The school will be told about Dennis in tomorrow's assemblies. They will be told about how to meet a dog, especially one who is 'working', which is to stay calm and not fuss them unless invited to do so. At some point Dennis will be on the playground before or after school so all our families can see him; please remember that he is training and we politely ask that he is not approached or fussed.

Dennis cannot wait to join Harriers!



Please see me or contact the office if you have any questions.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alex Pearson'.

Alex Pearson  
Executive Principal

FAQs about having a Dog in school

### **What will Dennis do on a day-to-day basis?**

Initially, Dennis will have minimal contact with the children and staff, until he becomes familiar with the school. All children will have the opportunity, over time, to have quality time with the dog and learn how to care for him. He will also be available to calm unsettled children, have children read to him and to go out on a lunchtime walk with Mr Pearson and a small group of children. He will see groups of children to support their learning and wellbeing.

### **Safety around the dog**

A detailed risk assessment is in place. Insurance will cover having a dog on site. Children will only have contact with the dog under the supervision of Mr Pearson. When moving around the school, Dennis will be on a lead. Children will receive training workshops, designed by the Kennel Club (before and when the dog is introduced into the school setting) to teach them how to behave safely around a dog.

### **What about the children who have allergies around a dog?**

Dennis will be regularly groomed to minimise dander. Parents and staff will be asked to inform the school if their child is allergic and if so we will work with the family to ensure that the child(ren) doesn't have direct contact with him if this is their wish.

### **What about the children/ staff who have a fear for dogs?**

One of the aims of introducing a dog into the school is to reduce the number of children who have a fear of dogs by teaching them how to care for and behave safely around them. If a child has a fear of dogs we will ask parents to inform their class teacher via Seesaw so that we can be aware and work with the parents / child, with advice from the Kennel Club, to build up their confidence so that they feel safe.

### **Health and well-being of the dog.**

Dennis will receive all vaccinations, be wormed, groomed and cared for by Mr Pearson.

### **Hygiene**

There will be a designated area for Dennis to toilet if necessary, which will be away from the main areas where children play. Children will never be asked to handle picked up excrement in a bag. If children have stroked the dog they will be taught to wash their hands afterwards.

### **What happens if the dog is ill?**

If Dennis were to be taken ill he would not attend school and would be cared for at home until he was fit to return to school.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions that have not been covered above.