



SURBITON

HIGH SCHOOL

School Dogs

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Surbiton High School: Ethos and Aims

Surbiton High School aims to **inspire, encourage and empower** all its students to discover and embrace their individual talents, within United Learning's core mission to bring out "the best in everyone". We combine an intellectually rigorous academic environment with outstanding pastoral care and outstanding co-curricular opportunities; through this provision, we encourage our students to live out our **School values**, and become compassionate, respectful, courageous, and inquisitive members of the community.

Our Values

We are compassionate:

We are kind and we care, in both thought and action. We consider those less fortunate and strive to support and offer aid. We are mindful of the gentle power of positive actions. We support and encourage those around us, living out the School's motto: *Amor nos semper ducat* (May love always lead us).

We are respectful:

We respect all people equally. We respect ourselves, our learning, our community, our environment, and the planet we all share. We strive to act with respect and integrity in all things. When we disagree, we do so respectfully.

We are courageous:

When challenged by our fears we are determined, not deterred. We call on resilience for strength when in the heat of the struggle. We bravely chase our dreams and fight for what we believe. When we fall, we pick ourselves up and forge forward.

We are inquisitive:

We understand that a thoughtful question is the key to unlock understanding. We believe where answers provide ends, questions pose exciting beginnings. We are eager to explore, we question to discover, we are curious to learn more of the world at large.

We are a community:

We are united - with a common focus. We value belonging to a wider community: our school community, our local community, our global community. We are inclusive of all, no matter our differences. We value and nurture the connections we form.

United Learning and the United Church Schools' Trust

Surbiton High School is part of *United Learning* and the *United Church Schools' Trust*. The School has an Anglican foundation, valuing its Christian heritage whilst welcoming staff and children from all faiths and none. We share with United Learning its core mission statement "to bring out the best in everyone". We are committed to the aims of United Learning, including its *Framework for Excellence*, which can be found at: www.unitedlearning.org.uk



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Policy Statement

The value of pet 'therapy' is widely accepted as a powerful aid to stimulation and communication. Studies have shown that the presence of companion animals can improve the well-being of children and lower the rate of anxiety, simply by making the environment happier, more enjoyable, and less forbidding.

Rationale

A school dog is one who undergoes intense training and passes increasingly difficult assessments before it is certified. It is specifically trained as an educational and therapeutic aid by a company such as The Dog Mentor Training. A school dog initially undergoes specialised puppy training (basic and advanced) and then is slowly acclimatised into the School environment whilst receiving its ongoing school dog training. This specialised training is important for the well-being of both the dog and the children at School.

The impact school dogs have on children and teenagers in the educational environment is palpable. School dogs have the potential to:

- 1) Improve academic achievement
- 2) Increase literacy skills
- 3) Support a child in regulating their behaviours
- 4) Increase social skills and self esteem
- 5) Increase confidence
- 6) Help prevent truancy and increase attendance
- 7) Teach responsibility and respect to all life
- 8) Teach children how to respect and look after a dog
- 9) Motivate children who are often not that attentive

The concept of dogs supporting children has been around for many years, with more recently a vast supporting range of evidence through papers and academic studies.

Sigmund Freud believed that dogs had a 'special sense' that allowed them to judge a person's character accurately. His dog Jofi (a Chow) attended all of his therapy sessions. Freud believed that the presence of his dog had a calming influence on all of his patients, especially children.

It was the academic work of Boris Levinson and his dog Jingles in the 1960's that brought the world evidence that pets were good for children and, more importantly, that pets could help children. Levinson felt that many children could derive benefit from pet psychology – the withdrawn, the inhibited, the autistic, the obsessive compulsive, the fearful, the submissive, the culturally disadvantaged and the young non-verbal.



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In the 1970's Dr Samuel Corson of Ohio State University had good success with a group of 20 dogs who helped children and other patients at a psychiatric hospital. At the same time Skeezer, a mixed breed, became America's first Canine Co-Therapist with children. For seven years Skeezer worked as a member of staff at the Children's Psychiatric Hospital in Michigan where she helped children who were severely troubled and those who needed a helping hand with their emotions.

More recently, American psychologist Dr Stacia Bjarnson discovered that children with social, emotional, behavioural and academic issues tended to open up and talk about their feelings when in the presence of her poodle Noodle, who was a registered therapy dog. Noodle worked with Dr Bjarnson at the Northwest Village School in Connecticut, a special school for over 200 children in both group settings and on an individual basis.

Logistics

The Senior School dog is named Willow. Willow is a female Golden Retriever, who is 17 months old (as of Sep 2026), owned by Miss Emma Rickards. She has completed the necessary puppy obedience and socialisation classes and was appropriately introduced to the School environment over summer 2025. Willow completed her formal school training with the Dog Mentor in September 2025 where she was awarded her Silver certificate. Miss Rickards continues to work closely with The Dog Mentor Programme as Willow progresses towards achieving her Gold Award which she is looking to achieve in 2026. Emma Rickards is Willow's legal owner; she cares for her out of school hours in her home and bears all the costs associated with having a pet dog.

The dog is primarily kept in Miss Rickards' Head of Year office. At other times the dog spends time in other offices, learning support, in outdoor learning spaces or classrooms. She spends time with small groups of pupils and has one-to-one sessions with identified pupils.

The Boys' Prep School dog is named Ozzy. Ozzy is a Labrador Retriever who is just over 8 years old (as of May 2026), owned by Miss Danielle Kilpin. He has completed his training with The Dog Mentor programme. Miss Kilpin works closely with The Dog Mentor programme and Ozzy received his Gold Award in June 2025. Ozzy plays an important role in supporting pupils' wellbeing and emotional development. Ozzy helps to create a calm and nurturing environment, offering comfort and companionship to children who may be feeling anxious, overwhelmed or in need of additional support. He is primarily kept in the Charles Burney House and Avenue Elmers offices. However, throughout the school day, Ozzy works alongside staff in classrooms, pastoral settings and reading sessions, helping to build confidence, encourage positive social interactions and promote emotional regulation.



