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University of Southampton

Faculty of Environmental and Life Sciences

School of Psychology

Fur, Feathers, or None at All: How Primary Schools Decide on Animal Inclusion

by

Jessica Delicata

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Thesis for the degree of Doctorate in Educational Psychology

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Abstract

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The inclusion of animals in primary schools is growing, yet how schools decide which animals to include and the roles they fulfil remains poorly understood. Practice is often inconsistent, unregulated, and lacks standardised guidance. This study combined a systematic review of 21 studies (2014–2025) on staff perceptions of therapy animals with an empirical survey of 70 English primary schools, comprising schools who currently have animals (CH); previously had animals but no longer (PH); had considered but decided they did not want to have animals (CDNW), or had never considered including animals (NC).

The review indicated that therapy animals, particularly dogs, can support students' social and emotional development by enhancing peer relationships, inclusion, empathy, and self-awareness, and promote well-being through reduced stress, anxiety, and improved confidence. Challenges included safety risks, allergies, fear of animals, ethical concerns, animal welfare, and practical considerations. The survey found that visiting animals, especially dogs, were commonly included, with CH schools including them more widely across classes than PH schools. Decision-making involved leadership teams, governors, staff, parents, and children, with attention to cultural, religious, welfare, and safety considerations. Policies and risk assessments were often limited or post hoc. Perceived benefits centred on social-emotional development, emotional and behavioural regulation, and well-being, while risks to people included allergies, bites, and anxiety.

These findings highlight the need for national frameworks, structured guidance, and longitudinal research to support ethical, evidence-informed, and sustainable inclusion of animals in schools. By balancing human *and* animal welfare, schools can harness social-emotional and therapeutic benefits while mitigating risks, creating inclusive, supportive learning environments.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	3
Table of Tables	8
Table of Figures	10
Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship.....	11
Acknowledgements.....	12
Definitions and Abbreviations.....	14
Chapter 1 Fur, Feathers, or None at All: How Primary Schools Decide on Animal Inclusion	18
1.1 Overview.....	18
1.2 Animals in Educational Contexts: A Growing but Uneven Field.....	18
1.3 Ethical and Welfare Considerations	20
1.4 Personal Interest and Reflexivity of the Researcher.....	21
1.5 Ontology and Epistemology.....	22
1.6 Research Relevance for Educational Psychologists	23
1.7 Dissemination Plan	23
Chapter 2 Therapy Animals in Schools: A Narrative Synthesis of Staff- Perceived Social and Emotional Benefits and Barriers	25
2.1 Abstract	25
2.2 Introduction	25
2.2.1 Therapy Animals	26
2.2.2 Benefits of Therapy Animals	27
2.2.3 Challenges and Concerns About Implementing Therapy Animals	28
2.3 Methodology	30
2.3.1 Search Strategy.....	30
2.3.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria	31
2.3.3 Study Selection.....	32
2.3.4 Quality Assurance of Studies	33

Table of Contents

2.3.5	Data Extraction and Analysis.....	33
2.4	Results	36
2.4.1	Synthesis Overview	36
2.4.2	Narrative Synthesis	36
2.4.2.1	Social Benefits	38
2.4.2.1.1	Fostering a Sense of School Community and Belonging	38
2.4.2.1.2	Social and Emotional Learning.....	39
2.4.2.2	Emotional Benefits	40
2.4.2.2.1	Changing Emotional State	40
2.4.2.2.2	Modulating Arousal and Supporting Emotional Regulation	40
2.4.2.2.3	Shifting Cognitive Focus	41
2.4.2.2.4	Experiencing Emotional Security and Attachment.....	42
2.4.2.3	Challenges.....	43
2.4.2.3.1	Safety Risks (Physical and Emotional)	43
2.4.2.3.2	Welfare of the Animal	44
2.4.2.3.3	Practical and Ethical Considerations for Having a Therapy Animal..	45
2.5	Discussion	47
2.5.1	Implications for Practice.....	48
2.5.2	Strengths and Limitations	49
2.5.3	Future Recommendations for Research.....	50
2.6	Conclusion.....	51
 Chapter 3 Paws and Principles: The Decision-Making Process of Primary		
Schools to Include Animals		
		52
3.1	Abstract	52
3.2	Introduction	52
3.2.1	How Schools Include Animals and Reasons for Having AAS	53
3.2.2	How Schools Decide Whether to Include Animals	54
3.2.3	Safety and Ethical Considerations.....	55
3.2.4	Theoretical Frameworks for Decision-Making.....	56

Table of Contents

3.2.5	Research Gaps and Rationale for the Study.....	56
3.2.6	Research Aims.....	57
3.2.7	Objectives	57
3.3	Methodology	58
3.3.1	Research Design Overview.....	58
3.3.2	Researcher Description	58
3.3.3	Participants	58
3.3.4	Participant Recruitment.....	59
3.3.5	Participant Selection	60
3.3.6	Data Collection.....	60
3.3.7	Data Analysis.....	61
3.4	Results	62
3.4.1	RQ1 Do schools have a policy regarding inclusion of animals through animal-related activities or more general contact with animals on the school premises?	63
3.4.2	RQ2 If animals are included, are there suitable risk assessments accounting for risks to staff, children, and the animal(s)?	64
3.4.3	RQ3 How are animals included in school settings?.....	65
3.4.4	RQ4 What are the perceived benefits and risks identified in the decision- making process?.....	68
3.4.4.1	Perceived benefits	68
3.4.4.2	Perceived Risks	74
3.4.5	RQ5 What are the decision-making processes regarding animal inclusion?.....	75
3.4.6	RQ6 What factors determine how and what type of animals will be involved?	79
3.4.7	RQ7 What other factors are considered in deciding if animals will be included?	84
3.4.8	If schools have decided to cease including animals, or not to include animals, what factors influenced this decision?	85
3.4.9	Other Comments Made About the Inclusion of Animals	94

3.5 Discussion	96
3.5.1 Implications for Practice.....	98
3.5.2 Strengths and Limitations	99
3.5.3 Future Recommendations for Research.....	100
3.6 Conclusion.....	100
Appendix A Search Terms Formulated using the PICO Framework	102
Appendix B University of Manchester’s Critical appraisal review frameworks (Woods, 2020).....	103
B1 Quantitative research framework (Woods, 2020)	103
B2 Qualitative research framework (Woods, 2020)	106
Appendix C Quality Assessment Summary	110
Appendix D Data Extraction of the Studies Included	113
Appendix E Analytic Framework for Thematic Synthesis	130
Appendix F Participant Recruitment Advert.....	162
Appendix G Gatekeeper Letter	163
Appendix H Email Invitation to Participants and Reminder Emails.....	165
Appendix I Participant Information Sheet & Consent	171
Appendix J Debriefing Form.....	177
Appendix K Flow Chart Demonstrating Survey Branching Logic for CH, PH, NC and CDNW	179
Appendix L Qualtrics Survey Flow	180
Appendix M The Survey	185
Section 1 Inclusion criteria	185
Section 2 About the School and your role.....	186
Section 3 Including animals in school.....	187
Section 4a Have Animals Currently - Decision Making	188
Section 4b Have Animals Currently - Policies/Funding	195
Section 4c Have Animals Currently - What Animals and How Included.....	196
Section 5a Schools Who Previously Included Animals – Decision Making	200

Table of Contents

Section 5b Schools Who Previously Included Animals – Policies/Funding 207

**Section 5c Schools Who Previously Included Animals – What Animals and How
Included..... 207**

Section 5d Schools Who Previously Included Animals – Reasons for Stopping .. 212

Section 7a Schools that have NEVER considered including animals 216

**Section 7b What generic things should a school consider when deciding whether
to include animals? 218**

Section 8– Any other comments 224

Debrief..... 224

Appendices 225

Counties list (48) 225

Appendix N Follow up Email 226

Appendix O Prize Draw Confirmation and Thank You 227

Appendix P Demographics of Schools Responding to the Questionnaire 229

Appendix Q Types of Animals in Schools 237

**Appendix R Factors Considered During Decision-Making by Schools that CH
Animals 242**

**Appendix S Factors Considered During Decision-Making by Schools that PH
Animals 249**

**Appendix T Factors Considered During Decision-Making by Schools of High
Importance 257**

Appendix U Participants in Each Group 263

Glossary of Terms 264

References 274

Table of Tables

Table 1	<i>Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria</i>	31
Table 2	<i>Summary List of Studies Included</i>	33
Table 3	<i>Inclusion and exclusion criteria</i>	59
Table 4	<i>Responses per Regions of England</i>	63
Table 5	<i>Geographical Type of Area</i>	63
Table 6	<i>School Policies related to the Inclusion of Animals</i>	64
Table 7	<i>Animals in Schools – School Animals Vs Visiting Animals</i>	65
Table 8	<i>Duration of Including Animals</i>	66
Table 9	<i>Targeting Inclusion of Animals</i>	67
Table 10	<i>How Animals are Included in Schools</i>	68
Table 11	<i>CH Schools Perceived Benefits</i>	69
Table 12	<i>Perceived benefits for Schools that PH Animals</i>	71
Table 13	<i>Children Identified as Potentially Benefiting from the Inclusion of Animals</i>	73
Table 14	<i>Perceived Risks of High Importance Considered During Decision-Making by Schools</i>	74
Table 15	<i>Team Members Initially with Responsibility for Making the Decision to Include Animals</i>	75
Table 16	<i>Other Stakeholders Consulted</i>	76
Table 17	<i>Were any Stakeholders Unhappy about the Decision to Include Animals</i>	77
Table 18	<i>External Resources Used in the Decision-Making Process</i>	77
Table 19	<i>Reviewing Inclusion of Animals to Inform Decision-making to Continue</i>	78
Table 20	<i>Factors Considered During Decision-Making by Schools of High Importance</i> ..	80
Table 21	<i>Other Factors Considered During Decision-Making by Schools of High Importance</i>	84

Table of Tables

Table 22	<i>Reasons Why PH Schools Stopped Including Them</i>	86
Table 23	<i>Reasons Why Schools Decided Not to Include Animals after Consideration...</i>	91
Table 24	<i>Other Comments from Schools about the Inclusion of Animals</i>	95

Table of Figures

Figure 1	<i>PRISMA Flowchart for Screening and Selection</i>	32
Figure 2	<i>Narrative Synthesis Main Themes and Sub-themes</i>	37

Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Jessica Delicata

Title of thesis: Fur, Feathers, or None at All: How Primary Schools Decide on Animal Inclusion

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed.
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission

Signature: Date: 20.02.2026

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Definitions and Abbreviations

- AAA** *Animal-Assisted Activities*: Less formal interactions involving animals that promote comfort, motivation, or enjoyment without a defined therapeutic goal.
- AAE** *Animal-Assisted Education*: Educational programmes or learning environments that include animals to enhance academic, social, and emotional outcomes.
- AAI** *Animal-Assisted Intervention*: Structured, goal-oriented practice that intentionally includes animals in health, education, or human services to support wellbeing.
- AAS** *Animal-Assisted Services*: A broad term encompassing therapeutic, educational, or supportive programmes that intentionally include animals to promote human wellbeing or learning outcomes.
- AASI** *Animal-Assisted Services International* – international body supporting animal-assisted programs.
- AASP** *Animal-Assisted Support Programme*: Broader initiatives using trained animals to promote human wellbeing and social connection.
- AAT / AATx** *Animal-Assisted Therapy*: Therapeutic interventions incorporating animals to enhance emotional, psychological, or social wellbeing.
- ADHD** *Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder*: A neurodevelopmental disorder characterised by inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity.
- ASC** *Autism Spectrum Condition*: A developmental condition affecting communication, behaviour, and sensory processing.
- CDNW** *Considered Did Not Want*: Schools that considered but decided against including animals.
- CH** *Currently Have*: Schools that currently have animals included in their environment or programmes.
- EPs** *Educational Psychologists*: Professionals who apply psychology to support the learning, emotional wellbeing, and development of children and young people.
- ERIC** *Education Resources Information Centre*: Online database providing access to education-related literature.

Definitions and Abbreviations

- ESRC** *Economic and Social Research Council*: UK research council providing funding and methodological guidance for social science research.
- EYFS** Early Years Foundation Stage: The framework in the UK for early childhood education for children aged 0–5.
- HAB** Human–Animal Bond: The mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship between people and animals that influences the health and wellbeing of both.
- HCPC** Health and Care Professions Council: The UK regulatory body that sets professional standards for practitioners in health and care professions, including educational psychologists.
- IAHAIO** *International Association of Human–Animal Interaction Organisations*: Global organisation that defines and guides ethical practice in animal-assisted work.
- K–12** *Kindergarten through 12th Grade*: Educational range encompassing primary and secondary school levels, mainly in the USA.
- LEAD** Lincoln Education Assistance with Dogs – risk-assessment framework for school animal inclusion.
- MEDLINE** *Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online*: Database covering medical, health, and psychological research.
- NAHT** National Association of Headteachers – professional association representing school leaders in England.
- NASEN** National Association for Special Educational Needs – professional association supporting education for children with special educational needs.
- NC** *Never Considered*: Schools that have never considered including animals in their environment or programmes.
- NCVO** National Council for Voluntary Organisations – UK body providing guidance on voluntary sector research and surveys.
- NHS** National Health Service: The publicly funded healthcare system of the United Kingdom.
- PETA** People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals – organisation advocating for animal welfare.

Definitions and Abbreviations

- PH** *Previously Had*: Schools that previously included animals but no longer do.
- PICO**..... *Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome*: Framework for structuring research questions and search strategies in systematic reviews.
- PRISMA** *Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses*: Internationally recognised evidence-based reporting framework for systematic reviews.
- ProQuest**..... An academic database hosting theses, dissertations, and journal articles.
- PSHCE** Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education: A curriculum subject that teaches children about personal development, health, citizenship, and social skills.
- PsycINFO** *Psychological Information Database*: APA database indexing psychology and behavioural sciences research.
- RAYYAN**..... *Rayyan QCRI*: A web-based tool designed to facilitate systematic review screening and collaboration.
- RSPCA** *Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals*: UK charity that promotes animal welfare and ethical standards.
- SCAS**..... Society for Companion Animal Studies – organisation providing guidance on the safe inclusion of animals.
- Scopus**..... A large multidisciplinary database of peer-reviewed literature in science, technology, and social sciences.
- SEN** *Special Educational Needs*: Children requiring additional learning or behavioural support.
- SENCO** Special Educational Needs Coordinator – school staff member responsible for overseeing provision for children with special educational needs.
- SEND**..... *Special Educational Needs and Disabilities*: A term used in UK education for children and young people who have learning difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for them to learn compared to others the same age.

Definitions and Abbreviations

- SLT** Senior Leadership Team: The group of senior staff responsible for strategic management and decision-making within a school.
- TA** *Therapy Animal*: A trained or appropriately socialised animal involved in therapeutic, educational, or wellbeing activities designed to support humans emotionally, socially, or psychologically.
- TD** *Therapy Dog*: A dog specifically trained and assessed for participation in animal-assisted interventions, often used to support emotional regulation, comfort, and engagement in schools or healthcare settings.
- UoM** *University of Manchester*: Institution providing critical appraisal frameworks for study quality assessment.
- Web of Science** A comprehensive citation database used for research indexing and analysis.

Chapter 1 Fur, Feathers, or None at All: How Primary Schools Decide on Animal Inclusion

1.1 Overview

The inclusion of animals in educational settings has grown markedly over the past two decades, reflecting the potential benefits of human–animal interactions for wellbeing, learning, and social development. Once confined largely to classroom pets or science teaching aids (Daly & Suggs, 2010; Herbert & Lynch, 2017), animals are now increasingly incorporated into schools as part of structured initiatives to support pupils’ emotional and behavioural regulation, social skills, literacy, and mental health (Kirnan et al., 2016; Baird et al., 2023; Wintermantel et al., 2023). This growth coincides with a wider educational and policy emphasis on holistic wellbeing approaches and early intervention in children’s mental health (NHS Digital, 2023). Children experiencing mental health difficulties often have lower academic attainment, higher rates of school exclusion and absenteeism (Deighton et al., 2019). They are at increased long-term risk of unemployment and lower earnings (Knapp et al., 2016). Therefore, schools face increasing pressure to provide holistic and accessible mental health support (Wiedermann et al., 2023). Meta-analyses have evidenced that social-emotional interventions in schools can reduce mental health difficulties (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017; Hayes et al., 2025).

1.2 Animals in Educational Contexts: A Growing but Uneven Field

The increasing inclusion of animals in schools has focused on the gains that ‘Animal -Assisted Services’ (AAS) can offer based on findings of the wider field of research exploring how human-animal bonds (HAB) in hospitals, therapy clinics, care homes, universities, workplaces, and individuals’ homes can offer many benefits to the client.

Research has shown that contact with animals can reduce stress (Odendaal, 2000), enhance motivation and self-esteem (Henderson et al., 2020), and foster positive peer relationships (O’Haire, 2012). In particular, therapy dogs have gained prominence due to their perceived approachability, trainability, and ability to form strong social bonds (Flynn et al., 2020; Glenk, 2020). Spending time with animals can help people to feel safer (Beck and Katcher 2003). Animals can act as a social support, provide an attachment object and this is thought to be based on a proposed innate desire to connect with other living organisms (Fine & Weaver 2018). However, although there are possible benefits of this HAB, there are also risks including treating

animals as if they are part human and imposing human attributes on them (Katz 2003) and for animals to be used simply to fill emotional gaps in our lives.

In education, although there are possible gains and benefits of including animals this may be optimistic as the field remains conceptually fragmented and methodologically inconsistent. The studies have tended to focus on different aspects of AAS which makes understanding the outcomes and comparing results difficult. For example, the type of AAS studied can be wide-ranging e.g., therapy dogs (Sweigart, 2023) or keeping classroom animals as pets (Herbert & Lynch, 2017), and focusing on a variety of related outcomes such as academic attainment, engagement, motivation, self-regulation (Gee, Griffin & McCardle, 2017), improvement in cognitive skills, social skills and ability to interact with others (McNicholas & Collis, 2000), empathy and emotional development (Daly and Suggs 2010), with some also incorporating physiological effects (Wells, 2009). Different species are included for diverse purposes, from guinea pigs and rabbits to dogs and miniature horses, often under broad and inconsistently applied labels for the AAS. Participants across studies also vary with different needs e.g., mental health needs, autism, challenging behaviour, and children lacking confidence in reading. Research designs have varied massively, and systematic reviews have often found them to be weak methodologically or deemed inconclusive (Davis et al, 2015; Maber-Aleksandrowicz, Avent, & Hassiotis, 2016). Studies have often had small sample sizes (Cooke and Farington, 2016) and researcher bias (Marino, 2012) has frequently not been considered. Due to confounding variables and the lack of adequate control groups, it is difficult to establish how effective AAS are in terms of which type of AAS are best implemented and with what types of people and how these impact on the potential benefits.

By focusing on potential benefits, the research has not considered whether it is the right decision to make for the setting, staff, child and the animal. Much less is known about how and why schools adopt these practices, or how decisions are made to balance child wellbeing, staff workload, and animal welfare. Research has tended to explore perspectives of the child and teaching staff, and not perspectives from a wider range of those involved including headteachers, senior leaders, school counsellors, dog handlers in school, and the whole school community. Decisions about including animals are not purely pedagogical or therapeutic. They intersect with legal, ethical, and organisational considerations. Schools are complex ecosystems shaped by competing priorities, constrained resources, and diverse stakeholder values. Headteachers, as the final decision-makers, must navigate statutory duties relating to child protection, health and safety, and animal welfare (Animal Welfare Act, 2006; Education Act, 2002).

Papers 2 and 3 in this thesis aim to contribute to closing a gap in the evidence base through complementary approaches of a systematic literature review and an empirical study. Paper 2 addresses this by systematically reviewing staff perceptions of both social and emotional benefits and challenges of including therapy animals in schools, while Paper 3 investigates schools' decision-making processes surrounding the inclusion of animals in primary schools. Together, these papers provide a cohesive understanding of both the conceptual and practical landscapes of AAS in schools. Both papers recognise that the successful and ethical inclusion of animals requires understanding of not only the potential benefits but also the practical challenges faced by senior leaders.

1.3 Ethical and Welfare Considerations

Both papers are underpinned by a commitment to balancing human benefit and animal welfare, a dual concern frequently overlooked in existing literature (Brelsford et al., 2017; Meints et al., 2017). Paper 2 identified that most studies prioritised child outcomes while giving minimal attention to the welfare of participating animals. Paper 3 extends this concern by investigating how welfare considerations inform leadership decisions in schools. Together, they offer a more holistic account of what 'ethical inclusion' means in school contexts.

The inclusion of animals in schools represents a rapidly expanding yet conceptually and ethically complex field within education and wellbeing research. While the potential benefits for children's emotional, social, and academic development are increasingly recognised, the evidence base remains fragmented and uneven. The pace of practice has 'overtaken science' leading to unregulated practice (Brelsford et al., 2020; Vardy et al., 2025). Studies have shown that the practice is often linked to animal availability, personal experiences and beliefs, funding, policies, and senior leaders as 'gatekeepers'. It is unclear whether the schools' decision-making processes are supported by understanding available research and existing guidelines and taking into consideration ethical implications.

The research study was approved by the University of Southampton Ethics Committee and while there were no anticipated ethical issues for participants completing the survey, there was a risk that participants may have shared practices that were non-compliant with guidance or welfare standards. If so, then this could then pose a dilemma between confidentiality and responsibility as a researcher. While no explicit unethical behaviour was reported, the findings reveal areas of ethical complexity. Schools often operated in the absence of formal guidance or regulation, leading to variable approaches to safeguarding, welfare assessment, and consent.

Ethical tensions arose around ensuring the wellbeing of both children and animals, particularly where the animal's involvement and ability to withdraw from interaction was unclear. Issues of equity and cultural sensitivity also surfaced, as not all children and staff shared the same attitudes towards animals. Furthermore, headteachers faced moral and practical dilemmas when balancing competing priorities, such as educational benefit, pupil safety, and animal welfare, within constrained resources.

1.4 Personal Interest and Reflexivity of the Researcher

Animals have always been an important part of my life, and I have personally experienced the benefits of a strong human–animal bond. I have often found their company more genuine than interactions with people; animals engage authentically, and when a bond is healthy and balanced, it can be mutually beneficial.

From an early age, I learned the responsibility involved in caring for animals, including confronting the realities of their finite lifespans. This fostered a lifelong motivation to support and protect animals. As a child, I was a member of the World Wildlife Fund, and as a teenager, I was inspired by the work of Jane Goodall, which deepened my interest in understanding and conserving animal life.

When I became a teacher, I sought opportunities to share this passion with children, helping them understand the importance of caring for all animals, regardless of size or perceived significance. I organised animal visits, hatching experiences, and trips, and in my final teaching role, I successfully persuaded the headteacher to allow the children to keep guinea pigs. Reflecting on this experience, I realised that the sustainability of such initiatives often depends on individual enthusiasm. Once I left the school and the guinea pigs were rehomed, it became clear that the decision had been driven primarily by my personal investment rather than a structured, long-term plan.

This experience motivated me to explore, as part of my doctorate, the benefits, challenges, and decision-making processes involved in including animals in schools. My aim is to support schools in making informed and sustainable decisions that prioritise the welfare of animals, the safety and wellbeing of children, and the practical realities for staff. While animals have much to offer humans, ethical considerations must guide any intervention, and I hope that the research presented in these papers contributes to evidence-informed, ethically responsible practice in educational settings.

Reflexivity has been an important consideration throughout this research. My lifelong connection with animals and professional experience as a teacher have informed both the

research questions and my interpretation of participants' responses. While these experiences have provided valuable insight into school practices and the potential benefits of animal-assisted services, they also present a risk of bias, particularly towards emphasising positive outcomes. To mitigate this, I maintained a reflexive 'approach with caution' to the research, discussed emerging interpretations with supervisors, and used a non-biased approach to grouping participant quotes extensively, ensuring findings were grounded in evidence. I remained mindful of my positionality during recruitment and analysis, recognising that my enthusiasm for animals may have shaped interpretation of participants' responses and my own perspective on ethical considerations, benefits, and challenges.

1.5 Ontology and Epistemology

This research adopts a pragmatic research paradigm, recognising that reality can be understood through both socially constructed experiences and observable phenomena, with the aim of generating useful knowledge and solutions for real life. Ontologically, it acknowledges that the experiences and perceptions of school staff, the roles of animals in educational settings, and the reported outcomes for children and animals are context-dependent and subjective, shaped by social, cultural, and institutional factors. At the same time, certain aspects, such as patterns of animal inclusion across schools or demographic characteristics, can be measured systematically and contribute to a broader understanding of the phenomenon.

Epistemologically, the study aligns with an interpretivist approach, recognising the meanings and perspectives of participants are valid and that knowledge is co-constructed through human experience. The narrative synthesis of the systematic literature review reflects this approach, allowing for the combination of various experiences and viewpoints on the benefits, challenges, and ways decisions are made.

The survey component complements this interpretive focus by providing structured, methodical data, capturing school practices and staff perceptions across a wider sample. By combining interpretivist and pragmatic perspectives, this research supports a nuanced and actionable understanding of AAS in schools. The methodological choices ensure that both subjective experiences and measurable patterns inform the findings, enabling the study to address its research aims comprehensively while remaining sensitive to ethical and practical considerations.

1.6 Research Relevance for Educational Psychologists

Educational Psychologists (EPs) work closely with schools to support the implementation of evidence-based interventions. Although many EPs may feel less confident commenting on AAS, due to limited research and ethical considerations governed by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) standards, schools are increasingly introducing these practices. EPs are well-positioned to provide guidance, helping schools critically evaluate the research evidence, assess effectiveness, and determine suitability for specific learners. This can reinforce that AAS is not a one-size-fits-all solution and support schools in considering alternative approaches where appropriate.

As independent professionals, EPs can facilitate stakeholder consultation, including students, parents, staff, and the wider community, to ensure decisions are well-informed and balanced. They can also mediate discussions to address expectations, concerns, and potential risks related to animal inclusion.

EPs can support the development of school policies, risk assessments, and monitoring procedures, ensuring that decisions comply with ethical guidelines and legal requirements, including animal welfare laws. By doing so, they advocate for both student and animal wellbeing, promote equitable access, and contribute to safer, more inclusive AAS practices.

Providing EPs with robust research on AAS enables them to adopt a proactive and informed approach, ultimately benefiting schools, children, and the animals involved.

1.7 Dissemination Plan

These two research papers have been written with the aim of publishing in journals that will reach the most relevant audiences, including senior leaders, teachers, educational psychologists, and advisory staff. For the systematic literature review, three potential journals were identified in consultation with my supervisors: *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, *International Journal of Educational Research*, and *Anthrozoos: A Multidisciplinary Journal of The Interactions of People & Animals*. The *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* focuses on learning, teaching, and child development in educational settings, targeting an audience directly engaged with school-based interventions. The *International Journal of Educational Research* has high impact, which may make initial acceptance more challenging for a first-time author. *Anthrozoos* is a further option, with a readership specialising in animal-assisted services (AAS). Chapter 2 has been written to allow adaptation to any of these journals in terms of structure, content, and scope.

Chapter 1

For the empirical survey study, potential journals include *People and Animals: The International Journal of Research and Practice* and *CABI Human–Animal Interactions*, both of which have published research on AAS in schools. These journals reach practitioners and researchers across education, psychology, and animal welfare, enhancing the visibility and impact of the findings.

Additionally, plans are in place to share the research locally with the Educational Psychology Service and with schools, for example through a Local Authority SEND conference. Future conferences may also provide opportunities to disseminate findings and support schools in ethical, evidence-informed decision-making about AAS.

Chapter 2 Therapy Animals in Schools: A Narrative Synthesis of Staff-Perceived Social and Emotional Benefits and Barriers

2.1 Abstract

This systematic review synthesises staff perceptions of the social and emotional impacts of therapy animals (TAs), particularly therapy dogs (TDs), and the challenges of incorporating TAs in school settings. Twenty-one studies published between 2014 and 2025 were included, primarily from the USA, UK, and Australia, and findings were synthesised narratively due to the heterogeneity of methods and outcomes. Staff reported that TAs supported students' social development by fostering school community, enhancing peer relationships, promoting inclusion, and facilitating social-emotional learning through skill development, empathy, and self-awareness. Emotional benefits included increased happiness, confidence, restorative mood shifts, reduced stress and anxiety, and enhanced comfort, love, safety, and opportunities for self-disclosure, redirecting attention, supporting positive cognitive reframing, and helping students manage fear. Challenges highlighted by staff encompassed safety risks, including allergies and fear of animals, concerns about animal welfare, practical and ethical considerations related to the animal's role, training, unpredictability, dual staff responsibilities, and cultural differences. Findings emphasise that while TAs can offer substantial benefits, their inclusion requires structured guidance, professional oversight, and careful attention to human and animal wellbeing. By incorporating perspectives from a broad range of school staff and focusing on predominantly mainstream settings, the review extends current knowledge beyond specialist or SEND contexts. Overall, therapy animals represent a promising, yet complex, resource for creating inclusive, emotionally supportive school environments when implemented safely and systematically.

Keywords: Therapy animals, therapy dogs, animal-assisted services, staff perceptions, inclusion, social-emotional development, student wellbeing, animal welfare.

2.2 Introduction

Animals have been incorporated into educational settings for decades, initially primarily as class pets or aids for science teaching (Daly & Suggs, 2010; Herbert & Lynch, 2017). More recently, they are specifically used to support reading (Kirnan et al., 2016; Gu & Wright 2023,

Steele, 2024), executive functioning (Baird et al., 2023; Tepper et al., 2021), and as therapeutic interventions targeting children's social and emotional needs (Wintermantel et al., 2023; Breilsford et al., 2017). The prevalence of mental health difficulties among young people in the UK is increasing, with approximately one in five affected (NHS Digital, 2023). In response to the rising demand for accessible and holistic mental health provision, schools are increasingly adopting approaches such as the inclusion of animals within educational settings to support pupils' wellbeing.

Schools have included a wide variety of species across taxa, including stick insects, fish, birds, and small and large mammals such as rabbits, guinea pigs, cats, potbellied pigs, and llamas (Chandler, 2012; Lewis et al., 2022), with dogs being the predominant species. Empirical support for the therapeutic use of animals, other than dogs, in educational contexts is limited (Hill, 2020). The range of both species and their roles have led to inconsistencies in terminology and uncertainty regarding best practices to ensure the welfare of both humans and animals. While much research has examined children's experiences, comparatively little attention has been paid to school staff perspectives on the benefits and challenges of incorporating animals. Understanding these perspectives is critical for informing and shaping policy and practice that effectively support children.

2.2.1 Therapy Animals

The absence of a universally recognised or national definition of a 'therapy animal' has created uncertainty in schools regarding which species are appropriate and how they should be integrated therapeutically. Organisations that provide therapy animals generally define them as animals trained to offer comfort, affection, or support, assessed for temperament, and working under the guidance of a handler (e.g., Pets as Therapy, Therapy Dogs, Huggle Pets in the Community, People and Animal Wellbeing Services). Research by Fredrickson-MacNamara and Butler (2010) indicates that breed, life expectancy, and temperament are important considerations when selecting an animal. Therapy animals are believed to have a 'special aptitude' for interacting with people (Marscher, 2014) and typically work as part of a team with their handler and/or a qualified professional (Howell et al., 2022) to provide physiological (Nimer & Lundahl, 2007), psychological, and social support (Friesen, 2010). Evidence suggests that therapy animals can deliver positive outcomes even when the handler or professional is not a mental health specialist (Marscher, 2014), implying both direct and indirect benefits. Unlike other types of support animals, such as service or assistance dogs, therapy animals can support multiple people through planned interventions (Schoenfeld-Tacher et al., 2017).

While the definition of a ‘therapy animal’ remains somewhat ambiguous, the International Association of Human–Animal Interaction Organisations (IAHAIO) (2018) provides a clear framework for *animal-assisted interventions* (AAIs), defining them as structured and goal-oriented practices that intentionally incorporate animals into health, education, or human service contexts to support wellbeing. Within educational settings, *Animal-Assisted Education* (AAE) refers to the integration of animals into learning environments to enhance academic, social, and emotional outcomes for pupils.

More recently, recommendations for uniform terminology have been proposed by Binder et al. (2024) and incorporated into IAHAIO’s forthcoming minimum standards for research involving people and/or animals (IAHAIO, 2025). These updates suggest replacing the term *AAI* with *Animal-Assisted Services* (AAS), encompassing therapeutic, educational, and supportive practices that include trained animals with the dual aim of improving human wellbeing and ensuring animal welfare. Within this framework, *Animal-Assisted Treatment* (AATx) involves the integration of animals into therapeutic interventions; *Animal-Assisted Education* (AAE) relates to educational programmes that include animals; and *Animal-Assisted Support Programs* (AASP) cover broader initiatives that enhance human wellbeing. For this review, literature will be discussed using IAHAIO’s (2018) definitions while acknowledging the recent adaptations for future inclusion of animals in educational contexts.

Despite ongoing debates around terminology, there is a clear increase in schools incorporating therapy animals, highlighting the need to understand the motivations and intended benefits of such inclusion.

2.2.2 Benefits of Therapy Animals

Research in health and medicine has documented numerous benefits of interacting with animals. For instance, Phillips (2002) reported health improvements for patients with coronary heart issues, and other studies have found that being with animals can reduce anxiety and stress, decrease loneliness (Friedmann, Locker, & Lockwood, 1990), increase oxytocin levels, and lower cortisol levels (Odendaal, 2000). In educational settings, animals can enhance learning by boosting engagement, motivation, self-regulation, and social interactions (Gee, Griffin, & McCardle, 2017).

The inclusion of animals in schools is supported by the biophilia hypothesis, which suggests that humans have an innate affinity for nature and other living things, shaped by evolution (Wilson, 1984). This connection to plants, animals, and natural environments is believed to support psychological and physical well-being. Animals are also thought to provide comfort and emotional support (Hartwig & Smelser, 2018; Parenti et al., 2013).

School-based interventions involving animals are generally appealing to students and considered less intrusive (Chodkiewicz & Boyle, 2017), with the aim of increasing engagement. This may be because animals are often perceived as fun and enjoyable (Kerns et al., 2023). Research also suggests that animals can promote social interactions and foster relationships among students (O’Haire, 2012; McNicholas et al., 2000).

Therapy animals, in particular, are expected to be specially trained and qualified. This may help explain the growing popularity of therapy dogs, as dogs are relatively straightforward to train for these roles (Flynn et al., 2020; Glenk, 2020). Dogs are recognised for their ability to connect people, acting as a “social lubricant,” and providing unconditional love and comfort (Protopopova et al., 2019). They are also seen as nonjudgmental, which helps children build trusting relationships (Friesen, 2010).

Introducing dogs into classrooms is thought to foster a sense of community and belonging, supporting protective factors for children (Fedor, 2018; O’Haire et al., 2014; Stevenson et al., 2015). At an individual level, studies indicate that dogs can enhance emotional awareness and attachment (Carlisle, 2015; Jalongo, 2015; Meehan et al., 2017), as well as increase self-efficacy (Gruen et al., 2017) and self-worth (Henderson et al., 2020; Woehr & Newman, 2020). Interacting with therapy dogs has also been shown to relieve stress and reduce anxiety (Thelwall, 2019). Overall, the benefits of therapy dogs are multifaceted, positively influencing social, emotional, and psychological well-being (Sweigart, 2024).

However, research into the benefits of therapy animals other than dogs is notably limited. A recent systematic review and meta-analysis by Pandey (2024), have highlighted that dogs display superior interactions in comparison to other species. Furthermore, a literature review by Suba-Bokodi et al. (2024), explored the effects of AAS through the inclusion of other species such as guinea pigs, rabbits, alpacas, donkeys and reptiles and concluded that there was a lack of standardised criteria for their selection and research into their effectiveness in therapeutic contexts was limited. These findings support the need for further research of other animals included therapeutically in schools and to support this, consideration is needed in defines an animal as being suitably qualified and trained to assist therapeutically. Even though therapy dogs have become much more popular and the benefits evidenced in various studies, there remains concerns by schools about the challenges of implementing therapy animals.

2.2.3 Challenges and Concerns About Implementing Therapy Animals

One of the primary concerns expressed by school leaders regarding the implementation of therapy animals is the potential health and safety risks to students. These include issues for students with allergies, asthma, or animal phobias (Friesen, 2010; Smith & Dale, 2016), as well

as the risks of animals biting or carrying diseases (Jalongo, 2005). Some organisations aim to support schools by providing guidance, including national bodies such as IAHAIO and the Society for Companion Animals, as well as charities like the RSPCA and Dogs Trust. However, not all schools are aware of these resources. In contrast, countries/regions such as Norway, Austria, and Bavaria provide training for teaching staff to prepare them for including dogs in schools (Bidoli et al., 2022).

Other studies have shown that schools are also concerned about funding, liability, legal implications, and responsibility for the animal (Anderson, 2021; Friesen, 2010; Jalongo, 2005; Scheckler, 2017). The introduction of a therapy animal can also increase staff workload, as the handler takes on additional duties to care for the animal (Hollingsworth, 2014). Moreover, schools are diverse environments with many cultural and religious beliefs that may influence the acceptability of animal-assisted services (Marscher, 2014; Jalongo et al., 2004).

More recently, concerns have also been raised about risks to the animals themselves (Glenk, 2017; Meints et al., 2017). However, current discussions still tend to focus more on risks to humans, while the welfare of the animals is often overlooked (Bidoli et al., 2022). Although regulations such as health and safety laws, the Animal Welfare Act (2006), and the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) apply, there are currently no regulating bodies overseeing the ethical and safe inclusion of animals in schools. This has led to what Gee et al. (2015) describe as an “underground culture,” in which it is unclear how animals are being incorporated, and whether they are owned by schools, staff, or external organisations. Schools, therefore, are largely left to make their own decisions about including therapy animals, often with minimal external support.

There is a clear gap in knowledge about how animals are included in schools (Gee et al., 2015). While some research has examined the use of therapy dogs in K–12 settings, this remains limited (Baird et al., 2022), and there is even less evidence regarding other species of therapy animals. Existing studies often lack methodological robustness, which reduces the quality and reliability of findings (Purewal et al., 2017), and many rely on small sample sizes (Fine, 2019).

Finally, the literature has not sufficiently addressed the challenges of implementing animal-assisted services (AAS) in schools or the potential negative implications of introducing therapy animals (Jalongo et al., 2004; Baird et al., 2022).

Although several recent reviews and a meta-analysis have explored therapy dog interventions in mainstream schools, focusing on social and emotional outcomes (Wintermantel et al., 2024; Baird et al., 2022) and effects on learning (Reilly, 2020), these studies primarily capture children’s perceptions and emphasise quantitative outcomes. They provide limited insight into the views of wider school staff and offer little consideration of the practical challenges involved

in implementing animal-assisted services (AAS). As these reviews emphasise, the evidence base is dominated by research on dogs, despite a wide range of species being incorporated into schools. This dog-focused lens may overlook how staff perceptions and challenges could differ depending on the animal involved.

To address gaps in existing research, particularly the limited knowledge of how animals are included in educational settings, the predominant focus on dogs, the lack of attention to challenges or potential implications of introducing therapy animals, limited insight into the perspectives of wider school staff, and the methodological weaknesses of previous studies in evaluating benefits, the present systematic literature review investigates school staff perceptions of both the social and emotional benefits, as well as the challenges, associated with incorporating therapy animals in educational contexts. This is explored through the following research question:

What do school staff perceive as the social and emotional benefits, and challenges of incorporating therapy animals in schools?

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 Search Strategy

This review was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Page et al., 2021). Search terms were formulated using the PICO framework (Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome; Higgins et al., 2019). The population (P) was defined as school staff of any role who had experience with the therapeutic use of animals, primarily with mainstream students. The intervention (I) was the incorporation of therapy animals in school settings. No formal comparison group (C) was specified. The outcomes (O) were staff perceptions of the social and emotional benefits and challenges associated with the intervention. Scoping searches were conducted in March 2025 across six electronic databases -ERIC, MEDLINE, PsycINFO, Web of Science, Scopus, and ProQuest—to identify relevant published studies and theses and to further refine the research question. These databases were selected to ensure coverage of research in psychology, education, and the sciences. Following the scoping search, broader search terms were adjusted using synonyms and adapted to each database’s specific search syntax and subject headings; the refined search terms (outlined in Appendix A) were then applied in the final systematic search in July 2025.

2.3.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies published after 2014 were considered eligible, following the release of the International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organizations (IAHAIO)'s 'Definitions for Animal-Assisted Intervention and Guidelines for the Welfare of Animals Involved in Animal-Assisted Interventions'. These guidelines provided standardised definitions for 'Animal-Assisted Therapy' (AAT), 'Animal-Assisted Education' (AAE), and 'Animal-Assisted Activities' (AAA) under the umbrella term 'Animal-Assisted Interventions' (AAI). Perceptions were sought from school staff (of any role) who had experience with the therapeutic use of animals, primarily with mainstream students (see Table 1).

