



Dogs and Wellbeing School Dog Policy

Member of Staff responsible: Lorraine Shaw

Ratified by Governors: 22 May 2025

Next Review Date: May 2026

Review Cycle: Annually

Introduction

Bush Hill Park Primary School supports the use of a wellbeing dog for the educational, social and emotional benefits of pupils.

Research has shown many benefits of having a wellbeing dog in school settings, and this policy sets out the reasons for having one, the rules governing a wellbeing dog safely working in our school, and the roles and responsibilities of the school community to make sure pupils, staff, and visitors are safe.

A wellbeing dog is specifically trained to provide affection and comfort to pupils in school, with the most important characteristic being that it is friendly, patient, confident, gentle and at ease in all situations. It is a pre-requisite that our school dog enjoys human contact and is content to be petted and handled, sometimes clumsily, and is comfortable allowing unfamiliar people making physical contact with it. Children can increase their understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills through contact with pets, as well as take enjoyment from the interaction.

This policy applies to our regulated school dog only. No other dogs are permitted on site, and having a wellbeing dog does not affect the school's right to prohibit other dogs anywhere on school property.

Bush Hill Park Primary School grounds, playing fields and playgrounds are private property and should not be used for the purposes of exercising any dogs other than our named wellbeing school dog.

Roles and responsibilities

- The governing body has a responsibility to ensure that the school has a written policy and risk assessment which are reviewed annually, and in response to any incidents associated with the wellbeing dog. The Headteacher and SBM will mitigate any concerns in the risk assessment with considered control measures.
- The Headteacher is responsible for implementing this policy.
- All pupils, staff, parents, governors and other visitors in school are required to abide by this policy, risk assessment, and Wellbeing Dog Rules.
- The Headteacher will ensure that there is sufficient and a suitable course of training for the Pastoral Support Team's handling of Winnie, and appropriate reward-based behaviour and wellbeing training is provided for Winnie, with her suitability reviewed throughout her training.
- In line with The Dogs Trust guidance, the Headteacher is committed, as the owner of Winnie, to meet and prioritise her physical and emotional needs, to ensure Winnie enjoys her time in our school environment, with stimulation, consistent company, exercise, play time and rest, which will be monitored on a regular basis.
- The Headteacher is responsible for appropriate comprehensive pet insurance cover, for the duration of Winnie's role as wellbeing dog in the school environment, which will be filed for the school's records.
- The school will provide a safe designated outdoor space, away from children, where Winnie can exercise and go to the toilet undisturbed, with access to clean water, and fresh air.

- The Headteacher will be involved in establishing a timetable which will not cause Winnie any stress, taking into consideration busy school seasons, periods and areas of the school to avoid when working and moving around.
- The Headteacher, Pastoral Support Team and SBM will work to establish school rules for staff, children and visitors on how to behave safely and considerately around Winnie, establishing clear boundaries and a focus on her needs (with reference to www.learnwithdogstrust.org.uk).

Reasons to have a wellbeing dog in school:

1. Behaviour

Winnie will enable pupils to put our school values into practice: Respect, Responsibility, and Resilience. With Winnie to care for, pupils will be more mindful of their behaviour. Noisy or aggressive incidences are likely to be reduced, with pupils taught to be more aware of the impact of their behaviour and choices.

2. Attendance

Pupils will be encouraged back into school with the reward of caring for Winnie, e.g., walking, playing, or grooming, as an incentive to attend school. Research has demonstrated that the presence of a wellbeing dog in school can decrease anxiety and enable children to work through issues, which may be adversely affecting their attendance by providing a comforting and calm presence.

3. Social Development

Wellbeing dogs in school offer an opportunity to improve social development, and they are especially useful for teaching pupils' social skills and responsibility. Research suggests that involving pupils in the daily care of a wellbeing dog is a positive experience and can help to promote their own daily care. Pupils can also learn about caring and sharing when helping each other to care for the dog. Winnie will be able to work on a one-to-one basis with pupils, alongside a member of staff, and will help pupils with SEND, pupils who may be going through upsetting or difficult times, or who may be scared or phobic of dogs. Dogs can bring enjoyment to those they interact with, and pupils who struggle with social interaction can find a reassuring friend in a dog.

