



School Therapy Dog Policy

PURPOSE

The aim of this project is to improve wellbeing and engagement across the school with the assistance of a school therapy dog. The program will be implemented school-wide on a trial basis. The objectives of this project are to improve teaching and learning practices related to personal and social competencies, and to gather evidence to show improvement in student outcomes.

SCOPE

This is a pilot program in place to directly support Staff and Student Wellbeing. This policy governs the program, ensuring the successful implementation of the program. Empirical evidence has shown that therapy dogs can enhance children's psychological development, improve social skills, and increase self-esteem. Dogs can also teach responsibility, compassion, and respect for other living things. Dogs in the classroom can be used to calm fears, relieve anxiety, and compliment the THRIVE actions.

Research has demonstrated that therapy dogs in the school setting can not only make a measurable difference in terms of gaining skills such as reading enhancement, but also in contributing critically to emotional and relational development. School counsellors are finding that the presence of a therapy dog decreases anxiety and enables students to work through issues such as anger management, bullying tendencies and other psycho/social problems. The introduction of a non-threatening therapy dog can serve as a catalytic vehicle for forming adaptive and satisfactory social interactions. Guided activities and group discussions help teach students how to handle interpersonal conflicts and develop constructive responses.

CONTEXT

- The dog is owned by primary handler - Melissa Hamilton
- Dog is a purebred Golden Retriever
- Dog will be based in the senior art room or Assistant Principals Office.
- Students will be educated in appropriate behaviour around the dog and develop increased responsibility with handling and managing the dog
- Visitors to school will be informed of the dog at the school reception, explaining the Dog's role and requirements
- This policy covers all aspects of having a dog in a school environment; careful management abiding by this policy ensures there is a very low risk of harm to students, staff, visitors and the dog.
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POLICY

Bella is a purebred golden retriever. Bella and her primary handlers have been trained by Lead The Way to undertake the therapy dog program at Langwarrin Park Primary School. Therapy dogs can help refocus students who may be feeling upset or anxious for a variety of reasons.

Bella has been thoroughly temperament tested and exposed to a range of experiences such as animals, wheelchairs, ramps, traffic, schools (both familiar and unfamiliar) and other dogs. Throughout the testing she has shown very low arousal, suggesting a highly appropriate temperament for ongoing training and work as a Therapy Dog.

Daily management.

The Dog:

- will only be at school if she is well
- will be kept on lead at all times whilst on duty at school
- will be under the supervision of trained handlers
- will be up to date with all vaccinations, worming and grooming
- will not be taken off the site, unless with the Primary Handler/s
- will have a safe area in the art room and assistant Principal's office (designated zones)
- will wear training vest/THRIVE bandana to ensure she is recognised as a therapy support dog

Student expectations

Students:

- will never have sole responsibility for the dog or be left unsupervised around the dog
- will be reminded of appropriate behaviours around the dog with each contact
- will learn to recognise the dog's body language and how to react
- will always be reminded to respect the dog and remain calm around her at all times
- will be gentle and not make sudden movements or attempts to physically contact the dog
- will not stare into the dog's eyes and be given knowledge as to why not
- will request permission before touching the dog
- will keep their face away from the dog
- will always approach the dog in a calm, slow manner and not touch the dog until it is sitting and calm
- will not disturb the dog while off duty in the safe zone/crate
- will never feed the dog
- will continue beneficial learning into the dog's development
- will ensure that no more than 3 students will approach the dog at once
- Demonstrate collaboration of the dog's role with the whole school community, including; staff, parents, students, family members

Health and Safety

- All persons should always wash their hands after handling the dog
- Any dog excrement to be cleaned and disposed of appropriately by handlers

- Only Assistance Dogs (eg Seeing Eye, Hearing, etc) allowed on school premises unless other arrangements made with school Principal
- Contact with Bella is optional and any students, staff or school visitors who are allergic to dogs do not have to have contact with Bella.

If Dog is hurt or injured (accident or by student)

- Dog will be removed by handler calmly from the situation, if required
- Dog to be moved to her safe area
- Handler to take Dog to the Vet if required
- Parents informed if harm caused by student and Progression of Consequences followed.

Incident protocols

- Parents to be notified immediately
- Seek medical attention if required
- Inform relevant staff
- A full investigation from Principal and handlers

Resolution of personalities protocol

- Safe comfort buffer zone perimeter provided between the dog and the other party of 3 meters

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Lead the Way : <https://leadtheway.com.au/>

School Therapy Dogs <http://www.schooltherapydogs.org/>

Dogs in the classroom <http://www.creativeteachingsite.com/dogs/dogs.html>

REVIEW CYCLE

This policy was last updated on 16/2 /2021 and is scheduled for review in June 2022.

PROTOCOLS :

1. The therapy dog and the handlers will be trained and certified. (Mrs Hamilton and Ms Haddow) The handlers will be the people working with the dog and the children at all times. The dog will have signage as in a vest or a THRIVE bandana to indicate that it is working.
2. Bella (LPPS Therapy dog) will have a safe space in both the senior art room (with handler 1) and the AP office (with handler 2)
3. Bella will be familiarised with the school setting when students are not on site. The dog will have training about safe spaces, enter/exit doors, food/water provision and toileting procedures/areas. The dog will have specified toileting areas where students do not play (eg garden areas)
4. The school community will be notified that a therapy dog is coming on site and what the program looks like for each term. To start with, Bella will become familiar with students from Mrs Hamilton's art classes. The program will be expanded each term with the trained dog handlers with Bella at all times. The school community will be notified about the program as it expands.
5. The target group of students will be familiarised with appropriate behaviour and protocols before the dog comes on site. This will include the dog's safe area, how to meet and greet, acceptable noise levels within the room and tones/commands the handlers may use. All interaction and degree of contact will be voluntary. The supervision of the dog is high at all times.
6. All parents/guardians must provide informed consent for their child/ren to interact with a visiting therapy dog. This means that they understand both the *benefits* and the *risks* associated with their involvement. Students will not be forced to go near the dog, the dog will simply be in the room/area and students may go to the dog according to the handler's instructions. LPPS has an opt out consent form. Opt out is acceptable where the team is a permanent and ongoing presence within a known setting (eg school) and the presence of the animal is an accepted part of being involved with that setting. Opt out consent assumes that all people who consent to be part of that setting know that the animal is an integral part of their involvement with that setting.

WHAT NEXT?:

1. If you are happy with all of this, you need to do NOTHING, your child will meet Bella soon and tell you all about it
2. **If you do not wish for your child to interact with Bella, please opt out by completing this form**
<https://forms.gle/5BY9J5y8T7TVQAtS8>