Table 1 *Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer-reviewed journal articles or theses/dissertations. • Published in English. • Published post-2014 (following 'The IAHAIO definitions for AAI and guidance for wellness of animals involved in AAI') • Empirical studies, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods designs. • Schools with therapy animals included as part of AAI, including AAT, AAE, and AAA. These may be animals that belong to staff, the school, or visiting, and include animals included therapeutically but not specified as a 'therapy animal.' • School settings with children aged 5-16 years, including K -12, primary, and secondary schools. • The majority of staff are working in the mainstream school. Studies with different types of schools and/or stakeholders were included if at least 50% of staff were from a mainstream school. • Studies reporting the perceptions of all personnel with educational responsibilities in mainstream K-12 schools, including teachers, teaching assistants, administrators, and support staff. The majority of staff, at 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any other reports, books, and sources of information • Non-empirical studies, e.g., literature reviews, meta-analyses, and systematic literature reviews. • Service animals, assistance animals, and/or companion animals that support only their owner. • Therapy animals that are accessed off the school site, e.g., equine-assisted therapy, farm animals • Pre-school, further and higher education settings, e.g., colleges, universities. • Studies including only special education schools and/or therapy animals supporting a young person with a particular SEN, e.g., ASC, ADHD • Studies reporting only the perceptions of people who are not working in the school. • Studies that did not clearly report any social and/or emotional and/or well-being benefits for students and/or challenges/barriers in having therapy animals.

- least 50% currently or previously, have experienced therapy animals in school.
- Studies that reported social and/or emotional and/or well-being benefits for children and staff and/or challenges/barriers in having therapy animals. Studies may have reported other benefits.
- Studies that reported only benefits to learning e.g., reading, memory, executive functioning, or general benefits to having animals

2.3.3 Study Selection

The systematic electronic database search identified 1,957 records, of which 418 duplicates were removed. Following this, 1,539 study titles and abstracts were screened against the inclusion criteria, with the process facilitated using RAYYAN (a web-based systematic review tool). Of these, 1,510 studies were excluded, leaving 29 studies for full-text assessment. Seventeen of these met the eligibility criteria. In addition, four further studies were identified through earlier scoping searches, reference screening, and direct contact with the authors of a soon-to-be-published study. This resulted in a final total of 21 studies included in the review (see Figure 1).

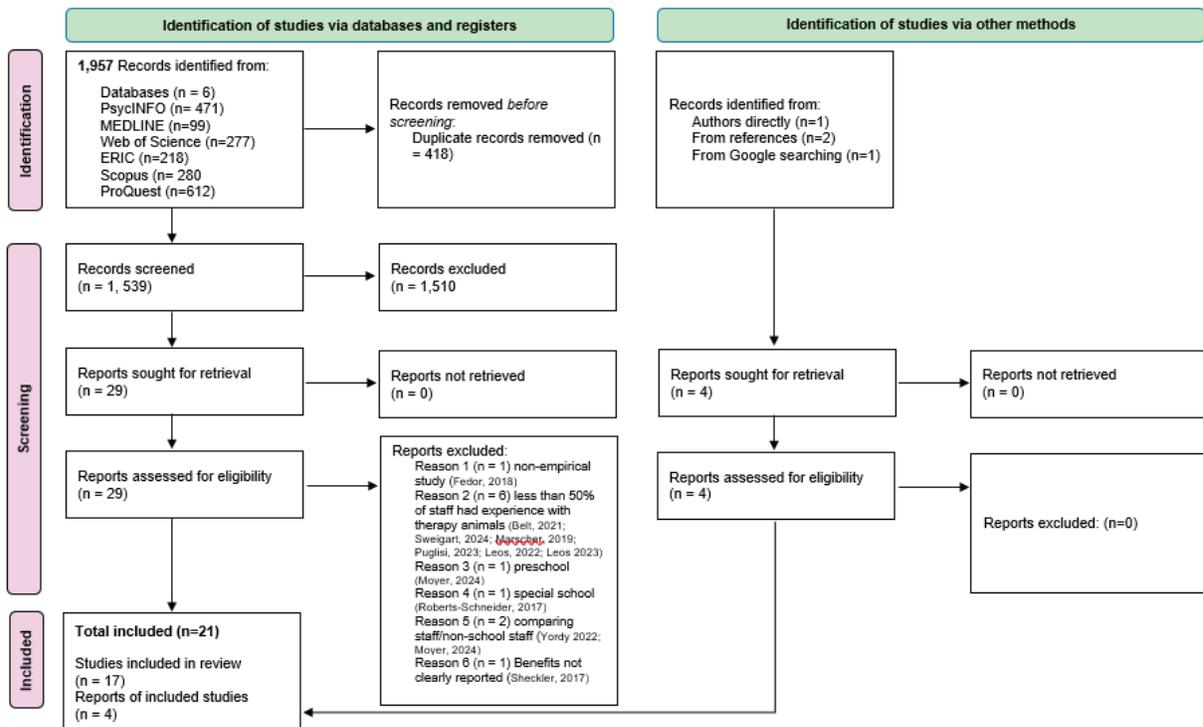


Figure 1 PRISMA Flowchart for Screening and Selection

2.3.4 Quality Assurance of Studies

The quality of the included studies was appraised using the University of Manchester's (UoM) critical appraisal review qualitative and quantitative frameworks (Woods, 2020; see Appendix A). Each study received a score out of 20 across domains concerning data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Scores of 0–6 were categorised as *low quality*, 7–13 as *medium quality*, and 14–20 as *high quality*.

Fifteen studies were subjected to independent appraisal by one author and a volunteer research assistant. For studies assessed with the qualitative framework, the appraisers' scores were either identical or diverged by a single point. A similar level of concordance was observed in the four studies assessed with the quantitative framework, where scores also differed by no more than one point. All discrepancies were subsequently resolved through discussion, and consensus scores were agreed. No study was assessed as low quality; therefore, all studies were retained in the review. The final quality assessment scores are presented in Appendix B, Quality Assessment Summary.

2.3.5 Data Extraction and Analysis

Data were extracted from the twenty-one included studies and are fully summarised in Appendix C, Data Extraction of the Studies Included. A summary list of studies and their quality assurance rating is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 *Summary List of Studies Included*

Study number	Author (year)	Country	Participants / School	Study Design	Quality assurance rating
1	Baird et al. (2023)	Victoria, Australia	118 participants who were education, health, or academic professionals in K-12 settings	Qualitative study using surveys	High
2	Baurys (2020)	Delaware, USA	Five parents of the 2nd-grade pupils and six school staff.	Qualitative research approach with interviews and written observations.	Medium
3	Beck (2015)	New York, USA	Eight responses from current teachers and staff, plus retired teachers, from primary and intermediate schools	Qualitative study using a survey	Medium
4	Broad (2018)	Birmingham, UK	52 primary schools - survey Case study participants included head teachers, staff, and children from two primary schools	Mixed methods: Initial online survey followed by a case study approach	High
5	Farrand & Young Jung (2025)	Arizona, USA	343 Teachers, staff, students, and family/community members at PK-12	Survey	Medium

Chapter 2

Study number	Author (year)	Country	Participants / School	Study Design	Quality assurance rating
6	Fick (2015)	Texas, USA	8 Participants, including principals and teachers from two schools (elementary school and middle school)	Qualitative study, phenomenological approach using semi-structured interviews	High
7	Grove et al. (2021)	Victoria, Australia	15 participants - 13 school staff and 2 coordinators from therapy dog organisations from primary schools, combined primary and secondary schools, and early learning centres.	Qualitative open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews	High
8	Helms (2024)	Minnesota, USA	6 participants from K-12 principals in schools	Qualitative study design: Semi-structured interviews	High
9	Kelsey (2021)	South Carolina, USA	9 teachers, all from an elementary school	Phenomenological study – interviews and focus group	High
10	Lewis et al. (2023)	UK based but worldwide survey	453 survey responses from educators with learners with dogs 9 participants who were interviewed came from primary and secondary schools across England and Wales	Mixed method design	High
11	Maricevic (2022)	New York, USA	16 participants from 11 secondary schools with therapy dog inclusion	Qualitative - semi-structured interviews	High
12	Mercer (2019)	Cumbria, UK	3 school staff interviewed and a further 10 questionnaires were completed	Mixed methods design	Medium
13	Overton (2022)	Missouri, USA	20 elementary school teachers	Qualitative - Surveys, classroom observations and semi-structured interviews	High
14	Romack (2024)	Michigan, USA	54 Participants in total from high schools, middle schools and elementary schools	Survey included quantitative and qualitative questions.	Medium
15	Sloan-Oberdier (2018)	Ohio, USA	7 School counsellors from schools with ages 2-17 years	Phenomenological research method - Semi-structured interviews	High
16	Suppon (2022)	Pennsylvania, USA	45 Elementary school teachers from a single school	Mixed method, sequential design: qualitative interviews informed by quantitative survey results	High
17	Tate (2015)	Missouri, USA	13 staff members from the junior high and elementary buildings.	Mixed methods design	High
18	Tate & Story (2020)	Alabama, USA	16 participants from 3 out of 4 elementary schools were invited to the study, mainly teachers, and also 2 librarians	Qualitative study - interviews	High
19	Van Schoick (2021)	California, USA	6 teachers from a single K-8 magnet school	Qualitative case study design - Semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and observations	High
20	Vardy et al. (2025)	UK	14 participants – primary, secondary and special education schools	Qualitative study design with semi-structured online interviews	High

Chapter 2

Study number	Author (year)	Country	Participants / School	Study Design	Quality assurance rating
21	Zents et al. (2017)	New York, USA	105 staff participants - 2 school psychologists, 3 school counsellors, and one special education teacher from 4 school districts	Semi-structured interviews and a survey	Medium

All studies are referenced in the results section using their study number.

Initial extraction was conducted by the volunteer research assistant, who recorded information on author(s), year, country, research question(s) or aims, participant characteristics and context, data collection methods, data analysis approach, findings, and quality assessment rating into a pre-formatted table. The extraction table was subsequently reviewed and refined by the main researcher.

Given the heterogeneity of the included studies, in terms of methodology, populations, and outcome measures, and the inclusion of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, a narrative synthesis was selected. The studies reporting quantitative data were predominantly descriptive statistics, reflecting sample sizes and survey designs; therefore, meta-analysis was considered. To support a narrative synthesis, the researcher used principles of thematic analysis as a method of identifying, analysing, and interpreting themes when grouping findings of the studies.

The synthesis was guided by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Guidance on Conducting Narrative Synthesis (Popay et al., 2006). A preliminary synthesis was first undertaken to organise the findings of the included studies by extracting data relevant to the research question; the social and emotional benefits, and the challenges of including animals therapeutically. These findings were then grouped into themes and sub-themes based on similarities (see Appendix D, Analytic Framework for Thematic Synthesis, which supported grouping findings using a visual key to explore the nuances in the data further), with overlaps discussed by the main researcher with both her supervisors among all authors until consensus was reached. Patterns were subsequently examined according to country of research, educational setting, and study design. The robustness of the individual studies included were assessed using quality assurance frameworks, and potential limitations were considered. The final themes and sub-themes are presented in the results section.

2.4 Results

2.4.1 Synthesis Overview

A total of twenty-one studies published between 2015 and 2025 were included in the synthesis, reporting staff perceptions of the social and emotional benefits and challenges of incorporating animals in schools. All studies involved dogs in therapeutic roles, though terminology varied and not all referred to them as therapy dogs (TDs); one study also included a cat, and others referenced additional therapy animals (TAs) (6).

Most studies were conducted in the USA ($n = 15$; 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21), four in the UK (4, 10, 12, 20), and two in Australia (1,7). From these studies, eight were published in peer-reviewed journals (1, 3, 5, 7, 10, 12, 20, 21) and thirteen studies were doctoral theses (2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19).

Categorisation by educational setting was complicated by cross-national differences in school systems. Of those identifiable, six studies involved staff from primary/elementary schools (2, 4, 9, 13, 16, 18), six from combined primary and secondary/middle schools (3, 6, 7, 10, 17, 19), and six from K–12 settings (1, 5, 8, 14, 15, 21). Three studies could not be grouped by setting (11, 12, 20).

Regarding study design, seven employed mixed methods (1, 4, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17), while the remainder used qualitative approaches.

2.4.2 Narrative Synthesis

A narrative synthesis of the twenty-one studies was conducted, with findings organised according to the social and emotional benefits and challenges of incorporating therapy animals (TAs) in schools. Four main themes captured emotional benefits: changing emotional state, modulating arousal and supporting emotional regulation, facilitating calmness to aid regulation, and reducing stress and anxiety. Social benefits were represented by two themes: acquiring social skills through interaction and care with the animal and enhancing self- and social-emotional awareness. Three themes were identified for challenges: safety risks (physical and emotional), animal welfare, and practical and ethical considerations of having a TA. Sub-themes within each main theme were also identified to capture more specific patterns and are presented in Figure 2, *Narrative Synthesis Main Themes and Sub-themes*. Each main theme and its sub-themes are described in detail below.



Figure 2 Narrative Synthesis: Main Themes and Sub-themes

2.4.2.1 Social Benefits

Within social benefits, the researcher grouped the findings into two main themes: *fostering a sense of school community and belonging*, and *social and emotional learning*. The first theme reflects staff perceptions that TAs facilitated stronger connections between staff and students, thereby contributing to a more cohesive school community. The second theme captures perceptions that TAs supported students' development of social skills and enhanced their capacity for self-awareness.

2.4.2.1.1 Fostering a Sense of School Community and Belonging

The theme *fostering a sense of school community and belonging* was derived from five sub-themes, and these will be described below.

Promoting a Positive Wider School Climate

Seven studies reported that TAs have a positive impact on the wider school climate (6, 18, 14, 8, 21, 15, 16). Across these studies, the presence of therapy animals contributed to a calmer, more welcoming, and positive school environment. Animals were perceived as creating a "home-like" atmosphere (6, 15), bringing light-heartedness and joy to the school climate (18, 21, 16, 8), and supporting a friendly and comfortable setting for both staff and students.

Increasing Opportunities for Social Interactions and Enhancing Communication

Nine studies reported TAs as promoting opportunities for social interaction with staff, peers, and visitors to the school (1, 4, 6, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15). This was described as particularly evident when students walked around the school with the TD, which created spontaneous opportunities for conversation with a range of people (14, 1, 15, 11) and helped break down social barriers, especially for shy students (6). 17.2% of staff reported that TAs supported students in engaging in more peer interactions (1) and in improving their ability to act appropriately (12, 13). Helms (2024) further noted these interactions as contributing to improvements in students' speech.

Facilitating Connection and Relationship Building

Eight studies reported TAs as facilitating connection and acting as a bridge within the school community, both between staff and students and among peers (6, 7, 8, 11, 15, 16, 18, 19). Staff reported that TAs strengthened social connections, both among students and between staff and students, reduced student self-isolation, and enhanced students' sense of belonging and care for the school community (6, 7, 16).

Enhancing Peer Friendships

Five studies extended the previous sub-theme with staff perceiving a dog in school as enhancing peer friendships (1, 4, 11, 18, 19). Staff indicated that the dog created a shared interest among students, often serving as a topic of conversation (18, 11). In one study, 40% of staff reported that the dog facilitated the development of peer friendships (1). More broadly, TAs were perceived as bringing students together socially, either by attracting others to interact with the dog or by encouraging students to engage with peers they might not otherwise approach (4, 18).

Fostering Unity and Inclusion

In four studies, the presence of a TD supported unity and inclusion within the school community (4, 11, 18, 19). By focusing on the dog, students were perceived as paying less attention to differences such as race, religion, gender, culture (18), or special educational needs (19). In one study, 14/16 staff members indicated that developing strong bonds with the dog provided children with a renewed opportunity to form attachments with others and enhanced their sense of inclusion (4).

2.4.2.1.2 Social and Emotional Learning

The theme *social and emotional learning* was derived from findings that staff reported students developed a range of social skills through their interaction with and care for the animal. Several studies also highlighted staff perceptions that students became more self-aware, which in turn enhanced their awareness of others.

Acquiring Social Skills through Interaction and Care with the Animal

Nine studies reported that interacting with and caring for TAs was perceived to influence students' acquisition of social skills (4, 6, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15, 16, 21). Three studies described how staff observed students mirroring the behaviour of the dog and taking social cues from it. For example, students were noted to follow the dog's response to familiar or unfamiliar adults entering the classroom (4) and to model behaviours demonstrated by the dog, such as patience, empathy, and self-control (6, 15). Staff also reported that caring for the animal increased students' sense of responsibility and fostered cooperation with peers to ensure the animal's safety, with these behaviours transferring to caring for others more broadly (6, 15, 8, 21). In addition, one study suggested that the presence of the TD provided students with a low-risk opportunity to practise social skills without fear of embarrassment (9).

Enhancing Self Awareness and Social- Emotional Awareness

There was a sense that having a TD enhanced self-awareness and social-emotional awareness. Three studies outlined different ways in which this was perceived to occur (4, 6, 11). Staff suggested that by reading the dog's behaviour, students became more aware of their impact on others and became less self-absorbed. They also described how students adjusted the way they spoke to the dog, including changes in tone of voice (11).

2.4.2.2 Emotional Benefits

Within emotional benefits, the researcher grouped the findings into four main themes.

2.4.2.2.1 Changing Emotional State

Changing emotional state included sub-themes: increasing happiness, increasing anticipation, elevating confidence and facilitating restorative mood shifts.

Increasing Happiness, Anticipation and Elevating Confidence

TAs contributed to a range of positive emotional experiences for students, including increased happiness, anticipation, and confidence, as well as facilitating restorative shifts in mood. These effects supported a more engaging, motivating, and emotionally supportive school environment.

Facilitating Restorative Mood Shifts

Six studies reported that the presence of the TA, enabled a restorative mood shift (2, 6, 13, 14, 15, 21). This mood change was described as allowing students to “flip” their day and have a more positive experience. Staff also suggested that TDs were particularly helpful during moments of crisis, supporting students' emotional recovery (14).

2.4.2.2.2 Modulating Arousal and Supporting Emotional Regulation

This theme reflected TAs as instilling a sense of calm, reducing arousal levels, and supporting emotional regulation, as well as their role in reducing stress and anxiety for both staff and students.

Facilitating Calmness to Support Emotional Regulation

Seventeen studies specifically noted that TAs have a calming effect and supported a calm, relaxed environment and contributed to a general sense of calmness (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21). Several studies elaborated that, during moments when students

required additional support to regulate, the TA was perceived as offering more effective support than a human (9, 8, 3), and de-escalation times were reportedly shortened (21).

Reducing Stress and Anxiety

Thirteen studies reported TAs as helping to reduce stress and anxiety levels in both staff and students (1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21). Five of these studies were conducted in primary/elementary schools. Staff suggested that the presence of a TA gave students something else to focus on, reducing their anxiety levels (19). The TA was also perceived as facilitating relaxation and destressing for both staff and students, particularly during exams (4, 11).

2.4.2.2.3 Shifting Cognitive Focus

Several studies reported TAs influencing cognition in both staff and students, redirecting their attention and encouraging them to think differently about situations.

Engaging in Positive Cognitive Reframing

Three studies described how the TA supported changes in both thinking and mood (11, 18, 19). This was perceived to occur by reminding students of their priorities, by providing perspective on their emotions, and helping them to come “out of their own minds.” Staff also suggested that the TD created a space for compassion, which in turn allowed students to develop compassion for themselves (11).

Redirecting Attention

Four studies reported TAs as providing a distraction for students, supporting either transitions during the school day and/or mood changes that enabled students to engage more effectively in their learning (4, 3, 11, 17). The TD was also seen as a conduit for de-escalating tension (11).

Using Cognitive Appraisal to Overcome Fear

In five studies, the presence of TAs, particularly dogs, helped students manage and overcome feelings of fear. The dogs were perceived as facilitating a cognitive reappraisal of these fears, enabling students to think more rationally and feel less afraid (6, 8, 9, 11, 12). For some students, cultural factors influenced their fear, as dogs may be considered unclean or seen as outdoor guard animals in certain cultures. Staff observed that these students learned to self-manage their reactions; even when they did not interact with the dog, they appeared comfortable with its presence in the room (11).

2.4.2.2.4 Experiencing Emotional Security and Attachment

This theme comprised the sub-themes of experiencing comfort, feeling love and acceptance, experiencing a sense of safety and protection, and facilitating self-disclosure, highlighting how staff perceived TAs as supporting students and staff in experiencing emotional security and attachment.

Experiencing Comfort

TAs were perceived to provide both students and staff with comfort, with nine studies highlighting the physical and emotional comfort staff observed animals offering (5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 15, 18, 19, 20). Staff reported that interacting with the TD, such as speaking to it, fostered feelings of comfort; when someone was sad or depressed, being with the dog helped them feel less alone (11, 19). This perception was supported by staff themselves, who were observed seeking out the TD when experiencing a difficult day (5). Physical comfort was also offered through cuddling and stroking the dog (2, 6, 18). Additionally, staff noted that TDs provided comfort to children facing challenging circumstances, such as receiving bad news or experiencing grief and loss (20, 15).

Feeling Loved and Accepted

The studies indicated that TAs helped students feel loved and accepted. Eight studies reported that students experienced unconditional love from the animal and felt free from judgment (2, 3, 5, 6, 11, 12, 19, 21). Staff observed that the TD provided students with an outlet to express love and receive it in return (2), which was particularly important for some students who had limited experiences of feeling or giving love to others (19).

Experiencing a Sense of Safety and Protection

Five studies reported that the presence of a TD was perceived to enhance feelings of safety for both students and staff (4, 11, 17, 18, 19). The dog was seen as providing protection and reassurance. In one instance, a headteacher reportedly chose to have a large TD present during difficult conversations with parents. The dog was perceived as offering reassurance and a sense of protection, contributing to feelings of safety (1).

Facilitating Self- Disclosure

Eleven studies highlighted that TAs facilitated self-disclosure by providing students with comfort to open up and share their feelings (2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 13, 15, 18, 20, 21). Students were able to express emotions to the TD in ways they might not feel comfortable doing with an adult. When students chose to share their feelings with a counsellor, the TD was perceived to support this

process (15). In two cases, the presence of a TD was considered a significant factor in students making safeguarding disclosures, which might not have occurred without the animal's support (4).

2.4.2.3 Challenges

The studies highlighted the perceived social and emotional benefits of including TAs in schools, but it was also important to report the challenges identified. These challenges were grouped into three themes: safety risks, animal welfare, and practical and ethical considerations of having a TA. In several of the studies, challenges were seen as initial difficulties which were then overcome (8, 15).

2.4.2.3.1 Safety Risks (Physical and Emotional)

Staff reported a range of physical and emotional safety risks they perceived TAs presented. These are included in the sub-themes: risk of harm, allergies, and fear of dogs.

Fear of Dogs

Eleven studies reported the challenges posed by fear of animals, particularly dogs (1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 20). Staff expressed concern that TDs could trigger distress in students with phobias, with one study reporting that 38.3% of staff believed this was a risk (1). These fears were often linked to previous negative experiences with animals (15), and staff noted challenges in managing interactions when students were anxious (10). The studies also highlighted staff members' own fears. For some staff, the TD itself was perceived as a source of stress and anxiety (9).

Allergies

Seven studies reported concerns related to allergies (4, 7, 9, 11, 14, 15, 17). These studies emphasised the importance of obtaining consent and implementing risk management strategies, particularly for students with asthma (9). Staff noted practical concerns, such as a TD that frequently sat on chairs and left hair behind (17). One study also reported that staff perceived a child's allergy as not being a significant issue, even when the child developed a rash (4).

Risk of Harm

Only three studies reported a range of further potential risks related to harm, not including fear of dogs and allergies (1, 4, 9). One concern was that children might not understand boundaries and that working TDs were not their personal pets (9). There were also concerns about the

perceived lack of guidance and procedures to ensure safety, with some staff noting that TDs might be 'safer for some students in some schools,' suggesting that both individual student characteristics and environmental factors could increase safety risks (1). Additionally, staff worried that students who failed to develop rapport with the TD might feel rejected, potentially negatively affecting their well-being (1). Finally, staff expressed concern about how students might react to the death of a TA, recognising that this could also have a negative emotional impact (4).

2.4.2.3.2 Welfare of the Animal

Staff also identified animal welfare as a challenge, expressing concern about the risk of children harming the TA and the importance of ensuring its welfare needs were consistently met.

Risks from Children Harming the Animal

Six studies highlighted concerns about children potentially harming the TA. In one study, 44.3% of staff felt it was important to establish screening procedures to identify and support students who might struggle with appropriate interactions, to safeguard the dog (1). This was reinforced where staff noted that incidents were more likely with particular learners (10). Concerns were also raised about the animal's safety during crisis moments, when acts of malice towards the dog were considered possible (4,9,11). Additional risks were noted for smaller animals, which were sometimes perceived as posing less danger and therefore not supervised as closely, increasing the likelihood of harm (20).

Ensuring the Animal's Welfare Needs are Met

Six studies identified concerns about meeting the welfare needs of TAs (1, 10, 11, 12, 15, 20). In one study, 67.9% of staff reported that protecting the safety and welfare of the TD was a challenge (1). Key considerations included limiting the duration of student contact, managing the size of student groups, ensuring adequate space to prevent overcrowding, and providing regular breaks and designated time-out areas for the dog (1, 12). Staff also expressed concern that not all TDs may enjoy their role in schools and highlighted the difficulty of recognising when a dog might be uncomfortable, particularly as many are trained to be obedient and selected for the temperamental trait of being eager to please (10, 20). Additional concerns were raised in schools where more than one dog was present (e.g., TDs, service dogs, or dogs brought in by other professionals), with staff perceiving a risk of potential altercations between animals (11, 15).

2.4.2.3.3 Practical and Ethical Considerations for Having a Therapy Animal

The last theme *practical and ethical considerations for having a TA* encompassed a range of concerns perceived by staff to be important.

Role of the Therapy Animal

Eight studies described staff confusion regarding the role of the TA and highlighted the need for a clear plan with defined aims and goals (1, 4, 6, 7, 8, 14, 15, 20). In several studies, staff reported that TAs were sometimes perceived primarily as a reward, with access limited to 'troubled' or 'bad' students (6, 14). Some staff were noted to 'forget' to include the TA (6), which reinforced the importance of scheduling structured opportunities for access (4, 8, 20). Staff also expressed uncertainty about the various roles a TD might play and how to implement programmes effectively, with much of the reported therapeutic work occurring in an ad hoc manner (20). Finally, concerns were raised that the perceived effects of the TA might be transient, occurring only in the animal's presence and limiting potential long-term impact (4).

Lack of Guidance to Implement Animal-Assisted Services

Three studies shared challenges related to lack of guidance in implementing animal-assisted services (7, 11, 20). Staff perceived a lack of centralised resources to facilitate animal inclusion and the differences between varying district requirements.

Selecting the 'Right Animal/Handler

In four studies, staff referred to the challenge of selecting the 'right' animal, considering factors such as size, breed, and temperament (11, 15, 20, 21). However, there was uncertainty about what these 'right' attributes might be. For example, some staff believed that larger animals posed less risk of being harmed due to their size, though such views were often shaped by stereotypes about particular types of animal species / breed (20). Staff also recognised the importance of ensuring an appropriate match between the animal, its handler, and the school context (11).

Level of Training

Training was identified as a challenge specifically in relation to TDs, as other TAs were not perceived to be subject to the same requirements. Five studies reported concerns about the appropriate level of training (1, 6, 11, 16, 20). Staff highlighted practical issues such as TDs barking, crying for their owners, or urinating in school settings (6). The age and stage of training of the dog were also viewed as important, with puppies considered particularly distracting (16). One study noted the financial cost associated with training TDs (11). There also appeared to be

a lack of understanding among some staff about training requirements, with concerns raised about conflicts when staff brought their own pet dogs into school without recognising the distinction between pets and trained TAs (20).

Unpredictability of the Animal

Staff acknowledged that animals were not predictable, even when highly trained. For example, staff reported that TAs did not always adhere to the lesson plan, sometimes opting out of participation, seeking attention (10), or falling asleep (4). At times, animals were also perceived as a source of distraction within the classroom (9,14).

Dual Role of Being Staff and Handler

In four studies, staff discussed the challenges of balancing the dual role of being both a school staff member and the primary caregiver for the TA, noting the additional workload this created (7, 10, 12, 15). Some staff felt that responsibility for the animal should be shared more broadly to reduce the burden on individuals (7).

Utilising Outside Organisations

One study addressed staff perspectives on using external organisations (11), Staff expressed concerns about the impact on student privacy and confidentiality when incorporating a TA into counselling sessions. They also highlighted challenges related to scheduling, as well as legal considerations regarding animal ownership, insurance, and liability.

Expectations and Acceptance of the Animal by Staff/Handlers

Six studies explored challenges with expectations and acceptance of TAs by staff and handlers (1, 6, 7, 12, 15, 21). Staff noted that not all colleagues were animal lovers, resulting in varying levels of tolerance (6). Some staff also held misconceptions about the TD, such as assumptions about funding, and viewed the dog as a distraction when it barked (15). Additionally, some struggled to recognise the positive impact of the TD on students, and others expressed concern that this lack of understanding might negatively affect students (15). There was also a perceived risk that inconsistent behaviour by some staff members could undermine the dog's training (12).

Cultural Issues

Two studies outlined the challenges related to cultural beliefs, in relation to how dogs are perceived by the Muslim participants (4,11). These studies shared staff views relating to the fear of dogs and challenges in managing cultural differences. The Islamic religion views dogs as unclean but they are not forbidden animals and can be used for specific purposes such as

guarding, hunting and herding. Therefore, some Muslim people do not view dogs as pets or keep them inside.

2.5 Discussion

This systematic review synthesises evidence from 21 studies on school staff perceptions of the social, emotional, and cognitive impacts, as well as the challenges of integrating therapy animals, particularly therapy dogs into educational settings. Fourteen of the twenty-one studies were quality assured as *high quality* and seven studies as *medium quality*. Therefore, this contributes to the confidence in this body of studies included and their findings. Overall, staff perceived TAs to support students' social and emotional development in multiple ways. Socially, TAs were reported to foster a sense of school community and belonging, enhance peer friendships, and promote unity and inclusion, supporting previous research on their role as a 'social lubricant' (Protopopova et al., 2019; O'Haire, 2012; McNicholas et al., 2000). Staff also observed opportunities for social and emotional learning, including the development of social skills, self-awareness, and social-emotional awareness (Carlisle, 2015; Jalongo, 2015; Meehan et al., 2017).

Emotionally, TAs were perceived to increase happiness, anticipation, and confidence, facilitate restorative mood shifts, and, importantly, reduce stress and anxiety for both students and staff. The animals were reported to provide comfort, love, acceptance, a sense of safety, and opportunities for self-disclosure, aligning with prior research on the non-judgmental and emotionally supportive role of animals (Chodkiewicz & Boyle, 2017; Friesen, 2010; Hartwig & Smelser, 2018; Parenti et al., 2013). Staff also identified cognitive benefits, including redirecting attention, supporting positive cognitive reframing, and helping students manage fear, which extended previous findings regarding the broader impact of TAs on student engagement and learning (Maricevic, 2022).

Challenges were also evident, reflecting previously reported concerns regarding risk of harm, allergies, and fear of dogs (Friesen, 2010; Smith & Dale, 2016; Jalongo, 2005). Additional challenges highlighted by staff included ensuring the welfare of TAs, managing the dual role of staff as educators and being responsible for the TAs, selecting and training appropriate animals, addressing unpredictability, and clarifying the role and structured integration of TAs into school programmes (Glenk, 2017; Meints et al., 2017; Gee et al., 2015). Staff also noted practical and ethical considerations, including managing multiple animals, navigating cultural differences, and utilising external organisations responsibly.

Overall, the review demonstrates that while TAs are perceived to provide substantial social, emotional, and cognitive benefits for students, these benefits must be balanced against practical, ethical, and welfare considerations. Schools require clear guidance and structured support to integrate TAs effectively, ensuring both human and animal wellbeing. This systematic literature review has extended beyond just children's and teachers' perspectives to include a broader range of staff, providing deeper positive insight into the social and emotional benefits of therapy animals as well as the challenges of implementation. This is important as it supports findings of prior research outlining the benefits of TA inclusion in schools.

2.5.1 Implications for Practice

Findings support Gee et al.'s (2015) concept of an 'underground culture'. Schools are largely left to decide on animal inclusion with minimal regulatory oversight, which creates challenges, particularly regarding the role of therapy animals (TAs). Schools often lack clarity on the aims and purpose of animal inclusion, and inconsistent terminology further compounds confusion. Terms such as 'visiting dog', 'therapy dog (TD)', 'school dog', and 'facility dog' are used interchangeably, blurring understanding of what therapeutic inclusion actually entails. This raises questions about the utility of terms like TAs and TDs in educational contexts and how useful these are. Using the term 'therapy' implies that it is the animal that provides the therapy, however, therapy is provided by humans. It may be clearer to refer to the animal as 'school animal' or 'visiting animal', supporting clarification that the animals are not pets or providing therapy. This is important when TDs are given a range of roles that do not align with a therapeutic function such as offering reassurance and a sense of protection, contributing to feelings of safety, Baird et al. (2023).

Although guidance and frameworks exist (IAHAOI, 2018), as well as legal provisions for animal inclusion, these are not widely recognised or followed internationally. If schools adhered to such frameworks, they would have clearer direction on how to include TAs and address implementation challenges. While many schools are eager to incorporate animals due to perceived benefits, structured training is essential, not only for safe implementation and risk management but also to maximize the therapeutic impact of animals through well-designed programmes. Effective inclusion requires strategies to support children directly and indirectly, alongside methods to evaluate outcomes. Professional guidance is critical to ensure animals are comfortable and responsive to cues, promoting welfare and effectiveness (McBride & Montgomery, 2018).

There has been an overemphasis in the research on TDs which means schools have a limited evidence base on which to draw regarding other species' welfare, training, and perceptions

related to the varying attitudes and assumptions about different animals' suitability, safety, and therapeutic value (Suba-Bokodi et al., 2024). This makes cross-species comparison difficult; for instance, fear responses to dogs differ greatly from those to rabbits, however this does not seem to be influencing the predominance of dogs in schools. Staff perceptions of size, handling, availability, training needs, and cultural attitudes further shape decisions regarding which animals are included.

Sustainability also emerged as a key issue, particularly when staff take on dual roles as handlers or are responsible for the animal. Workload, staff movement between schools, and funding considerations must be managed carefully. Staff buy-in is critical to ensure equitable animal inclusion across the school. Not all school communities can access or accept TAs, even when staff are supportive due to other practical challenges e.g., funding, available space. Therefore, staff perspectives are essential in decision-making, ethical practice, and policy development regarding animal inclusion.

2.5.2 Strengths and Limitations

The use of PRISMA and PICO frameworks was transparent and detailed, providing a clear and replicable process for study selection and analysis. The comprehensive search across psychology, education, and science databases, broadened the review's scope enhancing its scope. Inter-rater reliability during the quality assurance process further strengthened the transparency and consistency of study inclusion. Finally, the narrative synthesis method was well articulated and demonstrated a clear process for how studies were compared, findings grouped, and themes generated, ensuring transparency (see Appendix E: Analytic Framework for the Thematic Synthesis).

The review has also made a valuable contribution to the field by collating perspectives from a wider range of staff, including those in leadership roles, an area previously underexplored (Baird et al., 2022). Much existing research has focused on animal inclusion for students with SEND and/or those who are neurodiverse. By instead examining the benefits and challenges of animal inclusion within predominantly mainstream settings, this review broadens understanding of how AAS can be implemented more suitably across diverse educational contexts. Furthermore, the review offers some reassurance that welfare and ethical considerations are increasingly being addressed within schools, potentially to a greater extent than previous research has indicated (Bidoli et al., 2022).

However, several limitations should be acknowledged. The studies included were not straightforward in terms of participant characteristics, particularly regarding the ages of children and the balance of staff roles. Staff also varied widely in their experience with animals.

Contextually, most studies originated from the United States, where differences in culture, policy, curriculum, and school structure make direct comparisons with other education systems challenging. These contextual differences contributed to the complexity of applying inclusion and exclusion criteria consistently across studies.

The diversity in staff experience may also help explain why the depth of participants' perspectives appeared limited in some studies. In several cases, perceptions were reported at a surface level (e.g., 'TDs increased happiness') without exploring underlying mechanisms or broader implications. This may partly reflect the constraints of publication formats, but a more detailed exploration would have provided richer insights into both benefits and challenges.

All the included studies involved dogs, with only one study incorporating a cat and a small number of additional animals. This limited species diversity may relate to the search terms used and the prevailing expectation that therapy animals must be formally trained and qualified, resulting in the exclusion of other species. As a result, the findings cannot be easily generalised to animals beyond dogs. Finally, the review was not pre-registered, which would have further enhanced its transparency and credibility.

2.5.3 Future Recommendations for Research

There remains a clear need for future research to address several ongoing gaps. Studies involving animals often face methodological challenges, including small sample sizes, difficulties in establishing control conditions, and the complexity of multiple interacting variables. Future research should aim to triangulate findings more effectively by integrating multiple data sources, for example, combining observational data, behavioural measures, and qualitative feedback to enhance validity. This would reduce reliance on self-reported perceptions, which, although insightful and valuable, are still susceptible to bias and cognitive dissonance.

Existing research has focused heavily on TDs, and it would be valuable to explore the suitability of other species to enable meaningful cross-species comparisons. Research should also extend to students developing neurotypically, as much of the current evidence centres on those with SEND or neurodiverse profiles.

Another area for development concerns the balance of perspectives reported in the literature, which appear predominantly positive. This may accurately reflect participants' experiences, but it was often unclear whether contrasting views were also present. Many studies originate from settings that are already positively disposed toward animal inclusion, raising questions about participant bias. Future studies should therefore explore contexts where animal inclusion has

been less successful or where staff hold more critical views, including those in leadership roles who influence policy and implementation.

Further comparative work is needed to evaluate whether AAS are the most effective means of achieving intended outcomes relative to alternative approaches. This will require the design and evaluation of structured programmes with clearly defined aims, measurable goals, and appropriate outcome indicators. Finally, longitudinal research is required to examine the sustainability of benefits. It remains unclear whether the perceived advantages of animal inclusion persist beyond immediate interactions or extend into wider aspects of children's learning, wellbeing, and social development over time.

2.6 Conclusion

This systematic review provides a comprehensive synthesis of staff perceptions regarding the benefits and challenges of incorporating TAs, particularly TDs within school settings. Across twenty-one studies, the findings suggest that TAs can make meaningful contributions to students' social and emotional development. They appear to foster belonging, inclusion, and emotional wellbeing, supporting the role of animals as social facilitators within educational environments. However, these benefits are interwoven with significant practical, ethical, and welfare considerations that require structured guidance and professional oversight.

The review has contributed new insights by drawing together the perspectives of a wider range of school staff, including those in leadership roles, and by examining animal inclusion within predominantly mainstream settings. This review extends existing literature that has focused largely on specialist / SEND contexts and highlights that, while enthusiasm for animal inclusion is growing, as reflected in the increasing number of schools introducing animals, many continue to operate within an 'underground culture' of limited regulation and inconsistent practice. The findings underscore the need for clearer frameworks, consistent terminology, and structured training to ensure that animal-assisted interventions are implemented safely, ethically, and effectively.

The review highlights the potential of TAs as a valuable, though complex, element of educational practice. With appropriate structure, ethical oversight, and professional support, AAS have the potential to contribute meaningfully to inclusive and emotionally supportive school environments.

Chapter 3 Paws and Principles: The Decision-Making Process of Primary Schools to Include Animals

3.1 Abstract

The inclusion of animals in primary schools is growing rapidly, yet how schools make decisions, which animals are included, and their roles remains poorly understood. Current practice is often inconsistent, unregulated, and lacks standardised guidance. This study explored decision-making processes in English primary schools, focusing on ethical, welfare, and safety considerations. An online mixed-methods survey was completed by headteachers or delegated senior staff from 70 schools, grouped as currently having animals (CH), previously had animals (PH), had considered but decided they did not want to have animals (CDNW), or never considered animals (NC). Visiting animals, particularly dogs, were commonly included, while fewer schools kept animals on-site. CH schools retained animals longer and included them more widely across classes than PH schools. Decisions typically involved leadership teams, governors, staff, parents, and children, with attention to cultural, religious, welfare, and safety factors. Perceived benefits focused on social-emotional development, regulation, and well-being, whereas risks included allergies, bites, and anxiety. Policies and risk assessments were often limited or post hoc.

These findings highlight the need for national frameworks, comprehensive policies, and longitudinal research to support evidence-informed, ethical, and sustainable inclusion of animals in schools. By balancing the needs of children, staff, and animals, schools can safely harness the potential benefits of animal-assisted services while addressing welfare and ethical considerations.

Key words: animal-assisted services, primary schools, decision-making, welfare and safety, social-emotional development, visiting animals, ethical considerations, policy and risk assessment

3.2 Introduction

Although a recent systematic review by Brelsford et al. (2017) highlighted the growing inclusion of animals in schools, little is known about how this occurs in practice, in terms of types of

animals included and the roles they are taking (Vardy et al., 2025) as implementation has often ‘overtaken science’. Across the UK, there are no national data-collection tools capturing how animals are included in educational settings (Hill, 2020). While some guidelines and legislation exists, there are no universal standards governing animal inclusion in schools (Ng et al., 2015). As a result, inclusion often occurs in an “unregulated manner” (Brelsford et al., 2020, p1) and without a “unified approach” (Vardy et al., 2025, p2).

