



ABOVE
Animal
encounters
at Francis
Holland Prep

ANIMAL MAGIC

From providing comfort and teaching valuable lessons about empathy and care for the world around to supporting shy young readers, animals add magic that brings learning to life. Three schools tell us more about the rich benefits they bring

“AT FRANCIS HOLLAND PREP, THE ANNUAL CHARITY DOG SHOW IS HOTLY CONTESTED, SHOWCASING ANIMAL WHISPERER SKILLS ALONGSIDE CREATIVITY”

BELOW
Francis
Holland
therapy dog
Kanga



Francis Holland Prep School

At Francis Holland Prep, school life is made joyful by Kanga, a Hungarian Vizsla Therapy Dog, who belongs to the school's Lead Counsellor and has been a resident for six years – ever since she was a puppy. Kanga is a key member of ContemPlace, the FHP counselling service, and works alongside five specialist human therapists.

Pupils have the opportunity to drop in and visit Kanga whenever she is at the Prep – her time is split between Francis Holland Prep and the Senior School in Sloane Square. She comes into her own at the start of the academic year, especially for any new pupils finding it hard to settle, and she's also a huge support to Year 6 girls who are anxious about the 11+. Often, being with her for a few minutes is enough, say the team, and many friendships have been made between girls gathered in the Wellbeing Suite for a chat with Kanga.

Children have lots of other opportunities to encounter the animal kingdom. Reception and KS1 pupils enjoy incubating, hatching and rearing a number of chicks at school each year as part of their work on life cycles. There have been similar projects with butterflies, which pupils loved. There are regular trips, including the annual Reception trip to Bocketts Farm – a firm Summer Term favourite – where children

meet chickens, rabbits, horses, goats, cows and even 'racing pigs'.

The bespoke Francis Holland Foresters programme is tailored for every year group and combines nature identification with shelter building activities, connecting children with both animals and bugs. Girls learn about the importance of mini beasts within an ecosystem. Their creative skills are seen in bug hotels equipped with lifts, swimming pools and even bowling alleys. They also learn 'detective skills' over the course of the school year scouting for different tracks left by bigger beasts – including foxes and badgers.

All this fun outdoor learning also embeds knowledge, and FHP immerses pupils in hands-on science and geography from the outset. In the Early Years, pupils explore through play, and their natural capacity for experimentation lays foundations for deeper scientific thinking. As they move through the school, the curriculum becomes increasingly specialised, introducing key concepts in biology, chemistry and physics.

There are enrichment sessions for every year group involving animals to help bring these subjects to life. For example, Zoo Labs recently visited, bringing an array of fascinating creatures to support pupils'

learning about adaptation. From desert lizards that detach their tails to escape predators to giant snails with retractable eyes, the girls were captivated by the unique survival and adaptation strategies animals employ in their natural habitats.

Zoo Labs gave pupils the opportunity to get up close and handle some of the animals. The girls held the white snake, felt the texture of the giant snails and observed the intricate details of the tarantula. This hands-on experience not only deepened their understanding of science and nature but also helped many overcome initial fears of 'creepy crawlies', fostering curiosity and appreciation for the beauty of wild creatures.

Another aspect of animals up close, and a highlight of the school year, the Francis Holland Prep Charity Dog Show is all about fun and community spirit – raising funds for a chosen charity. This year, just under £2,000 was raised for School in a Bag. The competition is hotly contested by parents and pupils across five categories – Obedience, Loveliest Lady, Most Fabulous Fella, Puppy Love and Best Dressed. It offers pupils the opportunity to showcase their animal whisperer techniques, alongside creative and fashion skills and communication with the animals that bring magic to their life. **P**