



5th September 2023

Dear Students

My name is Ralph, and I am a one-year-old F1B Cockapoo – F1B means that I am a cross between a Cockapoo and a Poodle. I am classed as a hypoallergenic breed. I am a very sociable and happy young dog. I love being around people!

I will be new to the school from this September and at the beginning of October I will be completing my Dog Mentor Programme assessment. Mrs Wickham, Mrs Weaving, Miss Denney, Mrs Amery, Mrs Pacey and Ms Seymour (my owner) will be receiving training to become my 'handlers' in school.

My job, as the Dog Mentor, is to make a positive impact on your lives and health and well-being. I am hoping to become an integral member of the school. I am not a therapy dog, but I do hope to have a calming effect just by being nearby. My main role will be to react and respond to you under the guidance of and direction of my handlers. I will aim to support you in a range of academic, personal, and social situations.

I am looking forward to making a difference to your lives and I am prepared to have interesting and varied days once I am qualified and ready to work with you. Until then I will be spending a lot of time in Reception and in the Exams/Data office whilst I am introduced to school life slowly. It is important that you, the teachers, and other staff understand my needs and how to act around and engage with me, this is so I feel safe and secure - we will all need time to prepare for me being a new member of the school community.

When I become a dog mentor, I will have a timetable and have planned sessions with individual students or small groups. My time may vary; from students reading to me, teaching me new tricks, taking me for a walk or even drawing me – who knows! I may be asked to join a class for a lesson if it helps enrich the learning experience in some way. When I am not with students, I will be resting in reception or the exams office because it is important that I have time away from being with lots of people and I get my sleep – I am still very young so please try and respect my rest time.

All of this is very new to me and to you, but research studies has shown that the benefits of dogs in schools include:

- **Cognitive development** – companionship with a dog stimulates memory, problem-solving, game-playing and can improve reading skills.
- **Emotional development** – a school dog improves self-esteem, acceptance from others and lifts mood, often provoking laughter and fun. Dogs can also teach compassion and respect for other living things, as well as relieving anxiety.
- **Physical development** – interaction with a pet reduces blood pressure, provides tactile stimulation, assists with pain management, gives motivation to move, walk and stimulates the senses.
- **Environmental benefits** – a dog in a school contributes towards the creation of a home style environment, with all of the above benefits continuing long after the school day is over.
- **Social benefits** – a dog provides a positive mutual topic for discussion, encourages responsibility, wellbeing, developing social skills and focused interaction with others.

If you have any other questions about me and my time in the school, I am afraid you will need to speak to one of my handlers who will be able to help.

I look forward to working with you!

Ralph

Here's a photo of me on holiday on a farm in Devon last week!