3.2.1 How Schools Include Animals and Reasons for Having AAS

Empirical studies offer only snapshots of current practice, and these vary by region and scope. Hill (2010) found that half of surveyed educational settings in one local authority included animals, while Moorcroft (2015) reported that 22% of schools did so, mainly keeping small rodents. Larger surveys show increasing diversity: Lewis et al. (2022) reported 51.6% of participants had animals in their educational setting, of which 60% of were responses from primary schools with 30 different species identified across the study, with dogs being the most common; Uttley (2013) found approximately two-thirds of early-years settings kept animals, half of which were fish; and Vardy et al. (2025) identified 13 species across schools, again with dogs most prevalent. Munsinger (2025) similarly found that 30% of settings currently included animals and 61% of participants had experienced animals in schools. Despite these findings, the broader picture remains unclear without standardised data collection or terminology.

The term animal-assisted interventions (AAI), and more recently animal-assisted services (AAS), are umbrella terms often used to describe these practices. However, inconsistent application of terminology and a lack of universal definitions further complicate understanding (Davis & Balfour, 1992).

A growing body of research identifies potential benefits for children. Reported gains include improvements in reading and literacy (Kirnan et al., 2018), engagement (Chodkiewicz & Boyle, 2017), motivation (Brelsford et al., 2017), and social-emotional development (Fick, 2015; Helms, 2024), as well as enhanced well-being (Baird et al., 2023). Physiological benefits have also been observed, such as reduced heart rate and blood pressure (Wells, 2009; Friedmann et al., 1983) and increases in beta-endorphins (Allen, Blascovich, & Mendes, 2002). Animals can buffer stress (Allen et al., 2002) and have a calming influence, though individual responses vary (Somerville et al., 2009).

Animals are most included in reading interventions or as therapy dogs (Munsinger, 2025). They are also incorporated into curriculum topics such as life cycles (Vardy et al., 2025). However, their inclusion extends beyond teaching science; it can support multiple areas of development (Herbert & Lynch, 2017). Studies frequently lack clarity about how animals are included,

especially in unstructured approaches (Vardy et al., 2025), and individual animals are often expected to fulfil diverse roles within schools.

Much research has focused on potential effectiveness rather than the suitability of inclusion for specific contexts, staff, or animals. The variability in study design limits generalisability, with AAS used to support therapy (Sweigart, 2023), social-emotional development (Daly & Suggs, 2010), or academic achievement (Gee, Griffin, & McCardle, 2017). Most studies target children with neurodiverse and/or special educational needs, low reading levels and confidence, or mental-health needs. The resulting heterogeneity in intervention types, participant populations, and methodological quality restricts the comparability and applicability of findings (Davis et al., 2015; Maber-Aleksandrowicz, Avent, & Hassiotis, 2016; Cooke & Farrington, 2016; Marino, 2012).

3.2.2 How Schools Decide Whether to Include Animals

Decisions about animal inclusion are complex and influenced by multiple factors, yet few studies have examined these processes in detail. Inclusion is often driven by the availability of an animal (commonly a staff member's pet), the enthusiasm and beliefs of individual educators, available funding, and the support of senior leaders who act as "gatekeepers" (Harte, 2023). Consequently, whether animals are included often depends on the school's culture, policies and leadership approach.

Although decisions may involve multiple layers, headteachers make the final decision as they hold responsibility for health, safety, and safeguarding. Policies related to animal inclusion typically address risk assessment and potential adverse effects but do not always draw systematically on research evidence or ethical guidance (Sweigart, 2023; Gee et al., 2015; Brelsford et al., 2020). Cultural, welfare, and equity considerations for both humans and animals are inconsistently applied (Valiyamattam et al., 2018; Harte, 2023).

Legal responsibilities for UK headteachers are embedded in several statutory frameworks, including the Children Acts (1989, 2004), the Education Act (2002), the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974), Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025), the Animal Welfare Act (2006), the Animals Act (1971) and the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991 and amendments). Additionally, various organisations provide guidance, such as the Society for Companion Animal Studies (SCAS), the National School Dog Alliance, and international bodies including Animal-Assisted Services International (AASI) and the International Association of Human–Animal Interaction Organizations (IAHAIO). Tools such as the Lincoln Education Assistance with Dogs (LEAD) risk-assessment framework (Brelsford et al., 2020) offer structured approaches to evaluating welfare and safety. However, the extent to which such guidance informs school decision-

making is unclear (Gee et al., 2015). Increasing awareness and adoption of existing frameworks could support making more robust, evidence-informed, and ethical decisions (Brelsford et al., 2017).

Leadership commitment appears central to implementation success. Studies suggest that senior leaders who demonstrate 'buy-in' can act as promoters for AAS adoption (Sloan-Oberdier, 2018; Helms, 2024). While some leaders conduct their own research into perceived benefits, contributing to more informed decisions (Farrand & Young Jung, 2025), decision-making is often shaped by personal experiences, perceptions, and peer networks (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2017; Vardy et al., 2025). Teachers who own dogs often describe them as bringing joy and calm to classrooms (Sweigart, 2023), and the trend of teachers bringing personal dogs into schools is increasing (Beetz, 2013; Vardy et al., 2025). However, such decisions should not be driven solely by personal interest and schools should be operating through decision-making processes. The lack of consensus around suitable animal characteristics and training standards makes the process challenging (Vardy et al., 2025) and more risky.

Headteachers must also consider whether AAS are in the best interests of the school and its pupils (Cressey, 2019). In a climate of funding pressures and accountability (Edmiston, 2017), interventions must be both effective and sustainable (Hill, 2020). Inclusive decision-making processes that involve key stakeholders, staff, pupils, parents, and the wider community, can ensure more balanced outcomes and respect diverse values (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2017).

3.2.3 Safety and Ethical Considerations

Safety consistently underpins decision-making. Headteachers' duty of care encompasses safeguarding, health, and safety for both humans and animals. Commonly reported concerns include allergies, bites, zoonoses, phobias, and hygiene (Brelsford et al., 2020; Meints et al., 2022; Bidoli et al., 2022; Jalongo et al., 2004; Grové et al., 2021). However, the contribution of animal welfare to these concerns and to the individual animal's wellbeing is often underexplored. Animals may experience stress, overcrowding, or accidental harm from students (Glenk, 2017; Meints et al., 2017). Ensuring safety requires ethical practices such as teaching children to interpret animal behaviour, retaining the animal's autonomy through provision of accessible escape routes and safe havens which allow them to withdraw from interaction (Brelsford et al., 2020; Bremshorst & Mills, as cited in Peralta & Fine, 2021; Meints et al., 2022; Bidoli et al., 2022). Practical challenges, such as caring for animals overnight or during holidays, also influence decisions.

Some organisations, including People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA, 2019) and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), have expressed opposition to

keeping animals in schools due to welfare concerns. While research has focused largely on human benefits, there is limited examination of animal welfare and ethical implications (Brelsford et al., 2017). Differences in cultural and personal beliefs about animals can further complicate inclusion, as not all stakeholders may share positive perceptions, and some may have religious or cultural reservations (Moorcroft, 2015; Valiyamattam et al., 2018). Ethical and equitable decision-making therefore requires sensitivity to diverse values and consideration of all parties - children, staff, and animals (Harte, 2023).

3.2.4 Theoretical Frameworks for Decision-Making

Understanding how headteachers make decisions is essential, as these choices can significantly impact safety, welfare, and educational outcomes. Decision-making theories offer useful frameworks for examining these processes.

Bounded rationality (Simon, 1957) posits that decisions are shaped by cognitive limitations, time pressures, and available information, leading to 'satisficing', decisions that are good enough rather than optimal. This aligns with the complexity of school environments, where leaders must balance competing priorities under constraints.

In contrast, evidence-based decision-making (Slavin, 2002; Levin, 2013) encourages the use of systematic research, school-performance data, and best-practice evidence to inform choices. However, this can be challenging in the AAS context due to inconsistent methodologies and limited comparable evidence. Additionally, schools vary widely in context, resources, and staff expertise, which constrains the extent to which evidence can guide practice.

Decision-making styles, whether hierarchical or collaborative, also shape outcomes. Top-down decisions made solely by headteachers risk overlooking diverse perspectives, while collaborative approaches involving multiple stakeholders may foster more ethical, informed, and context-sensitive decisions.

3.2.5 Research Gaps and Rationale for the Study

To avoid what Gee et al. (2015) describe as an 'underground culture', where schools independently determine inclusion with minimal oversight, further research is needed into how these decisions are made. Current evidence is limited on how ethical considerations are evaluated, how welfare for all involved is balanced, and how research evidence is applied.

Few studies have explored the perceptions of school leaders regarding animal inclusion (Fick, 2015; Baird et al., 2022). It is therefore important to understand both the barriers and facilitators influencing decision-making (Schoenfeld-Tacher et al., 2017; Gee & Fine, 2019). Negative

experiences and challenges have received little attention (Jalongo et al., 2004; Baird et al., 2022), and methodological limitations, including small sample sizes and researcher bias, remain common (Davis et al., 2015; Maber-Aleksandrowicz et al., 2016; Cooke & Farrington, 2016; Marino, 2012).

Headteachers would benefit from greater access to guidance and holistic ethical frameworks to support evidence-informed decisions (Brelsford et al., 2017). Ensuring the welfare and safety of children, educators, and animals requires robust, transparent, and ethically grounded decision-making. However, this cannot be achieved without first understanding how such decisions are currently made.

3.2.6 Research Aims

Therefore, the study aim is to explore decision-making processes surrounding the inclusion of animals in primary schools, through examining influences, barriers, and facilitators that shape headteachers' choices. The study goal is to identify ways to support ethical, evidence-informed, and holistic decision-making that balances the needs of children, educators, and animals.

Research questions: Animals in primary schools

1. Do schools have a policy regarding inclusion of animals through animal-related activities or more general contact with animals on the school premises?
2. If animals are included, are there suitable risk assessments accounting for risks to staff, children, and the animal(s)?
3. How are animals included in school settings?
4. What are the perceived benefits and risks identified in the decision-making process?
5. What are the decision-making processes regarding animal inclusion?
6. What factors determine how and what type of animals will be involved?
7. What other factors are considered in deciding if animals will be included?
8. If schools have decided to cease including animals, or not to include animals, what factors influenced this decision?

3.2.7 Objectives

To expand the current knowledge and understanding of decision-making regarding including animals in primary schools. This can then facilitate more robust and ethical decision-making in schools and potentially facilitate the development of robust, practical and agreed guidance and standards for this decision-making process.

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 Research Design Overview

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach underpinned by a pragmatic research paradigm, combining quantitative and qualitative elements to gain a comprehensive understanding of school decision-making regarding animal-assisted interventions. Data were collected via an online questionnaire.

Initially, the questionnaire was intended to be qualitative; however, it was recognised that participants were likely to be busy professionals with limited time. To maximise response rates, a concise survey format was adopted, as online surveys typically achieve a 10–30% response rate (National Council for Voluntary Organisations [NCVO], n.d.).

To ensure clarity, appropriate wording, and manageable length, the questionnaire was piloted with four schools known to the researcher. Feedback from this pilot informed subsequent refinements.

3.3.2 Researcher Description

The researcher has professional experience with both animals and teaching and identifies as an animal lover, having personally benefited from the human-animal bond. They have previously included animals in educational settings, observing benefits firsthand, while also recognising associated challenges and exercising caution regarding inclusion.

No prior relationships with participants were known, except where a randomly sampled school was in an area where the researcher or supervisors had previously worked. This familiarity may have introduced some bias in responses from those schools.

3.3.3 Participants

Participants were headteachers or delegated senior staff members from mainstream and special primary schools in England, educating children aged 4–11 years. Headteachers were targeted as principal decision-makers but could delegate survey completion to another staff member. The following inclusion and exclusion criteria in table 3 were applied:

Table 3 *Inclusion and exclusion criteria*

Inclusion	Exclusion
Participants must be a headteacher or a member of senior leadership (e.g., SENCO) delegated by the headteacher.	Individuals not delegated by the headteacher.
Mainstream and special primary schools only (ages 4–11), including infant, junior, or nursery-attached schools.	Non-primary settings such as secondary or all-through special schools (ages 0–19).
AAS include animals brought into school (e.g., staff pets, therapy dogs, animal experience visits, chick hatching) or animals kept on-site (e.g., classroom pets). The survey included tick-box examples to clarify what counted as AAS.	Off-site animal experiences (e.g., farm visits, zoo trips, horse therapy) or on-site farms.
Schools may or may not have used AAS, either currently or previously.	

Schools not meeting the inclusion criteria were thanked, directed to exit the survey, and their data removed.

Participants who were not part of the decision-making process or not aware of how this happened were excluded. However, excluded responses were retained for descriptive summaries, such as types of animals and methods of inclusion, where relevant.

3.3.4 Participant Recruitment

The survey was advertised to schools across England to achieve a geographically diverse sample. Schools were contacted directly by email and via social media platforms including X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook. Gatekeeper approval was obtained for recruitment through online communities.

Professional organisations, such as the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) and National Association for Special Educational Needs (NASEN), were invited to share the survey, though their participation is unclear. These approaches aimed to facilitate wide dissemination and potential snowballing.

Participants completing the survey were offered entry into a prize draw for one of three Amazon vouchers (£100, £75, and £50). Schools participating in the prize draw were notified when the draw took place (Appendix O). The target was 100 participant schools.

3.3.5 Participant Selection

Invitations with the survey link were emailed to schools identified from the UK Department for Education database (<https://get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/Search>). A stratified sampling approach ensured a broad, representative sample. Schools were grouped by geographic location, size, classification, and area type, and samples were systematically drawn from each stratum.

In the first recruitment round, every 70th school was selected. In the second round, schools positioned midway between the initial selections were contacted. Contact details were obtained from school websites or the Department for Education database. Both mainstream and special primary schools were included.

3.3.6 Data Collection

Data were collected via an online mixed-methods questionnaire, combining quantitative and qualitative elements. Question types included nominal (binary and categorical), ordinal (Likert-scale), scale, and free-text items. The questionnaire was developed and administered using Qualtrics.

Consent was obtained electronically via checkboxes following a participant information sheet. Participants could save, progress and complete the survey in multiple sittings. The estimated completion time was ~20 minutes.

At the end of the survey, respondents were invited to take part in a short follow-up interview; due to time constraints, no interviews were conducted.

The survey was open from 11 November 2024 to 3 February 2025. The first distribution sent 488 emails (11 November 2024), followed by 497 emails in the second round (7 January 2025), totalling 985 invitations. Reminder emails were sent after a set period. Participants could withdraw data by emailing the researcher by 10 a.m. on 7 February 2025.

The questionnaire had three main sections with branching logic based on participant responses. All participants first completed eligibility and demographic questions, then were directed to one of four tailored sections:

- CH – currently have animals included
- PH – previously had included animals
- CDNW – considered but did not want to include animals
- NC – never considered animals

These sections explored decision-making processes relevant to each group. Appendix K has a flow chart showing the branching logic of the survey and outlining which questions participants were asked and Appendix L details the Qualtrics Survey Flow. The full survey instrument is provided in Appendix M.

Ethical approval was granted by the University of Southampton Ethics Committee prior to data collection (Appendix F, G, H, I and J for further details of ethics application).

School-level anonymity was maintained. Participants provided school name, postcode, and role for follow-up, but this information was not used in analysis. Qualitative quotes were anonymised, and school locations were referred to by UK region.

Participants wishing to enter the prize draw or follow-up surveys provided emails through a separate linked Qualtrics form, ensuring separation from survey responses. Data were stored securely on a password-protected computer and university server.

3.3.7 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics to summarise frequencies, rather than conducting inferential tests or calculating central tendencies. Responses were recorded in Excel, and a decision tree was used to separate responses according to participant groups, allowing branching of data: CH, PH, CDNW, and NC.

Frequencies were converted to percentages to allow comparisons between groups. Likert-scale responses were grouped into:

- ‘Of interest’ – combining *slightly important* and *somewhat important*
- ‘High importance’ – combining *very important* and *extremely important*

Responses marked ‘*no, it did not apply*’ or ‘*not important*’ were not combined. Missing data were removed, and percentages were calculated based on valid responses for each question. It became apparent during the analysis that participants did not fully understand the question about animals kept in schools and animals that were brought in. The researcher amended this in the data where this error seemed apparent.

Caution is required when interpreting percentages for small groups, as small numbers of responses may produce large percentage changes. Non-parametric tests (e.g., Chi-square, Mann–Whitney U) were considered but not conducted due to small group sizes. Most analyses were conducted in Excel, with some calculations performed manually due to branching and formula complexities.

3.4 Results

A total of 70 schools responded, a response rate of 7.1%. One response was completely removed as only demographic questions were completed, and the sample consisted of 69 participants. Questionnaires were completed by 58 headteachers and 11 delegated staff members. Among these:

- 43 schools currently included animals (CH). Of these, one response was removed from the descriptive analysis as inclusion was unplanned, and two further responses were removed as the respondents were not part of the decision-making process, leaving 40 CH schools providing decision-making data.
- 10 schools had previously included animals (PH), with 7 providing decision-making data.
- 9 schools had considered including animals but decided not to (CDNW), with 4 providing relevant responses from those involved in the decision-making process.
- 7 schools had never considered including animals (NC).

Appendix U lists which participants (by their participant numbers) were in CH, PH, CDNW and NC groupings and whether their responses were included in the decision-making analysis.

Among respondents, 80% (n = 56) were mainstream primary schools. The remainder were infant or junior schools, and 6% (n = 5) were special schools. 38.5% (n = 27) of schools had attached nurseries. 35.7% (n = 25) had between 101–250 children on roll. 91% (n = 64) of classes contained 21–30 children, which is typical for mainstream primary schools.

Geographically, schools represented a range of counties across England. A larger number of responses were received from Wiltshire (17%, n = 12), Gloucestershire (9%, n = 6), and Hampshire (7%, n = 5); areas located near the researcher's base, in comparison to other counties and this may have been to snowballing effects of participants who knew the researcher (Table 4). As shown in Table 5, (Geographical Type of Area), most responses came from urban areas, followed by rural villages. Fewer schools from inner-city locations responded, which may reflect more limited space for animal inclusion.

Table 4 *Responses per Regions of England*

Region in England	Responses	
	N	%
North East England	1	1.4
North West England	6	8.6
Yorkshire and the Humber	5	7.1
East Midlands	6	8.6
West Midlands	6	8.6
Greater London	1	1.4
East England	4	5.7
South East England	20	28.6
South West England	21	30.0

Table 5 *Geographical Type of Area*

Type of Area	Overall		CH		PH		CDNW		NC	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Inner city	6	9.0	3	50.0	1	17.0	2	33.0	-	0.0
Urban	22	31.0	13	59.0	3	14.0	2	9.0	4	18.0
Suburban	12	17.0	8	67.0	3	25.0	-	0.0	1	8.0
Rural town	13	19.0	7	54.0	2	15.0	3	23.0	1	8.0
Rural village	17	24.0	12	71.0	1	6.0	2	12.0	1	6.0

Additional demographics are provided in Appendix P.

3.4.1 RQ1 Do schools have a policy regarding inclusion of animals through animal-related activities or more general contact with animals on the school premises?

Not all schools answered and Table 6 summaries the responses to each question. Among CH schools 65% (n = 22) reported having a policy related to animal activities or contact with animals, and 94% (n = 32) had completed risk assessments. A small proportion (8.8%, n = 3) had

no policies or risk assessments in place. All PH schools that answered these questions (100%, n = 6) had completed risk assessments, and 43% (n = 3) had a policy related to animal activities. 71% (n = 22) of CH all PH (100%, n = 6) of those that PH animals reported considering relevant legislation, such as the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, to understand their legal responsibilities.

Table 6 *School Policies related to the Inclusion of Animals*

Policies related to inclusion of animals	CH N = 43				PH N=10			
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Does the school have a policy regarding animal-related activities?	22	65.0	12	35.0	3	43.0	4	57.0
Does the school have a policy regarding general contact with animals on the school premises?	22	65.0	12	35.0	2	29.0	5	71.0
Does the school have a risk assessment procedure / policy regarding animal-related activities?	32	94.0	2	6.0	6	100.0	0	0.0
Does the school have a procedure/policy regarding review of animal related activities?	21	62.0	13	38.0	3	50.0	3	50.0

3.4.2 RQ2 If animals are included, are there suitable risk assessments accounting for risks to staff, children, and the animal(s)?

55% (n = 17) of CH and 50% (n = 3) of PH were willing to share their policies; however, only four schools uploaded documents to Qualtrics.

One of the shared documents was a risk assessment using a risk matrix to grade potential human harms related to the animals, such as worming requirements, managing bites and allergies, and lone working when caring for animals. There were no identified risks exclusively related to the animal's welfare, at either individual or breed/species level.

The remaining three documents related to schools with a therapy dog, though their quality and comprehensiveness varied. It was not clear in the policies if the visiting dog was from an external organisation or being brought in by a staff member, as only one policy specified the dog's owner. One was a brief policy outlining the rationale for having the dog and general safety guidance for staff and pupils; however, it was limited to a single page of A4.

The second policy was more detailed, describing a puppy growing up within the school. It included information on training plans, safety protocols, bite management, appropriate interactions, and the handler's responsibilities. However, it did not specify the dog's role within the school.

The final policy was the most comprehensive. It clearly outlined the roles of different individuals (e.g., SLT, dog owner, staff, and pupils) and the importance of consent, (parental and the dog). It also contained sections on dog welfare, including grooming, supervision, and managing safety risks such as allergies, bite procedures, and zoonotic disease prevention. An accompanying risk assessment provided detailed management strategies for each identified risk. However, this document also did not define the dog's intended role or activities within the school.

3.4.3 RQ3 How are animals included in school settings?

Of the 40 CH schools that responded, 28 provided information on the types of animals either kept at school, brought in by staff from home, or brought in by external organisations (Appendix Q). Across these schools, there were 11 different species either being kept on-site or visiting. These included dogs, rabbits, guinea pigs, gerbils, tortoises, chicks/chickens, ducklings, goats, a pony, reptiles, and 'minibeasts'. Only 17.9% (n = 5) kept animals on school premises, with rabbits, chickens, guinea pigs, and goats being most common. Appendix O provides a detailed breakdown of the types of animals reported. Table 7 (Animals in Schools – School Animals vs Visiting Animals) shows 28 CH schools provided information. Of these 42.9% (n = 12) of schools had staff bringing in animals, while 28.5% (n = 8) hosted animals from external organisations only.

Table 7 *Animals in Schools – School Animals Vs Visiting Animals*

Animals in Schools – source of animal /where they live (N=28)	n	%
Only have animals kept in school/ grounds	1	3.6
Only have animals staff bring in from home	12	42.9

Animals in Schools – source of animal /where they live (N=28)	n	%
Only have animals brought in by external organisations	8	28.5
Have animals kept in school/ grounds and brought in by staff	3	10.7
Have animals kept in school/ grounds and brought in by external organisations	0	0.0
Have animals brought in by staff and external organisations	3	10.7
Have animals kept in school/ grounds and brought in by staff and external organisations	1	3.6

Among these CH schools, 89.3% (n = 25) had a visiting dog. 64.3% (n = 18) had a dog brought in by staff, and 21.4% (n = 6) had a dog brought in by an external organisation. One school reported having both a dog brought in by staff and one from an external organisation, while another school had a staff-owned dog and an external organisation that brought in puppies. External organisations also brought in minibeasts, reptiles, chicks, and ducklings.

Seven PH schools provided data of the species previously included. Three had fish and/or chicks or chickens, four had visiting dogs, chickens, and guinea pigs brought in by staff, and three reported visiting pigs, insects, reptiles, birds of prey or owls, and other “exotic animals” brought in by external organisations. Two-thirds (66.6%, n = 4) of PH schools had visiting dogs brought in by staff.

Animals were generally kept for more than a year by CH schools, with 38% had animals for 1–2 years, 21% for 3–5 years, and 26% for 6–10 years. In contrast, schools that PH animals had mostly kept them for less than two years (Table 8).

Table 8 *Duration of Including Animals*

Length of time	CH		PH	
	(N=34)		(N=8)	
	n	%	n	%
Less than 1 year	3	9.0	1	13.0
1-2 years	13	38.0	6	75.0
3-5 years	7	21.0	1	13.0

Length of time	CH		PH	
	(N=34)		(N=8)	
	n	%	n	%
6-10 years	9	26.0	0	0.0
Over 10 years	2	6.0	0	0.0

When animals are included in schools, they are most often used with individual children or small groups. In some cases, specific classes, year groups, or key stages are targeted.

The inclusion of animals across the whole school was notably higher in CH schools (76%, n = 26) compared with PH (29%, n = 2). Table 9 demonstrates that CH schools tend to include them more broadly across the school community.

Table 9 *Targeting Inclusion of Animals*

Groups of Children	CH				PH			
	(N=43)				(N=7)			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
Individual children	31	91.0	6.0	6.0	5	71.0	0	0.0
Small groups of children	30	88.0	6.0	6.0	6	86.0	0	0.0
Class of children	23	68.0	24.0	26.0	3	43.0	3	43.0
Particular Year Groups	9	26.0	6.0	18.0	3	43.0	3	43.0
Particular Key Stages	11	32.0	6.0	15.0	2	29.0	3	43.0
Whole school	26	76.0	6.0	7.0	2	29.0	3	43.0

As Table 10 shows, in CH schools animals kept on-site were included to support the teaching of PSHCE (Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education), to develop social skills, and as therapy animals to promote well-being.

In comparison, animals brought in by staff were most included as therapy animals and to support the development of social skills, followed by providing opportunities for pupils to meet animals, assisted reading activities, and support for teaching PSHCE.

Visiting animals from external organisations were included in a variety of ways; however, in half of the schools, their inclusion was primarily aimed at supporting social skills.

Table 10 *How Animals are Included in Schools*

Ways animals are included	CH						PH					
	Animals kept in the school / school grounds		Staff that bring in their own animals		External organisations that bring in animals		Animals kept in the school / school grounds		Staff that bring in their own animals		External organisations that bring in animals	
	(N=5)		(N=23)		(N=14)		(N=3)		(N=5)		(N=3)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
To support teaching particular parts of the curriculum	1	20.0	8	35.0	7	50.0	1	33.0	1	20.0	2	67.0
To support teaching of PSHCE (Personal Social Health and Citizenship Education)	4	80.0	14	61.0	4	29.0	2	67.0	2	40.0	0	0.0
For assisted reading	2	40.0	15	65.0	5	36.0	1	33.0	3	60.0	1	33.0
To support development of social skills, including communication and empathy	4	80.0	21	91.0	7	50.0	3	100.0	3	60.0	1	33.0
As therapy animals to support well-being	4	80.0	21	91.0	4	29.0	1	33.0	4	80.0	1	33.0
To provide an experience of meeting an animal e.g., petting, observing	2	40.0	18	78.0	6	43.0	1	33.0	1	20.0	1	33.0
Class pets for children to look after	1	20.0	3	13.0	0	0.0	1	33.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Animal rearing experiences e.g., chick hatching	1	20.0	2	9.0	5	36.0	2	67.0	1	20.0	0	0.0

3.4.4 RQ4 What are the perceived benefits and risks identified in the decision-making process?

3.4.4.1 Perceived benefits

CH schools highlighted a number of benefits (Table 11), with the three considered of high importance being:

- Supporting social skill development (90%, n = 36),
- Supporting regulation and providing a calming effect (87.5%, n = 35), and
- Serving as therapy animals to support well-being (82.5%, n = 33).

Schools were less likely to include animals for learning benefits or to provide a stimulating effect. Including animals as a class pet was not considered a reason in 55% (n = 22) of schools. Table 11 presents a more detailed overview of the perceived benefits.

Some schools provided additional context for their responses. For example, one school (P7) reported that animals not only helped children socialise but also develop verbal skills, noting that the ‘simple presence provides verbal stimulus to help your child practice talking and socialising with another being’. Another school (P17) included animals for a very specific purpose: reducing fear of dogs. Seventy-five percent of pupils at this school followed the Muslim faith, and many were culturally apprehensive about dogs. The school implemented a programme to support children to behave calmly and confidently around dogs, successfully reducing fear.

Table 11 CH Schools *Perceived Benefits*

<i>Initial Reasons for the Inclusion of Animals: CH Schools (N = 40)</i>									
Reason category	Purpose	No, it did not apply		Not important		Of interest		High importance	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Balancing arousal levels (emotionally and physically)	To have a calming effect and support self-regulation	2	5.0	1	2.5	2	5.0	35	87.5
	To have a stimulating effect (e.g., novelty of animals, increasing motivation)	3	7.7	6	15.4	10	25.6	20	51.3
	To provide physical activity (e.g., walking the animal, cleaning out pens)	9	22.5	10	25.0	12	30.0	9	22.5
Therapeutic benefits	As therapy animals to	3	7.5	1	2.5	3	7.5	33	82.5

Chapter 3

Initial Reasons for the Inclusion of Animals: CH Schools (N = 40)

Reason category	Purpose	No, it did not apply		Not important		Of interest		High importance	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
	support well-being								
	To support developing a therapeutic relationship with an animal	3	7.5	1	2.5	6	15.0	30	75.0
Social benefits	To support the development of social skills (communication, empathy)	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	10.0	36	90.0
	To provide an experience of meeting an animal (e.g., petting, observing)	2	5.0	0	0.0	12	30.0	26	65.0
	To give a sense of purpose and responsibility through looking after an animal	10	25.0	1	2.5	14	35.0	15	37.5
	Class pets for children to look after	22	55.0	4	10.0	10	25.0	4	10.0
	To support teaching about animal welfare	5	12.5	3	7.5	14	35.0	18	45.0
	To support the teaching of PSHCE	4	10.3	0	0.0	15	38.5	20	51.3
Learning benefits	To support teaching particular parts of the curriculum	9	23.1	7	17.9	12	30.8	11	28.2
	For assisted reading	8	20.0	5	12.5	11	27.5	16	40.0
	Animal rearing experiences (e.g., chick hatching)	21	52.5	2	5.0	8	20.0	9	22.5

Initial Reasons for the Inclusion of Animals: CH Schools (N = 40)

Reason category	Purpose	No, it did not apply		Not important		Of interest		High importance	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Equity benefits	To offer equity in accessing animals for those who do not have access outside of school	8	20.0	4	10.0	11	27.5	17	42.5

In comparison, PH schools reported different perceived benefits (Table 12). Their focus was primarily on social benefits, including:

- Supporting the development of social skills,
- Providing opportunities for pupils to meet animals, and
- Giving a sense of purpose and responsibility through caring for an animal.

These benefits were reported outside the context of PSHCE teaching. Beyond social benefits, PH schools also identified advantages related to therapy animals, supporting teaching about animal welfare, and animal-rearing experiences. Table 12 provides a detailed overview of these perceived benefits.

Table 12 *Perceived benefits for Schools that PH Animals*

Initial Reasons for the Inclusion of Animals: Schools that PH (N = 40)

Reason category	Purpose	No, it did not apply		Not important		Of interest		High importance	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Balancing arousal levels (emotionally and physically)	To have a calming effect and support self-regulation	1	14.3	0	0.0	2	28.6	4	57.1
	To have a stimulating effect (e.g., novelty of animals, increasing motivation)	1	14.3	0	0.0	4	57.1	2	28.6

Chapter 3

Initial Reasons for the Inclusion of Animals: Schools that PH (N = 40)

Reason category	Purpose	No, it did not apply		Not important		Of interest		High importance	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
	To provide physical activity (e.g., walking the animal, cleaning out pens)	1	14.3	1	14.3	3	42.9	2	28.6
Therapeutic benefits	As therapy animals to support well-being	1	14.3	0	0.0	1	14.3	5	71.4
	To support developing a therapeutic relationship with an animal	1	14.3	1	14.3	0	0.0	5	71.4
Social benefits	To support the development of social skills (communication, empathy)	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	100.0
	To provide an experience of meeting an animal (e.g., petting, observing)	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	14.3	6	85.7
	To give a sense of purpose and responsibility through looking after an animal	0	0.0	1	14.3	0	0.0	6	85.7
	Class pets for children to look after	1	14.3	2	28.6	3	42.9	1	14.3
	To support teaching about animal welfare	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	28.6	5	71.4
	To support the teaching of PSHCE	1	14.3	0	0.0	4	57.1	2	28.6
Learning benefits	To support teaching particular parts of the curriculum	1	14.3	0	0.0	5	71.4	1	14.3
	For assisted reading	3	42.9	2	28.6	2	28.6	0	0.0

Initial Reasons for the Inclusion of Animals: Schools that PH (N = 40)

Reason category	Purpose	No, it did not apply		Not important		Of interest		High importance	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
	Animal rearing experiences (e.g., chick hatching)	1	14.3	0	0.0	1	14.3	5	71.4
Equity benefits	To offer equity in accessing animals for those who do not have access outside of school	1	14.3	0	0.0	2	28.6	4	57.1

In terms of which children were identified as potentially benefiting from the inclusion of animals, both CH and PH schools recognised advantages for children with SEND and those with mental health or well-being needs (see Table 13). However, more CH schools (n = 28) than PH (n=1) reported perceived benefits for all children, including those with no identified additional needs.

Table 13 *Children Identified as Potentially Benefiting from the Inclusion of Animals*

Types of children	CH		PH	
	N=40		N= 7	
	n	%	n	%
Children with identified special educational needs	28	70.0	4	57.1
Children with identified mental health and wellbeing needs	33	82.5	6	85.7
Children from a disadvantaged background e.g., financially, family support, experienced abuse	23	57.5	1	14.3
Other children with no identified needs	17	42.5	1	14.3
All children	28	70.0	1	14.3

3.4.4.2 Perceived Risks

PH schools generally perceived higher risks associated with animal inclusion than CH schools, except for risks to the well-being of the local community (Table 14).

Most CH schools categorised risks associated with human health and safety as of High Importance, including allergies (83.8%) and injury (91.9%). The remaining schools considered these risks to be “of interest.” Zoonotic diseases were perceived as less of a risk in CH schools than PH schools, with 11.1% of CH schools indicating that this risk did not apply (further details are provided in Appendices P and Q).

Additionally, 37.8% of CH schools expressed concern about staff anxiety or fear of animals, and 59.5% reported concern about children’s anxiety or fear of animals.

Table 14 *Perceived Risks of High Importance Considered During Decision-Making by Schools*

Category	Risk	CH N=38		PH N=7	
		n	%	n	%
Human Health and Safety	Risk of allergies	31	83.8	7	100.0
	Risk of injury, including biting	34	91.9	7	100.0
	Risk of disease and/or illness	29	78.4	6	85.7
	Risk of zoonoses (infections that can pass from animals to humans)	21	58.3	5	71.4
Human wellbeing	Staff Dislike (personal or cultural) of animals	13	35.1	4	66.7
	Children's Dislike (personal or cultural) of animals	16	43.2	4	66.7
	Staff Anxiety / Fear of animals	14	37.8	4	57.1

Category	Risk	CH		PH	
		N=38		N=7	
	Children's Anxiety / Fear of animals	22	59.5	4	57.1
	Possible impact on local community	9	24.3	1	16.7
	Possible impact on school neighbours	6	16.2	2	28.6

3.4.5 RQ5 What are the decision-making processes regarding animal inclusion?

CH and PH Schools were asked about the decision-making process they undertook. In all cases, a wider team of decision-makers was involved, typically including the headteacher or, in one school, the deputy headteacher replaced the headteacher.

CH schools often involved the governing body in the decision. In addition, some schools included roles such as the Director of Education, School Business Manager, Forest School Leader, and EYFS Teacher. In PH schools, decision-making teams included the Site Manager and Specialist Resource Provision lead. Table 15 provides further details on the composition of the decision-making teams.

Table 15 *Team Members Initially with Responsibility for Making the Decision to Include Animals*

Member of Decision-Making Team	CH		PH	
	N=40		N=7	
	n	%	n	%
Head teacher	39	97.5	7	100.0
Deputy head teacher	20	50.0	3	42.9
Member of the senior leadership team	10	25.0	2	28.6
Special Educational Needs Coordinator	12	30.0	2	28.6
Inclusion Coordinator	3	7.5	0	0.0

Member of Decision-Making Team	CH		PH	
	N=40		N=7	
	n	%	n	%
Member of pastoral team	11	27.5	1	14.3
Governors	13	32.5	0	0.0
Whole school	1	2.5	7	0.0

Schools also consulted a range of stakeholders (Table 16). Both CH and PH schools consulted their staff teams, with only one (CH) school not doing so. Of the CH schools, 77.4% (n = 24) consulted parents, and 80.6% (n = 25) consulted children. School neighbours and the local community were rarely consulted, with the exception of one CH school that CH animals.

Table 16 *Other Stakeholders Consulted*

Groups of People	CH		PH	
	N=31		N=7	
	n	%	n	%
Staff	30	96.8	7	100.0
Parents	24	77.4	4	57.1
Children	25	80.6	3	42.9
School neighbours	0	0.0	0	0.0
Local Community	1	3.2	0	0.0

Among the consulted stakeholders, the majority were supportive of including animals. Percentages for each group are provided in Table 17. Stakeholders who expressed concerns were primarily worried about allergies, fear of dogs, and the welfare of chicks following chick-hatching schemes. Additional concerns related to cultural beliefs regarding dogs as unclean and the inclusion of outdoor animals.

Table 17 *Were any Stakeholders Unhappy about the Decision to Include Animals*

Stakeholders	CH		PH	
	N=32		N=7	
Unhappy	n	%	n	%
Yes	7	22.6	1	14.3
No	24	77.4	6	85.7

Both CH and PH schools relied on consulting individuals with personal experience of animals, although these individuals were not drawn from the wider network of schools. Other external sources consulted included professionals, books, and websites of professional or educational bodies, as well as animal and educational charities. Details of the different external resources consulted are provided in Table 18. Notably, none of the advice obtained was reported as discounted by the schools.

Table 18 *External Resources Used in the Decision-Making Process*

External Resources	CH				PH			
	N=32				N=7			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Colleagues in other schools within the same academy / trust / federation	4	12.9	27	87.1	0	0.0	6	100.0
Colleagues in other schools	3	10.3	26	89.7	1	16.7	5	83.3
Those who have personal experiences with animals	24	77.4	7	22.6	7	100.0	0	0.0
Professionals external to the school	16	50.0	16	50.0	6	85.7	1	14.3
Social media	2	6.7	28	93.3	1	16.7	5	83.3
Research studies	16	53.3	14	46.7	3	42.9	4	57.1
Books about animal care	14	46.7	16	53.3	2	40.0	3	60.0
Books about animal assisted interventions	12	40.0	18	60.0	2	33.3	4	66.7

Chapter 3

Websites of professional bodies/animal charities/educational charities	22	75.9	7	24.1	5	83.3	1	16.7
Commercial/other websites	5	16.7	25	83.3	0	0.0	5	100.0

As part of the decision-making process, schools considered how they would review the inclusion of animals. 10% (n = 3) of CH schools indicated that this would not be reviewed. Table 19 outlines the approaches used by schools to review animal inclusion. In CH schools, reviews were primarily conducted through stakeholder feedback and informal discussions.

Table 19 *Reviewing Inclusion of Animals to Inform Decision-making to Continue*

Review Processes	CH		PH	
	N=30		N=6	
	n	%	n	%
It was/ would not be reviewed	3	10.0	0	0.0
Informal discussions and sharing of anecdotal evidence	19	63.3	3	50.0
Regular formal discussions with the other decision-makers	11	36.7	1	16.7
As part of the school development plan	5	16.7	3	50.0
By the governing body / trustees	10	33.3	0	0.0
Measuring the impact of using animals on children	13	43.3	3	50.0
Feedback from parents	25	83.3	3	50.0
Feedback from staff	23	76.7	4	66.7
Feedback from children	26	86.7	5	83.3

Schools generally did not have additional funding for including animals, with the exception of two schools. One CH school used Pupil Premium and Service Children Premium, while one PH school used Pupil Premium and Sports Premium linked to mental health and well-being.

Consequently, the use of additional funding was not a standard part of the decision-making process.

3.4.6 RQ6 What factors determine how and what type of animals will be involved?

65.8% (n = 25) of CH schools expressed concern about whether a staff member would be the legal owner, aligning with earlier findings regarding staff bringing animals into school. The choice of animal, if owned by the school, was considered less important compared with other factors, likely reflecting the types of animals schools chose to own (e.g., rabbits, guinea pigs, chickens). The temperament of the animal was considered highly important by 73% (n = 27) of CH schools, which was also reflected in responses regarding where the animal would live and who would care for it. Financial implications were generally less important for CH schools compared to PH schools.

Cultural and religious factors were also considered important in CH schools, with 67.7% (n = 25) noting cultural factors and 67.5% (n = 25) religious factors. In contrast, only 33.3% of PH schools reported these factors as being of high importance.

