

SO MUCH MORE THAN A TEACHER'S PET

It's a new term for Assistant Headteacher Sara and Cocker Spaniel Tandy. On top of being her hearing dog, Tandy plays another key role at Sara's workplace – a school for deaf children – by supporting pupils to settle in after their summer break

Since discovering Hearing Dogs in 1990, Sara has been partnered with three successive hearing dogs. These have been her two mixed-breed hearing dogs, Sally-Anne and Spotty, and her current hearing dog Tandy, a nine-year-old Cocker Spaniel.

Over the summer holidays this year, Sara and Tandy enjoyed some well-earned fun and relaxation, including long walks, camping with friends, visiting family, and trips to the beaches in Devon. Now the summer holidays have come to an end, this superb partnership is a much-loved presence around Sara's workplace at a school for deaf children.

"I am Assistant Headteacher for the whole primary department, which has pupils aged 3–11 years old. I mostly teach the 7–9-year-olds in lower key stage 2," explained Sara. "As with Sally-Anne and Spotty, Tandy comes to work with me. She is the most wonderful company and is absolutely perfect for me."



"TANDY IS VERY POPULAR WITH PUPILS AND STAFF!"

"As a school, we know that dogs can also be really positive for children. So, as well as Tandy and my colleague's hearing dog, we also have a school dog who belongs to one of the co-headteachers.

"When the new term starts, pupils are usually really happy to be back and see their friends. However, occasionally a new pupil will be a little shy or an existing pupil may find it hard to come back after the holidays. So, Tandy and I might accompany them on their way to class to give them some extra support.

"Some pupils may also request extra time with Tandy. For example, in the past she helped a child who was bereaved and struggling to cope at school. As she is very calming, children who find regulation difficult might also spend time with her. In fact, 'Tandy Time' is popular with pupils and staff alike!

"On the first day back to school, if I am teaching a lesson, I like to run a 'getting to know you' session with Tandy and my new class. In this class, Tandy has 'written' a note on the whiteboard to introduce herself, and then the children write back to her to introduce themselves."

Tandy's extra training

To prepare Tandy for life as an 'Assistant Headteacher's Assistant', her Training Team arranged some initial short visits to the school. This was to introduce Tandy to this new environment at her own pace,



and included showing her the classrooms, Sara's office, the school's flashing light fire alarms and the sound of the school's audible fire alarm. Tandy loved practising alerting to this new sound – as with all her hearing dog training, she enjoyed earning some tasty treats as a well done!

"We also prepared the children for Tandy's company by showing them a presentation on what to do, and what not to do, when interacting with a dog," continued Sara. "Tandy has a bed in my office, which is her 'safe space', that she can always go to if she wishes. There are also some places in the school where the dogs don't go, including the dining room at lunchtimes.

"In the past, there have been some children who were frightened of dogs. In these cases, we introduced them very, very carefully to the dogs at the school. We would never do anything that caused upset to either the children or the dogs."

"MY HEARING DOGS ARE MY CLOSEST COMPANIONS"



Throughout their entire partnership, Sara and the team at Hearing Dogs will tend to Tandy's wellbeing, ensuring she loves her life as a hearing dog. However, it's not all about Tandy – Sara feels all her canine companions have given her the same level of wellbeing support:

"My hearing dogs are my closest companions. They have been hugely important to me in terms of independence, company and encouraging positive mental and physical health.

"Having had hearing dogs in my life for so long, I really would feel lost without them. I want to say a huge thank you to everyone involved with the charity – you really do make such a difference." PAW

