

## Therapy Dog Policy



### Help for non-English speakers

If you need help to understand the information in this policy please contact [insert school contact details].

### PURPOSE

A variety of animals, including dogs, are becoming a valuable addition to schools across the country. Students can benefit educationally and emotionally, increase their understanding of responsibility, and develop empathy and nurturing skills through contact with a dog. In addition to these benefits, students take great enjoyment from interaction with a dog.

At Lake Bolac College, we value the development of students' well-being along with their social education. A school dog will be a unique way to enrich all areas of the students' wider education, skills, and wellbeing. This policy applies to the approved school dog only (Sandy, a King Charles Cavalier). It does not affect the schools right to prohibit other dogs on school property in accordance with our Dogs and Other Pets Policy.

### RATIONALE

There are numerous benefits to having a dog in school, including but not limited to:

- > The presence and care of a school dog enables students to put the school values into practice: Achievement, Respect, Resilience.
- > With the presence of a calm and well-trained dog, students may find increased social support and peer interaction.
- > A dog may give confidence to students as they make amazing listeners, providing the students with a sense of comfort and love. The dog can work with students on a one-one basis and will especially help those students who are feeling vulnerable, have suffered trauma or are going through upsetting/difficult times.
- > Students may develop increased empathy through a connection with an animal.
- > Numerous local schools are using dogs to help students build self-esteem; learn about positive and negative reinforcement, responsibility, and boundaries. They are reporting that dogs help with communication, teach kindness, and empower students.

Further information regarding research in this area can be found in this 2018 Article published by the ABC.  
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-20/therapy-dogs-can-help-reduce-student-stress-anxietydepression/9564120>

### IMPLEMENTATION

- > The dog is owned by School Nurse/Mental Health Practitioner, Laura McDougall. There will only be one school dog at any given time.
- > Parents/carers will be informed of the intention to have a school dog before it comes to school. A copy of the Therapy Dog Policy will be available on Compass. Parents/carers have the right to remove consent for their child to have any direct contact with the dog. Any such wishes will be respected and upheld by the school. These wishes will be communicated by 'opting out' of contact with the school dog.
- > Lake Bolac College staff will take reasonable care to avoid, as far as possible, any contact between the school dog and pupils, other staff and visitors where allergic reactions are a known risk, however, the cooperation of all staff, visitors and pupils is requested in notifying the school of any known or suspected health concerns. Staff will be mindful of any student who has an allergy and monitor this on a case by case basis according to advice from the family.



- > The dog's health and well-being are prioritised along with that of the students and staff. All vaccinations, worming treatments and vet checks will be up to date. If the dog is ill, it will not be allowed into school.
- > Anyone with a fear of dogs will be respected and never be forced to interact with the dog. They can receive coaching in a controlled environment with the dog to help them overcome their fears if they so wish.
- > There will be appropriate adult supervision at all times when the dog is present with students. Notices will be displayed to inform students, staff and visitors of the dog's presence. Pupils will be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dog.
- > Information from the RSPCA and Responsible Pet Ownership Program will be used to guide conversations and lessons with students. Student responsibilities include:
  - > Students should remain calm around the dog. They should not make sudden movements and must never stare into a dog's eyes as this could be threatening for the dog.
  - > Students should not put their face near a dog and should always approach it standing up.
  - > Students should never go near or disturb the dog if it is sleeping or eating.
  - > Students will not be allowed to play too roughly with the dog.
  - > If the dog is surrounded by a large number of students, the dog could become nervous and agitated. Therefore, the adult in charge of the dog must ensure that they monitor the surroundings at all times.
  - > Dogs express their feelings through their body language. Growling or baring of teeth indicate that the dog is feeling angry or threatened. Flattened ears, tail lowered or between their legs, hiding behind their owner, whining or growling are signs that the dog is frightened or nervous. If the dog is displaying any of these warning signs it will be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment.
  - > Students should not feed the dog or eat close to the dog. The dog will not be allowed to enter any classroom where food is being prepared.
  - > Students should always wash their hands after handling the dog.
- > Any dog waste will be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately. If any 'accidents' occur in areas where students have access to, appropriate measures will be taken to disinfect the affected site.

#### FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

- > Pets and Other Animals Policy
- > Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1986)
- > Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulations (2008)
- > Wildlife Act (1975) and Regulations (2013) Review Cycle and Evaluation

#### REVIEW CYCLE

This policy was last reviewed and approved by school council in March 2023 and is scheduled for evaluation and review in March 2025.

#### APPROVAL

Created date	Wednesday 1 <sup>st</sup> March
Endorsed by	Giselle Allgood, Principal
Endorsed on	Tuesday 21 <sup>st</sup> March 2023
Next review date	March 2025