Factors considered most important (see Table 20) were related to how the animal would be included and its welfare. CH schools placed strong emphasis on teaching children to interact safely (94.6%) and on consideration of how children would be allowed to interact (97.3%). Additionally, 73.0% (n = 27) reported that teaching children to understand animal communication and body language was highly important.

Regarding animal welfare, both CH and PH schools rated the following as highly important:

- Monitoring the animal for signs of stress (CH = 94.3%; PH = 100%)
- Ensuring uninterrupted time away from people (CH = 97.1%; PH = 85.7%)
- Plans to manage if the animal is injured or not properly cared for (CH = 91.2%; PH = 100%)

In addition, 91.4% (n = 32) of CH schools considered it important to allow the animal choice over whether to interact. Less importance was placed on the longer-term plan for the animal, including its retirement. Few s considered alternatives to having an animal as highly important, 20.6% (n = 7) of CH and 14.3% (n = 1) of PH schools.

Table 20 *Factors Considered During Decision-Making by Schools of High Importance*

Category	Factor	CH		PH	
		N=38		N=7	
		n	%	n	%
Ownership of the animal	Who would own the animal – be its legal keeper	22	57.9	3	42.9
	If the school would be the legal owner of the animal	5	13.5	3	42.9
	If a member of staff would be the legal owner of the animal	25	65.8	3	42.9
	If an external organisation would be the legal owner of the animal	7	18.9	2	28.6
Choice of animal if owned by the school	What breed / type of animal to get	22	57.9	6	85.7
	Size of the animal	19	50.0	4	57.1
	Temperament of the animal	27	73.0	7	100.0
	Expected lifespan for the animal	7	18.4	3	50.0
	Suitability of the animal to match the identified need e.g., teaching the curriculum, wellbeing	19	50.0	7	100.0
Where the animal will live if owned by the school	Having an appropriate amount of space to keep the animal	19	50.0	4	100.0

Chapter 3

	Having appropriate housing for the animal	20	52.6	5	100.0
Responsibility for the animal if owned by the school	Who would look after the animal daily	16	42.1	5	71.4
	Who would care for the animal during school holidays	10	27.0	5	71.4
	Who would care for the animal if the nominated staff member were ill or leaves	9	23.7	5	71.4
	What would happen if the animal became ill	13	34.2	5	71.4
Access to the animal	Having equal access to the animal for all children	20	54.1	3	42.9
	Having access to the animal only for specifically identified children	7	19.4	2	28.6
	Any cultural factors affecting access to the animal	12	32.4	2	33.3
	Any religious factors affecting access to the animal	10	27.0	2	33.3
	If a visiting animal, (external organisation or staff owned) how frequent the visits should be e.g., weekly, monthly	13	35.1	4	57.1
	Teaching how the animal communicates by	27	73.0	4	57.1

Human Health and Safety	understanding body language				
	Teaching how to have appropriate interactions with the animal	35	94.6	7	100.0
	How the children will be allowed to interact with the animal safely	36	97.3	6	85.7
Animal health and welfare	The value and importance of the animal as a living creature, regardless of its size or financial cost	29	82.9	7	100.0
	The type of contact with the animal e.g., viewed only, touched, handled	27	77.1	7	100.0
	Activities with the children are structured and planned	23	65.7	7	100.0
	Breaks for the animal to be scheduled part of activities	29	82.9	6	85.7
	Animal has choice in whether to interact or not	32	91.4	5	71.4
	Monitoring of animal stress during activities	33	94.3	7	100.0
	Animal has uninterrupted time away from people	34	97.1	6	85.7
	Plan to manage the situation if an animal is harmed accidentally	32	91.4	7	100.0

Chapter 3

	Plan to manage the situation if an animal is harmed deliberately	33	94.3	7	100.0
	What happens if the animal is not being cared for properly	31	91.2	7	100.0
	Plan for animal's retirement	15	42.9	3	50.0
	Plan for what happens in the school after the animal's retirement/death	16	45.7	4	57.1
	Plan for decrease in interest in the animal	9	25.7	2	33.3
	Consideration of other alternatives to an animal	7	20.6	1	14.3
<hr/>					
Financial costs	Initial cost of the animal, housing, and equipment if to be kept by the school	4	11.8	3	42.9
	Ongoing costs for upkeep and veterinary care for animal kept by the school	3	8.8	2	28.6
	Cost of Animal Health Insurance if animal kept by the school	3	8.8	2	28.6
	Public Liability Insurance – if kept by the school	10	29.4	3	42.9
	Public Liability Insurance – if brought in by member of staff	18	54.5	6	85.7

3.4.7 RQ7 What other factors are considered in deciding if animals will be included?

Schools also considered factors beyond those related to human health and safety, human well-being, and animal selection and welfare.

CH schools gave less importance was given to financial costs and staff training, likely reflecting the fact that many of these schools relied on visiting animals rather than keeping animals on-site. In contrast, these factors were of greater importance for PH schools. Table 21 provides a detailed overview of each factor and whether it was considered of high importance. Further details of the factors considered are included in Appendices R, S and T.

Table 21 *Other Factors Considered During Decision-Making by Schools of High Importance*

Category	Factor	CH		PH	
		N=38		N=7	
		n	%	n	%
Financial costs	Costs of visits by an external organisation	2	5.9	3	42.9
	Public Liability Insurance – if brought in by an external organisation	8	25.0	3	42.9
	Staff training	15	44.1	6	85.7
	Staff time	14	41.2	6	100.0
Staff Training - Animal Care	What experience the staff have of looking after the animal	16	47.1	6	85.7
	Identifying the qualifications that staff might need	8	23.5	4	66.7
	How staff will gain identified qualifications	7	20.6	4	66.7
	Who will pay for staff training	6	17.6	4	57.1

Category	Factor	CH		PH	
		N=38		N=7	
		n	%	n	%
Staff Training – Interventions	What experience the staff have of running animal assisted interventions	11	34.4	5	71.4
	Identifying the qualifications that staff might need	8	25.0	4	66.7
	How staff will gain identified qualifications	8	25.0	4	66.7
	Who will pay for staff training	7	21.9	5	71.4

3.4.8 If schools have decided to cease including animals, or not to include animals, what factors influenced this decision?

Of the 10 PH schools, only four were able to share details about why and how the decision to stop including animals was made. The reasons provided were primarily related to:

- Ownership issues
- Difficulties in finding someone to care for the animal
- Unacceptable levels of stress for the animal
- Insurance costs
- Costs associated with staff training and time

In addition, one school reported that the animal had died, and two schools cited loss of interest in the animal(s). Further details are provided in Table 22.

The decision to cease animal inclusion was typically made by the headteacher alone, except in one school where both the headteacher and deputy headteacher were involved. Three had consulted staff and one parents, but none consulted the children. Regarding external resources,

three schools consulted individuals with personal experience of animals, and two schools consulted external professionals for advice.

Table 22 *Reasons Why PH Schools Stopped Including Them*

Reasons for stopping inclusion of animals	No, it did not apply		Not important		Of interest		High Importance	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
No longer felt to be supporting the curriculum sufficiently	4	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Assisted reading did not improve reading scores sufficiently	3	75.0	0	0.0	1	25.0	0	0.0
Alternative ways to achieve learning outcomes used	3	75.0	0	0.0	1	25.0	0	0.0
Alternative ways to achieve social, emotional, and mental health outcomes used	4	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Difficulties with ownership of the animal if owned by the school	3	75.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	25.0
Difficulties with ownership of the animal if owned by member of staff	3	75.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	25.0
Difficulties with ownership of the animal if owned by external organisation	3	75.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	25.0

Reasons for stopping inclusion of animals	No, it did not apply		Not important		Of interest		High Importance	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Animal was not suitable to match the identified need e.g., teaching the curriculum, wellbeing	4	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Animal was no longer suitable due to its breed / type / size	4	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Animal was no longer suitable due to its temperament	4	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Not enough space to house the animal	4	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Didn't have appropriate housing for the animal	4	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Wanted to use the space that animals were kept, in a different way	3	75.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Difficulties with having someone to look after the animal e.g., daily care, during the holidays, nominated staff member left and no one to replace.	2	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	25.0
Difficulties with ensuring equity of access	3	75.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0

Chapter 3

Reasons for stopping inclusion of animals	No, it did not apply		Not important		Of interest		High Importance	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Issues with cultural and religious factors affecting access to the animal	3	75.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Unhappy about the frequency of visits by an external organisation	3	75.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Issues with human health and safety	2	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Issues with staff dislike of animals	3	75.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Issues with children's dislike of animals	3	75.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Issues with staff anxiety / fear of animals	3	75.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Issues with children's anxiety / fear of animals	3	75.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Issues with the local community due to including animals	3	75.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Issues with the school neighbours due to including animals	3	75.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Animal was not cared for adequately e.g.,	3	75.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0

Chapter 3

Reasons for stopping inclusion of animals	No, it did not apply		Not important		Of interest		High Importance	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
feeding, cleaning house								
Unacceptable levels of animal stress during activities	2	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	25.0
Animal did not have enough uninterrupted time away from people	2	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Animal was physically harmed	3	75.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Animal retired	3	75.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Animal died	2	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	25.0
Decreased interest in the animal	2	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	25.0
Unable to continue ongoing financial costs for upkeep and veterinary care for animal kept by the school	1	25.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	50.0
Cost of Animal Health Insurance if animal kept by the school	2	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	25.0
Costs of public liability insurance	2	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	25.0
Costs of visits by an external organisation	2	50.0	1	25.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Financial costs of staff training	2	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	25.0

Reasons for stopping inclusion of animals	No, it did not apply		Not important		Of interest		High Importance	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Financial costs of staff time	1	25.0	0	0.0	1	25.0	1	25.0
Lack of knowledge about how to care for animals	2	50.0	0	0.0	1	25.0	0	0.0
Lack of guidance available to support caring for animals	3	75.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Lack of knowledge about running the animal assisted interventions	3	75.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Lack of guidance available to support running the animal assisted interventions	2	50.0	0	0.0	1	25.0	0	0.0
Difficulties in identifying the qualifications that staff might need	3	75.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Difficulties with staff gaining identified qualifications	2	50.0	0	0.0	1	25.0	0	0.0
Lack of training available	2	50.0	0	0.0	1	25.0	0	0.0

Four schools considered including animals but ultimately decided not to (CDNW). The reasons provided are summarised in Table 23.

Three schools cited concerns about human health and safety. Two schools highlighted issues related to equity of access and the impact of the animal’s death. Other reasons included:

- Alternative approaches to improving reading outcomes without animals
- Concerns about ownership
- Potential impact on the local community
- Animal welfare concerns, including levels of stress, risk of harm, and ensuring sufficient uninterrupted time away from people
- Costs associated with public liability insurance

Table 23 *Reasons Why Schools Decided Not to Include Animals after Consideration*

Schools that considered including animals and decided not to (CDNW =4)								
Reasons for deciding not to include animals	No, it did not apply		Not important		Of interest		High importance	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Alternative ways to support the curriculum preferable without including animals	1	25.0	0	0.0	1	25.0	1	0.0
Alternative ways to improve reading scores without including animals	1	25.0	1	25.0	1	0.0	0	25.0
Alternative ways to achieve learning outcomes preferable without including animals	1	25.0	1	25.0	0	0.0	1	0.0
Alternative ways to achieve social, emotional, and mental health outcomes preferable without including animals	1	25.0	0	0.0	1	25.0	2	0.0
Concerns about ownership of the animal if owned by the school	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	25.0	2	25.0
Concerns about ownership of the animal if owned by member of staff	0	0.0	1	25.0	0	0.0	3	0.0

Chapter 3

Reasons for deciding not to include animals	No, it did not apply		Not important		Of interest		High importance	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Concerns about ownership of the animal if owned by external organisation	1	25.0	1	25.0	0	0.0	2	0.0
Concerns about the animal's breed/type/size being suitable	0	0.0	1	25.0	0	0.0	3	0.0
Concerns about the animal's temperament	1	25.0	0	0.0	1	25.0	2	0.0
Not enough space to house the animal	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	25.0	3	0.0
Not having appropriate housing for the animal	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	0.0
Potential difficulties with having someone to look after the animal e.g., daily care, during the holidays, if the nominated staff member left and no one to replace.	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	0.0
Concerns about ensuring equity of access	1	25.0	0	0.0	2	0.0	1	50.0
Concerns about cultural and religious factors affecting access to the animal	1	25.0	1	25.0	0	0.0	2	0.0
Concerns about human health and safety	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	0.0	1	75.0
Concerns about staff dislike of animals	1	25.0	1	25.0	0	0.0	2	0.0
Concerns about children's dislike of animals	0	0.0	1	25.0	0	0.0	3	0.0
Concerns about staff anxiety/fear of animals	1	25.0	1	25.0	0	0.0	2	0.0

Chapter 3

Reasons for deciding not to include animals	No, it did not apply		Not important		Of interest		High importance	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Concerns about children's anxiety/fear of animals	0	0.0	1	25.0	0	0.0	3	0.0
Concerns about the impact on the local community	1	25.0	2	50.0	1	0.0	0	25.0
Concerns about the impact the school neighbours	1	25.0	1	25.0	2	25.0	0	25.0
Concerns about the animal not being cared for adequately e.g., feeding, cleaning house	1	25.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	0.0
Concerns about possible unacceptable levels of animal stress during activities	1	25.0	0	0.0	1	0.0	2	25.0
Concerns about giving the animal enough uninterrupted time away from people	1	25.0	0	0.0	1	0.0	2	25.0
Concerns about the animal being physically harmed	1	25.0	0	0.0	1	0.0	2	25.0
Concerns about when the animal retires	1	25.0	0	0.0	1	25.0	2	0.0
Concerns about when the animal dies, and the impact on the children	1	25.0	0	0.0	3	25.0	0	50.0
Concerns about children's interest in the animal decreasing	1	25.0	1	25.0	1	25.0	1	0.0
Concerns about ongoing financial costs for upkeep and veterinary care for animal kept by the school	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	25.0	2	25.0
Concerns about the cost of Animal Health Insurance if animal kept by the school:	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	50.0	2	0.0

Chapter 3

Reasons for deciding not to include animals	No, it did not apply		Not important		Of interest		High importance	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Concerns about the costs of public liability insurance	1	25.0	1	25.0	1	0.0	1	25.0
Concerns about the costs of visits by an external organisation	2	50.0	0	0.0	1	25.0	1	0.0
Concerns about the financial costs of staff training	2	50.0	0	0.0	1	25.0	1	0.0
Concerns about the financial costs of staff time	2	50.0	0	0.0	1	25.0	1	0.0
Lack of knowledge about how to care for animals	2	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	0.0
Lack of guidance available to support caring for animals	2	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	0.0
Lack of knowledge about running the animal assisted interventions	2	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	0.0
Lack of guidance available to support running the animal assisted interventions	2	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	0.0
Difficulties in identifying the qualifications that staff might need	2	50.0	0	0.0	1	25.0	1	0.0
Difficulties with staff gaining identified qualifications	2	50.0	0	0.0	1	25.0	1	0.0
Lack of training available	2	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	0.0

3.4.9 Other Comments Made About the Inclusion of Animals

At the end of the survey, schools were asked whether they had any additional comments or reflections regarding any aspect of the inclusion or non-inclusion of animals in schools. The following comments were provided (Table 24):

Table 24 *Other Comments from Schools about the Inclusion of Animals*

From CH schools	
P67	Risk management is key. No child is made to engage with the animal. You definitely need a key staff member to oversee the animal.
P64	No, we spent a long time weighing up the evidence and research and trialled animals within school before committing
P54	It is the best thing we have done for the well-being of our children. They help massively with separation in the mornings and behaviour during the day.
P49	Our school dog has been the best initiative I've introduced to the school in the 14 years I've been in post. He has alleviated fear, quelled anxiety, calmed dysregulation, aided reading (including allowing us to hear elective mutes read aloud) I tried to find dogs to visit and, having sent multiple requests without success, asked the Governors if I could buy one and bring him in. Best thing ever! Nothing in the survey has changed my views.
P46	Need to think about our policy towards animals, check it is robust
P44	XXX [dog] is loved by all the children in school and has been a great asset to the school community.
P42	Having animals in our school has been very successful. They have a wonderful calming effect on the children and are a good way for children to make friends and have something to talk about.
P24	There needs to be legislation to protect the welfare of the animals when being around children.
From PH schools	
P61	We would love to have a therapy dog
P52	Animals in school is a huge responsibility. The welfare of the animal must be paramount. The bigger/long term picture must be considered. Eg vet bills, insurance, retirement of animal, if the animal dies, food costs, holidays. Risk Assessment is ongoing. As Headteacher, I will not be allowing school pets on site, if one-off days by experts, then yes. Eg owl sanctuary, insects. Certainly not dogs or Guinea pigs.

3.5 Discussion

Findings from this research support some of the concerns identified in prior studies in this field, while also providing evidence that schools are addressing these concerns as part of their decision-making processes. Decision-making in schools is often guided by policies; however, with only 65% of schools having policies for the inclusion of animals and 94% having risk assessments, this framework appears insufficient to fully support the process. Moreover, from the small sample of policies shared, it seems many were developed after the decision to include animals had already been made.

The study demonstrates that fewer schools are keeping their own animals, with a greater reliance on visiting animals, either pets of staff or animals from external organisations. The findings align with other research indicating that dogs are a popular choice (Vardy et al., 2025; Munsinger, 2025). Comparing PH and CH schools, it is evident that the use of visiting dogs has increased, and CH schools tend to retain them, and kept animals, for longer periods than PH did. This may reflect a more thoughtful decision-making process, in which schools consider multiple factors before inclusion, reducing the likelihood of subsequently discontinuing animal programmes.

The findings also suggest a shift in the reasons for including animals in schools. In previous decades, animals were mainly introduced as class pets or teaching aids as in biology for example. More recently, their inclusion has extended to supporting learning as assisted reading programmes, as in Reading Education Assistance Dogs programme started in 1999 (therapyanimals.org/read). However, the present study indicates that animals are increasingly being included to support the social and emotional needs of children, including the development of social skills, regulation, and provision of calming or therapeutic benefits. This trend likely corresponds to the growing need to support young people with mental health needs, given that approximately 20% of individuals aged 8–25 years, experience a mental disorder (NHS Digital, 2023). Survey responses suggest that schools are recognising the benefits of animals for all children, not only those with identified needs.

Nonetheless, schools must be clear about how animals are intended to support these outcomes, as the sampled policies did not clearly define the role of visiting dogs, or other animals, and confusion remains regarding the designation of therapy animals, with many schools using this term for any visiting animal regardless of purpose.

The study also reinforces previously identified risks of including animals. Main concerns remain related to allergies, bites, injuries, and emotional risks such as anxiety or fear of animals (Sweigart, 2023; Gee et al., 2015; Brelsford et al., 2020).

A notable gap in the literature has been the decision-making process for including animals in schools. The survey demonstrates that schools are attempting to adopt an evidence-based approach (Slavin, 2002; Levin, 2013), consulting beyond personal experience and drawing on professionals, research, books, and resources from animal or educational charities. This aligns with the findings of Farrand & Young Jung (2025), who reported that some school leaders conduct their own research into perceived benefits to inform decisions. However, it contrasts with Vardy et al. (2025), who found that schools often rely primarily on wider school networks for guidance.

Although it is unclear whether schools are explicitly using guidance frameworks from organisations such as SCAS and IAHAIO or use risk assessment tools developed in prior research (Brelsford et al., 2017; Grove et al., 2021), schools are involving a team of staff in decision-making. CH schools are also including governors and consulting staff, parents, and children, demonstrating a collaborative approach.

The factors considered in decision-making appear to drive the increase in using visiting animals as opposed to having animals that are kept by the school. This approach reduces concerns about ownership, legal responsibility and practicalities of animal care. Importantly, the welfare of the animal emerges as a central consideration. Previous research suggested that animal welfare was often overlooked in educational settings (Bioldi, 2022); however, the present study indicates that schools are actively considering safe interactions, teaching children about animal behaviour and body language, monitoring for stress, providing uninterrupted rest periods, and giving animals the choice to interact. Regarding visiting animals, these considerations may reflect knowledge of the policies and requirements of the organisations providing the visiting animal.

Regarding the stopping or non-inclusion of animals, PH and CDNW schools, the small number of responses limits definitive conclusions. Nonetheless, some reasons for discontinuation, such as ownership and welfare concerns, may be mitigated by using visiting animals, suggesting this may be a safer and more sustainable approach, provided a formalised, safe process is in place. This is important given the “underground culture” described by Gee et al. (2015), where inconsistent practices may place animals at risk. Vardy et al. (2025) also highlight that staff bringing in ‘visiting’ animals can create a lack of a unified approach, potentially jeopardising animal welfare.

3.5.1 Implications for Practice

Schools require support to develop comprehensive policies and risk assessments if they plan to include animals. It would be beneficial for schools to have template policies and risk assessments that highlight key areas to consider, encompassing both the decision-making process and the introduction and management of animals in school settings. Following this, schools could implement an audit-style approach on at least an annual basis, to ensure that the needs of animals, children, staff, the wider community, and the school as a whole are being met. This would help maintain safe protocols to manage risks effectively.

It is currently unclear whether schools are using specific guidance frameworks or models to guide their decision-making. Schools would benefit from a national guidance model, potentially published by the Department of Education, which could provide consistent guidance for including animals, similar to the recommendations of Brelsford et al. (2017). Such frameworks and models would need to be tailored to types of school and be able to accommodate the specifics of individual schools. They also should be thoroughly tested for ease of use, applicability and effectiveness. Additionally, schools require wider access to high-quality research outlining the benefits and challenges of animals in educational settings to support an evidence-based decision-making process that balances potential benefits against safety, welfare, and ethical considerations, with the animal's welfare at the centre. Research evidences that when animal welfare and wellbeing is appropriately provided for, risks are minimised (McBride & Hinde-Megarity, 2022).

Understanding cultural and religious factors is also crucial, as some survey responses indicated that these considerations were fundamental to inclusion decisions. Schools should actively consult their wider local communities to develop this understanding, rather than avoiding animal inclusion due to perceived barriers. While it is important to respect cultural and religious attitudes toward animals, schools can also gently challenge assumptions and support the development of positive relationships with animals, again reducing risks beyond the school gates (McBride & Hinde-Megarity, 2022).

Schools should also consider how they engage with and listen to different stakeholders both when making decisions to include animals and when deciding not to include or discontinue animal inclusion.

To enhance understanding of animal inclusion practices nationally, there should be a standardised system for collecting and monitoring this information, potentially as part of the annual school census. Including questions about animal inclusion would allow for regular

oversight. Finally, the establishment of a governing body for animals in schools would help ensure that inclusion occurs in a safe, ethical, and consistent manner.

3.5.2 Strengths and Limitations

This study has several strengths and was ambitious in its aim to reach a wide range of primary schools across England. Despite contacting nearly 1,000 schools via email and promoting the survey on social media, the response rate was lower than anticipated. However, responses were received from schools across multiple counties and urban and rural locations, with a good spread of school types.

The survey employed a branching logic approach, which was complex but effective in capturing the different decision-making processes of schools that include animals, those that considered inclusion but decided against it, and those that had never considered inclusion. Due to the volume of data, it was not possible to include all findings in this paper.

Notwithstanding, the survey had several limitations. Some errors arose due to the complexity of the instrument, and it would have benefited from piloting with a wider range of schools. For example, one question about whether the respondent had been part of the decision-making process was missed for some participants, requiring follow-up via email. Certain questions asked two things within a single item, which needed to be separated for clarity. Additionally, some terminology may not have been consistently understood by participants. For instance, there was confusion between animals kept at school and animals brought in by staff, which led to some data duplication. This could have been clarified by explicitly distinguishing permanently housed animals from those temporarily brought in.

It would also have been helpful for schools to explain when a factor 'did not apply' or 'was not important' as this left unanswered questions for the researcher. However, including these options would have lengthened the survey, potentially reducing completion rates. Providing participants with lists of possible factors may also have limited their ability to consider factors independently.

Another limitation was the incomplete survey responses, which created missing data and occasionally resulted in percentages being calculated from small sample groups. There were also imbalances between respondent groups. It is likely that schools more interested in animals or with positive experiences were more likely to respond, whereas responses from schools that CDNW or NC animals were underrepresented.

3.5.3 Future Recommendations for Research

Further research is needed to provide deeper knowledge and understanding of the roles animals are expected to fulfil in schools and how their inclusion impacts both children and the wider school environment, directly and indirectly.

There is a need to examine how existing guidance frameworks and decision-making models are implemented by schools. These resources should be tested for effectiveness and adapted to accommodate the diverse cultures and contexts of different schools.

Current research tends to focus primarily on dogs, particularly therapy dogs. Schools require evidence on a broader range of species to enable informed decision-making, rather than relying solely on the availability of visiting animals. Moreover, school staff are not automatically trained in how to safely and effectively include animals, highlighting the potential value of incorporating this content into initial teacher training and headship training programmes.

Schools also need access to high-quality, robust research on the benefits of animal inclusion, as the current evidence base is limited. Longitudinal studies are particularly important to determine the long-term impacts of animal inclusion and how these benefits evolve over time. Finally, research should consider the impacts, benefits and challenges of animal inclusion alongside those of alternatives, including the rapidly developing field of robotic animals (Broadbent et al., 2018; Barber, 2023).

3.6 Conclusion

This study provides new insights into the inclusion of animals in primary schools in England, highlighting both the evolving practices and the decision-making processes underpinning their use. Findings demonstrate that while schools previously may have traditionally included animals as class pets or for learning purposes, there has been a clear shift toward using animals to support social and emotional development, including the promotion of social skills, emotional regulation, and wellbeing. Both CH and PH schools recognise the potential benefits for children with identified needs, such as SEND or mental health concerns, while CH schools also reported benefits for all children, reflecting a broader understanding of the role of animals in supporting holistic development.

The study confirms that schools are aware of the risks associated with animal inclusion, including allergies, injuries, bites, and emotional concerns such as anxiety or fear. Importantly, CH schools appear to address these risks systematically, with attention to animal welfare, safe interactions, and the teaching of animal behaviour and body language. This represents progress

from previous findings which suggested welfare considerations were often overlooked. The use of visiting animals, rather than animals owned by the school, has increased, potentially mitigating practical challenges related to care, ownership, and long-term maintenance, while enabling schools to focus on safety and educational outcomes.

Decision-making processes vary across schools but generally involve collaboration among headteachers, governors, staff, parents, and, in some cases, children, with consideration of external advice from professionals and research. However, gaps remain in the use of structured frameworks or nationally consistent guidance. Further, policies and risk assessments are not universally applied or comprehensive.

The study highlights several implications for practice, including the need for template policies, guidance frameworks, and regular audits, as well as greater access to robust, species-inclusive research to support evidence-based decisions. Cultural and religious considerations should also be integrated into decision-making, alongside strategies to engage stakeholders effectively.

Future research should explore longitudinal impacts, the roles of a wider variety of species, and the effectiveness of guidance frameworks and staff training, as well as alternative means of providing for school aims. Overall, this study contributes to the growing understanding of how animals are included in educational settings, offering insights that can inform safer, ethical, and more evidence-based practice in schools.

Appendix A Search Terms Formulated using the PICO Framework

Population	school staff school settings	classroom* OR school* OR "educational setting*" OR kindergarten OR "public school*" OR "elementary school*" OR "primary school*" OR "middle school" OR "secondary school" OR "high school" OR "education teachers" OR staff OR "school stakeholders" OR principal OR superintendent OR teachers OR "teaching staff" OR teaching OR students OR "education staff" OR "school staff"
Intervention	incorporation of therapy animals	"therapy animal" OR "animal-assisted therapy" OR "animal assisted therap*" OR "animal-assisted intervention*" OR "animal-assisted education" OR "animal assisted activit*" OR "animal-assisted program*" OR animal assisted OR "therapy dog support" OR "therapy dog" OR "canine-assisted programs" OR "canine assisted intervention" OR dog* OR "dog assisted intervention" OR "emotional support animal"
Comparison		no formal comparison group
Outcome	staff perceptions: social and emotional benefits and challenges	experience* OR "learning outcomes" OR "teacher attitudes" OR "teacher perceptions" OR perspectives OR "teacher perspectives" OR "mental health" OR social OR emotional OR social-emotional OR engagement OR benefits OR "perceived benefits" OR "wellbeing" OR "well-being" OR challenges OR limitations OR "positive effects" OR "positive impact" OR "negative effects" OR outcomes OR "safety risks" OR "human safety" OR risks OR welfare OR advantages OR barriers OR feasibility OR cost-effective OR "psychosocial well-being" OR "social functioning" OR "interpersonal skills" OR socio-emotional

Appendix B University of Manchester’s Critical appraisal review frameworks (Woods, 2020)

B1 Quantitative research framework (Woods, 2020)




Author(s):

Title:

Journal Reference:

Criterion	Score	R1	R2	Agree %	R1	R2	Agree %	Comment
Design (evaluation studies only)								
Use of a randomised group design	2 1 0							
(i) Comparison with treatment-as-usual or placebo, OR	2 1 0							
(ii) Comparison with standard control group/ single case experiment design	1 0							
Use of manuals/ protocols for intervention/ training for intervention	2 1 0							
Fidelity checking/ supervision of intervention	2 1 0							
Data gathering								
Clear research question or hypothesis	1 0							

Appendices

<i>e.g. well-defined, measurable constituent elements</i>								
Appropriate participant sampling <i>e.g. fit to research question, representativeness.</i>	1 0							
Appropriate measurement instrumentation. <i>e.g. sensitivity/ specificity/ reliability/ validity</i>	2 1 0							
Use of multiple measures	2 1 0							
Comprehensive data gathering <i>e.g. context of measurement recorded (e.g. when at school vs at home)</i>	1 0							
Appropriate data gathering method used <i>e.g. soundness of administration</i>	1 0							
Reduction of bias within participant recruitment/ instrumentation/ administration <i>e.g. harder-to-reach facilitation; accessibility of instrumentation</i>	1 0							
Response rate/ completion maximised <i>e.g. response rate specified; piloting; access options</i>	1 0							

Appendices

Population subgroup data collected <i>e.g. participant gender; age; location</i>	1 0							
Data analysis								
Missing data analysis <i>e.g. Level and treatment specified</i>	1 0							
Time trends identified <i>e.g. year on year changes</i>	1 0							
Geographic considerations <i>e.g. regional or subgroup analyses</i>	1 0							
Appropriate statistical analyses (descriptive or inferential) <i>e.g. coherent approach specified; sample size justification/ sample size adequacy</i>	2 1 0							
Multi-level or inter-group analyses present <i>e.g. comparison between participant groups by <u>relevant</u> location or characteristics</i>	1 0							
Data interpretation								
Clear criteria for rating of findings <i>e.g. benchmarked/ justified evaluation of found quantitative facts</i>	1 0							

Appendices

Limitations of the research considered in relation to initial aims <i>e.g. critique of method; generalizability estimate</i>	1 0							
Implications of findings linked to rationale of research question <i>e.g. implications for theory, practice or future research</i>	1 0							
	Total score			Mean % agree			Mean % agree	
Total (investigation studies) (max=20)								
Total (evaluation studies) (max=28)								

B2 Qualitative research framework (Woods, 2020)



The University of Manchester

Author(s):

Title:

Journal Reference:

Criterion/ score	R1	R2	Agree %	R1	R2	Agree %	Comment
Clear aim of research 1 0							

Appendices

<i>e.g. aim/ goal/ question of the research clearly stated, importance/ utility justified</i>								
Appropriateness of the research design <i>e.g. rationale vis-à-vis aims, links to previous approaches, limitations</i>	1 0							
Clear sampling rationale <i>e.g. description, justification; attrition evaluated</i>	1 0							
Appropriateness of data collection method <i>e.g. methods link to research aims, rationale for method provided</i>	1 0							
Well executed data collection <i>e.g. clear details of who, what, where, how; intended/ actual (if modified) effect of execution on data quality; data saturation considered</i>	2 1 0							
Analysis close to the data, <i>e.g. researcher can evaluate fit between categories/ themes and data, participant 'voice' evident</i>	2 1 0							
Evidence of explicit reflexivity <i>e.g.</i>	4							

Appendices

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>impact of researcher (vis-à-vis cultural/ theoretical position; researcher-participant relationship)</i> • <i>limitations identified</i> • <i>data validation (e.g. inter-coder checks/ peer moderation/ consultation)</i> • <i>researcher philosophy/ stance evaluated</i> • <i>conflict of interest statement included</i> 	<p>3</p> <p>2</p> <p>1</p> <p>0</p>						
Negative case analysis, e.g. e.g. <i>contrasts/ contradictions/ outliers within data; categories/ themes as dimensional; diversity of perspectives.</i>	1 0						
Evidence of researcher-participant negotiation of meanings, e.g. <i>member checking, methods to empower participants.</i>	1 0						
Valid conclusions drawn <i>e.g. data presented support the findings which in turn support the conclusions</i>	1 0						
Emergent theory related to the problem, e.g. <i>links to previous findings/ explanation of changes</i>	1 0						

Appendices

<i>or differences/ abstraction from categories/ themes to model/ explanation.</i>								
Transferable conclusions <i>e.g. contextualised findings: limitations of scope identified.</i>	1 0							
Evidence of attention to ethical issues <i>e.g. presentation, sensitivity, minimising harm, feedback</i>	1 0							
Comprehensiveness of documentation <i>e.g. schedules, transcripts, thematic maps, paper trail for external audit</i>	1 0							
Clarity and coherence of the reporting <i>e.g. clear structure, clear account linked to aims, key points highlighted</i>	1 0							
Total	<i>Max</i> 20			Mean % agree			Mean % agree	

Appendix C Quality Assessment Summary

Quantitative Aspects of Study		Qualitative Aspects of Study										
Author (year)	Design (Evaluation Studies)	Data Gathering	Data Analysis	Data Interpretation	Overall Score	Clear Aim & Research Design	Sampling & Data Collection	Data Analysis & Reflexivity	Conclusions & Links to Theory	Ethical Issues	Clear Reporting	Overall Score
Baird et al. (2023)	N/A	8	2	3	13	2	4	5	3	1	1	16
Baurys (2020)	-	-	-	-	-	2	3	4	1	0	1	11
Beck (2015)	-	-	-	-	-	2	4	2	1	0	2	10
Broad (2018)	N/A	7	2	2	11	2	3	6	3	1	2	17
Farrand & Young Jung (2025)	-	-	-	-	-	2	3	3	3	1	1	13
Fick (2015)	-	-	-	-	-	2	3	5	3	1	2	16
Grove et al. (2021)	-	-	-	-	-	2	4	5	3	1	2	17

Appendices

Author (year)	Design (Evaluation Studies)	Data Gathering	Data Analysis	Data Interpretation	Overall Score	Clear Aim & Research Design	Sampling & Data Collection	Data Analysis & Reflexivity	Conclusions & Links to Theory	Ethical Issues	Clear Reporting	Overall Score
Helms (2024)	-	-	-	-	-	2	4	7	3	1	2	19 High
Kelsey (2021)	-	-	-	-	-	2	3	4	2	1	2	14 High
Lewis et al. (2023)	N/A	10	3	3	16 High	2	5	2	3	1	1	13 Medium
Maricevic (2022)	-	-	-	-	-	2	4	7	3	1	2	19 High
Mercer (2019)	N/A	7	0	2	9 Medium	2	3	3	3	1	1	13 Medium
Overton (2022)	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	5	3	1	1	14 High
Romack (2024)	-	-	-	-	-	2	4	4	2	0	2	13 Medium
Sloan-Oberdier (2018)	-	-	-	-	-	2	4	7	3	1	2	19 High
Suppon (2022)	N/A	10	4	3	17 High	2	3	5	3	0	2	15 High

Appendices

Author (year)	Design (Evaluation Studies)	Data Gathering	Data Analysis	Data Interpretation	Overall Score	Clear Aim & Research Design	Sampling & Data Collection	Data Analysis & Reflexivity	Conclusions & Links to Theory	Ethical Issues	Clear Reporting	Overall Score
Tate (2015)	N/A	9	1	3	13 Medium	2	4	4	2	1	2	15 High
Tate & Story (2020)	-	-	-	-	-	2	3	6	3	1	2	19 High
Van Schoick (2021)	-	-	-	-	-	2	3	3	3	1	2	14 High
Vardy et al. (2025)	-	-	-	-	-	2	3	6	3	1	2	17 High
Zents et al. (2017)	-	-	-	-	-	2	3	3	3	1	1	12 Medium

Appendix D Data Extraction of the Studies Included

Author (year)	Country	Research question(s) or aims	Participant characteristics and context	Data collection methods	Data analysis approach	Findings	Quality assurance rating
Baird et al. (2023)	Victoria, Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do participants perceive as the positive effects of therapy dog AAls on K-12 students' school wellbeing? - What do participants perceive as the negative effects of therapy dog AAls on K-12 students' school wellbeing? - What do participants perceive as the important considerations and challenges for implementing therapy dog AAls in K-12 school settings? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 118 participants who were education, health, or academic professionals with experience in therapy dog AAls for children and adolescents. - Participants were grouped into categories: school leaders (n=9; 7.6%), teachers (n=51; 43.2%), education support workers (n=3; 2.5%), health professionals (n=29; 24.6%), researchers/academics (n=9; 7.6%), and others (n=9; 7.6%). - Participants had work experience in early childhood, primary, secondary, combined primary and secondary, or special education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Qualitative study using surveys with 16 open-ended questions. - Data collection through Qualtrics; implied consent obtained. - Questions were about the intended aims of AAl, strategies used, effects, and considerations and challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's method. - Codes were created for each segment of responses before being turned into themes determined by similarities across responses - Statistical analysis computed using SPSS - Analysis included Chi-square tests and Fisher's exact tests to look at endorsements of themes. - Descriptive statistics for demographics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Therapy dogs provide emotional benefits by reducing students' stress, anxiety, and arousal through unconditional positive regard, comfort, and affection. They also model emotional regulation skills that students can learn to manage their own emotions, leading to more positive mood states. - Therapy dogs encourage and support students to engage in social interactions, help them develop social and communication skills, motivate them to learn social norms, enable them to form friendships, and foster a sense of belonging. 	High

Appendices

Author (year)	Country	Research question(s) or aims	Participant characteristics and context	Data collection methods	Data analysis approach	Findings	Quality assurance rating
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - settings. 50% worked in 2 or 3 settings. - Therapy dog experience ranged from one month to over 16 years, with most having worked with trained therapy dogs. - Recruitment via online platforms and snowball sampling or invitation email. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are significant safety concerns for both students and therapy dogs during interactions and welfare concerns for the dogs. - There is a need for standardized protocols to guide the safe implementation of therapy dog interventions in schools. 	
Baurys (2020)	Delaware, USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does the presence of a therapy dog in the classroom elicit positive behaviours in students as perceived by their parents and staff? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Purposeful sampling for participant selection. - Participants included five parents of the pupils and six school staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Therapy dog present almost every Tuesday during 2018-2019 in the second-grade classroom. - Qualitative research approach with interviews and written observations. - Parents received notebooks for observations; interviews were conducted post-school year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interviews with five parents and six teachers/staff; transcribed and analysed. - Data analysed using constant comparative method and triangulation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The presence of a therapy dog in the classroom increased positive mood and positivity about school among parents and staff. - Therapy dogs contributed to excitement, motivation, stress relief, and positive verbalization among students. - Therapy dogs had a calming and motivating 	Medium

Appendices

Author (year)	Country	Research question(s) or aims	Participant characteristics and context	Data collection methods	Data analysis approach	Findings	Quality assurance rating
Beck (2015)	New York, USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the impacts of canine-assisted therapy and activities on students academically, physically, socially, emotionally, and behaviourally in an educational setting? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Current teachers and staff, plus retired teachers. - 8 responses to the survey from 80 participants contacted - No participant demographics included 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants were interviewed with a set of predetermined questions at the end of the period of visits - A survey was sent to teachers in a primary and an intermediate elementary school with access to a registered therapy dog. - The survey included 9 open-ended questions and one multiple-choice. - The survey was conducted using the "Qualtrics" system and distributed via email and a social networking site. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Data analysis involved identifying common themes among responses. - - 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Therapy dogs have positive effects on students in various ways. - The presence of therapy dogs creates a calming and motivating environment for academic and behavioural success. - The use of therapy dogs makes students and visitors feel comfortable and welcome, with no reported negative experiences. 	Medium
Broad (2018)	Birmingham, UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is the role of school dogs? - Do the dogs studied play a specific role in therapy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 52 primary schools took part in the initial survey - Participants included head teachers, staff, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mixed methods - Initial online survey - Case study approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quantitative data was analysed using tools in the Bristol Online Survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School dogs primarily support nurture and therapy, indirectly 	High

Appendices

Author (year)	Country	Research question(s) or aims	Participant characteristics and context	Data collection methods	Data analysis approach	Findings	Quality assurance rating
		and/or academic learning?"	children, from two primary schools - 2 dogs (one in each school)	Data collection through observations, interviews, and documentary analysis	software and Microsoft Excel to creates graphs - Qualitative data used coding and vignettes	impacting academic learning. - They positively affect school attendance, communication, and managing difficult situations. - Initially intended for academic support, school dogs are not directly used for this purpose but contribute to transitions and safeguarding.	
Farrand & Young Jung (2025)	Arizona, USA	- How do therapy dogs impact the social-emotional well-being of students, faculty, and staff in PK-12 educational spaces? - How do therapy dogs impact teaching and learning in PK-12 educational spaces?	- Teachers, staff, students and family/community members at PK-12 schools within an Arizona school district with at least one therapy dog - Total of 343 participants detailed with roles and type of school	- QR code survey completed by 343 education stakeholders from 43 district locations.	- Thematic analysis and content analysis to identify themes related to well-being and teaching and learning.	- Therapy dogs contribute to stress reduction, classroom participation, and social connectivity, promoting well-being in PK-12 education settings. - The study identifies two main themes: well-being and teaching and learning, with sub-themes that detail positive impacts on	Medium

Appendices

Author (year)	Country	Research question(s) or aims	Participant characteristics and context	Data collection methods	Data analysis approach	Findings	Quality assurance rating
Fick (2015)	Texas, USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The purpose of this study was to determine how principals and teachers perceive human-animal interactions in an educational setting." - Research Questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) How do principals perceive human-animals interaction in educational settings? 2) How do teacher perceive human-animal interaction in educational settings?" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 8 Participants, including principals and teachers from two schools (elementary school and middle school) who have animals in the Texas school district that the researcher works in - The majority were female, and all were white - They ranged in age and years of experience - Participants volunteered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Qualitative study, phenomenological approach - Semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thematic analysis was conducted on interview transcriptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adults perceive the use of animals in educational settings positively, noting benefits for children's physical health, psychological well-being, social interaction, and academic achievement. - The research provides insights into a range of adult attitudes toward the use of animals as pets and in animal-assisted therapy 	High
						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - community, self-regulation, cognition, motivation, engagement, and social interaction. - Therapy dog programs are seen as a viable, evidence-based intervention for creating more inclusive and emotionally supportive school environments. 	

