

# How the presence of a dog in school can promote wellbeing and development

Having a school dog is a popular practice that is being adopted around the world (Finn-Stevenson, 2016; Gee et al, 2017). Dogs are being used in a variety of school settings to motivate and engage pupils in tasks by providing a non-judgmental companion in a warm, comforting and relaxing environment, which supports learning and development (Chandler, 2017).



Child psychologist Levinson (1962), noticed that children in his therapy room would immediately feel relaxed in the company of his dog Jingles and that this acted as a transitional bridge to form a non-threatening relationship with him as an adult (Freisen, 2010).



Friesen (2010) suggests that a dog's presence within the school and classroom offers children a unique social, emotional and academic support that results in considerably higher quality attention and focus. Sensory experiences (including touch and smell) form real world experiences not always found in the classroom (Gee et al, 2017) and Dolly will allow us to provide this for our children.

While purely scientific evidence that dogs improve actual learning is as yet limited (Hall et al, 2016; Beetz, 2017), there is a huge amount of anecdotal research that shows how children make significant progress with the addition of a school dog. Scientists believe that animal interventions are effective at reducing levels of stress and anxiety as the process of sensory interaction such as stroking or touching, activates a hormone and neurotransmitter in the brain and circulatory system called oxytocin (Beetz et al., 2012). Oxytocin, is a mediator of anti-stress, well-being, social interaction, growth and healing (Uvnas-Moberg, 2005). Higher levels of oxytocin may encourage verbal communication and reduce stress reactions during challenging activities such as learning new skills (Beetz, 2017).



Evidence Informed Research

Our children with Dolly



Children can learn to recognise the immediate non-verbal clues that their demeanour has upon animals which leads them to evaluate the nature of their behaviour. This leads to improvement of self and social awareness, goal-directed behaviour, and communication skills (Gee et al, 2017).

The quality of the experience rather than the experience alone creates better learning opportunities and facilitates self-confidence in an activity. The dog alone cannot create a better learner, yet can be a part of successful intervention. The dog and the teacher are equally crucial in creating a valuable experience (Anderson et al; 2006). We are very aware of our role as a staff, in making Dolly a success at Fairfield.