



FINTON HOUSE
SCHOOL

POLICY FOR SCHOOL WELLBEING DOG

Member(s) of staff responsible: Ben Freeman

Date Revised: September 2025

A hardcopy of this policy is available to all governors and parents on request from the School Office. It is accessible to all staff electronically (in the Policy folder on the Staff Admin Drive) and a hardcopy held on file in the Head's Office. This policy applies to all at the School including those in Reception (the EYFS).

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1. Introduction

There are many benefits to therapy, wellbeing and reading dogs in school settings and Finton House would like to introduce the use of one in the school. This policy is designed to set out to pupils, parents, staff and visitors the reasons for having a school dog at Finton House and the rules and responsibilities to ensure the safety of everyone, including the dog. Although there is a risk in bringing a dog into a school environment, this can be mitigated against with a robust and dynamic risk assessment.

2. The benefits of a school dog

School dogs have been proven to help develop pupils' reading skills, improve behaviour, attendance and academic confidence, as well as increasing the pupils' understanding of responsibility and developing empathy and nurturing skills. Research has shown that a school dog can:

- Encourage empathy and appropriate interpersonal skills
- Help individuals develop social skills
- Be soothing and support the development of a rapport between a teacher and pupil
- Support emotional regulation through the positive impact on the autonomic nervous system
- Increase motivation for learning, resulting in improved outcomes
- support children with social and emotional learning needs, which in turn can assist with literacy development.
- Enhance relationships with peers and teachers due to experiencing trust and unconditional positive regard from a dog. This in turn helps pupils learn how to express their feelings and enter into more trusting relationships.

If children are partnered with a dog to read to, for example, the dog provides comfort, encourages positive social behaviour, enhances self-esteem, motivates speech and inspires children to have fun and enjoy the non-judgemental experience. For further information, see Bark & Read – The Kennel Club <https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/barkandread>

Therapy dogs have also shown to help with special needs, including autistic children, by giving focus and providing a calming environment. For more information see <http://www.tdn.org.uk>

Researchers report that pupils can identify with animals, and with empathy for the dog, can better understand how classmates may feel. It was found that violent behaviour in participating pupils declined by 55%, and general aggression went down 62%. In a controlled study, pupils were found to have fewer disciplinary referrals in schools with a dog than schools without. Pupils' behaviour improved toward teachers, and pupils also showed more confidence and responsibility.

3. The process of introduction

The Head Teacher, Ben Freeman and The Governors agreed in January 2021 to the presence of a wellbeing dog at Finton House School. Fin was born on 25th April 2022 and introduced to the school environment from 1st September 2022. Since then, she has matured and is very settled and comfortable within the school environment.

It is important that new pupils are introduced to Fin gradually and carefully. While appreciating that some children are afraid or uncomfortable with animals, it is also important that all pupils know how to handle and pet her to avoid any anxiety.

4. The school's dog policy

Only the school dog is allowed on the premises. No other dogs are permitted unless the Head has approved their visit.

The Wellbeing dog is a 'Cavapoo' breed. The Wellbeing dog is not Kennel Club registered as it is a cross-breed, but is selected for its calm temperament, reduced risk of congenital health issues, and hypoallergenic, non-shedding coat.

Ben Freeman is the legal owner of the dog and has full responsibility for its purchase cost, welfare, vaccinations, flea and worm treatment, food, insurance and maintenance costs.

The school is responsible for ensuring that the dog is listed on the school's Public Liability Insurance policy for as long as the dog remains 'the school dog'. The DFO has the responsibility of ensuring that this is always in place.

A risk assessment has been written and is regularly updated for approval by the DFO. The dog will also be included in the fire evacuation procedure.

Staff, parents and pupils will be informed in writing that a dog will be in school. The presence of a school dog will be made clear to visitors upon their arrival at the School reception.

5. Code of conduct

Staff responsibilities

The whereabouts of the dog and which staff are supervising will be known at all times, either through a timetable/rota or booking system. If the dog is ill it will not be allowed into school and alternative arrangements organised.

