

# The perfect partnership

Cooper the labrador with pupil David and School Health Nurse Jinell.

As WC Fields once said, you should never work with children or animals. But Mr Fields never met our dedicated School Public Health Team. Chloe Crouch met one of our school staff nurses who is using man's best friend to make a big difference to students at Goldwyn School in Ashford.

It may seem just a memory now, but it was during the hottest week of this summer's heatwave that I travelled to Goldwyn School near Great Chart in Ashford, to meet School Staff Nurse Jinell Wood and her trusty companion Cooper.

While we were wilting a little in the high temperatures, the heat didn't seem to affect Cooper's enthusiasm as he joyfully greeted us in the medical room that has been developed to support the School Health Team.

Cooper is a beautiful black labrador, who belongs to the school's deputy headteacher Nic Petri and is training to be a therapy dog.

He is a permanent fixture at the school for children aged 11 to 16 whose social, emotional and mental health needs require

more support than a mainstream school can offer, but it wasn't until recently that Cooper partnered up with KCHFT's Jinell to really make a difference to the health and wellbeing of Goldwyn's students.

Jinell runs a drop-in clinic at the school once a week where students know they can speak to her about anything that might be worrying them, from self-harm and bereavement to sexual health questions.

Wearing her bright green polo shirt, the students have affectionately nicknamed the School Health Team, the 'green tops' and they know the polo shirt represents a safe person for them to talk to and ask questions.

If no-one knocks on her office door during clinic time, Jinell walks the corridors of the school during lunchtime with Cooper by her side and he acts as the perfect ice breaker.

Jinell said: "I've found walking around with Cooper gives students a chance to come and talk to me under the pretence of saying hello to him first.

"He is a reassuring presence and helps to calm students down, so they are able to talk and let me know what they are worried about.

"He is such a friendly dog and is making it easier for me to do my job. If a student wants to talk to me, we go for a walk around the field; they feel safe and know that what we are going to talk about is private and that's really

important for building trust."

School Nurse Team Co-ordinator Chris Beer said: "What Jinell has achieved here with Goldwyn School is really special. The school has been so welcoming and considers Jinell a member of the team. It's a great partnership and it's having really positive outcomes for the children.

"We have a saying for this school, 'no green top, no entry', because we know how important it is that young people feel they can trust their school nurse. Whether it's Jinell or someone else from the team, if they are wearing our uniform, then students know they are there to help."

One of the many devoted Cooper fans at the school is 15-year-old David from Ashford.

David enjoys taking Cooper for a walk every day and said: "When I am annoyed or frustrated, walking Cooper really helps to calm me down. I think it's really good that we have a dog at our school. Every school should have one!"

Deputy Head of the school Nic Petri said: "Having Jinell in the school gives students access to a really important service and having Cooper accompany her means they can access health advice without feeling intimidated.

"We needed something a bit different for our school environment and this has really worked. It's a great partnership."

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## Have you met your school nurse?

Our school public health teams work to improve the general health and wellbeing of children, young people and their families to support children to get the best start in life.

The service is available from 8am until 6pm, Monday to Friday, including during school holidays.

It is for children and young people who are school-age, between the ages of four and 19. You do not need to be in mainstream education to seek our support. If you are home-schooled or in a pupil referral unit, you can use our service.