4. As a reward

Winnie will, where appropriate, offer fun and enjoyment for pupils and time spent interacting with her, when relevant, will be used as a reward. Research has shown that working and playing with a dog improves children's social skills and self-esteem.

5. Reading

Reading programmes with dogs have been found to work well with some pupils. Pupils who might be embarrassed to read aloud in class are likely to be less scared to read to a dog. A school wellbeing dog can be a calming influence and can also join a group of pupils whilst they are having a book reading session. Dogs give unconditional acceptance as they are non-judgemental, which is especially important for struggling readers. Pupils who read to dogs show an increase in reading levels, word recognition, a higher desire to read and write, and an increase in interpersonal skills amongst the pupils they mix with. As a

focus or context for learning, Winnie will be able to provide an excellent resource and tangible motivation for pupils in all subject areas and especially in our emphasis on reading for pleasure.

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 is the Headteacher, Mrs Theodosiou, who will bear the costs associated with owning the dog at home, including any specialised Pet insurance Cover and Public Liability Insurance. Alongside a robust risk assessment, and parental choice of accessing the dog for their child/children, the Headteacher is responsible for making sure the correct documentation is in place. The school budget will fund training costs and essential equipment needed for use at school to facilitate Winnie's comfort whilst at school. The school's public liability insurance covers a school therapy dog as long as a risk assessment and appropriate measures are in place.

Q Where is the dog from?

A Winnie is an affectionate Cockapoo from a reputable breeder. She loves the company of children and adults, and is hypoallergenic to mitigate the risk of any allergic reactions.

Q Has a risk assessment been undertaken?

A Yes, a full risk assessment has been undertaken and measures put in place to reduce any risk, and this is regularly reviewed and updated. The school has carefully considered having a dog in school and sought advice from many sources, including other schools that have successfully had a school dog.

Q Who is responsible for training?

A Mrs Theodosiou is the legal owner of the dog and as a result, will be responsible for Winnie's care. The school will fund Winnie's professional training to become the school wellbeing dog and specific staff will work with a trainer, and incorporate advice from recognised expert organisations including PAWS, The Dogs Trust, and The Kennel Club.

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

A In the interest of health and hygiene our school dog will be toileted when taken out for walks and any dog foul will be picked up, double bagged and disposed of in a permitted external refuse bin.

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

A The dog will be kept in secure areas off of the Main Corridor, either in the Headteacher's Office or Finance Office with a dog gate, or the SBM or Deputy Headteacher's Office to enable Winnie to have space to roam when she is not working.

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

A Winnie will be kept in secure areas away from pupils' classrooms and the Headteacher, Office Staff and Pastoral Support Team will make sure she only comes into close contact with children who are happy to have contact with her and where there has been no refusal of permission by parents - this will be 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. Where the dog will be visiting classes, discussions with the class teacher's regarding children who may be nervous or scared around dogs will take place to ensure they feel safe and comfortable during the visit using seating decisions etc.

Q How will the dog's welfare be considered?

A Winnie's welfare will be carefully monitored by her owner and she will be taken on regular walks throughout the day and given free time outside of sessions to rest and play. Winnie will be carefully trained over a period of time and will have appropriate access to food, treats, water, toys and rest. If Winnie is unwell she may need to be taken home until recovered.

Q How will this be managed where children have allergies or medical conditions?

A Health issues will be considered when assessing the appropriateness of animals in the classroom and medical notes will be reviewed each year. Winnie is hypoallergenic and will pose a minimal risk to pupils with pet hair allergies. Children whose health will be compromised in any way will not need to touch Winnie or be in the same room as her (where needed) to mitigate any possible 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 if they have any ongoing concerns. Winnie will be regularly groomed to reduce any possibility of allergens.