Appendices

Author (year)	Country	Research question(s) or aims	Participant characteristics and context	Data collection methods	Data analysis approach	Findings	Quality assurance rating
Grove et al. (2021)	Victoria, Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the facilitative factors associated with implementing a therapy dog program in schools? - What are the perceived challenges and barriers with implementing a therapy dog program in schools? - What support is required when implementing a therapy dog program in schools?" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Total: 15 (13 school staff and 2 coordinators from therapy dog organisations) - School staff with existing programs: 9 - School staff considering implementation 4 - Coordinators from therapy dog organisations: 2 - Gender: 2 males, 13 females – - From primary schools, combined primary and secondary schools, and early learning centres - From Victoria, New South Wales, and Australian Capital Territory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Qualitative research design - Open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews - Data from schools with existing therapy dog programs, schools considering implementation, and therapy dog organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thematic analysis using Clarke and Braun's framework - Interrater reliability established – Hexagon Tool used for survey construction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Successful implementation of therapy dogs in educational settings requires flexibility in the program to meet school needs, qualities of the program instigator, whole-school support, communication and training, and considerations for dog welfare. – - A whole-school effort is crucial for successful implementation, emphasising the need for involvement and support from the entire school community. - Guidelines are necessary for assessing school readiness and overcoming challenges associated 	High

Appendices

Author (year)	Country	Research question(s) or aims	Participant characteristics and context	Data collection methods	Data analysis approach	Findings	Quality assurance rating
Helms (2024)	Minnesota, USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the experiences of K-12 principals while implementing therapy dog programs in the school setting?" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 6 participants - K-12 principals in schools who have had or have approved a therapy dog whilst they have been principal - Recruited from an online organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Qualitative study design - Semi-structured interviews (in person or on Zoom) - Transcription taken 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inductive thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's six-step framework - Use of in vivo coding to develop themes 	<p>with program implementation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Principals reported overwhelmingly positive experiences with therapy dog programs, recognising their beneficial impact on students, faculty, and school climate. - Therapy dog programs were found to enhance the overall school experience and climate, with no insurmountable challenges reported by principals. 	High
Kelsey (2021)	South Carolina, USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In general, what are the lived experiences teachers have with students exhibiting undesirable behaviours? - What are teacher attitudes and beliefs about the use of therapy dogs in support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 9 teachers (all 9 were part of focus groups and 4 elected to be interviewed) - All from an elementary school located in South Carolina - They must have had two or more experiences in which a therapy dog was used to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Phenomenological study - Use of focus groups and independent interviews - Focus groups used pre-written questions and probing questions - Interview questions developed from the focus group - Both held online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In vivo, evaluation and value coding were used 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers unanimously support the use of therapy dogs for managing undesirable behaviours in classrooms. - Therapy dog programs should be implemented with specific parameters to ensure effectiveness 	High

Appendices

Author (year)	Country	Research question(s) or aims	Participant characteristics and context	Data collection methods	Data analysis approach	Findings	Quality assurance rating
Lewis et al. (2023)	UK based but worldwide survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - of classroom management? - What benefits and/or challenges has the use of therapy dogs brought to the classroom as it relates to classroom management?" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - de-escalate negative behaviour from a child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transcription and coding occurred 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Survey data analysed using SPSS - A descriptive analysis, bivariate analysis and Chi-Square were used - Interviews were transcribed and thematic analysis was performed using NVIVO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - and safety. Therapy dogs are seen as a promising strategy to aid in mitigating undesirable behaviours and supporting classroom management. - The study found that while school dogs are perceived positively for their benefits, but 'unexpected' incidents such as toileting, barking, growling, and biting were reported. - The research highlights the tension between practical realities and teachers' expectations when including dogs in classrooms, indicating a need for better preparation and management. 	High

Appendices

Author (year)	Country	Research question(s) or aims	Participant characteristics and context	Data collection methods	Data analysis approach	Findings	Quality assurance rating
						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The study emphasizes the additional responsibilities and potential stress for teachers managing school dogs, as well as instances of distress or anxiety among children, staff, or dogs. 	
Maricevic (2022)	New York, USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What were the outcomes of bringing a therapy dog into a secondary school? How, if at all, do secondary educators perceive therapy dogs as contributors to their students' social-emotional competency development? How, if at all, do secondary educators perceive therapy dogs as a distraction from students' social-emotional competency development? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 16 participants 11 secondary schools with therapy dog inclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial data gathered through virtual semi-structured interviews During these interviews unstructured interview protocol was used to follow up Close analysis of documents such as letter of intent and codes of conduct in relation to the dog A case record was created 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transcription and coding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Therapy dogs contribute positively to secondary students' social-emotional learning and competency development. Therapy dogs have a broader positive impact on the school environment, including reducing stress and anxiety and improving mental health. Successful implementation of therapy dog programs requires careful planning, including 	High

Appendices

Author (year)	Country	Research question(s) or aims	Participant characteristics and context	Data collection methods	Data analysis approach	Findings	Quality assurance rating
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What factors contributed to the implementation process as related to including a therapy dog in the secondary setting?" ➤ What challenges and supports were encountered during the process? 				<p>teacher initiation, administrative support, and addressing safety and legal considerations.</p>	
Mercer (2019)	Cumbria, UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the motives for and benefits of introducing a full-time canine into an educational setting for children and young people? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 school staff interviewed using an online questionnaire from a convenience sample of known contacts - Questionnaire was shared with schools known to have dogs and a further 10 questionnaires were completed - 2 dog training sessions were observed by the researcher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mixed methods design - Phenomenological study - Included semi-structured interviews, surveys and observations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inductive analysis was used to determine themes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Full-time school dogs have a positive impact on children's and young people's social and emotional development, behaviour, and academic enthusiasm. - School dogs provide educational value and contribute to a positive school climate. - The introduction of school dogs requires careful consideration of dog welfare and training, as 	Medium

Appendices

Author (year)	Country	Research question(s) or aims	Participant characteristics and context	Data collection methods	Data analysis approach	Findings	Quality assurance rating
Overton (2022)	Missouri, USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are perceptions from teachers, counsellors, and administrators about animal assisted interventions and its effect on student behaviour before and after implementation of the program? - To what extent do students believe animal assisted interventions impacted their behaviours? - What are observed changes in student behaviour after the implementation of an animal assisted intervention program?" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 20 elementary school teachers were surveyed pre and post an animal assisted intervention - Two teachers, two students, two counsellors and two building administrators were interviewed about their perceptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Qualitative research design - Surveys, classroom observations and semi-structured interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inductive and deductive data analysis - Categorical coding for thematic analysis - Triangulation of data from the surveys, interviews and observations 	<p>well as policies and risk assessments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Animal-assisted interventions positively impact students' social and emotional behaviours, leading to increased on-task behaviours and improved social interactions. - These interventions enhance students' confidence and willingness to complete tasks at school. - Data from surveys, interviews, and observations indicate a decrease in off-task or negative classroom behaviours following the implementation of animal-assisted interventions. - Staff perceived that a lack of information or training 	High

Appendices

Author (year)	Country	Research question(s) or aims	Participant characteristics and context	Data collection methods	Data analysis approach	Findings	Quality assurance rating
Romack (2024)	Michigan, USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the effects of therapy dogs on student learning, participation, social interactions, and emotional well-being in an academic setting? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 54 participants in total - 45 observed therapy dogs - 9 not observed therapy dogs - Staff members from early education to high school - Various roles: teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, mental health clinicians, counsellors, social workers, secretaries, clerks, behaviour specialists. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Survey included quantitative (multiple-choice and Likert scale) and qualitative questions. - Survey was voluntary and anonymous. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quantitative data analysed using Likert scales and multiple-choice responses. - Qualitative data categorised and scored based on response frequency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Therapy dogs had the most positive impact on students' emotional well-being, followed by learning, social interactions, and participation. - The majority of staff members who observed therapy dogs reported positive impacts, with a significant percentage wanting the dogs to visit their students in the future. 	Medium
Sloan-Oberdier (2018)	Ohio, USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What benefits do elementary school counsellors experience working with therapy dogs alongside them at their schools? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School counsellors who had worked with a therapy dog in their school for a minimum of six months prior - Total of 7 participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Phenomenological research method - Semi-structured interviews (some in person and some over the phone/Skype) with some follow-ups and probes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Moustakas' (1994) modified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method was used - Involved identifying and clustering meaning units into themes, construction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Therapy dogs in schools promote improved emotions and connections among students and staff. - Therapy dogs enhance school counsellors' job 	High

Appendices

Author (year)	Country	Research question(s) or aims	Participant characteristics and context	Data collection methods	Data analysis approach	Findings	Quality assurance rating
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What challenges do elementary school counsellors experience working with therapy dogs alongside them at their schools?" 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> of textural-structural descriptions and then cross analyse themes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> effectiveness and create a positive school climate. Challenges associated with therapy dogs are minor and easily overcome. 	
Suppon (2022)	Pennsylvania, USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are teachers' perceptions of the effects of therapy dogs in a school setting? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elementary school teachers from a single school Purposive sampling was used to select participants 45 participants completed the survey 3 of these then volunteered for being interviewed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mixed method, sequential design: qualitative interviews informed by quantitative survey results Survey using Likert scales, questions focused on three main components, student learning environment, behaviour, and well-being. Semi-structured interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data from the survey Interviews were analysed with inductive coding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers perceive therapy dogs as a positive influence on the learning environment, student behaviour, and student well-being in elementary classrooms. 	High
Tate (2015)	Missouri, USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the perceived effects of animal-assisted activities and therapies in the public school? What are the observable effects of animal-assisted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 13 staff members from a Missouri public school who had direct contact with the school's therapy dog replied to the questionnaire. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mixed methods design combining qualitative case study and quantitative methods Data collection through field work, interviews, surveys, and observations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Descriptive statistics were used to analyse survey data Interview data was coded, and themes were identified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perceived effects of pet therapy dog in the school were positive Having a pet therapy dog led to a positive change in school climate, supporting emotional and 	High

Appendices

Author (year)	Country	Research question(s) or aims	Participant characteristics and context	Data collection methods	Data analysis approach	Findings	Quality assurance rating
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - activities and therapies in the public school? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The primary building involved junior high and elementary buildings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Surveys as self-report instruments for gathering perceptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of triangulation for cross-checking findings - Data from surveys, interviews and observations were analysed with the constant comparative method 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - academic needs and improved teacher, staff, and parent attitudes. 	
Tate & Story (2020)	Alabama, USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do educators describe their lived experiences regarding the implementation of facility dogs to promote a positive elementary school climate? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 16 participants from 3 out of 4 elementary schools invited to the study, mainly teachers and librarians 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Qualitative study - Phenomenological approach - Interviews conducted via Zoom and Google Meet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thematic analysis of qualitative data - Coding and categorization of themes and codes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facility dogs significantly improve school climate by creating a warm and welcoming environment. - The presence of facility dogs enhances social interactions and fosters a sense of community among students and staff. - Facility dogs contribute to reducing stress and anxiety, promoting a calming effect in educational settings. 	High
Van Schoick (2021)	California, USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All participants were teachers from a single K-8 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Qualitative case study design - Triangulation of methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Data was organised, using the data analysis spiral and coded into themes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Therapy dogs improved the moods of both students and teachers in 	High

Appendices

Author (year)	Country	Research question(s) or aims	Participant characteristics and context	Data collection methods	Data analysis approach	Findings	Quality assurance rating
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - impact of therapy dogs on students' moods? - What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the impact of therapy dogs on their own moods? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - magnet school in northern California - Three male and three female teachers - They all liked dogs and were interested in seeing whether people's moods were improved - None of the participants had any prior experience with dog therapy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Semi-structured interviews, a focus group, observations of teachers, and student paragraphs. - Therapy dogs visited classrooms for 30 minutes per session, over a 6-week period, with a total of six visits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The themes were selected by counting the number of times the topic, ideas, or words appeared collectively across the four instruments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - an inner-city school setting. - The presence of therapy dogs promoted inclusion and fostered kindness and compassion among students and teachers. - Incorporating therapy dogs into educational programs could potentially reduce suspensions and dropouts. 	
Vardy et al. (2025)	UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To to explore, from the perspectives of educators, the general risks and benefits to both students and animals of including animals in schools, the types of activities undertaken, species included and their associated management, and the perceived impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants included 14 educators - 10 of which were female - 11 had animals in their school included in various ways e.g., therapy dogs, for teaching. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Qualitative study design with semi-structured online interviews - Two interview schedules based on the participants' experience of including animals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflexive thematic analysis following transcript analysis - A list of codes was generated to identify key themes and sub-themes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educators perceive the inclusion of animals in schools as beneficial for student well-being and motivation. - There is a lack of clear guidance and support for managing animals in educational settings. - The study calls for the development of structured policies and resources to 	High

Appendices

Author (year)	Country	Research question(s) or aims	Participant characteristics and context	Data collection methods	Data analysis approach	Findings	Quality assurance rating
		on both students and animals.				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure safe and effective inclusion of animals in schools. Dogs had various roles within the school and participants were not always clear on the roles that therapy dogs took. 	
Zents et al. (2017)	New York, USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To assess how students and staff perceptions on having a therapy dog in school and what they perceive to be the impact on student well-being 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants were students, teachers, health professionals, and therapy dogs from four school districts 35 students, 2 school psychologists, 3 school counsellors and one special education teacher participated in semi-structured interviews 196 students and 105 staff participated in the questionnaires Four therapy dogs who had been at their 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Semi-structured interviews with selected students and faculty; surveys distributed to a larger group of students and faculty. Survey Content: Questions about contact with therapy dogs, perceived effectiveness on a Likert scale. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data Analysis: Coding of interview and survey responses to identify themes; triangulation for consistency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faculty and students from four rural school districts in Western New York support the use of therapy dogs as a viable school intervention. Therapy dogs are beneficial for addressing social, emotional, and behavioural issues among students and staff. Therapy dogs enhance the therapeutic process by providing unconditional positive regard, empathetic 	Medium

Appendices

Author (year)	Country	Research question(s) or aims	Participant characteristics and context	Data collection methods	Data analysis approach	Findings	Quality assurance rating
			respective schools for over 3 years			understanding, and congruency.	

Appendix E Analytic Framework for Thematic Synthesis

List of Themes

Emotional Benefits

Changing Emotional State

Increasing Happiness

Increasing Anticipation

Elevating Confidence

Facilitating Restorative Mood Shifts

Modulating Arousal and Supporting Emotional Regulation

Facilitating Calmness to Support Emotional Regulation

Reducing Stress and Anxiety

Shifting Cognitive Focus

Engaging in Positive Cognitive Reframing

Redirecting Attention

Using Cognitive Appraisal to Overcome Fear

Experiencing Emotional Security and Attachment

Experiencing Comfort

Feeling Loved and Accepted

Experiencing a Sense of Safety and Protection

Facilitating Self- Disclosure

Social Benefits

Fostering a Sense of School Community and Belonging

Promoting a Positive Wider School Climate

Increasing Opportunities for Social Interactions and Enhancing Communication

Facilitating Connection and Relationship Building

Enhancing Peer Friendships

Fostering Unity and Inclusion

Social and Emotional Learning

Acquiring Social Skills through Interaction and Care with Animal

Enhancing Self Awareness and Social- Emotional Awareness

Challenges

Safety Risks (Physical and Emotional)

Risk of Harm

Allergies

Fear of Dogs

Welfare of the Animal

Risks from Children Harming the Animal

Ensuring the Animal's Welfare Needs are Met

Practical and Ethical Considerations for Having a Therapy Animal

Role of the Therapy Animal

Lack of Guidance to Implement Animal-Assisted Services

Selecting the 'Right Animal/Handler

Level of Training

Unpredictability of the Animal

Dual Role of Being Staff and Handler

Utilising Outside Organisations

Expectations and Acceptance of the Animal by Staff/Handlers

Cultural Issues

To group the findings, each finding was written on a post it note and then organised into groups according to similarity of findings. To manage the nuances with the theme vocabulary/meanings and find the overlaps in themes, a visual symbol key was applied. This was not needed for the ‘challenges’ which seemed clearer to group and organise.

Visual Symbols Key

Increased happiness / joy		Feeling loved	
Positive emotions/mood		Feeling accepted	
Brighten day		Feeling safe and protected	
Increased excitement		Increased social interactions	
Mood Shift		Enhanced communication	
Increased confidence		Positive school climate	
Change in thinking		Connecting	
Distraction of thoughts		Friendships	
Overcoming Fear		Opening up / talking	
Calming		Learning social skills	
Reducing anxiety and stress		Self and Social Awareness	
Comfort			

Emotional Benefits

Changing Emotional State

Increasing happiness

12 studies

Appendices

Romack (2024)	Dogs impacting students' emotional wellbeing (ave score by staff 8.51/10) 18 participants said that dogs promoted positive emotions			
Overton (2022)	Students appear happier			
Helms (2024)	TD make students happy, kids smiling			
Tate (2015)	TD brightens students' day.			
Tate & Story (2020)	TDs brought joy, happiness, and fun			
Suppon (2022)	'Just looking at a dog makes people smile and feel happier' Positive impact on students' wellbeing			
Sloan-Oberdier (2018)	TD makes people smile and students appeared happier			
Maricevic (2022)	'Happy to see;' 'light up;' mood change			
Farrand & Young Jung (2025)	Mood enlightening – 'children light up every time they see TD,' joy and happiness – 'provides so much comfort, joy, and happiness'			
Baurys (2020)	Increased positive mood. 'Students instantly lit up when they saw Molly'			
Beck (2015)	TD walks in the room and students faces light up sincerely happy to see him, enjoy petting him and saying hello, spirits appear lifted'			
Fick (2015)	'Faces of children brightened			

Increasing Anticipation

4 studies

Suppon (2022)	Students are excited to see TD			
Beck (2015)	Students are always excited to see TD.			
Baurys (2020)	'Excitement of students and staff on the days that Molly was present'			
Fick (2015)	Increased excitement			

Elevating Confidence

2 studies

Romack (2024)	8 participants said dogs boost confidence.			
Mercer (2019)	Increased confidence as not judged.	 		

Facilitating Restorative Mood Shifts

6 studies

Overton (2022)	Presence of TD helped 'flip' students' day			
Sloan-Oberdier (2018)	TD makes people change the start of their day, promotes improved emotions,			
Fick (2015)	Their mood improved.'			

Zents et al., (2017)	TDs help students feel better about themselves.			
Romack (2024)	15 participants said emotional support for students when having a crisis. 3 participants thought dog helped to motivate students to arrive or stay in class after a crisis			
Baurys (2020)	'Students drawn to Molly who gave them unconditional love, starting or ending their day on a better note than what it may have been before'			

Modulating Arousal and Supporting Emotional Regulation

Facilitating Calmness to Support Emotional Regulation

17 studies

Tate (2015)	Presence of TD had a calming effect.			
Van Schoick (2021)	TD calmed students			
Vardy et al., (2025)	Calming effect of animals TDs promoting emotional regulation and being sensitive to the emotional needs of the student			
Farrand & Young Jung (2025)	SALT found it calmed students, creating a more positive experience with them			
Fick (2015)	Students became calm and relaxed after initial excitement.			
Mercer (2019)	Dog calming and gave emotional support			

Appendices

Sloan-Oberdier (2018)	Students appeared calmer.			
Sloan-Oberdier (2018)	Calming an upset student, going from being angry to relaxed	 		
Overton (2022)	Relaxed / calm effect pre intervention 55% and rose to 80% afterwards			
Broad (2018)	Calmness in room when school dog present – created a safe relaxed environment. Dogs slept for large chunks of the day. ‘When Pongo was asleep children and staff often placed feet on dog’s back, taking shoes off to stroke him as they worked’ – touch and stroking a dog creates a calming effect			
Broad (2018)	Mood changer – feeling aggressive, spending time with dog, calmed and outlet for tears. Speed at resolving the issue	 		
Kelsey (2021)	TD can be useful as a reactive behaviour management strategy to help calm a student in crisis. Idea of having space with dog to self-regulate			
Helms (2024)	Having a direct effect on students when in crisis			
Tate & Story (2020)	Enhanced climate – calm peaceful school/classroom			
Tate & Story (2020)	Calm a student who is agitated, upset and support to regulate			
Beck (2015)	TD helps students calm down when feeling frustrated, ‘it works every time’			

Appendices

Beck (2015)	Supports self-regulation as students will often not become aggressive when TD is present			
Suppon (2022)	Calming effect with TD setting the tone of the room Boosting morale in the room Positive impact on the emotional environment of the classroom			
Baurys (2020)	'There was calmness around Molly, instead of ramping up their behaviour the opposite happened'			
Zents et al., (2017)	Shortened de-escalation time for upset students			
Baird (2023)	N=105 11.7% TDs assist students to regulate by coregulating with them through behavioural escalations			
Baird (2023)	TDs assist students to regulate by modelling self-regulations skills. N=125 14% TDs model emotional regulation skills to students which they replicate to manage their own difficult emotions			

Reducing Stress and Anxiety

13 studies

Fick (2015)	Reducing feeling stressed and anxious 'Having animal is therapeutic as lessens anxiety, boosts morale, and raises spirits'			
Van Schoick (2021)	Reducing anxiety levels for students and improving mood – 'have a way of bringing students out of their own minds' (something else to focus on)			
Van Schoick (2021)	Destress teachers – improve their moods which then impacts on students			
Baurys (2020)	Teachers discussed how Molly helped to relieve our own stress levels with her calming presence – 'Molly did			

Appendices

	amazing things for my anxiety. I felt she could sense when I really needed her love, when I was having a stressful morning'			
Kelsey (2021)	To de-stress students and staff			
Helms (2024)	Helped with stress for both staff and students.			
Sloan-Oberdier (2018)	TDs assisted students by helping staff relax. TD emulated calmness copied by others			
Zents et al., (2017)	TD stress relief and soothing benefits Reduction in anxiety and anger			
Suppon (2022)	Perceive TD to contribute to a visible decrease in students' anxiety and stress in the classroom.			
Baird (2023)	22.1% believed TDs reduce students' stress, anxiety, and arousal (by providing them with unconditional positive regard, comfort, and affection)			
Broad (2018)	Reducing SATs anxiety – time to walk dog with an adult. Could have been the conversation with the adult + dog as dog could have been the catalyst for the conversation			
Maricevic (2022)	Managing anxiety related to tests.			
Maricevic (2022)	TD helped students manage mental health directly and indirectly by TDs activating the parasympathetic side of students' nervous systems, positive experience with TD shifts internal emotional state. TD and student relationships are an antidote to stress and anxiety, sense of peace and calm			

Maricevic (2022)	Greater self-awareness in terms of stress and anxiety			
Tate & Story (2020)	Provide a tool to calm and regulate mental health by reducing symptoms of anxiety and stress. Calming and reducing anxiety and stress			
Tate & Story (2020)	Facility dogs magnified and supported others to be more self-aware of those that were struggling as could spot stress/anxiety levels of person with dog			
Romack (2024)	16 participants stated dogs have calming effects and reduce anxiety.			

Shifting Cognitive Focus

Engaging in Positive Cognitive Reframing

3 studies

Tate & Story (2020)	Change in thinking/mood – reminder of what to prioritise/what’s important – provide perspectives for own emotions (my words – don’t sweat the small stuff)			
Van Schoick (2021)	Reducing anxiety levels for students and improving mood – ‘have a way of bringing students out of their own minds’ (something else to focus on)			
Maricevic (2022)	TD creates ‘a space of compassion’ and provides students with space to create such compassionate spaces for themselves.			

Redirecting Attention

4 studies

Beck (2015)	Great distraction when students are feeling angry.			
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Broad (2018)	Staff reported spending time with Ruby helped them chill and provide a distraction. Distraction at school gates for students feeling anxious about coming into school			
Maricevic (2022)	TD is a needed distraction from life stressors to deescalate tension			
Tate (2015)	Ease transition at start of day to new kindergarteners. New students who are feeling apprehensive about starting at the school			

Using Cognitive Reappraisal to Overcome Fear

5 studies

Maricevic (2022)	Managing fear			
Kelsey (2021)	TD offered those who were fearful an experience to overcome this			
Helms (2024)	Overcoming fear			
Fick (2015)	Supported some children to manage their feelings of fear			
Mercer (2019)	Children overcoming fears of dogs.			

Experiencing Emotional Security and Attachment

Experiencing Comfort

9 studies

Maricevic (2022)	Speaking to TD gave comfort, impartial. Outlet for invisible trauma and untold stories			
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Appendices

Van Schoick (2021)	TD for comfort			
Van Schoick (2021)	TD help when you feel sad or depressed and you don't feel lonely.	 		
Farrand & Young Jung (2025)	'If I am having a bad day Biscuit comforts me' (staff)			
Mercer (2019)	Having physical cuddles/comfort			
Fick (2015)	Solace of interacting with an animal – 'some children need extra love and the comfort and reassurance... they feel by holding, touching or just talking to an animal gives them the feeling of closeness they need'			
Tate & Story (2020)	Comfort for students when upset. Touching/petting dog provided a sense of peace and calm - comfort			
Lewis et al., (2023)	TD main role was to offer physical comfort			
Vardy et al., (2025)	Support for children in difficult circumstances e.g., delivering bad news and coping after the news			
Sloan-Oberdier (2018)	TD support for being told bad news. Support for grief and loss			
Sloan-Oberdier (2018)	Students appeared comforted			

Feeling Loved and Accepted

8 studies

Fick (2015)	Unconditional love – hard to feel sad.			
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Appendices

Farrand & Young Jung (2025)	'Guinness is positive, warm, accepting and makes everyone feel loved'			
Maricevic (2022)	TD meeting basic needs, source of love			
Van Schoick (2021)	TD showed the students unconditional love. Help others to feel loved. Some students don't experience being loved or giving love			
Zents et al., (2017)	Unconditional love			
Beck (2015)	Student taking TD out on lead once a week – made the student feel special, needed, and secure			
Baurys (2020)	It gives students an outlet for their love and to know they are loved back			
Mercer (2019)	TD nonjudgmental			
Fick (2015)	Not feeling judged by the animal			

Experiencing a Sense of Safety and Protection

5 studies

Broad (2018)	The idea that children felt protected by the dog increasing feelings of safety			
Maricevic (2022)	Transfer of energy between student and TD gives a grounded feeling and creates a feeling of safety and security			
Van Schoick (2021)	Students feel safer and secure			
Tate (2015)	The presence of TD has a way of reassuring students and situations			

Broad (2018)	Head teacher having large dog in for difficult parent conversations, using them to manage and deflect potentially confrontational behaviour			
Tate & Story (2020)	Feeling of safety			

Facilitating Self-Disclosure

11 studies

Zents et al., (2017)	TD helps students to talk about feelings.			
Fick (2015)	Students are able to talk to animals and open up.			
Tate & Story (2020)	TD are someone for students to talk to when they don't want to unload to an adult			
Broad (2018)	Death of TD presented important learning opportunity to talk about grief and loss			
Helms (2024)	TD helped students to talk and share emotions that perhaps might be more difficult without the dog. Outlet for their emotions – can just cry with the dog without having to say a word			
Lewis et al., (2023)	TDs provide listening ear so pupils can talk about their emotional problems			
Sloan-Oberdier (2018)	Students feel comfortable with the presence of dog when they needed to talk to something with their counsellor			
Zents et al., (2017)	Developing social acceptability for counselling			
Overton (2022)	Students are more able to share personal thoughts and feelings with others at school.			

	Increased confidence to communicate with others and initiate those conversations			
Broad (2018)	Presence of school dog supported 2 incidents of safeguarding disclosures. Children felt safe with the dog and ‘dropped their guard’			
Baurys (2020)	‘I saw students who might not respond outwardly or positively to adults or peers but feel safe enough with Molly to reach out to them.’ ‘Molly is nonjudgemental, non-threatening presence, who for some students is the only comfortable presence to talk to, connect with and share secrets with.’			
Vardy et al., (2025)	Facilitate communication and opening up.			
Beck (2015)	TD helps students realise communication is important. TD has helped some students open up and want to talk more.			

Social Benefits

Fostering a Sense of School Community and Belonging

Promoting a Positive Wider School Climate

7 studies

Fick (2015)	Happier campus School environment changed due to the presence of the animal – calming atmosphere, home like feel, welcoming, positive			
Tate & Story (2020)	TDs brought light heartedness to the school’s climate. Enhance school’s climate positively			

Romack (2024)	Impact on staff and students – wider school			
Helm (2024)	Positive impact on school climate, brought joy.			
Zents et al., (2017)	Foster a positive friendly environment.			
Sloan-Oberdier (2018)	Warmer climate in school – ‘little bit of home there’			
Suppon (2022)	Perceive TDs to make classroom a better environment for students socially. More comfortable atmosphere			

Increasing Opportunities for Social Interactions and Enhancing Communication

9 studies

Romack (2024)	Dogs impact social interactions – ave rating 7.18 / 10. 14 participants thought it promoted opportunities for conversations			
Mercer (2019)	Improved social interactions and children behaved respectfully			
Baird et al., (2023)	N=154 17.2% perceived TDs to encourage and support students to engage in more social interactions with peers			
Sloan-Oberdier (2018)	Increased student interactions when with TD			
Overton (2022)	Students’ ability to interact more appropriately with others			
Maricevic (2022)	Providing opportunities for social interaction when a child takes TD for a walk in school			

<p>Broad (2018)</p>	<p>Pongo attracted attention from staff, pupils and visitors who would love to stop and talk to the child.</p> <p>Positive impact on social skills, self-esteem, and communication as a result of this</p> <p>Developing communication skills led to spontaneous conversations and interactions</p>			
<p>Fick (2015)</p>	<p>Facility dog opens lines of communication and breaks social barriers.</p> <p>Children who felt shy initially became more comfortable and happier to open up</p>			
<p>Helms (2024)</p>	<p>Students can speak better.</p>			

Facilitating Connection to Build Relationship

8 studies

<p>Tate & Story (2020)</p>	<p>Act as a bridge to connect people.</p> <p>Bridging gaps in school community</p> <p>Tool to connect with others and bring commonality between students and staff.</p> <p>Improved relationship between teacher and student</p>			
<p>Helms (2024)</p>	<p>Connected people.</p>			
<p>Maricevic (2022)</p>	<p>Building connections: connect with TD – connect with adult – connect with wider community.</p> <p>TD a bridge between different students and individual needs</p>			

	TD as a tool to develop relationships and extend relationships with TD to handler and teacher			
Sloan-Oberdier (2018)	Promoted connection. With counsellors - with school With community			
Van Schoick (2021)	Help teachers to have better relationships with the students. TD encouraged socialisation and friendship building between students and teachers. Improved teachers' perceptions of each other, bringing them together, seeing each other as more friendly			
Fick (2015)	Animals increase feeling of family and making those connections – ‘thing a kid can attach to and connect to and feel a connection here.’ ‘Connect with the animal as they’ve not been able to connect with people.’ When students feel a connection to the school they care more about the school and the people at the school and their performance at the school			
Grove et al., (2021)	TD build trust with students which formed meaningful relationships and fostered a sense of belonging.			
Suppon (2022)	Reducing students' self-isolation when TD in the room. TD brings students together.			

Enhancing Peer Friendships

5 studies

Tate & Story (2020)	Helped to develop friendships as TD something shared and in common to talk about Something to enjoy together when they might not normally play together,			
Maricevic (2022)	Peer interactions seem to be more positive in the presence of a TD. Actively talk to each other 'be more of a pod'			
Baird et al., (2023)	N=36 40% indicated TDs enable students to develop friendships with peers 'Gives confidence to make friends at school...helps them to feel they belong at school'			
Broad (2018)	Helping children to develop friendships. Being with school dogs gave them kudos and attracted other children and encouraging communication and thereby provided opportunities for building friendships.			
Van Schoick (2021)	TD created a more cohesive social dynamic – brought students together and stopped them quarrelling.			

Fostering Unity and Inclusion

4 studies

Tate & Story (2020)	Facility dogs unified and celebrated diverse populations as do not see differences and love all regardless of race, gender, religion, culture of background			
Maricevic (2022)	TD create a feeling of inclusivity. TD as a unifier			
Van Schoick (2021)	Helped students to be inclusive as students focused on dogs and not each other's SEN needs			

Broad (2018)	14/16 thought children in nurture group developed strong bonds with Pongo and helped give these children a second chance at developing positive attachments			
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Social and Emotional Learning

Acquiring Social Skills through Interaction and Care

9 studies

Broad (2018)	Children mirror the response to school dogs for unfamiliar visitors to the room – learning how to respond. Difference responses - frequent visitors looked at and went back to sleep / children kept working and not distracted, unfamiliar visitors more attention given			
Helms (2024)	Taught them responsibility as children active role in raising the dog.			
Kelsey (2021)	Opportunity to try out and practice social skills on the dog without feeling embarrassed.			
Sloan-Oberdier (2018)	TD promoted opportunities for children to learn about respect, responsibility, honesty, and kindness. TD as a role model of ‘good character’			
Suppon (2022)	TD teaches students time and place for everything and boundaries and cause and effect.			
Romack (2024)	4 participants said that dog’s presence teaches students interpersonal skills.			
Fick (2015)	Learning skills from dog e.g., patience, following rules. Interacting with animal teaches students about empathy, compassion, responsibility, self-control			

Fick (2015)	Improved children co-operating and working together e.g., children sitting in a circle and making sure guinea pig doesn't run off. Team building			
Overton (2022)	Learning to use appropriate positive body language and improved eye contact			
Zents et al., (2017)	TD helps students to learn about how to appropriately care for others.			

Enhancing Self Awareness and Social-Emotional Awareness

3 studies

Maricevic (2022)	Reading dog's behaviour / feelings taught students how to understand their social skills / social awareness and understand perspectives of others			
Maricevic (2022)	Through TD retreating, children adapted voice tone to be more positive and less sing song.			
Maricevic (2022)	Self-management – students with cultural differences coping with TD.			
Broad (2018)	Helped nurture children to develop a growing awareness and emotional understanding of others. Moving from being self-obsessed to thinking about others through responsibility of looking after school dog			
Fick (2015)	Caring for a living animal 'instills a sense of respect for life. Students see directly how their behaviour and actions affect others.'			

	Their social skills improve as they learn to think outside of themselves because their behaviour and actions affect others'			
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Challenges

Safety Risks (physical and emotional)

Risk of Harm

3 studies

Kelsey (2021)	TDs not pets. Children must understand boundaries in place for working dogs.			
Baird et al., (2023)	29.2% n=105 importance of having standardised regulations for TDs in schools and mandatory regulations to ensure interactions between students and TDs are conducted safely			
Baird et al., (2023)	335 n = 76 cited a lack of guidance and procedures to ensure that TDs are implemented for students 'TDs safer for some students in some schools and less safe for students in other schools'			
Baird et al., (2023)	8.7% n = 20 felt that some students could experience feelings of rejection if TDs unable to build rapport with them			
Baird et al., (2023)	Students becoming impatient / competitive about turn taking to spend with TD potentially leading to fights/meltdowns particularly for SEN children			
Broad (2018)	Impact of dog dying on particular children - leading to a negative impact on them			

Allergies

7 studies

Broad (2018)	Incident of downplaying a child’s allergy as staff were so positive about the school dog and believed that it wasn’t a risk, being a labradoodle			
Romack (2024)	Concern about allergies and the importance of consent			
Grove et al., (2020)	Risk management with allergies			
Kelsey (2021)	Effects of a therapy dog in the buildings for children with asthma or other adverse reactions (allergies)			
Sloan-Oberdier (2018)	Most challenges were at the initial period - allergies			
Maricevic (2022)	Allergies			
Tate (2014)	Particular therapy dog likes to sit on chairs and then leaves dog hair on them!			

Fear of Dogs

11 studies

Baird et al., (2023)	38.3 % n=88 perceived TDs can trigger distress for students with dog phobias			
Broad (2018)	Impact for a teacher who was scared of dogs – planning routes carefully and avoiding meetings with the school dog. Cultural issue to for this teacher who was a Muslim – dogs seen as aggressive and to guard so scary and not as pets.			

Appendices

Broad (2018)	Issue of the presence of Pongo in the assembly scares some children – moved away. Occasion when 2 x YRs cried			
Broad (2018)	Presence of a large dog barking at visitors to school			
Fick (2015)	Fear of a teacher – afraid of some animals but not all breeds of dog			
Romack (2024)	Main concern was about those afraid of dogs			
Helms (2024)	Staff worried about children being fearful of dogs, but this was overcome			
Maricevic (2022)	Fear of dogs			
Suppon (2022)	Fear of dogs			
Vardy et al., (2025)	Fear of animals			
Sloan-Oberdier (2018)	Fears/worries due to previous bad experiences			
Lewis et al., (2023)	Difficulties with managing interactions with children, particularly when some children are anxious			
Kelsey (2021)	Impact on staff who were fearful of dogs – difficult to do their jobs/felt disoriented when dog around them. TD being a source of stress/anxiety for staff			

Welfare of the Animal

Risks from Children Harming the Animal

6 studies

Baird et al., (2023)	44.3% n =158 highlighted the importance of developing and using screening procedures to identify, manage and support students with difficulties interacting with TDs			
Baird et al., (2023)	79.9% n=177 importance of establishing expectations and rules for the behaviour of students with TDs – acceptable/unacceptable behaviour, clear to all e.g., gentle petting, keeping a distance until their turn			
Lewis et al., (2023)	Major or minor incidents are more likely to take place with certain groups of learners			
Broad (2018)	Incident of a child possibly hurting Pongo and he then growled at her and apprehensively going forward			
Kelsey (2021)	Concern for safety of the dog especially when being involved in crisis moments			
Maricevic (2022)	TD’s welfare and security are a concern due to acts of malice			
Vardy et al., (2025)	Perceived risk of smaller animals reflected in how included and potentially less supervision, which has led to increased risk of the animal being manhandled.			

