***A group of children in a classroom

Description automatically generated with low confidence***

***The benefits of a school dog***

School dogs have been proven to help develop students’ reading skills, improve behaviour, attendance, and academic confidence, as well as increasing student understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills. At St. Mary of the Angels, we hope that a dog will be a beneficial addition to the therapeutic offer, acting as an adjunct to the interventions already offer and promoting engagement for students who may have found it difficult to access talking therapies in the past.

***Animal assisted therapy can: -***

- Teach empathy and appropriate interpersonal skills; - Help individuals develop social skills.

- Be soothing and support the development of rapport between the professional and client, and improve individual’s skills to pick up social cues’ imperative to human relationships.

- Professionals can process that information and use it to help clients see how their behaviour affects others; - Therapy dogs have been shown to support emotional regulation through the positive impact on the autonomic nervous system

- A recent report highlighted children working with therapy dogs experienced increased motivation for learning, resulting in improved outcomes.

- Therapy dogs are being used to support children with social and emotional learning needs, which in turn can assist with literacy development.

***Research into the effects of therapy dogs in schools is showing a range of benefits including:***

- Increase in school attendance.

- Gains in confidence; - Decreases in learner anxiety behaviours resulting in improved learning outcomes, such as increases in reading and writing levels.

- Positive changes towards learning and improved motivation.

- Enhanced relationships with peers and teachers due to experiencing trust and unconditional positive regard from a therapy dog. This in turn helps students learn how to express their feelings and enter more trusting relationships.

***Confidence benefits*** “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” [Bark & Read – The Kennel Club](https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/barkandread)

***SEN benefits*** “Therapy Dogs Nationwide dogs have also shown to help with special needs and autistic children and adults by giving focus and providing a calming environment.” Therapy Dogs Nationwide [Schools - THERAPY DOGS NATIONWIDE (tdn.org.uk)](https://tdn.org.uk/schools-2/)

***Mental Health Benefits*** “There is emerging evidence to suggest that Animal Assisted Psychotherapy improves the efficacy of mental health treatments in self-selected adolescent populations via reductions in primary symptomatology, and via secondary factors that improve therapeutic processes and quality, such as engagement and retention”. Research can be found here:- [Incorporating animal-assisted therapy in mental health treatments for adolescents: A systematic review of canine assisted psychotherapy. – DOAJ](https://doaj.org/article/4e3fd074a9be4de199e16424e3c02437#:~:text=The%20aims%20of%20this%20study%20were%20to%20identify,mental%20health%20treatments%20for%20adolescents%20aged%2010-19%20years.)

***Behaviour benefits*** “Researchers report that students 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 students declined by 55%, and general aggression went down 62%. In a controlled study, students were found to have fewer disciplinary referrals in schools with a dog than schools without. Students’ behaviour improved toward teachers, and students also showed more confidence and responsibility.” [Study investigating the roles of animals in educational settings to enhance learning and wellbeing | Nottingham Trent University](https://www.ntu.ac.uk/about-us/news/news-articles/2021/03/study-investigating-the-roles-of-animals-in-educational-settings-to-enhance-learning-and-wellbeing)