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The Girls' Prep School dog is named Annie. Annie is a Cavapoo who is just over 2 years old (as of September 2026), owned by Mrs Caroline Blight. Annie has undertaken puppy obedience and socialisation classes with The Dog Walker and was then introduced to the School environment during the Autumn and Spring terms of the 2025-2026 academic year. Annie completed her formal school training with The Dog Mentor in January 2026, being awarded her Silver certificate, and Mrs Blight is planning to continue with The Dog Mentor Programme so Annie progresses towards achieving the Gold Award.

Annie plays an important role in supporting pupils' wellbeing and emotional development, and works closely with our Well-being Coordinator. She creates a calm and nurturing environment, offering comfort and companionship to children who may be feeling anxious, overwhelmed or in need of additional support. Annie is primarily based in either the Head's Office or the Well-being Hub, but throughout the school day she works alongside staff and our Year 6 Dog Prefects in classrooms, pastoral settings, reading sessions and the playground, helping to build confidence, encourage positive social interactions and promote emotional regulation.

Training

Emma Rickards is the legal owner of the Senior School Dog and is therefore responsible for her training.

Danielle Kilpin is the legal owner of the Boys' Prep School Dog and is therefore responsible for his training. He is now fully trained although he continues to undergo 'top-up' training as needed with The Dog Mentor training.

Caroline Blight is the legal owner of the Girls' Prep School Dog and is therefore responsible for Annie's ongoing training, which will be done in conjunction with The Dog Mentor.

How will the dogs be used in School?

Educational Assistance Dogs are trained in four areas and then work in anywhere from one to all four of the areas.

Classroom Canines – these dogs will be happy to simply 'chill out' in the classroom whilst the children are having their lessons. Their very presence will have a calming effect on the children. Research studies in both Britain and America have concluded that having a dog in a school classroom can have many positive benefits – these include help to calm children down, improve academic achievement, motivate those children who are often not that attentive, teach responsibility and encourage children to respect all life. Furthermore, it has been shown



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that when classmates share the affection and care of a 'class' dog, a bond forms among the classmates and strengthens their team ethos.

Listening Canines – these dogs will be incredibly calm and happy to have an individual child read to them or join a group of children in the library whilst they are having a book-reading session. Dogs give unconditional acceptance, as they are non-judgmental, which is especially crucial to struggling, emerging readers. The listening canines also provide confidence to children as they do not make fun of them when they read, but above all they make amazing listeners, providing the children with a sense of comfort and love. In America, the 'Read' Dogs, as they are known, have proved through research that children who read to these dogs show an increase in reading levels, word recognition, a higher desire to read and write, and an increase in intra and interpersonal skills among the children they mix with.

Reward Canines – these dogs will be gentle and loving, but at the same time full of fun and enjoyment for the children. Those children who have performed incredibly well during the week or those who have made progress in a certain subject, or those who have achieved objectives, will be rewarded with spending time during lunch or break to interact with these dogs. Walking, grooming, playing and training are some of the responsibilities the children will be allowed to undertake with the reward dogs. It has been proved that working and playing with a dog improves children's social skills and self-esteem.

Therapy Canines – these dogs will work with children on a one-one basis only and will especially help those children who are reluctant to be in school, are suffering from social, emotional and mental health issues, are going through upsetting/difficult times or even scared/phobic of dogs. These dogs will bring much joy to all those children they meet. Children who struggle with social interaction will find a reassuring friend in a School Dog.

A fully comprehensive risk assessment has been written and will be periodically checked to ensure all aspects of the dog's involvement at school has been considered.

Health, hygiene and dog welfare

In the interests of health and hygiene, the dogs are toileted either away from the School building or in a sectioned-off area of the school where children have no access.

The School Dogs are in School between 1 and 4 days per week. The School Dogs are exercised before School and then at least once during the school day (either break or lunch). They are always provided with unlimited access to water, a bed and favourite toys. Our School Dogs have been carefully trained over a period of time, and their owners have worked closely with the behaviourist to ensure their welfare is always carefully considered.

The School Dogs are regularly groomed and checked for signs of infection or other illness.



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If a School Dog is ill, they will be diagnosed and treated by a vet and not be allowed on the School premises until their health is restored. The dogs have received all relevant inoculations and are wormed every six months and flea treated every month. The dogs' claws are kept trimmed to reduce the risk of scratches.

Children and Staff who are allergic to or fearful of dogs

In order to interact with the dog, pupils will not need to touch them unless of course they wish to, and this will therefore relieve some of the possibility of reactions. The School already manages a number of allergies amongst pupils, and this is no different for those who are allergic to dogs. Individual needs will always be met, and the School will work with parents to put additional control measures in place where needed.

Access to the school dog is carefully managed and supervised. ***Pupils will not need to have any contact with the dog unless they are keen to do so.*** It is hoped that the school dog can work closely with any girls fearful of dogs to alleviate the fear and help them manage it. School Dogs are highly trained to help with this particular issue.

A child at Surbiton High School will only work with our school dog if they are happy to do so. If any parent or pupil wishes to opt out of working with a School dog, then arrangements will be made to ensure that the animal is kept away from them. If necessary, the animal may need exclusion from specific areas. This also applies to staff; members of our School community are never put in a position in which they feel uncomfortable. Pupils and staff are encouraged to wash their hands or use hand gel after stroking or playing with the School dogs.



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