Ensuring the Animal’s Welfare Needs are Met

6 studies

Baird et al., (2023)	67.9% n =159, protecting the safety and welfare of therapy dogs was the most common challenge. Settings with TD’s are often too small or enclosed, increasing the risk of overcrowding and frightening the dog			
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Appendices

Baird et al., (2023)	21.3% n=76 Importance of strict limits around duration and no. of students at once to reduce risks for the dog of fatigue, stress, and anxiety Perceived interactions between students and TDs are often too long and involve too many students. 'Often there is 5 or more, and there should be no more than 3-4...sessions>1 hour and should be 40 mins tops'.			
Baird et al., (2023)	34.5% n=123 talked about student free spaces and time out areas for TDs to reduce risk of overcrowding			
Mercer (2019)	Dog welfare important – having a responsible staff member in care of the dog to ensure regular breaks, given space, only in part time for their own welfare and trained			
Lewis et al., (2023)	Not all TDs enjoy their role in school. Need to leave them alone/give them space			
Maricevic (2022)	Potential for altercations with other working dogs in the school			
Sloan-Oberdier (2018)	Other dogs coming into school with OT and Physical Therapist or students with service dog interacting with TDS			
Vardy et al., (2025)	Dogs have needs – identifying when they are not comfortable			
Vardy et al., (2025)	Challenge of knowing whether the dog is happy to participate – may walk off to show this. However, it does not consider the potential desire of dogs to acquiesce to or co-operate with the requests of their owner			

Practical and Ethical Considerations for Having a Therapy Animal

Role of the Therapy Animal

8 studies

Baird et al., (2023)	20.3% n=45 talked about the importance of formulating measurable aims and goals to have a clear plan and strategy for implementation			
Fick (2015)	Encouraging staff to make more use of the animal – more than just a reward			
Fick (2015)	Some teachers ‘forget’ to use them as focused on the curriculum coverage			
Romack (2024)	Only ‘troubled’ or ‘bad’ students see TDs, whilst other students are often forgotten			
Romack (2024)	11 participants stated that dogs need to be more available and visible to students. Suggested use of a sign-up sheet /schedule			
Helms (2024)	Scheduling time for everyone and allocating access to dog			
Helms (2024)	How principals envisioned TDs being with children different in reality – sometimes an interruption to learning and time consuming to organise			
Grove et al., (2020)	Need for foundational knowledge about the role of the dog as well as how best to involve the dog therapeutically and effectively			
Sloan-Oberdier (2018)	Making sure TDs used in a purposeful way. Staff have a shared understanding of the role of a TD and the programme			
Vardy et al., (2025)	Those that have TDs are not clear on the roles the dog undertook in the environment to provide therapeutic support			

Vardy et al., (2025)	Issue of structured sessions versus ad hoc time. More therapeutic work seemed to happen when contact was ad hoc.			
Broad (2018)	Impact of dog maybe transient or very gradual and only in the presence of the dog e.g., children fighting with dog present stopped but when dog not there, continued			

Lack of Guidance to Implement Animal-Assisted Services

3 studies

Maricevic (2022)	Varying district requirements – more informal in some districts			
Grove et al., (2020)	Trouble in finding regulations/guideline and support in how to implement a TD programme			
Vardy et al., (2025)	Participants desire for greater access to advice and material. Some animal organisations are anti-having animals in schools and therefore will not give advice			
Vardy et al., (2025)	Lack of centralised resources and support to facilitate inclusion and standard guidelines of how to implement animal e.g., programmes for TDs			

Selecting the ‘Right’ Animal / Handler

4 studies

Vardy et al., (2025)	Size of the animal – larger animals seen as increased potential risk but less vulnerable to being manhandled			
Vardy et al., (2025)	Importance of selecting an animal with the right attributes but what are the ‘right’ attributes? Size/breed/temperament but these are often informed by stereotypes			
Maricevic (2022)	Selecting right handlers/TDs combinations, different breeds, and personalities (both animal and human)			

Appendices

Zents et al., (2017)	Needs to be a well-tempered dog			
Sloan-Oberdier (2018)	Personality of some TDs gravitating towards others who are not keen on them			

Level of Training

5 studies

Baird et al., (2023)	32.8% n=88 standards for level of training and certification			
Maricevic (2022)	Financial cost of training up a TD			
Fick (2015)	Some teachers are not happy at the level of dogs training. Barking at class pets Crying for the owner Urinating when excited			
Suppon (2022)	Age and stage of dog in training e.g., if puppies use can be distracting			
Vardy et al., (2025)	Training requirements for TDs e.g., cannot be on a raw diet, people including their own pet dog in the workplace			

Unpredictability of the Animal

6 studies

Lewis et al., (2023)	Animals do not always choose to adhere to the lesson plan! Didn't participate. Being needy			
Broad (2018)	Issue of dog sleeping on the job!			
Vardy et al., (2025)	Unpredictability of dogs and the risks this may pose.			

Romack (2024)	TDs can disrupt learning in class			
Kelsey (2021)	TDs can be a distraction			
Sloan-Oberdier (2018)	TDs can be a distraction			

Dual Role of Being Staff and Handler

4 studies

Mercer (2019)	Staff being responsible for the dog but needing to attend meetings			
Grove et al., (2020)	Idea of ‘flying solo – the workload of the instigator and the handler.’ Time constraints and additional workload Needs to be a shared responsibility			
Lewis et al., (2023)	Challenges of managing a dog alongside the fulfilling role of teacher Practical and operational challenges, including managing the dog – toileting, barking, over-exuberance			
Sloan-Oberdier (2018)	Increase workload / time having a TD for school counsellors			
Sloan-Oberdier (2018)	Managing other demands of the job and having to shut the TD in the office at times			

Utilising Outside Organisations

1 study

Maricevic (2022)	Limitations of outside TD organization Scheduling constraints Student privacy and confidentiality, having handler present in group therapy sessions			
Maricevic (2022)	Legal considerations Ownership of TD and not handler employed by school			
Maricevic (2022)	TD handlers having an agreement with school and issue of insurance and liability			

Expectations and Acceptance of the Animal by Staff/Handlers

6 studies

Baird et al., (2023)	32.1% n =75 perceived lack of agreement between school leaders, teachers, and TD organisations with regard to the endorsement and expectations of TDs School leaders – more accepting of enclosed spaces and having a larger group with the dog. TD organisations – unclear about aims/goals for the dog and how to manage safety risks			
Fick (2015)	Tolerance of some teachers – some people are animal lovers, and some are not			
Mercer (2019)	Staff spoiling the ‘dog’ impact on consistency of training			
Grove et al., (2020)	Whole school community needs to be open and accepting of TD. Without staff support would be very difficult – resistance would be a barrier			
Zents et al., (2017)	Need staff with the passion to stick with the training of a TD			

Appendices

Sloan-Oberdier (2018)	Managing misconceptions related to TD e.g., funding for TD, TD seen as ‘just distracting and barking’			
Sloan-Oberdier (2018)	Some staff didn’t understand the impact of the TD for the student and could lead to some negativity about the TD			

Cultural Issues

2 studies

Broad (2018)	Cultural issue to for this teacher who was a Muslim – dogs seen as aggressive and to guard so scary and not as pets.			
Maricevic (2022)	Managing cultural differences – Muslim child explained wouldn’t pet TD as culture does not believe in dogs being inside, but child was accepting of dog being in the classroom			

Helms (2024) – although initial challenges, not recognising these as really being challenges as overcome and therefore only seeing the positives.

Appendix F Participant Recruitment Advert



University of Southampton

**ANIMALS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS?
YES OR NO, WE WANT TO HEAR
FROM YOU**

yes? No?

Are you a headteacher in a mainstream or special school for children aged between 4-11 years?
Is your school located in England?
Do you have 30 minutes to spare?

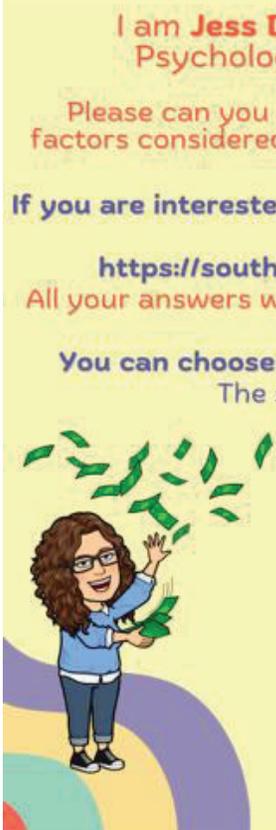
I am **Jess Delicata** and I am a trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Southampton.

Please can you help us understand more about the process and factors considered by school to decide whether to have animals in or visiting their school or not.

If you are interested in contributing to this research, please scan this QR code below or go to https://southampton.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6tZdYYC4ZJSpjVk
All your answers will be confidential. You can complete part of the survey and save it to finish at your leisure.
You can choose to enter a **PRIZE DRAW** -our thank you for participating.
The survey closes at midnight 3rd February 2025.

1st PRIZE £100
2nd PRIZE £75
3rd PRIZE £50
(Amazon vouchers)

If you have any questions then please contact me by email at J.Delicata@soton.ac.uk
ERGO number 93138
Date: 21/10/24 Version 2.0



Appendix G Gatekeeper Letter



Gatekeeper Letter

Study Title: To include animals or not: how schools with primary aged children make the decision.

Researcher(s): Jess Delicata, Dr Anne McBride and Dr Sarah Wright

University email: j.delicata@soton.ac.uk

Ethics/ERGO no: 93138

Version and date: Version 2, 21.10.24

Dear _____

My name is Jess Delicata, and I am an Educational Psychology doctorate student at the University of Southampton. I am currently conducting my doctoral research project which is supervised by Dr Anne McBride and Dr Sarah Wright. I am contacting you as I am hoping you would be happy to share details of my study with potential participants *in your academy / trust / organisation / through your membership (*delete as applicable).

The study aims to increase our understanding of the processes and factors considered by schools when deciding to include animals in their school, or not. The study comprises an online, confidential survey which will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. If you wish, you can complete it in more than one sitting. We do also ask for copies of relevant policies; these can be uploaded in the survey or forwarded later.

All information collected remains confidential. The study has received ethical approval from the University.

To gain a representative perspective, we invite participation from special and mainstream primary, infant and junior schools, located in England, regardless of whether they currently or previously have included animals, decided not to, or not even considered it a possibility.

I am seeking head teachers / principals as participants, as they will have an overview of the school's decision-making processes.

If you are willing to inform your members about this study, please find attached my research

advert that can be shared via any means, for example email, social media, forums, networks, and news bulletins. The survey will end at midnight on 3rd February 2025, and I will be sending reminders week beginning 18th November, 9th December 2024, 6th January and 20th January 2025. If at all possible, please could you share these reminders.

It is important when sharing the research advert that you clarify that individuals are being contacted through your gatekeeper role. Some suggested wording is below.

“You are receiving an invitation to participate in this study (please see the attached research poster/research poster link) because *(please enter your name/ organisation/forum)* has agreed to forward you this information on the researcher’s behalf. The researcher does not have your contact details and any participation in the survey will remain anonymous to others in this organisation/forum. The survey will end at midnight on 3rd February 2025. I will be sharing reminders from the researcher in the weeks beginning 18th November, 9th December 2024, 6th January, and 20th 2025”.

If you require any further information, then please contact me. Your help is much appreciated in supporting the recruitment of participants.

Best wishes,

Jess Delicata

Trainee Educational Psychologist

University of Southampton

**ANIMALS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS?
YES OR NO, WE WANT TO HEAR
FROM YOU**

yes? No?

Are you a headteacher in a mainstream or special school for children aged between 4-11 years?
Is your school located in England?
Do you have 30 minutes to spare?

I am **Jess Delicata** and I am a trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Southampton.

Please can you help us understand more about the process and factors considered by school to decide whether to have animals in or visiting their school or not.

If you are interested in contributing to this research, please scan this QR code below or go to
https://southampton.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6tZdYVC4ZJSpjVk
All your answers will be confidential. You can complete part of the survey and save it to finish at your leisure.

You can choose to enter a **PRIZE DRAW** -our thank you for participating.
The survey closes at midnight 3rd February 2025.

1st PRIZE £100
2nd PRIZE £75
3rd PRIZE £50
(Amazon vouchers)

If you have any questions then please contact me by email at
J.Delicata@soton.ac.uk
ERGO number 93138
Date: 21/10/24 Version 2.0

Appendix H Email Invitation to Participants and Reminder Emails



Study Title: To include animals or not: how schools with primary aged children make the decision.

Researcher(s): Jess Delicata, Dr Anne McBride and Dr Sarah Wright

University email: j.delicata@soton.ac.uk

Ethics/ERGO no: 93138

Version and date: Version 2 21.10.24

Initial survey invitation by email (sending last week in October / start of November 2024)

For the Attention of the Head teacher/Principal

Dear _____

My name is Jess Delicata. I am an Educational Psychology doctorate student at the University of Southampton. I am conducting my doctoral research (supervised by Drs Anne McBride and Sarah Wright), with the aim to increase our understanding of the processes and factors considered by schools when deciding to include animals in their school, or not. (please see advert below).

To gain a representative perspective, we invite participation from special and mainstream primary, infant and junior schools, located in England, regardless of whether they currently or previously have included animals, decided not to, or not even considered it a possibility.

I am seeking head teachers / principals as participants, as they will have an overview of the school's decision-making processes. Of course, you may wish to delegate this to another member of the senior management team. The study comprises an online, confidential survey which will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. If you wish, you can complete it in more than one sitting. We will ask for copies of relevant policies, and these can be uploaded in the survey or forwarded later.

All information collected remains confidential. The study has received ethical approval from the University.

The survey will be open until midnight 3rd February, and I will be sending reminders.

There is the opportunity to win an Amazon voucher worth £100, £75 or £50.

I do hope your school will be able to contribute to this research. I thank you for your time in reading this letter and thank you in advance should you decide to participate. To participate please use the link below or the QR code

https://southampton.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6tZdYYC4ZJSpjVk

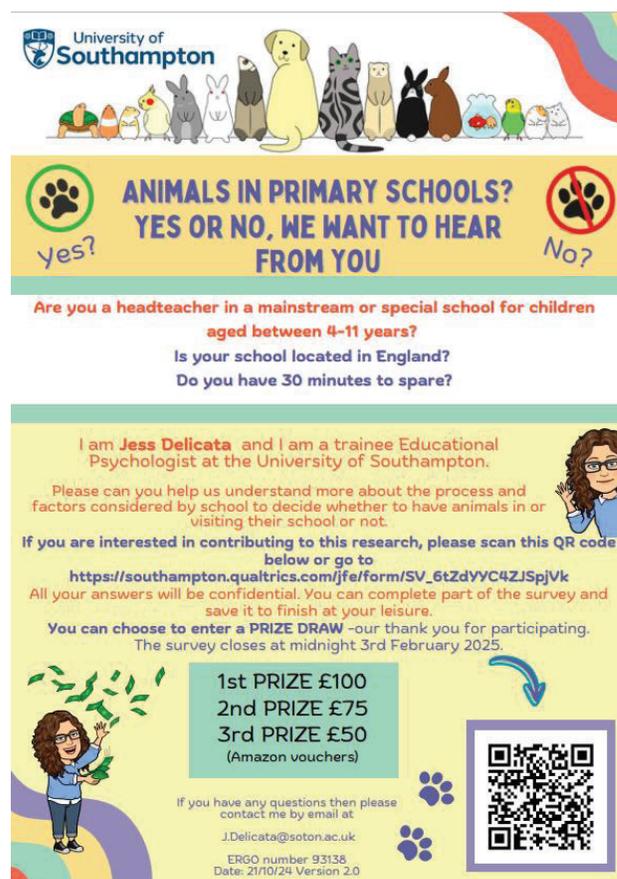


If you require any further information, then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best wishes,

Jess Delicata

Trainee Educational Psychologist



University of Southampton

**ANIMALS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS?
YES OR NO, WE WANT TO HEAR
FROM YOU**

yes? No?

Are you a headteacher in a mainstream or special school for children aged between 4-11 years?
Is your school located in England?
Do you have 30 minutes to spare?

I am **Jess Delicata** and I am a trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Southampton.

Please can you help us understand more about the process and factors considered by school to decide whether to have animals in or visiting their school or not.

If you are interested in contributing to this research, please scan this QR code below or go to
https://southampton.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6tZdYYC4ZJSpjVk
All your answers will be confidential. You can complete part of the survey and save it to finish at your leisure.

You can choose to enter a PRIZE DRAW -our thank you for participating.
The survey closes at midnight 3rd February 2025.

**1st PRIZE £100
2nd PRIZE £75
3rd PRIZE £50
(Amazon vouchers)**

If you have any questions then please contact me by email at
J.Delicata@soton.ac.uk
ERGO number 93138
Date: 21/10/24 Version 2.0

Email reminder 1 (sending wc week beginning 18th November 2024)

Dear _____

My name is Jess Delicata, and I am an Educational Psychology doctorate student at the University of Southampton. I emailed you a couple of weeks ago after half term about my research supervised by Drs Anne McBride and Sarah Wright. The study aims to increase our understanding of the processes and factors considered by schools when deciding to include animals in their school, or not.

I know how busy term gets at this time of year, so I thought I would just send a quick reminder about how *you / your school's headteacher (*delete according to whether the email address on the website is for the school's admin or head teacher) can participate in this survey. It will take about 30 minutes to complete.

Please see the advert with more details about the study and how to participate. There is a prize draw, with prizes of £100, £75 and £50 (Amazon vouchers) as our way of saying thank you to those that participate. The survey closes at midnight on 3rd February 2025.

If you require any further information, then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best wishes,

Jess Delicata

Trainee Educational Psychologist

The advertisement is a colorful flyer for a survey titled "ANIMALS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS? YES OR NO, WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU". At the top, it features the University of Southampton logo and a row of various cartoon animals including a dog, cat, rabbit, and birds. Below the title, there are two circular icons: a green one with a paw print and the word "yes?" and a red one with a paw print and a slash and the word "No?". The survey questions are: "Are you a headteacher in a mainstream or special school for children aged between 4-11 years?", "Is your school located in England?", and "Do you have 30 minutes to spare?". The flyer introduces Jess Delicata as a trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Southampton. It asks for help in understanding school factors for animal inclusion and provides a QR code and a URL: https://southampton.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6tZdYYC4ZJSpjVk. It mentions that answers are confidential and that participants can complete the survey at their leisure. A prize draw is announced, with prizes of £100, £75, and £50 in Amazon vouchers. The survey closes at midnight on 3rd February 2025. Contact information for Jess Delicata is provided: email J.Delicata@soton.ac.uk, ERGO number 93138, and date 21/10/24 Version 2.0. A QR code is located in the bottom right corner.

Email reminder 2 (sending wc week beginning 9th December 2024)

FAO Headteacher/Principal

Dear _____

It is very nearly the winter holiday season, and I am sure you are all busy with all sorts of activities in your school – with very excited children. I know the end of term is fast approaching and you are looking forward to a well-earned break.

You may recall this is my doctoral project which is supervised by Dr Anne McBride and Dr Sarah Wright. The study aims to increase our understanding of the processes and factors considered by schools when deciding to include animals in their school, or not.

If you have already done the survey, thank you, and I apologise for the reminder.

If not, I am hoping with the break, you may have time to do so, perhaps with a well-deserved cuppa.

Please see the advert with more details about the study and how to participate. There is a prize draw, with prizes of £100, £75 and £50 (Amazon vouchers) as our way of saying thank you to those that participate. The survey closes at midnight on 3rd February 2025.

If you require any further information, then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best wishes,

Jess Delicata

Trainee Educational Psychologist



**ANIMALS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS?
YES OR NO, WE WANT TO HEAR
FROM YOU**

Are you a headteacher in a mainstream or special school for children aged between 4-11 years?
Is your school located in England?
Do you have 30 minutes to spare?

I am **Jess Delicata** and I am a trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Southampton.

Please can you help us understand more about the process and factors considered by school to decide whether to have animals in or visiting their school or not.

If you are interested in contributing to this research, please scan this QR code below or go to https://southampton.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6tZdYYC4ZlSpjVk
All your answers will be confidential. You can complete part of the survey and save it to finish at your leisure.
You can choose to enter a **PRIZE DRAW** – our thank you for participating. The survey closes at midnight 3rd February 2025.

1st PRIZE £100
2nd PRIZE £75
3rd PRIZE £50
(Amazon vouchers)

If you have any questions then please contact me by email at J.Delicata@soton.ac.uk
ERGO number 93138
Date: 21/10/24 Version 2.0



Email reminder 3 (sending wc week beginning 6th January 2025)

FAO Headteacher / Principal

Dear _____

Happy New Year and I hope you had a well-deserved break. I am just sending another quick reminder to say that there is still time for your school to participate in my doctoral study to increase our understanding of the processes and factors considered by schools when deciding to include animals in their school, or not.

I would really value your school's participation.

If you have already done the survey, thank you, and I apologise for the reminder.

If not, I am hoping you can find time to do so.

Please see the advert with more details about the study and how to participate. There is a prize draw, with prizes of £100, £75 and £50 (Amazon vouchers) as our way of saying thank you to those that participate. The survey closes at midnight on 3rd February 2025.

If you require any further information, then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best wishes,

Jess Delicata

Trainee Educational Psychologist

University of Southampton

**ANIMALS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS?
YES OR NO, WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU**

Are you a headteacher in a mainstream or special school for children aged between 4-11 years?
Is your school located in England?
Do you have 30 minutes to spare?

I am **Jess Delicata** and I am a trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Southampton.

Please can you help us understand more about the process and factors considered by school to decide whether to have animals in or visiting their school or not.

If you are interested in contributing to this research, please scan this QR code below or go to https://southampton.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6tZdYVC4ZJSpjVk
All your answers will be confidential. You can complete part of the survey and save it to finish at your leisure.

You can choose to enter a **PRIZE DRAW** -our thank you for participating.
The survey closes at midnight 3rd February 2025.

1st PRIZE £100
2nd PRIZE £75
3rd PRIZE £50
(Amazon vouchers)

If you have any questions then please contact me by email at
J.Delicata@soton.ac.uk
ERGO number 93138
Date: 21/10/24 Version 2.0

Email reminder 4 (sending wc week beginning 20th January 2025)

FAO Headteacher/ Principal

Dear _____

I expect the Spring term is now in full swing and I wanted to send this final reminder to say that there is still time for your school to participate in my doctoral study to increase our understanding of the processes and factors considered by schools when deciding to include animals in their school, or not.

I would really, really value your school's participation.

If you have already done the survey, thank you, and I apologise for the reminder.

If not, I am hoping you can find time to do so, now or over the break. This is the last opportunity for your school's views to be represented. **The survey closes at midnight on Monday 3rd February 2025.**

Please see the advert with more details about the study and how to participate. There is a prize draw, with prizes of £100, £75 and £50 (Amazon vouchers) as our way of saying thank you to those that participate.

If you require any further information, then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best wishes,

Jess Delicata

Trainee Educational Psychologist

University of Southampton

**ANIMALS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS?
YES OR NO, WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU**

Are you a headteacher in a mainstream or special school for children aged between 4-11 years?
Is your school located in England?
Do you have 30 minutes to spare?

I am **Jess Delicata** and I am a trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Southampton.

Please can you help us understand more about the process and factors considered by school to decide whether to have animals in or visiting their school or not.

If you are interested in contributing to this research, please scan this QR code below or go to https://southampton.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6tZdYVC4ZJSpjVk

All your answers will be confidential. You can complete part of the survey and save it to finish at your leisure.

You can choose to enter a **PRIZE DRAW** -our thank you for participating. The survey closes at midnight 3rd February 2025.

1st PRIZE £100
2nd PRIZE £75
3rd PRIZE £50
(Amazon vouchers)

If you have any questions then please contact me by email at J.Delicata@soton.ac.uk

ERGO number 93136
Date: 21/01/24 Version 2.0

Appendix I Participant Information Sheet & Consent



Participant Information Sheet & Consent

Study Title: To include animals or not: how schools with primary aged children make the decision.

Researcher(s): Jess Delicata, Dr Anne McBride and Dr Sarah Wright

University email: j.delicata@soton.ac.uk

ERGO no: 93138

Version and date: Version 2, 21.10.24

You are being invited to take part in the above research study. To help you decide whether you would like to take part or not, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the information below carefully and ask questions if anything is not clear or you would like more information before you decide to take part in this research. You may like to discuss it with others, but it is up to you to decide whether to take part. If you are happy to participate you will be asked to tick a consent form.

What is the research about?

My name is Jess Delicata. I am an Educational Psychology doctorate student at the University of Southampton. This research is being supervised by Drs Anne McBride and Sarah Wright.

My research is an investigation of the considerations involved in the decision-making processes regarding whether, or not, to include animals in schools with primary-aged children (4-11 years).

To gain a representative perspective, we invite participation from special and mainstream primary, infant and junior schools, located in England, regardless of whether they currently or previously have included animals, decided not to, or not even considered it a possibility.

This study was approved by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) at the University of Southampton (Ethics/ERGO Number: 93138)

Why have I been asked to participate?

You have been asked to participate as you are a headteacher of a school with children aged between 4 to 11 years. As headteacher you have oversight of the school's decision-making

processes. If you wish to delegate participation to a member of your senior management team, please do so.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be asked to complete a confidential survey which should take approximately 30 minutes. If you wish, you can be complete in more than one sitting as your answers can be saved. There are no right or wrong answers, as it is about the school's perceptions and experiences.

There is the opportunity to enter a prize draw, to indicate if you would be agreeable to taking part in a follow up interview, and/or wish to be sent a summary of the research findings. In all cases you will be asked to click a link to a separate survey to give your contact details. There will be no link between your contact details and your answers to the main survey.

Are there any benefits in my taking part?

Whilst there are no direct benefits, you can enter a prize draw. However, your school's participation will contribute to knowledge in this area and may further your understanding of factors to be considered in relation to animals in schools.

Are there any risks involved?

It is not expected that taking part in this study will cause any psychological discomfort and/or distress. Should you feel uncomfortable you can leave the survey at any time and/or contact the following support resources.

Education Support <https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/>

Headrest <https://www.headrestuk.co.uk/>

RSPCA <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare>

Blue Cross <https://www.bluecross.org.uk/how-we-help>

What data will be collected?

The survey will initially ask about the school, including its type, classification, whether it is inner city, rural etc., number of pupils and average class size. We also ask you to give your role in the school.

Next are a few questions to identify whether animals are currently, previously, or have never been included in the school. These will filter you to questions relevant to your school's circumstances.

We do ask that any relevant policies and risk assessments are provided to us for qualitative analysis. These can be uploaded to the survey or forwarded by email to j.delicata@soton.ac.uk.

Some questions contain textboxes where you can elaborate on your answers. Please note, to maintain confidentiality we ask that you do not include information, such as names, from which you, or other people, could be identified. If you do so accidentally, these will be anonymized.

Whilst you can choose to not answer questions, all answers are confidential and if all questions are answered, it gives us a more holistic data set of the benefits and challenges perceived by schools.

Will my participation be confidential?

Your participation and the information we collect about you and the school in this research will be kept strictly confidential.

Only members of the research team and responsible members of the University of Southampton may be given access to data about you for monitoring purposes and/or to carry out an audit of the study to ensure that the research is complying with applicable regulations. Individuals from regulatory authorities (people who check that we are carrying out the study correctly) may require access to your data. All of these people have a duty to keep yours and the School's information, as a research participant, strictly confidential.

All information collected for this study will be stored securely on a password-protected computer, password-protected backup portable hard drives, and backed up on a secure server. In addition, all quantitative data will be pooled and only compiled into data summaries or summary reports. Qualitative data provided may be quoted, but the data will remain anonymous, using pseudonyms where appropriate and necessary. Only the researcher and their supervisors as part of the research team will have access to this information.

The information collected will be analysed and written up as part of the researcher's doctorate thesis. It may be published in a journal, presented at conferences, etc. to disseminate the research findings in the future.

The information collected about you may be used to support other approved research in the future and may be shared in an anonymised form with other researchers. The data collected from the survey will be deposited in PURE and it may be used for future research and learning.

The University of Southampton conducts research to the highest standards of ethics and research integrity. In accordance with our Research Data Management Policy, data will be held for 10 years after the study has finished when it will be securely destroyed.

Do I have to take part?

No, it is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part. If you decide to participate, you will need to complete the consent form at the bottom of this page to confirm this.

What happens if I change my mind?

You have the right to change your mind and can request to withdraw your data up until **10am on 7th February 2025**. To withdraw your data, you will need to notify the researcher Jess Delicata by email at jd5n22@soton.ac.uk giving the name of your school and its post code.

If you withdraw from the study, we will keep the information about you that we have already obtained for the purposes of achieving the objectives of the study only.

What will happen to the results of the research?

Your personal details and details of the school will remain strictly confidential. Research findings made available in any reports or publications will not include information that can directly identify you or the school without your specific consent.

The results will be written up as part of my Doctoral thesis. This will be completed and examined in summer of 2025. I am intending to publish the findings. At the end of the survey, you will be asked if you wish to receive a summary of the findings.

Where can I get more information?

If you have any queries or questions, then please email Jess Delicata at jd5n22@soton.ac.uk.

What happens if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should speak to the researchers who will do their best to answer your questions. Please contact Jess Delicata at jd5n22@soton.ac.uk.

If you remain unhappy or have a complaint about any aspect of this study, please contact the University of Southampton Head Research Ethics and Governance (023 8059 5058, rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk), giving the Ethics ID: 93138

Data Protection Privacy Notice

How will we use information about you?

For the purposes of data protection law, the University of Southampton is the 'Data Controller' for this study, we will need to use information from you and your school for this research project.

This information may include the school's name and post code, and your role and/or email address. People will use this information to do the research or to check your records to make sure that the research is being done properly. People who do not need to know these details will not be able to see them, as all participants in the survey will have a code number.

We will keep all information about you and the school safe and secure.

What are your choices about how your information is used?

- You can stop being part of the study at any time up until 10am on 7th February 2025, without giving a reason, but we will keep all anonymous information about you that we already have.
- We need to manage your records in specific ways for the research to be reliable. This means that we won't be able to let you see or change the data we hold about you.

Where can you find out more about how your information is used?

You can find out more about how we use your information:

- by sending an email to University's Data Protection Officer (data.protection@soton.ac.uk).
- by asking one of the research team or from our [general privacy policy](#).
- by sending an email to Jess Delicata directly at jd5n22@soton.ac.uk.

The survey data will be anonymised. This means that all personal data is deleted and is no longer accessible and therefore the research data cannot be traced back to an individual or school.

Thank you for taking the time to read the above information.

It is very important to us to conduct our studies in line with ethics principles, and this Consent Form asks you to confirm that you agree to take part in this study. Please carefully consider the statements below and tick the box only if you agree to participate in this research and understand what this will mean for you. If you do not agree to all these statements, then please exit the survey.

Mandatory Consent Statements	Tick to agree
I confirm that I read the Participant Information Sheet version 2.0, dated 21.10.24 explaining the study above and I understand what is expected of me.	
I was given the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions about the study, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.	
I agree to take part in this study and understand that data collected during this research project will be used for the purpose of this study.	
For the survey, I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time without giving a reason up until 10am on 7 th February 2025.	
I understand that all personal information about me and the school's name and postcode will be kept confidential (i.e., will not be shared beyond the study team) unless required by law or relevant regulations (e.g., for the purpose of monitoring the safety of this study).	
I understand that the anonymised data collected during this study will be archived in a data repository so that it can be used for future research and learning.	

Appendix J Debriefing Form



Debriefing Form

Study Title: To include animals or not: how schools with primary aged children make the decision.

Researcher(s): Jess Delicata, Dr Anne McBride and Dr Sarah Wright

University email: j.delicata@soton.ac.uk

Ethics/ERGO no: 93138

Version and date: Version 2, 21.10.24

Thank you for taking part in our research project. Your contribution is very valuable and greatly appreciated.

Purpose of the study

The aim of this research was to explore how schools with primary aged children decide whether to include animals or not in the school, and where animals are included, the types of animals and how they are used.

It is expected that the results from the survey will help to identify the factors and considerations that are important to schools and will facilitate knowledge sharing more robust and ethical decision-making in schools regarding this emerging area of activity.

Confidentiality

Results of this study will not include your name or that of the school or any other identifying characteristics.

Right to withdraw data

If you wish to withdraw your data, please notify the researcher Jess Delicata by email at j.delicata@soton.ac.uk giving the name of your school and its post code. You have until **10am on 7th February 2025** to withdraw your data.

Prize Draw/Study Results/Follow up interview

Please see end of this sheet.

Further support

If taking part in this study has caused you discomfort or distress, you can contact the following organisations for support:

Education Support <https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/>

Headrest <https://www.headrestuk.co.uk/>

RSPCA <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare>

Blue Cross <https://www.bluecross.org.uk/how-we-help>

Further reading

If you would like to learn more about this area of research, you can refer to the following resource:

Fine, A. H. (2019). *Handbook on animal-assisted therapy: foundations and guidelines for animal-assisted interventions* (5th ed). Elsevier Academic Press.

Further information

If you have any concerns or questions about this study, please contact Jess Delicata at j.delicata@soton.ac.uk who will do their best to help.

If you remain unhappy or would like to make a formal complaint, please contact the Head of Research Integrity and Governance, University of Southampton, by emailing: rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk, or calling: + 44 2380 595058. Please quote the Ethics/ERGO number which can be found at the top of this form. Please note that by making a complaint, you might be no longer anonymous.

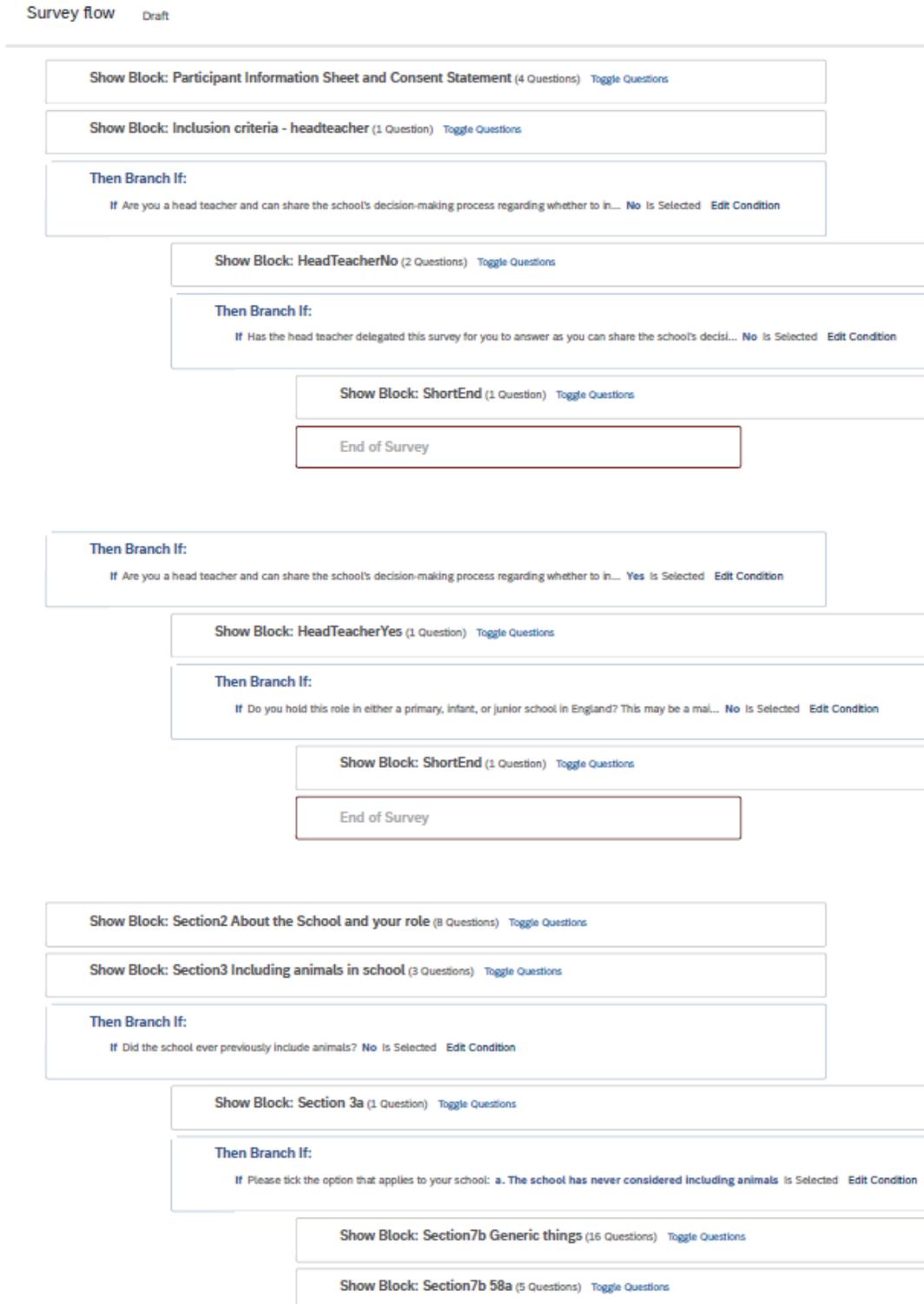
Thank you again for your participation in this research.

If you are interested in entering the Prize draw, receiving results from this study and/or potentially participating in a future interview please click on the link below. If the link does not work, please contact j.delicata@soton.ac.uk

[link to separate Qualtrics here]

Appendix L Qualtrics Survey Flow

NB: Questions numbers do not align with paper version of survey due to Qualtrics branching logic ability



Appendices

6/25/25, 11:08 PM

Edit Survey | Qualtrics Experience Management

Show Block: Section7b 5 (2 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section8 Any other comments (1 Question) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Debrief Statement (1 Question) [Toggle Questions](#)

End of Survey

Then Branch If:

If Please tick the option that applies to your school: **b. The school did consider including animals and decided not to** Is Selected [Edit Condition](#)

Show Block: Section 7a Never Consider Set 2 (5 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section7b Generic things (16 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section7b 58a (5 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section7b 5 (2 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section8 Any other comments (1 Question) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Debrief Statement (1 Question) [Toggle Questions](#)

End of Survey

End of Survey

Then Branch If:

If Did the school ever previously include animals? **Yes** Is Selected [Edit Condition](#)

Show Block: Section5a Schools Previously Included (2 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Then Branch If:

If Were you part of the decision-making process to include animals in the school or aware of how the... **No** Is Selected [Edit Condition](#)
Or Were you working at the school when they included animals? **No** Is Selected [Edit Condition](#)

Show Block: Section7b Generic things (16 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section7b 58a (5 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section7b 5 (2 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section7c (8 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section7d (3 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section5c2 Schools Previously Included - what and how (15 Questions) [Toggle Question](#)

Appendices

6/25/25, 11:08 PM

Edit Survey | Qualtrics Experience Management

Show Block: Section5d Schools previously included - reasons stopping (1 Question) [Toggle Questions](#)

Then Branch If:

If Were you part of the decision-making process to stop including animals in the school or aware of... **No** Is Selected

Show Block: Section8 Any other comments (1 Question) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Debrief Statement (1 Question) [Toggle Questions](#)

End of Survey

Then Branch If:

If Were you part of the decision-making process to stop including animals in the school or aware of... **Yes** Is Selected

Show Block: Section 5d2 (8 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section8 Any other comments (1 Question) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Debrief Statement (1 Question) [Toggle Questions](#)

End of Survey

Show Block: Section7e (1 Question) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section7e2 (8 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section8 Any other comments (1 Question) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Debrief Statement (1 Question) [Toggle Questions](#)

End of Survey

Show Block: Section5a2 (19 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: section5a37a (3 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section5a37b (3 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section5a37c (3 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section5a37d (4 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section5a37e (3 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section5a37f (3 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section5a37g (3 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section5a37h (3 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

https://southampton.qualtrics.com/survey-builder/SV_6tZdYYC4ZJSpjVk/edit?Tab=SurveyFlow

3/5

Appendices

6/25/25, 11:08 PM

Edit Survey | Qualtrics Experience Management

Show Block: Section5a37i (3 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section5a37j (4 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section5a37k (4 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section5a4 (3 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section5b Schools Previously Included - Policies (8 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section5c Schools Previously Included - what and how (3 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section5c2 Schools Previously Included - what and how (15 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section5d Schools previously included - reasons stopping (1 Question) [Toggle Questions](#)

Then Branch If:

If Were you part of the decision-making process to stop including animals in the school or aware of... **Yes** Is Selected [Edit Condition](#)

Show Block: Section 5d2 (8 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Then Branch If:

If Were you part of the decision-making process to stop including animals in the school or aware of... **No** Is Selected [Edit Condition](#)

Show Block: Section8 Any other comments (1 Question) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Debrief Statement (1 Question) [Toggle Questions](#)

End of Survey

Show Block: Section8 Any other comments (1 Question) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Debrief Statement (1 Question) [Toggle Questions](#)

End of Survey

Show Block: Section4a Have Animals Currently - Decision Making (3 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Then Branch If:

If Was the decision to include animals planned? **Yes** Is Selected [Edit Condition](#)

And Were you part of the decision-making process to include animals in the school or aware of how the... **Yes** Is Selected [Edit Condition](#)

Show Block: Section4a2 (16 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section4a18a (6 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section4a18b (3 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Appendices

6/25/25, 11:08 PM

Edit Survey | Qualtrics Experience Management

- Show Block: Section4a18c (3 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)
- Show Block: Section4a18d (4 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)
- Show Block: Section4a18e (3 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)
- Show Block: Section4a18f (3 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)
- Show Block: Section4a18g (3 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)
- Show Block: Section4a18h (3 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)
- Show Block: Section4a18i (3 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)
- Show Block: Section4a18j (4 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)
- Show Block: Section4a18k (4 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)
- Show Block: Section4a4 (1 Question) [Toggle Questions](#)
- Show Block: Section4a5 (2 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Then Branch If:

If Was the decision to include animals planned? **No** Is Selected [Edit Condition](#)

Or Were you part of the decision-making process to include animals in the school or aware of how the... **No** Is Selected [Edit Condition](#)

- Show Block: Section7b Generic things (16 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)
- Show Block: Section7b 58a (5 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)
- Show Block: Section7b 5 (2 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section4b Have Animals currently - Policies and Funding (8 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section4c How animals included and which animals (17 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Section8 Any other comments (1 Question) [Toggle Questions](#)

Show Block: Debrief Statement (1 Question) [Toggle Questions](#)

End of Survey

Appendix M The Survey

Survey



Study Title: To include animals or not: how schools with primary aged children make the decision.

