

So which of these barking bit-players got the lead?



Picture: Hattie Miles rad6BBC

DOGS large and small attended the open auditions to play the part of Bill Sykes' hound Bulls Eye in *Oliver* next month.

Swish of the Curtain Drama School, which will stage the ever-popular musical at the Regent Centre, July 5 to 15, invited stage-struck pooches to try out for the infamous role through the Echo last week.

Around 20 dogs leapt to the challenge and joined Swish pupils during their rehearsals at St Nicholas Church, Hengistbury Head, where Oliver promoter Chris Witham put them through their paces.

The clear winner was Jess, an English bull terrier from Bournemouth, who came along with owner Dave Rigby.

Chris said: "Jess was fantastic in her audition. She was a little bit nervous at first but she would sit and wait and when asked she'd run to you.

"She would stop, sit and lie on demand and she loved all the kids. She is so good she will be going on stage without a lead."

However, knowing that Jess is rather partial to a lump of cheese,

Dominic Smith, 16, who plays Bill Sykes, will be keeping a block of English cheddar in his pocket just in case he needs to bribe her with rewards.

Memories of an earlier Swish production, *Annie*, have not gone away, when the Airedale terrier playing Sandy refused to walk on stage and had to be replaced by her older brother – who was sub-

sequently bribed with handfuls of biscuits.

Never afraid to work with children and animals, Swish went on to include a handful of doves after that in their production of *Fame*.

Jess will not be sharing the role and will appear in all performances of *Oliver*.

Hilary Porter