

# Therapy Dog Policy

## Purpose

The aim of this initiative is to improve wellbeing and engagement across the college with the assistance of a therapy dog. The objectives of this program 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 program is in place to directly support staff and student wellbeing. This policy governs the program to ensure successful implementation. 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 complement our CORE Values. 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 – Dilek Yucel (Head of Wellbeing Services).
- The dog is a Maltese x Miniature Poodle.
- The dog will be based in the Head of Wellbeing Service's Office.
- Students will be educated in appropriate behaviour around the dog and develop increased responsibility with handling and managing the dog.
- Visitors to the college will be informed of the dog at reception, including an explanation of 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.

## Policy

The therapy dog (Bali) and his primary handler have been trained by **Lead the Way Institute** to undertake the therapy dog program at Beaumaris Secondary College. Therapy dogs can help refocus students who may be feeling upset or anxious for a variety of reasons. Bali 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 he 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 he is well
- be kept on lead at all times whilst on duty at school
- be under the supervision of trained handlers
- be up to date with all vaccinations, worming and grooming
- not be taken off the site, unless with the primary handler
- have a safe area in the Head of Wellbeing Service's Office
- wear a training vest to ensure he is recognised as a therapy support dog
- Continue to be trained as a therapy dog on an ongoing basis

#### Students will:

- never have sole responsibility for the dog or be left unsupervised around the dog
- be reminded of appropriate behaviours around the dog with each contact
- learn to recognise the dog's body language and how to react
- always be reminded to respect the dog and remain calm around him at all times
- be gentle and not make sudden movements or attempts to physically contact the dog
- not stare into the dog's eyes and be given knowledge as to why not
- request permission before touching the dog
- keep their face away from the dog
- always approach the dog in a calm, slow manner and not touch the dog until it is sitting and calm
- not disturb the dog while off duty in the safe zone

- never feed the dog without permission
- continue beneficial learning into the dog's development
- ensure that no more than 3 students will approach the dog at once

#### **Staff and student expectations**

- demonstrate collaboration of the dog's role with the whole school community, including; staff, parents, students and 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 (e.g., Seeing Eye, Hearing, etc.) allowed on school premises unless other arrangements made with the Principal
- Contact with the therapy dog is optional and any students, staff or school visitors who are allergic to dogs do not have to have contact.

#### **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 his safe area
- Handler to take dog to the vet if required
- Parents informed if harm caused by student and Progression of Consequences followed.

#### **Incident with dog protocols**

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

## 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>

## Policy review and approval

Policy last reviewed	19/3/2024
Approved by	Principal
Next scheduled review date	19/3/2026