Researcher(s): Jess Delicata, Dr Anne McBride, and Dr Sarah Wright

University email: j.delicata@soton.ac.uk

Ethics/ERGO no: 93138

Version and date: Version 3, 24.02.25

Please answer all questions as openly and honestly as you can.

Please answer about the school where you currently work.

Section 1 Inclusion criteria

Q1 Are you a head teacher and can share the school's decision-making process regarding whether to include or not include animals at your school?

Yes / No

(If no, then Q2

If yes, then Q3)

Q2 Has the head teacher delegated this survey for you to answer as you can share the school's decision-making process whether to include or not include animals at your school?

(If no, they will be thanked and exited from the questionnaire)

If yes, please specify your role:

Deputy headteacher

Assistant headteacher

Other please specify:

Q3 Do you hold this role in either a primary, infant, or junior school in England?

This may be a mainstream or special school.

Yes/No

(If no, they will be thanked and exited from the questionnaire

If yes, then Q4)

Section 2 About the School and your role

Please give the name of your school and post code – this data will **not be used** in any analysis but is needed if we have any follow-up queries or you wish to withdraw your data.

Name of School

Post code

Q4 What type of school is this? Please tick the one that best describes your school.

A mainstream primary school (children aged 4-11 years)

A special primary school (children aged 4-11 years)

A mainstream infant school (children aged 4-7 years)

A special infant school (children aged 4-7 years)

A mainstream junior school (children aged 7-11 years)

A special junior school children aged 7-11 years)

Q5 Does the school have an attached nursery?

Yes / No

Q6 What is the classification of the school? Please tick one

Community school

Foundation school

Trust school

Voluntary aided

Voluntary controlled

Academy

Free school

Special school

Independent school

Charity funded school

Q7 Which county is the school located in? Please tick one (Reviewer see list in appendices)

Q8 What type of area is the school in? Please tick the one that best describes the area.

Inner city

Urban

Suburban

Rural town

Rural village

Q9 How many children are on the school roll?

Q10 What is the average class size?

Less than 10 pupils

10-20 pupils

21-30 pupils

Over 30 pupils

Section 3 Including animals in school

This study concerns including animals *at school* for educational and well-being purposes. It *does NOT* include any animal experiences off the school site, e.g., visiting places with animals such as farms, and zoos, horse therapy.

The types of activity of interest involve animals being part of the school community either living on the school site or coming into school to visit a class/group of children or an individual child for an educational or well-being experience. These include, but are not limited to, therapy dog visits, staff bringing in their pets from home, animals kept in the classroom, animals kept on the school grounds including onsite farms, and short-term animal rearing experiences e.g., chick hatching.

The types of animals included in school may include, but are not limited to, any animal from small species such as fish, hamsters, rabbits, Guinea pigs, budgies, chickens, lizards, snakes, stick insects, wormeries, to larger species such as cats, dogs, goats, pigs, horses, sheep, donkeys etc.

Q11 Are animals currently included in the school? Yes/No

If yes go to **Section 4a Have Animals Currently**

If no go to Q12

Q12 Did the school ever previously include animals?

No then... Section 7a Schools that have NEVER considered including animals

Yes then... Section 5a – Schools Who Previously Included Animals

Section 4a Have Animals Currently - Decision Making

Q13 Was the decision to include animals planned? Yes / No

If the decision was unplanned, can you explain more about how including animals happened?

Now go to **Section 7b What generic things should a school consider when deciding whether to include animals -FOLLOWED by Section 4b and 4c**

Q14 Were you part of the decision-making process to include animals in the school or aware of how the decision was made? Yes / No

If yes go to Q15 (Why the school wanted them?)

If no go to **Section 7b What generic things should a school, consider when deciding whether to include animals -FOLLOWED by Section 4b and 4c**

Q15 Why did the school initially want to include animals?

Please tick all those that apply and indicate the importance of each.

(Likert scale of no it did not apply, not, slightly important, somewhat important, very important, extremely important, don't know)

(Reviewer for each statement this will be a table of 7 columns – tick if considered, 5-point Likert scale + don't know)

To support teaching particular parts of the curriculum

To support teaching of PSHCE (Personal Social Health and Citizenship Education)

For assisted reading

To support teaching about animal welfare

To support development of social skills, including communication and empathy

To provide an experience of meeting an animal e.g., petting, observing

Class pets for children to look after

To give a sense of purpose and responsibility through looking after an animal

Animal rearing experiences e.g., chick hatching

To provide physical activity through animal-related activities e.g., walking the animal, cleaning out pens.

As therapy animals to support well-being

To support developing a therapeutic relationship with an animal

To have a calming effect and support self-regulation

To have a stimulating effect e.g., novelty of animals, increasing motivation

To offer equity accessing animals for those who do not have access outside of school

Other, please specify:

Q16 Who was on the team with responsibility for making the decision? Please tick all that apply

Head teacher

Deputy head teacher

Member of the senior leadership team

Special Educational Needs Coordinator

Inclusion Coordinator

Member of pastoral team

Governors

Other – please state

Q17 Which children were identified as potentially benefitting from the inclusion of animals?

Please tick all that apply

Children with identified special educational needs

Children with identified mental health and wellbeing needs

Children from a disadvantaged background e.g., financially, family support, experienced abuse

Other children with no identified needs

Children in a particular class – if yes please specify year age of the class

Children in a particular year group – if yes, please specify which year group

Children in a particular Key Stage – if yes, please specify which key stage

All children

Q18 What factors were considered during the decision-making process?

Please tick all those that applied by indicating the importance of each or 'no, it did not apply'.

(Likert scale of no did not apply, not, slightly important, somewhat important, very important, extremely important, don't know)

(Reviewer for each statement this will be a table of 7 columns – tick if considered, 5-point Likert scale + don't know)

18a. Ownership of the animal

Who would own the animal – be its legal keeper

If the school would be the legal owner of the animal

Appendices

If a member of staff would be the legal owner of the animal

If an external organisation would be the legal owner of the animal

18b. **Choice of animal if owned by the school**

If school decided not to own them, please tick

What breed/type of animal to get

Size of the animal

Temperament of the animal

Expected lifespan for the animal

Suitability of the animal to match the identified need e.g., teaching the curriculum, wellbeing.

18c. **Where the animal will live if owned by the school**

Having an appropriate amount of space to keep the animal

Having appropriate housing for the animal

18d. **Responsibility for the animal if owned by the school**

Who would look after the animal daily

Who would care for the animal during school holidays

Who would care for the animal if the nominated staff member were ill or leaves

What would happen if the animal became ill

18e. **Access to the animal**

Having equal access to the animal for all children

Having access to the animal only for specifically identified children

Any cultural factors affecting access to the animal

Any religious factors affecting access to the animal

If a visiting animal, (external organisation or staff owned) how frequent the visits should be e.g., weekly, monthly

18f. **Human Health and Safety**

Risk of allergies

Risk of injury, including biting

Risk of disease and/or illness

Appendices

Risk of zoonoses (infections that can pass from animals to humans)

Teaching how the animal communicates by understanding body language

Teaching how to have appropriate interactions with the animal

How the children will be allowed to interact with the animal safely

18g. **Human wellbeing**

Staff Dislike (personal or cultural) of animals

Children's Dislike (personal or cultural) of animals

Staff Anxiety/ Fear of animals

Children's Anxiety/Fear of animals

Possible impact on local community

Possible impact on school neighbours

18h. **Animal health and welfare**

The value and importance of the animal as a living creature, regardless of its size or financial cost

The type of contact with the animal e.g., viewed only, touched, handled

Activities with the children are structured and planned

Breaks for the animal to be scheduled part of activities

Animal has choice in whether to interact or not

Monitoring of animal stress during activities

Animal has uninterrupted time away from people

Plan to manage the situation if an animal is harmed accidentally

Plan to manage the situation if an animal is harmed deliberately

What happens if the animal is not being cared for properly

Plan for animal's retirement

Plan for what happens in the school after the animal's retirement/death

Plan for decrease in interest in the animal

Consideration of other alternatives to an animal

18i. **Financial costs**

Initial cost of the animal, housing, and equipment if to be kept by the school

Appendices

Ongoing costs for upkeep and veterinary care for animal kept by the school

Cost of Animal Health Insurance if animal kept by the school

Costs of visits by an external organisation

Public Liability Insurance – if kept by the school

Public Liability Insurance – if brought in by member of staff

Public Liability Insurance – if brought in by an external organisation

Staff training

Staff time

18j. **Staff Training – Animal Care**

What experience the staff have of looking after the animal

Identifying the qualifications that staff might need

How staff will gain identified qualifications

Who will pay for staff training

18k. **Staff Training – Interventions**

What experience the staff have of running animal assisted interventions

Identifying the qualifications that staff might need

How staff will gain identified qualifications

Who will pay for staff training

18l. **Any other factors**

Please specify any other factors considered:

Q19 Who was consulted with about including animals?

Please tick all that apply

a Staff

Parents

Children

School neighbours

Local Community

Appendices

b Were any of these people consulted unhappy about the decision to include animals?

Yes / No

If yes, please explain what their concerns were:

Q20 Were any of the following external resources consulted in the decision-making process?

a Colleagues in other schools within the same academy / trust / federation

Colleagues in other schools

Those who have personal experiences with animals

Professionals external to the school

If yes, please specify the type of external, e.g., vet:

b Social media

Research studies

Books about animal care

Books about animal assisted interventions

Websites of professional bodies/animal charities/educational charities

Commercial/other websites

Other: please specify

c Were any of the following discounted in the decision-making process?

If yes, please specify the reason(s) for this decision

(List of external resources a-c, with option to tick if discounted and then a text box to give reason)

d From the list consulted, which were the most trusted and important? Pick your top three by 'dragging and dropping' into the box.

(List of external resources a-c, with option to tick 3 choices)

Q21 Did the school consider pertinent legislation such as the Animal Welfare Act 2006, Dangerous Dogs Act to understand legal responsibilities involved? Yes / No / The school wasn't aware of this legislation

Q22 How has the inclusion of animals been reviewed since their inclusion in school?

Please tick all that apply

It has not been reviewed

Informal discussions and sharing of anecdotal evidence

Regular formal discussions with the other decision-makers

As part of the school development plan

By the governing body / trustees

Measuring the impact of using animals on children

Feedback from parents

Feedback from staff

Feedback from children

Other (please specify):

Section 4b Have Animals Currently - Policies/Funding

Q 23 Policies

We are interested in the policies School have around animal related activities.

- a Does the school have a policy regarding animal-related activities? Yes/No
- b Does the school have a policy regarding general contact with animals on the school premises? Yes/No
- c. Does the school have a risk assessment procedure / policy regarding animal-related activities? Yes / No
- d. Does the school have a procedure/policy regarding review of animal related activities?
Yes / No

If yes, would the school be happy to share these policies and procedures with us?

Yes / No

If yes, please can you upload these policies or email them to j.delicata@soton.ac.uk

- Q24** Does the school have any additional funding to support the inclusion of animals e.g., pupil premium, special educational needs, personal education plans for children who are looked after?

Yes / No/ Don't know

If yes, please specify the types of funding:

Section 4c Have Animals Currently - What Animals and How Included

Q25 How long has the school included animals?

Less than 1 year

1-2 years

3-5 years

6-10 years

Over 10 years

Q26 Does the school currently include animals with ...?

Individual children Yes / No

Small groups of children Yes / No

Class of children Yes / No

Particular Year Groups Yes / No

Particular Key Stages Yes / No

Whole school Yes / No

Q27 Are animals kept in the school/school grounds Yes / No

If no, then q28

If yes, please tick all that apply in the following question:

a What animals are kept in the school / school grounds? Please write in the type of animal(s) you have e.g., cat, dog. Are they are allowed to roam free unattended?

Type of Animal	Tick if kept inside the school	Tick if kept in the school grounds	Can roam free unattended in the grounds	Can roam free unattended in the school	Can roam free unattended in the classroom	Always supervised with children and not

Appendices

			where children are present	buildings where children are present	where children are present	allowed to roam free

b *How are these animals actually used? Tick all that apply*

To support teaching particular parts of the curriculum

To support teaching of PSHCE (Personal Social Health and Citizenship Education)

For assisted reading

To support development of social skills, including communication and empathy

As therapy animals to support well-being

To provide an experience of meeting an animal e.g., petting, observing

Class pets for children to look after

Animal rearing experiences e.g., chick hatching

Other: please specify

Then Q28

Q28 Do staff bring their own animals into the school? Yes/No

If no, then q29

If yes, please tick all that apply in the following question:

a What animals do staff bring in? Please write in the type of animal(s) you have e.g., cat, dog. Are they are allowed to roam free unattended?

Appendices

Type of Animal	Tick if kept inside the school	Tick if kept in the school grounds	Can roam free unattended in the grounds where children are present	Can roam free unattended in the school buildings where children are present	Can roam free unattended in the classroom where children are present	Always supervised with children and not allowed to roam free

b *How are these animals actually used? Tick all that apply*

To support teaching particular parts of the curriculum

To support teaching of PSHCE (Personal Social Health and Citizenship Education)

For assisted reading

To support development of social skills, including communication and empathy

As therapy animals to support well-being

To provide an experience of meeting an animal e.g., petting, observing

For class pets for children to look after

For animal rearing experiences e.g., chick hatching

Other: please specify

Q29 Do organisations bring animals into the school? Yes/No

If no **go to Section 8 Any further comments and then FINISH.**

If yes, please tick all that apply in the following question:

a What animals do organisations bring in? Please write in the type of animal(s) that come in e.g., dog, sheep. Are allowed to roam free unattended?

Appendices

Type of Animal	Tick if kept inside the school	Tick if kept in the school grounds	Can roam free unattended in the grounds where children are present	Can roam free unattended in the school buildings where children are present	Can roam free unattended in the classroom where children are present	Always supervised with children and not allowed to roam free

b What is the purpose of including these animals?

Tick all that apply

To support teaching particular parts of the curriculum

To support teaching of PSHCE (Personal Social Health and Citizenship Education)

For assisted reading

To support development of social skills, including communication and empathy

As therapy animals to support well-being

To provide an experience of meeting an animal e.g., petting, observing

For class pets for children to look after

For animal rearing experiences e.g., chick hatching

Other: please specify

c *Which organisations do you use to bring animals into the school? Please tick all that apply*

Therapy dogs Nationwide

Pets as Therapy (PAT)

PAWS – therapy dogs

Autism Dogs Charity

Read2Dogs

Dogs for Good

Other: please specify

d *Are organisations used to provide the following?*

Animal Workshops? Yes / No

If yes, please specify which organisation

Petting farms? Yes / No

If yes, please specify which organisation

Other: please specify

Now go to Section 8 Any further comments and then FINISH.

Section 5a Schools Who Previously Included Animals – Decision Making

Q30 Were you working at the school when they included animals?

Yes

No

Q31 Were you part of the decision-making process to include animals in the school or aware of how the decision was made?

Yes – then Q32

No – then Section 7b What generic things should a school consider when deciding whether to include animals, FOLLOWED by Section 5b, 5c & 5d

Q32 Why did the school initially want to include animals?

Please tick all those that apply and indicate the importance of each.

(Likert scale of no did not apply, not, slightly important, somewhat important, very important, extremely important, don't know)

(Reviewer for each statement this will be a table of 7 columns – tick if considered, 5-point Likert scale + don't know)

Appendices

To support teaching particular parts of the curriculum

To support teaching of PSHCE (Personal Social Health and Citizenship Education)

For assisted reading

To support teaching about animal welfare

To support development of social skills, including communication and empathy

To provide an experience of meeting an animal e.g., petting, observing

Class pets for children to look after

To give a sense of purpose and responsibility through looking after an animal

Animal rearing experiences e.g., chick hatching

To provide physical activity through animal-related activities e.g., walking the animal, cleaning out pens.

As therapy animals to support well-being

To support developing a therapeutic relationship with an animal

To have a calming effect and support self-regulation

To have a stimulating effect e.g., novelty of animals, increasing motivation

To offer equity accessing animals for those who do not have access outside of school

Other, please specify:

Q33 Who was on the team initially with responsibility for making the decision to include animals?

Please tick all that apply

Head teacher

Deputy head teacher

Member of the senior leadership team

Special Educational Needs Coordinator

Inclusion Coordinator

Member of pastoral team

Appendices

Governors

Other – please state

Q34 Which children were identified as potentially benefitting from the inclusion of animals?

Please tick all that apply

Children with identified special educational needs

Children with identified mental health and wellbeing needs

Children from a disadvantaged background e.g., financially, family support, experienced abuse

Other children with no identified needs

Children in a particular class – if yes please specify year age of the class

Children in a particular year group – if yes, please specify which year group

Children in a particular Key Stage – if yes, please specify which key stage

All children

Q35 What factors were considered during the decision-making process?

Please tick all those that apply and indicate the importance of each to the final decision.

(Likert scale of no did not apply, not, slightly important, somewhat important, very important, extremely important, don't know)

(Reviewer for each statement this will be a table of 7 columns – tick if considered, 5-point Likert scale + don't know)

35a. Ownership of the animal

Who would own the animal – be its legal keeper

If the school would be the legal owner of the animal

If a member of staff would be the legal owner of the animal

If an external organisation would be the legal owner of the animal

35b. Choice of animal if owned by the school

If school decided not to own them, please tick

What breed/type of animal to get

Size of the animal

Temperament of the animal

Expected lifespan for the animal

Suitability of the animal to match the identified need e.g., teaching the curriculum, wellbeing.

35c. Where the animal will live if owned by the school

Having an appropriate amount of space to keep the animal

Having appropriate housing for the animal

35d. Responsibility for the animal if owned by the school

Who would look after the animal daily

Who would care for the animal during school holidays

Who would care for the animal if the nominated staff member were ill or leaves

What would happen if the animal became ill

35e. Access to the animal

Having equal access to the animal for all children

Having access to the animal only for specifically identified children

Any cultural factors affecting access to the animal

Any religious factors affecting access to the animal

If a visiting animal, (external organisation or staff owned) how frequent the visits should be e.g., weekly, monthly

35f. Human Health and Safety

Risk of allergies

Risk of injury, including biting

Risk of disease and/or illness

Risk of zoonoses (infections that can pass from animals to humans)

Teaching how the animal communicates by understanding body language

Teaching how to have appropriate interactions with the animal

How the children will be allowed to interact with the animal safely

35g. Human wellbeing

Appendices

Staff Dislike (personal or cultural) of animals

Children's Dislike (personal or cultural) of animals

Staff Anxiety/ Fear of animals

Children's Anxiety/Fear of animals

Possible impact on local community

Possible impact on school neighbours

35h. **Animal health and welfare**

The value and importance of the animal as a living creature, regardless of its size or financial cost

The type of contact with the animal e.g., viewed only, touched, handled

Activities with the children are structured and planned

Breaks for the animal to be scheduled part of activities

Animal has choice in whether to interact or not

Monitoring of animal stress during activities

Animal has uninterrupted time away from people

Plan to manage the situation if an animal is harmed accidentally

Plan to manage the situation if an animal is harmed deliberately

What happens if the animal is not being cared for properly

Plan for animal's retirement

Plan for what happens in the school after the animal's retirement/death

Plan for decrease in interest in the animal

Consideration of other alternatives to an animal

35i. **Financial costs**

Initial cost of the animal, housing, and equipment if to be kept by the school

Ongoing costs for upkeep and veterinary care for animal kept by the school

Cost of Animal Health Insurance if animal kept by the school

Costs of visits by an external organisation

Public Liability Insurance – if kept by the school

Public Liability Insurance – if brought in by member of staff

Public Liability Insurance – if brought in by an external organisation

Staff training

Staff time

35j. **Staff Training – Animal Care**

What experience the staff have of looking after the animal

Identifying the qualifications that staff might need

How staff will gain identified qualifications

Who will pay for staff training

35k. **Staff Training – Interventions**

What experience the staff have of running animal assisted interventions

Identifying the qualifications that staff might need

How staff will gain identified qualifications

Who will pay for staff training

35l. **Any other factors**

Please specify any other factors considered:

Q36 Who was consulted with about including animals?

Please tick all that apply

a Staff

Parents

Children

School neighbours

Local Community

b Were any of these people consulted unhappy about the decision to include animals?

Yes / No

If yes, please explain what their concerns were:

Q37 Were any of the following external resources consulted in the decision-making process?

a Colleagues in other schools within the same academy / trust / federation

Colleagues in other schools

Appendices

Those who have personal experiences with animals

Professionals external to the school

If yes, please specify the type of external, e.g., vet:

b Social media

Research studies

Books about animal care

Books about animal assisted interventions

Websites of professional bodies/animal charities/educational charities

Commercial/other websites

Other: please specify

c Were any of the following discounted in the decision-making process?

If yes, please specify the reason(s) for this decision

(List of external resources a-c, with option to tick if discounted and then a text box to give reason)

d From the list consulted, which were the most trusted and important? Pick your top three by 'dragging and dropping' into the box.

(List of external resources a-c, with option to tick 3 choices)

Q38 Did you consider pertinent legislation such as the Animal Welfare Act 2006, Dangerous Dogs Act to understand legal responsibilities involved? Yes / No / The school wasn't aware of this legislation

Q39 How was the inclusion of animals reviewed?

Please tick all that applied

It was not reviewed

Informal discussions and sharing of anecdotal evidence

Regular formal discussions with the other decision-makers

As part of the school development plan

By the governing body / trustees

Measuring the impact of using animals on children

Feedback from parents

Feedback from staff

Feedback from children

Other (please specify):

***Section 5b Schools Who Previously Included Animals –
Policies/Funding***

Q 40 Policies

a Did the school have a policy regarding animal-related activities? Yes/No/Don't know

b Did the school have a policy regarding general contact with animals on the school premises? Yes/No/Don't know

c Did the school have a risk assessment procedure / policy regarding animal-related activities? Yes/No/Don't know

d Did the school have a procedure/policy regarding review of animal related activities? Yes/No/Don't know

If yes, would the school be happy to share these policies and procedures with us?

Yes / No

If yes, please can you upload these policies or email them to j.delicata@soton.ac.uk

Q41 Did the school have any additional funding to support the inclusion of animals e.g., pupil premium, special educational needs, personal education plans for children who are looked after?

Yes / No / Don't know

If yes, please specify the types of funding:

***Section 5c Schools Who Previously Included Animals – What Animals
and How Included***

Q42 How long did the school include animals?

Less than 1 year

1-2 years

3-5 years

6-10 years

Over 10 years

Don't know

Q43 When did the school stop including animals?

(Text box)

Q44 Did the school include animals with ...?

Individual children Yes / No

Small groups of children Yes / No

Class of children Yes / No

Particular Year Groups Yes / No

Particular Key Stages Yes / No

Whole school Yes / No

Don't know

Q45 Were animals kept in the school/school grounds Yes / No / Don't know

If no or don't know, then q46

If yes, please tick all that apply in the following question:

a

What animals were kept in the school grounds? Please write in the type of animal(s) you had e.g., cat, dog.

Were they allowed to roam free unattended?

Appendices

Type of Animal	Tick if kept inside the school	Tick if kept in the school grounds	Can roam free unattended in the grounds where children were present	Can roam free unattended in the school buildings where children were present	Can roam free unattended in the classroom where children were present	Always supervised with children and not allowed to roam free

b *How were these animals actually used? Tick all that apply*

To support teaching particular parts of the curriculum

To support teaching of PSHCE (Personal Social Health and Citizenship Education)

For assisted reading

To support development of social skills, including communication and empathy

As therapy animals to support well-being

To provide an experience of meeting an animal e.g., petting, observing

Class pets for children to look after

Animal rearing experiences e.g., chick hatching

Other: please specify

Then Q43

Q46 Did staff bring their own animals into the school? Yes / No / Don't know

If no or don't know, then q47

If yes, please tick all that apply in the following question:

Appendices

- a What animals did staff bring in? Please write in the type of animal(s) staff brought in e.g., dog, rabbit.
Were they allowed to roam free unattended?

Type of Animal	Tick if kept inside the school	Tick if kept in the school grounds	Can roam free unattended in the grounds where children were present	Can roam free unattended in the school buildings where children were present	Can roam free unattended in the classroom where children were present	Always supervised with children and not allowed to roam free

- b *How were these animals actually used? Tick all that apply*

To support teaching particular parts of the curriculum

To support teaching of PSHCE (Personal Social Health and Citizenship Education)

For assisted reading

To support development of social skills, including communication and empathy

As therapy animals to support well-being

To provide an experience of meeting an animal e.g., petting, observing

Class pets for children to look after

Animal rearing experiences e.g., chick hatching

Other: please specify

Q47 Did organisations bring animals into the school? Yes / No / Don't know

If no or don't know then Q48

Appendices

If yes, please tick all that apply in the following question:

- a What animals did organisations bring in? Please write in the type of animal(s) that came in e.g., dog, sheep. Were they allowed to roam free unattended?

Type of Animal	Tick if kept inside the school	Tick if kept in the school grounds	Can roam free unattended in the grounds where children were present	Can roam free unattended in the school buildings where children were present	Can roam free unattended in the classroom where children were present	Always supervised with children and not allowed to roam free

- b What was the purpose of these animals?

Tick all that apply

To support teaching particular parts of the curriculum

To support teaching of PSHCE (Personal Social Health and Citizenship Education)

For assisted reading

To support development of social skills, including communication and empathy

As therapy animals to support well-being

To provide an experience of meeting an animal e.g., petting, observing

Class pets for children to look after

Animal rearing experiences e.g., chick hatching

Other: please specify

- c Which organisations did you use to bring animals into the school? Please tick all that apply

Therapy dogs Nationwide

Pets as Therapy (PAT)

PAWS – therapy dogs

Autism Dogs Charity

Read2Dogs

Dogs for Good

Other: please specify

d *Did you use organisations to provide the following?*

Animal Workshops? Yes / No

If yes, please specify which organisation

Petting farms? Yes / No

If yes, please specify which organisation

Other: please specify

Section 5d Schools Who Previously Included Animals – Reasons for Stopping

Q48 Were you part of the decision-making process to stop including animals in the school or aware of how the decision was made? Yes / No

If yes, then Q49

*If no **Now go to Section 8 Any further comments and then FINISH.***

Q49 Why did the school stop including animals?

Please tick all those that apply and indicate the importance of each.

(Likert scale of no it did not apply, not, slightly important, somewhat important, very important, extremely important, don't know)

(Reviewer for each statement this will be a table of 7 columns – tick if considered, 5 point Likert scale + don't know)

Appendices

No longer felt to be supporting the curriculum sufficiently

Assisted reading did not improve reading scores sufficiently

Alternative ways to achieve learning outcomes used

Alternative ways to achieve social, emotional, and mental health outcomes used

Difficulties with ownership of the animal if owned by the school

Difficulties with ownership of the animal if owned by member of staff

Difficulties with ownership of the animal if owned by external organisation

Animal was not suitable to match the identified need e.g., teaching the curriculum, wellbeing.

Animal was no longer suitable due to its breed/type/size

Animal was no longer suitable due to its temperament

Not enough space to house the animal

Didn't have appropriate housing for the animal

Wanted to use the space that animals were kept, in a different way

Difficulties with having someone to look after the animal e.g., daily care, during the holidays, nominated staff member left and no one to replace.

Difficulties with ensuring equity of access

Issues with cultural and religious factors affecting access to the animal

Unhappy about the frequency of visits by an external organisation

Issues with human health and safety

Please specify:

Issues with staff dislike of animals

Issues with children's dislike of animals

Issues with staff anxiety/fear of animals

Issues with children's anxiety/fear of animals

Issues with the local community due to including animals

Issues with the school neighbours due to including animals

Animal was not cared for adequately e.g., feeding, cleaning house

Appendices

Unacceptable levels of animal stress during activities

Animal did not have enough uninterrupted time away from people

Animal was physically harmed

Animal retired

Animal died

Decreased interest in the animal

Unable to continue ongoing financial costs for upkeep and veterinary care for animal kept by the school

Cost of Animal Health Insurance if animal kept by the school

Costs of public liability insurance

Costs of visits by an external organisation

Financial costs of staff training

Financial costs of staff time

Lack of knowledge about how to care for animals

Lack of guidance available to support caring for animals

Lack of knowledge about running the animal assisted interventions

Lack of guidance available to support running the animal assisted interventions

Difficulties in identifying the qualifications that staff might need

Difficulties with staff gaining identified qualifications

Lack of training available

Other, please specify:

Q50 Who was on the team with responsibility for making the decision to stop?

Please tick all that apply

Head teacher

Deputy head teacher

Member of the senior leadership team

Special Educational Needs Coordinator

Inclusion Coordinator

Appendices

Member of pastoral team

Governors

Other – please state

Q51 Who was consulted about stopping the inclusion of animals?

Please tick all that apply

a Staff

Parents

Children

School neighbours

Local Community

b Were any of these people consulted unhappy about the decision to stop including animals?

Yes / No

If yes, please explain what their concerns were:

Q52 Were any of the following external resources consulted about stopping the inclusion of animals?

a Colleagues in other schools within the same academy / trust / federation

Colleagues in other schools

Those who have personal experiences with animals

Professionals external to the school

If yes, please specify the type of external, e.g., vet:

b Social media

Research studies

Books about animal care

Books about animal assisted interventions

Websites of professional bodies/animal charities/educational charities

Commercial/other websites

Other: please specify

Now go to Section 8 Any further comments and then FINISH.

Section 7a Schools that have NEVER considered including animals

Q53 Please tick the option that applies to your school:

- a. The school has never considered including animals (if ticked go to section 7b)
- b. The school did consider including animals and decided not to (then Q53a, Q53b followed by Q54 and section 7b)

Q53a Were you working at the school when they considered including animals?

Yes

No

Q53b Were you part of the decision-making process to consider including animals in school or aware of how the decision was made?

Yes

No

Q54 Why did the school decide not to include animals?

Please tick all those that apply and indicate the importance of each or tick 'did not apply' if not relevant

(Likert scale of did not apply, not, slightly important, somewhat important, very important, extremely important, don't know)

(Reviewer for each statement this will be a table of 7 columns – tick if considered, 5 point Likert scale + don't know)

Alternative ways to support the curriculum preferable without including animals

Alternative ways to improve reading scores without including animals

Alternative ways to achieve learning outcomes preferable without including animals

Alternative ways to achieve social, emotional, and mental health outcomes preferable without including animals

Concerns about ownership of the animal if owned by the school

Appendices

Concerns about ownership of the animal if owned by member of staff

Concerns about ownership of the animal if owned by external organisation

Concerns about the animal's breed/type/size being suitable

Concerns about the animal's temperament

Not enough space to house the animal

Not having appropriate housing for the animal

Potential difficulties with having someone to look after the animal e.g., daily care, during the holidays, if the nominated staff member left and no one to replace.

Concerns about ensuring equity of access

Concerns about cultural and religious factors affecting access to the animal

Concerns about human health and safety

Please specify:

Concerns about staff dislike of animals

Concerns about children's dislike of animals

Concerns about staff anxiety/fear of animals

Concerns about children's anxiety/fear of animals

Concerns about the impact on the local community

Concerns about the impact the school neighbours

Concerns about the animal not being cared for adequately e.g., feeding, cleaning house

Concerns about possible unacceptable levels of animal stress during activities

Concerns about giving the animal enough uninterrupted time away from people

Concerns about the animal being physically harmed

Concerns about when the animal retires

Concerns about when the animal dies, and the impact on the children

Concerns about children's interest in the animal decreasing

Concerns about ongoing financial costs for upkeep and veterinary care for animal kept by the school

Concerns about the cost of Animal Health Insurance if animal kept by the school

Concerns about the costs of public liability insurance

Appendices

Concerns about the costs of visits by an external organisation

Concerns about the financial costs of staff training

Concerns about the financial costs of staff time

Lack of knowledge about how to care for animals

Lack of guidance available to support caring for animals

Lack of knowledge about running the animal assisted interventions

Lack of guidance available to support running the animal assisted interventions

Difficulties in identifying the qualifications that staff might need

Difficulties with staff gaining identified qualifications

Lack of training available

Other, please specify:

Section 7b What generic things should a school consider when deciding whether to include animals?

Q55 If the school were to consider including animals, why might be this be?

Please tick all those that apply by indicating the importance of each or 'no it would not apply'

(Likert scale of no it would not apply, not, slightly important, somewhat important, very important, extremely important, don't know)

(Reviewer for each statement this will be a table of 7 columns – tick if considered, 5-point Likert scale + don't know)

To support teaching particular parts of the curriculum

To support teaching of PSHCE (Personal Social Health and Citizenship Education)

For assisted reading

To support teaching about animal welfare

To support development of social skills, including communication and empathy

To provide an experience of meeting an animal e.g., petting, observing

As class pets for the children to look after

Appendices

To give a sense of purpose and responsibility through looking after an animal

For animal rearing experiences e.g., chick hatching

To provide physical activity through animal-related activities e.g., walking the animal, cleaning out pens.

As therapy animals to support well-being

To support developing a therapeutic relationship with an animal

To have a calming effect and support self-regulation

To have a stimulating effect e.g., novelty of animals, increasing motivation

To offer equity accessing animals for those who do not have access outside of school

Other, please specify:

Q56 Who would you include in the team responsible for making the decision to include animals?

Please tick all that apply

Head teacher

Deputy head teacher

Member of the senior leadership team

Special Educational Needs Coordinator

Inclusion Coordinator

Member of pastoral team

Governors

Other – please state

Q57 Which children do you think might potentially benefit from the inclusion of animals?

Please tick all that apply

Children with identified special educational needs

Children with identified mental health and wellbeing needs

Children from a disadvantaged background e.g., financially, family support, experienced abuse

Appendices

Other children with no identified needs

Children in a particular class – if yes please specify year age of the class

Children in a particular year group – if yes, please specify which year group

Children in a particular Key Stage – if yes, please specify which key stage

All children

Q58 What factors might be considered during the decision-making process?

Please tick all those that apply and indicate the importance of each in making a final decision or 'No, it would not apply'.

(Likert scale of no it would not apply, not, slightly important, somewhat important, very important, extremely important, don't know)

(Reviewer for each statement this will be a table of 7 columns – tick if considered, 5-point Likert scale + don't know)

58a. Ownership of the animal

Who would own the animal – be its legal keeper

If the school would be the legal owner of the animal

If a member of staff would be the legal owner of the animal

If an external organisation would be the legal owner of the animal

58b. Choice of animal if owned by the school

What breed/type of animal to get

Size of the animal

Temperament of the animal

Expected lifespan for the animal

Suitability of the animal to match the identified need e.g., teaching the curriculum, wellbeing.

58c. Where the animal will live if owned by the school

Having an appropriate amount of space to keep the animal

Having appropriate housing for the animal

58d. Responsibility for the animal if owned by the school

Who would look after the animal daily

Who would care for the animal during school holidays

Who would care for the animal if the nominated staff member were ill or leaves

What would happen if the animal became ill

58e. Access to the animal

Having equal access to the animal for all children

Having access to the animal only for specifically identified children

Any cultural factors affecting access to the animal

Any religious factors affecting access to the animal

If a visiting animal, (external organisation or staff owned) how frequent the visits should be
e.g., weekly, monthly

58f. Human Health and Safety

Risk of allergies

Risk of injury, including biting

Risk of disease and/or illness

Risk of zoonoses (infections that can pass from animals to humans)

Teaching how the animal communicates by understanding body language

Teaching how to have appropriate interactions with the animal

How the children will be allowed to interact with the animal safely

58g. Human wellbeing

Staff Dislike (personal or cultural) of animals

Children's Dislike (personal or cultural) of animals

Staff Anxiety/ Fear of animals

Children's Anxiety/Fear of animals

Possible impact on local community

Possible impact on school neighbours

58h. Animal health and welfare

The value and importance of the animal as a living creature, regardless of its size or
financial cost

Appendices

The type of contact with the animal e.g., viewed only, touched, handled

Activities with the children are structured and planned

Breaks for the animal to be scheduled part of activities

Animal has choice in whether to interact or not

Monitoring of animal stress during activities

Animal has uninterrupted time away from people

Plan to manage the situation if an animal is harmed accidentally

Plan to manage the situation if an animal is harmed deliberately

What happens if the animal is not being cared for properly

Plan for animal's retirement

Plan for what happens in the school after the animal's retirement/death

Plan for decrease in interest in the animal

Consideration of other alternatives to an animal

58i. **Financial costs**

Initial cost of the animal, housing, and equipment if to be kept by the school

Ongoing costs for upkeep and veterinary care for animal kept by the school

Cost of Animal Health Insurance if animal kept by the school

Costs of visits by an external organisation

Public Liability Insurance – if kept by the school

Public Liability Insurance – if brought in by member of staff

Public Liability Insurance – if brought in by an external organisation

Staff training

Staff time

58j. **Staff Training – Animal Care**

What experience the staff have of looking after the animal

Identifying the qualifications that staff might need

How staff will gain identified qualifications

Who will pay for staff training

58k. **Staff Training – Interventions**

What experience the staff have of running animal assisted interventions

Identifying the qualifications that staff might need

How staff will gain identified qualifications

Who will pay for staff training

58l. Are there any other factors that might be considered during the decision-making process that haven't been listed?

Please share these factors here

Q59 Who might the school consult with to include animals?

Please tick all that might apply

Staff

Parents

Children

School neighbours

Local Community

Q60 Which of the following external resources might the school consult with to support the decision-making process?

a Colleagues in other schools within the same academy / trust / federation

Colleagues in other schools

Those who have personal experiences with animals

Any professionals external to the school?

If yes, please specify the type of external, e.g., vet:

b Social media

Research studies

Books about animal care

Appendices

Books about animal assisted interventions

Websites of professional bodies/animal charities/educational charities

Commercial/other websites

Other: please specify

Q61 Would the school consider pertinent legislation such as the Animal Welfare Act 2006, Dangerous Dogs Act to understand legal responsibilities involved? Yes / No / not sure

Q62 How might the inclusion of animals be reviewed after their inclusion in school?

Please tick all that apply

It would not be reviewed

Informal discussions and sharing of anecdotal evidence

Regular formal discussions with the other decision-makers

As part of the school development plan

By the governing body / trustees

Measuring the impact of using animals on children

Feedback from parents

Feedback from staff

Feedback from children

Other (please specify):

Now go to Section 8 Any further comments and then FINISH.

Section 8– Any other comments

Do you have any other comments or thoughts regarding any aspect of the inclusion or non-inclusion of animals in schools that you would like to share? Have your thoughts changed in any way after participating in the survey?

(text box provided)

Debrief

See Debrief document for content

Appendices

Counties list (48)

Bedfordshire	Lancashire
Berkshire	Leicestershire
Bristol	Lincolnshire
Buckinghamshire	Merseyside
Cambridgeshire	Norfolk
Cheshire	North Yorkshire
City of London	Northamptonshire
Cornwall	Northumberland
County Durham	Nottinghamshire
Cumbria	Oxfordshire
Derbyshire	Rutland
Devon	Shropshire
Dorset	Somerset
East Riding of Yorkshire	South Yorkshire
East Sussex	Staffordshire
Essex	Suffolk
Gloucestershire	Surrey
Greater London	Tyne and Wear
Greater Manchester	Warwickshire
Hampshire	West Midlands
Herefordshire	West Sussex
Hertfordshire	West Yorkshire
Isle of Wight	Wiltshire
Kent	Worcestershire

Appendix N Follow up Email



Study Title: To include animals or not: how schools with primary aged children make the decision.

Researcher(s): Jess Delicata, Dr Anne McBride and Dr Sarah Wright

University email: j.delicata@soton.ac.uk

Ethics/ERGO no: 93138

Version and date: Version 1.0, 24.02.25

Subject: Follow-up Questions for Doctoral Survey

Dear Headteacher,

Thank you for taking the time to complete my doctoral survey on the processes and factors schools consider when deciding whether to include animals.

I hope you don't mind me reaching out again, but as I have started analysing the data, I realised that I inadvertently omitted two important questions. I would be extremely grateful if you could take a moment to answer these two quick questions:

1. **Were you working at the school when they were considering including animals?**

Please respond with 'Yes' or 'No'.

2. **Were you part of the decision-making process to consider including animals in school or aware of how the decision was made?**

Please respond with 'Yes' or 'No'.

Your response would be greatly appreciated and will help ensure my research is as comprehensive as possible.

Thank you again for your time and support.

Best regards,

Appendix O Prize Draw Confirmation and Thank You



Study Title: To include animals or not: how schools with primary aged children make the decision.

Researcher(s): Jess Delicata, Dr Anne McBride and Dr Sarah Wright

University email: j.delicata@soton.ac.uk

Ethics/ERGO no: 93138

Version and date: Version 1.0, 24.02.25

Email for those that haven't won the prize draw:

Subject: Thank You & Prize Draw Update

Dear Headteacher,

I hope this email finds you well.

I wanted to take a moment to sincerely thank you once again for your participation in my doctoral survey on the processes and factors schools consider when deciding whether to include animals. Your contribution has been invaluable to this research.

As you may recall, there was an optional prize draw for participants. I would like to confirm that this has now taken place, and the winners have been contacted directly via their school office.

I truly appreciate your support in exploring this important area of research.

Best regards,

Email for those that have won the prize draw:

Subject: Prize Draw Winner – Thank You for Your Participation!

Dear Headteacher,

I hope you're doing well.

