

# **Helping Hounds: The role of animal-interventions in alternative schools in England - the why, the how and the recommendations for policy**

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## **Abstract**

The rise of dogs in schools has really taken off in western cultures in the last decade, with more and more schools introducing an emotional support animal, a facility dog, or using animal-assisted learning with profoundly positive reported outcomes. Published research on this topic within an educational context, spans back a mere thirty-five years ago when dogs were introduced as support animals in schools. This research presents the largest study to date on the perceived impact of having a school dog in alternative education settings, to determine if the hype is backed by impact. Through a national questionnaire for the basis of a collective case study approach with four schools, the thematic analysis; supported by Nvivo, will reveal the findings from this research. As youth mental wellbeing and absenteeism from school remains a prominent topic for education, school dogs in alternative settings support the positive childhood experiences young people are often missing with higher than average adverse childhood experiences (ACE's) from their peers. The conclusions from this study highlight that animal-assisted learning is a worthwhile investment instead of a passing fad in education, and makes recommendations for a future policy from the department of education to support schools with this strategy.

**Keywords:** animal-assisted; canines; dogs; interventions; trauma-informed