



Wellbeing/Therapy Dog at School Policy

Rationale

It is well recognised that animals provide children with companionship, a sense of caring and the opportunity to develop responsibilities. Holy Family school encourages the integration of appropriate animals into our classrooms. Further, the value of a pet in supporting student wellbeing is recognised and enacted at Holy Family through the provision of a wellbeing/therapy dog.

Aims

The aims of the Wellbeing/Therapy Dog at School Policy are to:

- Provide the students with first-hand experiences of caring for a dog
- Ensure that students realise and meet the obligations involved in caring for a dog
- Outline the processes in place to manage any risks associated with having a dog at school

Implementation

1. *Ownership and responsibility*

The Wellbeing/Therapy Dog, Lola, is owned by the Principal, Julie David. There will only be one school dog at any given time.

2. *Onsite supervision*

There will be appropriate adult supervision at all times when the dog is present with students and they 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. Lola will always be on a lead during the hours between 8:30am and 3:30pm.

3. *Parental consent*

Families will be able to access this policy and the Risk Assessment through our website and 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.

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.

4. *Expected student behaviour*

Students will be encouraged to remain calm around the dog. They should not put their face near the dog and should always approach it standing up. Students should never go near or disturb the dog if it is sleeping, eating or not wearing its therapy dog coat and will not be allowed to play roughly with



the dog. If the dog is surrounded by a large number of children, 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.

Students will not feed the dog or eat close to the dog and it will not be allowed to enter any areas where food is being prepared. Students are encouraged to be mindful of food scraps on the classroom floor where the dog may have access, as consumption of inappropriate food can have an impact on its health. Students will be encouraged to wash their hands after handling the dog. Any dog waste will be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately. If any 'accidents' occur in areas students have access to, appropriate measures will be taken to disinfect the affected site.

5. Handling of allergies

Holy Family staff will take reasonable care to avoid, as far as possible, any contact between the school dog and students, other staff and visitors where allergic reactions are a known risk. The cooperation of all staff, visitors and pupils is essential 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.

6. Wellbeing/Therapy Dog health and behaviour

The wellbeing/therapy dog's health and well-being is prioritised along with that of the children and staff. The therapy dog will be insured. All vaccinations, worming treatments and vet checks will be up-to-date and paid for by the dog's owner. If the dog is ill, it will not be allowed into school.

Dogs express their feelings through their body language. Growling or baring of teeth indicates 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.

Evaluation

This policy was drafted by the Leadership Team in February 2023.

This policy is next due for review in 2024.

Attachments:

Risk Assessment