I wanted to take this opportunity to sincerely thank you once again for participating in my doctoral research study on the processes and factors schools consider when deciding whether to include animals. Your contribution has been invaluable to this research.

As part of the study, there was an optional prize draw, and I'm delighted to inform you that your school has been selected as one of the winners! You have won [first/second/third] prize – a £[100/75/50] Amazon voucher. Please find your voucher attached to this email.

Congratulations!

Thank you again for your support in this important area of research.

Best regards,

Appendix P Demographics of Schools Responding to the Questionnaire

Role of Participant Completing the Survey

Role in School of Participant Completing Survey	Overall		CH		PH		CDNW		NC	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
	Headteacher	59	84.2	37	63.0	8	14.0	7	12.0	6
Not headteacher	11	15.0	6	55.0	2	18.0	2	18.0	1	9.0
Deputy headteacher	4	36.0	2	50.0	1	25.0	-	0.0	1	25.0
Assistant headteacher	3	27.0	2	67.0	-	0.0	1	33.0	-	0.0
School Administrator	1	9.0	-	0.0	1	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
Administrator	1	9.0	1	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
Head of Inclusion	1	9.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	1	100.0	-	0.0
Forest School leader	1	9.0	1	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0

Appendices

Type of School

Type of School	Overall		CH		PH		CDNW		NC	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
A mainstream primary school (children aged 4-11 years)	56	80.0	32	57.0	9	16.0	9	16.0	6	11.0
A special primary school (children aged 4-11 years)	2	3.0	2	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
A mainstream infant school (children aged 4-7 years)	4	6.0	4	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
A special infant school (children aged 4-7 years)	1	1.0	1	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
A mainstream junior school (children aged 7-11 years)	6	9.0	3	50.0	1	17.0	-	0.0	1	17.0
A special junior school (children aged 7-11 years)	1	1.0	1	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0

Nursery Attached to the School

Nursery Attached	Overall		CH		PH		CDNW		NC	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Yes	27	38.5	16	59.0	3	11.0	4	15.0	4	15.0
No	43	61.4	27	63.0	7	16.0	5	12.0	3	7.0

Appendices

Classification of the School

Classification of School	Overall		CH		PH		CDNW		NC	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Community school	21	30.0	16	76.0	2	10.0	1	5.0	1	5.0
Foundation school	2	3.0	-	0.0	1	50.0	-	0.0	1	50.0
Trust school	13	19.0	10	77.0	2	15.0	1	8.0	-	0.0
Voluntary aided	4	6.0	2	50.0	2	50.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
Voluntary controlled	8	11.0	5	63.0	-	0.0	3	38.0	-	0.0
Academy	18	26.0	7	39.0	3	17.0	4	22.0	4	22.0
Free school	1	1.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	1	100.0
Special school	3	4.0	3	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
Independent school	-	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Charity funded school	-	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Average Class Size

Average Class Size	Overall		CH		PH		CDNW		NC	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Less than 10 pupils	3	4.0	2	67.0	-	0.0	1	33.0	-	0.0
10-20 pupils	1	1.0	1	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
21-30 pupils	64	91.0	39	61.0	10	16.0	8	13.0	6	9.0
Over 30 pupils	2	3.0	1	50.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	1	50.0

Size of the School

Appendices

Number of children on roll	Overall		CH		PH		CDNW		NC	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
0-50	3	4.0	1	33.0	-	0.0	1	33.0	-	0.0
51-100	4	6.0	3	75.0	-	0.0	1	25.0	-	0.0
101-150	7	10.0	7	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
151-200	12	17.0	8	67.0	1	8.0	2	17.0	1	8.0
201-250	13	19.0	8	62.0	3	23.0	1	8.0	1	8.0
251-300	3	4.0	3	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
301-350	5	7.0	2	40.0	2	40.0	-	0.0	1	20.0
351-400	8	11.0	5	63.0	1	13.0	1	13.0	1	13.0
401-450	7	10.0	3	43.0	2	29.0	1	14.0	1	14.0
451-500	4	6.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	2	50.0	2	50.0
501-550	1	1.0	1	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
551-600	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
601-650	2	3.0	1	50.0	1	50.0	-	0.0	-	-
651-700	1	1.0	1	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	-

Appendices

Geographical Type of Area

Type of Area	Overall		CH		PH		CDNW		NC	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Inner city	6	9.0	3	50.0	1	17.0	2	33.0	-	0.0
Urban	22	31.0	13	59.0	3	14.0	2	9.0	4	18.0
Suburban	12	17.0	8	67.0	3	25.0	-	0.0	1	8.0
Rural town	13	19.0	7	54.0	2	15.0	3	23.0	1	8.0
Rural village	17	24.0	12	71.0	1	6.0	2	12.0	1	6.0

UK Geographical Location

County	Overall		CH		PH		CDNW		NC	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Bedfordshire	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Berkshire	1	1.0	1	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
Bristol	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Buckinghamshire	1	1.0	1	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
Cambridgeshire	1	1.0	1	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
Cheshire	3	4.0	1	33.0	2	67.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
City of London	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cornwall	1	1.0	1	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
County Durham	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cumbria	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Derbyshire	2	3.0	1	50.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
Devon	1	1.0	1	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
Dorset	1	1.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	1	100.0
East Riding of Yorkshire	1	1.0	1	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
East Sussex	3	4.0	1	33.0	-	0.0	2	67.0	-	0.0

Appendices

Essex	1	1.0	1	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
Gloucestershire	6	9.0	4	67.0	-	0.0	2	33.0	-	0.0
Greater London	1	1.0	1	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
Greater Manchester	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hampshire	5	7.0	4	80.0	1	20.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
Herefordshire	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hertfordshire	1	1.0	1	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
Isle of Wight	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Kent	3	4.0	1	33.0	-	0.0	2	67.0	-	0.0
Lancashire	3	4.0	2	67.0	1	33.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
Leicestershire	1	1.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	1	100.0
Lincolnshire	1	1.0	1	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
Merseyside	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Norfolk	1	1.0	1	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
North Yorkshire	1	1.0	1	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
Northamptonshire	1	1.0	1	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
Northumberland	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Nottinghamshire	2	3.0	-	0.0	1	50.0	-	0.0	1	50.0
Oxfordshire	3	4.0	3	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
Rutland	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Shropshire	1	1.0	1	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
Somerset	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
South Yorkshire	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Staffordshire	2	3.0	1	50.0	-	0.0	1	50.0	-	0.0
Suffolk	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Surrey	2	3.0	1	50.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	1	50.0
Tyne and Wear	1	1.0	-	0.0	1	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0

Appendices

Warwickshire	1	1.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	1	100.0
West Midlands	2	3.0	-	0.0	1	50.0	1	50.0	-	0.0
West Sussex	2	3.0	2	100.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
West Yorkshire	2	3.0	1	50.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	1	50.0
Wiltshire	12	17.0	7	58.0	3	25.0	1	8.0	1	8.0
Worcestershire	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Regions of England

<p>North East England</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County Durham • Northumberland • Tyne and Wear 	<p>North West England</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheshire • Cumbria • Greater Manchester • Lancashire • Merseyside 	<p>Yorkshire and the Humber</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • East Riding of Yorkshire • North Yorkshire (excluding Tees Valley areas) • South Yorkshire • West Yorkshire • Lincolnshire
<p>East Midlands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Derbyshire • Leicestershire • Northamptonshire • Nottinghamshire • Rutland 	<p>West Midlands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Herefordshire • Shropshire • Staffordshire • Warwickshire • West Midlands (the metropolitan county) • Worcestershire 	<p>Greater London</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This region is primarily made up of the 32 London Boroughs and the City of London.
<p>East England</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bedfordshire • Cambridgeshire • Essex • Hertfordshire 	<p>South East England</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Berkshire • Buckinghamshire • East Sussex • Hampshire 	<p>South West England</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bristol • Cornwall (including the Isles of Scilly) • Devon

Appendices

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Norfolk	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Suffolk• Isle of Wight• Kent• Oxfordshire• Surrey• West Sussex	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dorset• Gloucestershire• Somerset• Wiltshire
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Appendix Q Types of Animals in Schools

Types of Animals in Schools

CH		PH					
School	Animal kept in school/ grounds	Animals staff bring in from home	Animals brought in by external organisations	School	Animal kept in school/ grounds	Animals staff bring in from home	Animals brought in by external organisations
P7	Goats	Dog	Minibeasts	P4		Dog	Pig
	Chickens	Lizard					
	Rabbits	Tortoise					
P10		Dog		P22		Dog	
		Rabbit				Chickens	
P14			Dog	P28		Dog	
			Reptiles				
P15			Dog	P30		Dog	
			Chicks			Chickens	
						Chicks	

Appendices

CH		PH					
School	Animal kept in school/ grounds	Animals staff bring in from home	Animals brought in by external organisations	School	Animal kept in school/ grounds	Animals staff bring in from home	Animals brought in by external organisations
P17			Dog Chicks Ducklings Petting Farm	P52		Guinea Pigs	Insects Reptiles Birds of Prey / owls
P23			Chicks	P61	Fish		Exotic animals
P24		Dog		P69	Chicks Chickens		
P25		Dog	Dog Ducklings				
P26		Dog					

Appendices

CH		PH					
School	Animal kept in school/ grounds	Animals staff bring in from home	Animals brought in by external organisations	School	Animal kept in school/ grounds	Animals staff bring in from home	Animals brought in by external organisations
P27			Dog				
P36		Dog					
P41			Dog				
P42	Guinea Pigs Chickens	Pony Gerbils					
P44		Dog					
P45			Dog				

Appendices

CH		PH					
School	Animal kept in school/ grounds	Animals staff bring in from home	Animals brought in by external organisations	School	Animal kept in school/ grounds	Animals staff bring in from home	Animals brought in by external organisations
P46		Dog	Dog				
P47			Dog				
P48		Dog					
P49		Dog					
P51	Guinea pigs Chickens						
P53		Dog					
P54		Dog					

Appendices

CH		PH					
School	Animal kept in school/ grounds	Animals staff bring in from home	Animals brought in by external organisations	School	Animal kept in school/ grounds	Animals staff bring in from home	Animals brought in by external organisations
P55		Dog					
P56		Dog					
P64	Guinea Pig	Dog					
P67		Dog					
P68		Dogs	Puppies				
P70	Guinea Pig	Dog	Guinea Pigs				
	Rabbit						

Appendix R Factors Considered During Decision-Making by Schools that CH Animals

Factors Considered During Decision-Making by Schools that CH Animals (N=38)									
Category	Factors	No, it did not apply		Not important		Of interest		High Importance	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Ownership of the animal	Who would own the animal – be its legal keeper	13	34.2	1	2.6	2	5.3	22	57.9
	If the school would be the legal owner of the animal	30	81.1	1	2.7	1	2.7	5	13.5
	If a member of staff would be the legal owner of the animal	12	31.6	0	0.0	1	2.6	25	65.8
	If an external organisation would be the legal owner of the animal	29	78.4	0	0.0	1	2.7	7	18.9
Choice of animal if owned by the school	What breed / type of animal to get	11	28.9	2	5.3	3	7.9	22	57.9
	Size of the animal	9	23.7	1	2.6	9	23.7	19	50.0
	Temperament of the animal	8	21.6	0	0.0	2	5.4	27	73.0

Appendices

	Expected lifespan for the animal	13	34.2	4	10.5	14	36.8	7	18.4
	Suitability of the animal to match the identified need e.g., teaching the curriculum, wellbeing	10	26.3	1	2.6	8	21.1	19	50.0
Where the animal will live if owned by the school	Having an appropriate amount of space to keep the animal	17	44.7	0	0.0	2	5.3	19	50.0
	Having appropriate housing for the animal	16	42.1	0	0.0	2	5.3	20	52.6
Responsibility for the animal if owned by the school	Who would look after the animal daily	21	55.3	1	2.6	0	0.0	16	42.1
	Who would care for the animal during school holidays	24	64.9	1	2.7	2	5.4	10	27.0
	Who would care for the animal if the nominated staff member were ill or leaves	27	71.1	0	0.0	2	5.3	9	23.7
	What would happen if the animal became ill	23	60.5	0	0.0	2	5.3	13	34.2
Access to the animal	Having equal access to the	5	13.5	5	13.5	7	18.9	20	54.1

Appendices

	animal for all children								
	Having access to the animal only for specifically identified children	13	36.1	7	19.4	9	25.0	7	19.4
	Any cultural factors affecting access to the animal	10	27.0	2	5.4	13	35.1	12	32.4
	Any religious factors affecting access to the animal	10	27.0	2	5.4	15	40.5	10	27.0
	If a visiting animal, (external organisation or staff owned) how frequent the visits should be e.g., weekly, monthly	19	51.4	1	2.7	4	10.8	13	35.1
Human Health and Safety	Risk of allergies	0	0.0	0	0.0	6	16.2	31	83.8
	Risk of injury, including biting	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	8.1	34	91.9
	Risk of disease and/or illness	1	2.7	0	0.0	7	18.9	29	78.4
	Risk of zoonoses (infections that can pass from animals to humans)	4	11.1	0	0.0	11	30.6	21	58.3
	Teaching how the animal	0	0.0	0	0.0	10	27.0	27	73.0

Appendices

	communicates by understanding body language								
	Teaching how to have appropriate interactions with the animal	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	5.4	35	94.6
	How the children will be allowed to interact with the animal safely	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	2.7	36	97.3
Human wellbeing	Staff Dislike (personal or cultural) of animals	2	5.4	2	5.4	20	54.1	13	35.1
	Children's Dislike (personal or cultural) of animals	1	2.7	3	8.1	17	45.9	16	43.2
	Staff Anxiety / Fear of animals	2	5.4	2	5.4	19	51.4	14	37.8
	Children's Anxiety / Fear of animals	1	2.7	1	2.7	13	35.1	22	59.5
	Possible impact on local community	16	43.2	3	8.1	9	24.3	9	24.3
	Possible impact on school neighbours	19	51.4	5	13.5	7	18.9	6	16.2
	Animal health and welfare	The value and importance of the animal as a living creature, regardless of its	1	2.9	0	0.0	5	14.3	29

Appendices

size or financial cost								
The type of contact with the animal e.g., viewed only, touched, handled	2	5.7	1	2.9	5	14.3	27	77.1
Activities with the children are structured and planned	1	2.9	3	8.6	8	22.9	23	65.7
Breaks for the animal to be scheduled part of activities	2	5.7	1	2.9	3	8.6	29	82.9
Animal has choice in whether to interact or not	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	8.6	32	91.4
Monitoring of animal stress during activities	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	5.7	33	94.3
Animal has uninterrupted time away from people	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	2.9	34	97.1
Plan to manage the situation if an animal is harmed accidentally	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	8.6	32	91.4
Plan to manage the situation if an animal is harmed deliberately	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	5.7	33	94.3

Appendices

	What happens if the animal is not being cared for properly	3	8.8	0	0.0	0	0.0	31	91.2
	Plan for animal's retirement	7	20.0	3	8.6	10	28.6	15	42.9
	Plan for what happens in the school after the animal's retirement/death	3	8.6	2	5.7	14	40.0	16	45.7
	Plan for decrease in interest in the animal	7	20.0	3	8.6	16	45.7	9	25.7
	Consideration of other alternatives to an animal	12	35.3	2	5.9	13	38.2	7	20.6
Financial costs	Initial cost of the animal, housing, and equipment if to be kept by the school	25	73.5	1	2.9	4	11.8	4	11.8
	Ongoing costs for upkeep and veterinary care for animal kept by the school	26	76.5	1	2.9	4	11.8	3	8.8
	Cost of Animal Health Insurance if animal kept by the school	26	76.5	2	5.9	3	8.8	3	8.8
	Costs of visits by an external organisation	29	85.3	1	2.9	2	5.9	2	5.9

Appendices

	Public Liability Insurance – if kept by the school	18	52.9	2	5.9	4	11.8	10	29.4
	Public Liability Insurance – if brought in by member of staff	11	33.3	1	3.0	3	9.1	18	54.5
	Public Liability Insurance – if brought in by an external organisation	24	75.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	8	25.0
	Staff training	6	17.6	1	2.9	12	35.3	15	44.1
	Staff time	8	23.5	1	2.9	11	32.4	14	41.2
Staff Training - Animal Care	What experience the staff have of looking after the animal	9	26.5	1	2.9	8	23.5	16	47.1
	Identifying the qualifications that staff might need	17	50.0	3	8.8	6	17.6	8	23.5
	How staff will gain identified qualifications	21	61.8	2	5.9	4	11.8	7	20.6
	Who will pay for staff training	22	64.7	1	2.9	5	14.7	6	17.6
Staff Training – Interventions	What experience the staff have of running animal assisted interventions	12	37.5	2	6.3	7	21.9	11	34.4

Appendices

Identifying the qualifications that staff might need	18	56.3	3	9.4	3	9.4	8	25.0
How staff will gain identified qualifications	18	56.3	3	9.4	3	9.4	8	25.0
Who will pay for staff training	19	59.4	2	6.3	4	12.5	7	21.9

Appendix S Factors Considered During Decision-Making by Schools that PH Animals

Factors Considered During Decision-Making by Schools that PH Animals (N=7)

Category	Factor	No, it did not apply		Not important		Of interest		High Importance	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Ownership of the animal	Who would own the animal – be its legal keeper	2	28.6	0	0.0	2	28.6	3	42.9
	If the school would be the legal owner of the animal	3	42.9	0	0.0	1	14.3	3	42.9
	If a member of staff would be the legal owner of the animal	1	14.3	0	0.0	3	42.9	3	42.9
	If an external organisation would be the legal	1	14.3	0	0.0	4	57.1	2	28.6

Appendices

		owner of the animal							
Choice of animal if owned by the school	What breed / type of animal to get	1	14.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	6	85.7
	Size of the animal	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	42.9	4	57.1
	Temperament of the animal	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	100.0
	Expected lifespan for the animal	1	16.7	1	16.7	1	16.7	3	50.0
	Suitability of the animal to match the identified need e.g., teaching the curriculum, wellbeing	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	100.0
Where the animal will live if owned by the school	Having an appropriate amount of space to keep the animal	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	100.0
	Having appropriate housing for the animal	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	100.0
Responsibility for the animal if owned by the school	Who would look after the animal daily	2	28.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	71.4
	Who would care for the animal during school holidays	2	28.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	71.4
	Who would care for the animal if the nominated	2	28.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	71.4

Appendices

	staff member were ill or leaves								
	What would happen if the animal became ill	1	14.3	0	0.0	1	14.3	5	71.4
Access to the animal	Having equal access to the animal for all children	1	14.3	1	14. 3	2	28.6	3	42.9
	Having access to the animal only for specifically identified children	1	14.3	1	14. 3	3	42.9	2	28.6
	Any cultural factors affecting access to the animal	1	16.7	3	50. 0	0	0.0	2	33.3
	Any religious factors affecting access to the animal	2	33.3	2	33. 3	0	0.0	2	33.3
	If a visiting animal, (external organisation or staff owned) how frequent the visits should be e.g., weekly, monthly	2	28.6	0	0.0	1	14.3	4	57.1
Human Health and Safety	Risk of allergies	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	100.0
	Risk of injury, including biting	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	100.0
	Risk of disease and/or illness	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	14.3	6	85.7
	Risk of zoonoses (infections that	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	28.6	5	71.4

Appendices

	can pass from animals to humans)								
	Teaching how the animal communicates by understanding body language	1	14.3	0	0.0	2	28.6	4	57.1
	Teaching how to have appropriate interactions with the animal	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	100.0
	How the children will be allowed to interact with the animal safely	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	14.3	6	85.7
Human wellbeing	Staff Dislike (personal or cultural) of animals	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	33.3	4	66.7
	Children's Dislike (personal or cultural) of animals	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	33.3	4	66.7
	Staff Anxiety / Fear of animals	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	42.9	4	57.1
	Children's Anxiety / Fear of animals	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	42.9	4	57.1
	Possible impact on local community	1	16.7	0	0.0	4	66.7	1	16.7
	Possible impact on school neighbours	3	42.9	0	0.0	2	28.6	2	28.6
Animal health and welfare	The value and importance of the animal as a living	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	100.0

Appendices

creature, regardless of its size or financial cost									
The type of contact with the animal e.g., viewed only, touched, handled	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	100.0	
Activities with the children are structured and planned	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	100.0	
Breaks for the animal to be scheduled part of activities	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	14.3	6	85.7	
Animal has choice in whether to interact or not	1	14.3	0	0.0	1	14.3	5	71.4	
Monitoring of animal stress during activities	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	100.0	
Animal has uninterrupted time away from people	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	14.3	6	85.7	
Plan to manage the situation if an animal is harmed accidentally	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	100.0	
Plan to manage the situation if an animal is harmed deliberately	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	100.0	

Appendices

	What happens if the animal is not being cared for properly	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	100.0
	Plan for animal's retirement	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	50.0	3	50.0
	Plan for what happens in the school after the animal's retirement/death	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	42.9	4	57.1
	Plan for decrease in interest in the animal	1	16.7	0	0.0	3	50.0	2	33.3
	Consideration of other alternatives to an animal	2	28.6	0	0.0	4	57.1	1	14.3
Financial costs	Initial cost of the animal, housing, and equipment if to be kept by the school	2	28.6	0	0.0	2	28.6	3	42.9
	Ongoing costs for upkeep and veterinary care for animal kept by the school	3	42.9	0	0.0	2	28.6	2	28.6
	Cost of Animal Health Insurance if animal kept by the school	4	57.1	0	0.0	1	14.3	2	28.6
	Costs of visits by an external organisation	2	28.6	0	0.0	2	28.6	3	42.9

Appendices

	Public Liability Insurance – if kept by the school	3	42.9	0	0.0	1	14.3	3	42.9
	Public Liability Insurance – if brought in by member of staff	1	14.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	6	85.7
	Public Liability Insurance – if brought in by an external organisation	3	42.9	0	0.0	1	14.3	3	42.9
	Staff training	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	14.3	6	85.7
	Staff time	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	6	100.0
Staff Training - Animal Care	What experience the staff have of looking after the animal	1	14.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	6	85.7
	Identifying the qualifications that staff might need	1	16.7	0	0.0	1	16.7	4	66.7
	How staff will gain identified qualifications	1	16.7	0	0.0	1	16.7	4	66.7
	Who will pay for staff training	2	28.6	0	0.0	1	14.3	4	57.1
Staff Training – Interventions	What experience the staff have of running animal assisted interventions	1	14.3	0	0.0	1	14.3	5	71.4
	Identifying the qualifications that staff might need	1	16.7	0	0.0	1	16.7	4	66.7

Appendices

How staff will gain identified qualifications	1	16.7	0	0.0	1	16.7	4	66.7
Who will pay for staff training	1	14.3	0	0.0	1	14.3	5	71.4

Appendix T Factors Considered During Decision-Making by Schools of High Importance

Factors Considered During Decision-Making by Schools of High Importance					
Category	Factor	CH N=38		PH N=7	
		n	%	n	%
Ownership of the animal	Who would own the animal – be its legal keeper	22	57.9	3	42.9
	If the school would be the legal owner of the animal	5	13.5	3	42.9
	If a member of staff would be the legal owner of the animal	25	65.8	3	42.9
	If an external organisation would be the legal owner of the animal	7	18.9	2	28.6
Choice of animal if owned by the school	What breed / type of animal to get	22	57.9	6	85.7
	Size of the animal	19	50.0	4	57.1
	Temperament of the animal	27	73.0	7	100.0
	Expected lifespan for the animal	7	18.4	3	50.0
	Suitability of the animal to match the identified need e.g., teaching the curriculum, wellbeing	19	50.0	7	100.0

Appendices

Where the animal will live if owned by the school	Having an appropriate amount of space to keep the animal	19	50.0	4	100.0
	Having appropriate housing for the animal	20	52.6	5	100.0
Responsibility for the animal if owned by the school	Who would look after the animal daily	16	42.1	5	71.4
	Who would care for the animal during school holidays	10	27.0	5	71.4
	Who would care for the animal if the nominated staff member were ill or leaves	9	23.7	5	71.4
	What would happen if the animal became ill	13	34.2	5	71.4
Access to the animal	Having equal access to the animal for all children	20	54.1	3	42.9
	Having access to the animal only for specifically identified children	7	19.4	2	28.6
	Any cultural factors affecting access to the animal	12	32.4	2	33.3
	Any religious factors affecting access to the animal	10	27.0	2	33.3
	If a visiting animal, (external organisation or staff owned) how frequent the visits should be e.g., weekly, monthly	13	35.1	4	57.1

Appendices

Human Health and Safety	Risk of allergies	31	83.8	7	100.0
	Risk of injury, including biting	34	91.9	7	100.0
	Risk of disease and/or illness	29	78.4	6	85.7
	Risk of zoonoses (infections that can pass from animals to humans)	21	58.3	5	71.4
	Teaching how the animal communicates by understanding body language	27	73.0	4	57.1
	Teaching how to have appropriate interactions with the animal	35	94.6	7	100.0
	How the children will be allowed to interact with the animal safely	36	97.3	6	85.7
Human wellbeing	Staff Dislike (personal or cultural) of animals	13	35.1	4	66.7
	Children's Dislike (personal or cultural) of animals	16	43.2	4	66.7
	Staff Anxiety / Fear of animals	14	37.8	4	57.1
	Children's Anxiety / Fear of animals	22	59.5	4	57.1
	Possible impact on local community	9	24.3	1	16.7
	Possible impact on school neighbours	6	16.2	2	28.6

Appendices

Animal health and welfare	The value and importance of the animal as a living creature, regardless of its size or financial cost	29	82.9	7	100.0
	The type of contact with the animal e.g., viewed only, touched, handled	27	77.1	7	100.0
	Activities with the children are structured and planned	23	65.7	7	100.0
	Breaks for the animal to be scheduled part of activities	29	82.9	6	85.7
	Animal has choice in whether to interact or not	32	91.4	5	71.4
	Monitoring of animal stress during activities	33	94.3	7	100.0
	Animal has uninterrupted time away from people	34	97.1	6	85.7
	Plan to manage the situation if an animal is harmed accidentally	32	91.4	7	100.0
	Plan to manage the situation if an animal is harmed deliberately	33	94.3	7	100.0
	What happens if the animal is not being cared for properly	31	91.2	7	100.0
Plan for animal's retirement	15	42.9	3	50.0	

Appendices

	Plan for what happens in the school after the animal's retirement/death	16	45.7	4	57.1
	Plan for decrease in interest in the animal	9	25.7	2	33.3
	Consideration of other alternatives to an animal	7	20.6	1	14.3
Financial costs	Initial cost of the animal, housing, and equipment if to be kept by the school	4	11.8	3	42.9
	Ongoing costs for upkeep and veterinary care for animal kept by the school	3	8.8	2	28.6
	Cost of Animal Health Insurance if animal kept by the school	3	8.8	2	28.6
	Costs of visits by an external organisation	2	5.9	3	42.9
	Public Liability Insurance – if kept by the school	10	29.4	3	42.9
	Public Liability Insurance – if brought in by member of staff	18	54.5	6	85.7
	Public Liability Insurance – if brought in by an external organisation	8	25.0	3	42.9
	Staff training	15	44.1	6	85.7
	Staff time	14	41.2	6	100.0
Staff Training - Animal Care	What experience the staff have of looking after the animal	16	47.1	6	85.7

Appendices

	Identifying the qualifications that staff might need	8	23.5	4	66.7
	How staff will gain identified qualifications	7	20.6	4	66.7
	Who will pay for staff training	6	17.6	4	57.1
Staff Training – Interventions	What experience the staff have of running animal assisted interventions	11	34.4	5	71.4
	Identifying the qualifications that staff might need	8	25.0	4	66.7
	How staff will gain identified qualifications	8	25.0	4	66.7
	Who will pay for staff training	7	21.9	5	71.4

Appendix U Participants in Each Group

Participant Group	Participant Numbers in this group
CH	2, 3, 6,7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17, 20, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 32, 33, 34, 36, 37, 39, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 51, 53, 54, 55, 56, 58, 64, 67, 68, 70
CH – excluded from decision-making related questions	2, 8, 51
PH	4, 21, 22, 28, 30, 38, 52, 59, 61, 59
PH – excluded from decision-making related questions	30, 38, 59
CDNW	1, 11, 16, 19, 31, 50, 60, 63, 66
CDNW – excluded from decision-making related questions	1, 19, 31, 50, 66
NC	5, 13, 18, 35, 57, 62, 65

Glossary of Terms

Animal-assisted

education (AAE) Use of animals within educational activities to enhance engagement, learning, and emotional regulation.

Animal-assisted

interventions Intentional, structured interactions with animals to improve physical, social, emotional, or cognitive functioning.

Animal-assisted

services (AAS) An encompassing term for all structured activities, therapies, or programmes involving animals to promote human wellbeing and animal welfare.

Animal-assisted support

programmes (AASP) Wider initiatives aimed at improving wellbeing or social connection through human–animal interactions.

Animal-assisted

treatment (AATx) Formal therapeutic practice where animals are integrated into clinical or counselling settings.

Animal Welfare The physical and psychological well-being of animals, including proper care, stress reduction, choice, rest, and humane treatment.

Anthropomorphism The attribution of human traits, emotions, or intentions to non-human entities, particularly animals.

Arousal Levels Emotional and physical states of alertness or excitement in children, which can be influenced by interaction with animals.

Assisted Reading An educational activity in which animals (often dogs) are used to motivate or support children in improving literacy skills.

Attachment object A being or item to which an individual forms an emotional bond, providing comfort and security.

Audit-Style Approach – A systematic review process to ensure policies, procedures, and outcomes regarding animal inclusion are effective and safe.

Definitions and Abbreviations

- Biophilia hypothesis** The theory that humans possess an innate emotional connection to nature and other living beings, influencing wellbeing (Wilson, 1984).
- Bounded rationality** Theory that decisions are limited by cognitive capacity, available information, and time constraints, often resulting in “good enough” choices.
- Branching logic** Survey design feature where participants are directed to different questions or sections based on prior responses.
- Class Pets** Animals permanently or semi-permanently kept within a school for educational or enrichment purposes.
- Cognitive dissonance** Potential bias when participants’ perceptions may conflict with actual observations or evidence.
- Confounding variables**.... External factors that may influence both independent and dependent variables, potentially distorting research results.
- Control group**..... A group in research that does not receive the experimental intervention, allowing comparison with those who do.
- Cross-country comparison** Examination of similarities and differences between studies conducted in different national contexts.
- Cross-species Comparison** Evaluating the effects of different species in educational or therapeutic contexts.
- Cultural sensitivity** Awareness and respect for cultural differences, ensuring that practices and interventions are inclusive and appropriate for diverse communities.
- Data anonymisation** Process of removing identifying information to protect participant privacy.
- Data extraction** The process of systematically recording relevant information from included studies into a standardised format.
- Data interpretation** the process of making sense of research findings by identifying patterns, meanings, or implications.
- Decision-making** The process by which schools determine whether and how to include animals, considering ethical, welfare, and safety factors.

Definitions and Abbreviations

- Descriptive statistics** Basic numerical summaries of data, such as means, frequencies, and percentages.
- Dissemination** The process of sharing research findings with relevant audiences through publications, conferences, or other channels.
- Dual role of staff/handler** Managing both educational and animal-care responsibilities.
- Early intervention** Providing targeted support at an early stage to prevent or reduce the development of more serious difficulties later on.
- Educational Psychology Service** A local authority or independent service providing support from educational psychologists to schools and families.
- Educational setting** The type of learning environment (e.g., primary, secondary, or mixed-level school).
- Elementary school** A school for young children, usually covering the first years of formal education (typically grades 1–5 or 1–6, ages 5–11). It focuses on basic subjects like reading, writing, math, and social studies.
- Empathy** The ability to understand and share the feelings of others, often cited as a skill enhanced through interaction with animals.
- Empirical study** Research based on observed and measured phenomena, as opposed to theoretical work.
- Epistemology** The study of how knowledge is created, validated, and understood within research contexts.
- Equity of Access** Ensuring all children have fair and equal opportunity to interact with or benefit from animals in the school setting.
- Ethical concerns** Issues relating to moral principles, such as fairness, responsibility, and welfare.
- Ethical inclusion** The practice of integrating animals (or any intervention) in ways that balance human benefit with animal welfare and ethical responsibility.
- Ethics Committee** A formal body within an institution that reviews research proposals to ensure they meet ethical standards for participants and data handling.

Definitions and Abbreviations

- Evidence base** The collective body of research and data that supports or challenges the effectiveness of an approach or intervention.
- Evidence-informed practice** Approaches and decisions guided by a balance of research evidence, professional expertise, and contextual realities.
- Follow-up survey** Additional data collection conducted after the main survey to gather more detailed information.
- Framework analysis** A systematic approach for coding and categorising qualitative data.
- Gatekeepers** Individuals or groups (such as headteachers or senior leaders) who control access to participants, settings, or data in research.
- Handler** The individual responsible for managing, caring for, and guiding the animal during interventions or school activities.
- Headteacher** The principal leader of a school, responsible for its management, policies, and educational outcomes.
- Health and safety legislation** Laws designed to protect the wellbeing of individuals and animals in institutional settings (e.g., *Animal Welfare Act 2006*).
- Heterogeneity** Variation or diversity in study designs, methods, participants, or outcomes that makes direct comparison difficult.
- Holistic approaches** Methods that address the whole child (mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing), not just academic performance.
- Human–animal interaction (HAI)** The study or practice of interactions and relationships between humans and animals.
- Inclusion** Ensuring all pupils, regardless of differences or needs, participate fully in the educational experience.
- Inclusion and exclusion criteria** Predetermined rules specifying which studies qualify for inclusion in a review based on relevance, design, or quality.
- Inclusive education** An approach ensuring all children, regardless of background or ability, can participate fully in learning environments.

Definitions and Abbreviations

- Infant school**..... A type of primary school for the youngest children, usually ages 4–7 (reception to Year 2 in the UK). Focuses on basic literacy, numeracy, and social skills.
- Interpretivist approach**... A perspective in social research that prioritises understanding human experiences, meanings, and perspectives.
- Junior High school** Similar to middle school, often covering grades 7–9 (ages 12–15). It may have a stronger focus on subject specialization and preparation for high school.
- Junior school**..... Often the second stage of primary education for children ages 7–11 (Years 3–6 in the UK). It builds on skills learned in infant school.
- Level of training** Ensuring therapy animals, especially TDs, are appropriately trained for school environments.
- Liability** Legal responsibility for injury, harm, or damage that might occur in relation to including animals in schools.
- Likert-scale** Survey response format measuring levels of agreement, importance, or frequency (e.g., 1–5 or 1–7 scales).
- Local Authority** A local government organisation responsible for education, social care, and community services in a given area.
- Longitudinal research** Research conducted over an extended period to study changes and long-term outcomes.
- Mainstream schools** Schools that serve the general student population, as opposed to specialist settings.
- Meta-analysis** A statistical technique combining data from multiple studies to determine overall trends.
- Methodological consistency** The degree to which research studies follow similar designs and methods, enabling comparison and synthesis of findings.
- Methodological Robustness**..... The strength and reliability of a study’s design, data collection, and analysis.
- Middle school** A school that serves as a transition between elementary and high school, usually including grades 6–8 or 7–8 (ages 11–14). It

Definitions and Abbreviations

emphasizes a broader curriculum and prepares students for higher-level education.

Mixed methods..... Combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single study.

Narrative synthesis..... A method of summarising and interpreting diverse study findings through descriptive, thematic integration rather than statistical pooling.

National frameworks Standardised guidance issued by government or professional bodies to ensure consistency across institutions.

Neurodiverse..... Individuals with neurological differences (e.g., autism, ADHD) that may affect learning or behaviour.

Neurotypically

developing studentsStudents without identified neurodiverse or SEND profiles.

Non-parametric tests Statistical tests used when data do not meet the assumptions required for parametric tests (e.g., Chi-square, Mann–Whitney U).

Ontology The philosophical study of what exists or what constitutes reality in research.

Outcome measures The specific results or effects examined in a study, e.g., social skills, stress reduction.

Peer-reviewed journal An academic publication in which submitted articles are evaluated by experts in the field before acceptance.

Phenomenological

approach A qualitative research method focusing on understanding participants' lived experiences and perceptions.

Pilot testing..... Trial run of the survey with a small group to identify and correct issues before full deployment.

Policy A school's formal statement or document guiding the inclusion, care, and management of animals, and outlining responsibilities, safety procedures, and intended outcomes.

Positionality The researcher's social, cultural, and professional identity and how it may shape their perspective or interpretation of findings.

Definitions and Abbreviations

- Post hoc** Latin for “after the fact”; describes reasoning or action taken retrospectively.
- Pragmatic paradigm** A research philosophy that values practical approaches and mixed methods, focusing on what works to address real-world problems.
- Primary school**..... A term commonly used in many countries (e.g., UK, Australia) for the first stage of formal education, typically covering ages 5–11 (roughly equivalent to elementary school).
- Primary schools** Schools providing early compulsory education for children aged roughly 4–11 in the UK.
- Protective factors** Conditions or characteristics that help buffer individuals from psychological harm or stress.
- Pupil Premium** Additional funding provided to schools in England to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils.
- Qualitative research** Research exploring experiences, meanings, or perceptions using interviews, focus groups, or thematic analysis.
- Quality assurance**
- Frameworks** Tools used to assess the rigour of study design, data collection, and analysis.
- Qualtrics** Online survey software used for designing, distributing, and analysing questionnaires.
- Quantitative research** Research based on numerical data, statistics, and measurable variables.
- Reflexivity** The process by which a researcher reflects on their own background, values, and potential biases throughout the research process.
- Research assistant** Individual supporting data collection or analysis under the supervision of the lead researcher.
- Reviewer concordance** ... The level of agreement between two or more reviewers assessing the same study or data.
- Risk assessment** A formal process for identifying and mitigating potential hazards related to health, safety, or welfare.

Definitions and Abbreviations

- Robotic Animals** Artificial animals used as alternatives to live animals in educational or therapeutic contexts.
- Role clarity** Clearly defined expectations and functions for therapy animals and staff within schools.
- Safeguarding**..... Policies and practices designed to protect children and vulnerable individuals from harm, abuse, or neglect.
- Scoping search** An initial search to map existing literature, identify gaps, and refine search terms or scope.
- Screening**..... The process of reviewing titles and abstracts to determine eligibility for inclusion.
- Search syntax** The specific commands and operators used to structure database search queries effectively.
- Self-regulation** Managing one’s emotions, behaviour, and attention; frequently supported by calming interactions with animals.
- Service Children**
- Premium**..... Additional funding provided to schools for children of military personnel to support their education.
- Social and emotional**
- Development**The process of learning to understand and manage emotions, form relationships, and make responsible decisions.
- Social and emotional**
- learning (SEL)** Enhancement of social skills, self-awareness, and emotional understanding.
- Social benefits**..... Positive effects on students’ social skills, peer interactions, and school community cohesion.
- Social lubricant** Concept describing the facilitative effect of therapy animals on social interaction.
- Special school** A school designed to cater to children with special educational needs (SEN), including physical disabilities, learning difficulties, or emotional and behavioural challenges.
- Stakeholder Feedback**.... Information or opinions gathered from individuals or groups affected by the inclusion of animals in schools (e.g., staff, parents, children).

Definitions and Abbreviations

- Statutory duties** Legal obligations schools and their leaders must follow, such as safeguarding, health and safety, and welfare compliance.
- Stratified sampling** Sampling method that divides a population into subgroups (strata) and selects participants systematically to ensure representativeness.
- Subject headings** Controlled vocabulary terms (e.g., MeSH, Thesaurus terms) used to categorise and retrieve relevant literature in databases.
- Sub-theme** A secondary or supporting concept that contributes to a larger theme within qualitative analysis.
- Survey** A data collection method involving direct questioning to gather measurable evidence from participants.
- Systematic review** A structured synthesis of existing studies that follows a transparent, replicable method to summarise the current evidence.
- Template Policies** Pre-prepared policy documents provided as a model for schools to adapt, ensuring key factors such as welfare, safety, and learning outcomes are addressed.
- Thematic analysis** A qualitative technique used to identify and interpret patterns or themes within data.
- Thematic synthesis** Combining themes across multiple qualitative studies to identify overarching insights.
- Theme** A broad category capturing recurring ideas or findings across studies.
- Therapeutic**
- Relationship** A supportive relationship developed between children and animals to promote well-being and emotional regulation.
- Therapy animals** Animals involved in structured interventions designed to provide emotional support, improve wellbeing, or assist in therapeutic or educational activities.
- Therapy dogs (TDs)** Dogs that undergo specific training or assessment to ensure they can safely and positively interact with humans in educational or therapeutic settings.

Definitions and Abbreviations

- Triangulation**..... Use of multiple methods or data sources (e.g., observations, behavioural measures, self-reports) to enhance research validity.
- Underground culture** Informal, minimally regulated approach to animal inclusion in schools (Gee et al., 2015).
- Visiting animals** Animals that come into the school temporarily (e.g., therapy dogs), as opposed to animals kept on-site. These maybe staff pets or animals from external organisations.
- Well-being** A holistic state of positive mental, emotional, and physical health.
- Zoonoses** Illnesses that can be transmitted between animals and humans.

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