Ben Freeman is responsible for ensuring the training and behaviour of the dog.

The wellbeing dog will only move around the school under the supervision of an adult (ie, it will not roam free).

The wellbeing dog will be based in the Head's Office or Front Office in his absence.

Staff, visitors and children known to have allergic reactions to dogs must not go near the wellbeing dog. The Office keeps an updated list of all pupils and staff with a reported allergy to or fear of dogs.

Pupils must never be left alone with the dog and there must be appropriate adult supervision at all times.

Pupils will be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dog before any interaction during a therapy session or visit.

If the dog is surrounded by a large number of children, the dog could become nervous and agitated. Therefore, the adult in charge of the dog must ensure that s/he monitors the situation. If the dog is displaying any warning signs such as growling or flattening of ears, it should be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment by the trained staff member handling it.

Any dog foul should be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately by the trained dog handling staff only.

Pupil Responsibilities

Pupils will be taught to stroke the dog on its body, chest or back and not around its face or tail.

Pupils are not allowed to approach or disturb the dog whilst it is sleeping or eating.

Pupils are not allowed to play roughly with the dog.

Pupils must wait until the school dog is sitting or lying down before touching or stroking it.

Pupils are not allowed to eat while in the same room as the dog. The dog will never enter the kitchen area and will not be taken into the dining room area during lunch service.

Pupils must always wash their hands after handling the dog or if contact is made with the face.

6. School dog frequently asked questions (FAQs)

Q: Who is the legal owner of the dog and who pays for its costs?

A: The legal owner of the dog will be Ben Freeman. He will bear the costs associated with owning the dog and it will be listed on the school's public liability insurance.

Q: Is the dog from a reputable breeder?

A: Yes. The dog is from a non-commercial breeder and a home where both parents were seen and who were chosen specifically for their calm temperament, intelligence, and hypoallergenic coat.

Q: Will the dog be a distraction to pupils' learning?

The dog will be kept in the Head's Office or School Office and only visit a classroom when the Class Teacher feels this is appropriate, e.g. to listen to readers. Children will have access to it most break times, supervised by a member of staff.

Q: Has a risk assessment been undertaken?

A: Yes, we have carefully considered having a dog in school and sought advice from many sources, including other schools that have introduced a school dog.

Q: Who is responsible for training?

A: Ben Freeman will be the legal owner of the dog and as a result, will be responsible for its training.

Q: How will the dog be toileted to ensure hygiene for all?

A: In the interest of health and hygiene, our school dog will have a long walk at the beginning of each day and be toileted in a designated place in the front garden, away from where pupils play.

Q: What if my child is scared of dogs? Will they be forced to be in the same room as the dog?

A: The dog will only come into contact with children who are happy to have contact and under strict supervision. A pupil will not be forced to be in contact with the dog at any time against their wishes. We hope to work closely with parents of children who are fearful of dogs to alleviate their fear and to teach them how to manage this using evidence-based interventions such as graded exposure

Q: How will the dog's welfare be considered?

A: The dog's welfare will be carefully monitored, but the very nature of the Cavapoo is continual socialisation; they do not enjoy being alone! Nevertheless, the dog will be walked regularly and given time to rest and play, particularly during the first couple of years. The dog will be carefully trained over a period of time and will have appropriate access to food and water.

Q: What about children who have allergies?

A: Children with allergies will not need to touch the dog or be in the same room as the dog at any point which will relieve the possibility of allergic reactions. We already manage a number of allergies at school and this will be no different for children and adults that are allergic to dogs. Individual needs will always be met and we are happy to work with parents to put additional control measures in place for individual allergies. The school dog was specifically chosen for being a breed known for its hypoallergenic, non-shedding coat. It will be given a high-quality food and regularly groomed to further reduce any possibility of allergens being dispersed.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact Ben Freeman.