



Sacred Heart
College
GEELONG

THERAPY AND ASSISTANCE DOGS POLICY

Rationale

Sacred Heart College is aware of the special needs of certain children and that some of their needs may be met with the aid of a therapy or assistance dog. Without discrimination and fully aware of Government and Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools policies, the College will always look first and foremost towards assisting a child with all their needs in a loving and caring way; at the same time, not alienating or risking the health and wellbeing of other children sharing the College.

Workplace participants at the College are aware of their legal obligations under the [Disability Discrimination Act 1992](#) (Cth- Part 1.8 and 1.9), and other applicable anti-discrimination legislation.

Definitions

Assistance dog

An assistance dog is any dog that is specifically trained to perform tasks or functions that help a person with a disability to alleviate the effects of the disability. This includes seeing eye and hearing dogs, dogs trained to pick things up for people with mobility disabilities, and dogs trained to assist people who have seizures, amongst other things.

Therapy dog

A therapy dog is a dog who has been individually trained, evaluated and registered with its handler to provide animal assisted activities, animal assisted therapy and animal assisted interactions within a school or other facility. Examples of activities that students may engage in with a therapy dog include petting and/or hugging the dog, speaking to the dog, giving the dog simple commands that the dog is trained to respond to and reading to the dog.

Workplace Participant

All College employees, contractors, consultants, students on placement and volunteers (hereafter referred to as workplace participants), both inside and outside of the workplace



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Policy Statement

The College is aware that, for people with certain special needs, contact with a therapy/assistance dog may be beneficial. The College will, to the extent it is reasonably able and appropriate to do so, accommodate contact with a therapy/assistance dog for students in respect of whom that contact is requested. In considering whether the College is able to reasonably accommodate contact with a therapy/assistance dog, consideration will be given to:

- whether the request for contact with a therapy/assistance dog appropriately links with the educational program and learning needs of the student in respect of whom the request is made; and
- whether there may be available alternative therapies which would meet the student's needs (in the context of the needs of the College community as a whole).

The final decision on allowing a therapy/assistance dog to enter the College rests with the Principal or Principal's delegate. The key considerations in this regard are:

- the best interests of the student requesting the assistance and other students at the College, in the context of the overall operational requirements of the College; and
- the College's non-delegable duty to ensure, so far as practicable, the health and safety of students and its workplace participants, or of the public generally.

Overview of supervision, training, registration, hygiene and other requirements

There are a number of supervision, training, accreditation, hygiene and other requirements that necessarily apply to the use of therapy and assistance dogs, and which, where they apply, must be complied with. A failure to comply with these requirements may have significant adverse consequences, ranging from the loss of accreditation for the use of the dog, to the risk of physical harm.

Examples of the requirements that may apply include the requirement that certain dogs may only be provided to, or permitted to work with, adults (for example, seeing eye dogs). There may be strict requirements for housing/caging/leashing and work schedules (including mandated break and toilet times). Some dogs are subject to strict restrictions regarding what contact may be had with them which may, in certain circumstances, mean that it may be impractical for a particular dog to be in contact with children other than the particular child with which the dog is working. There are also requirements around appropriate vaccination, worming and other animal health considerations (including ensuring that an animal does not have any infectious disease), which in most circumstances require appropriate veterinary certification.

These examples are non-exhaustive and the specific requirements that apply in any given circumstance must be specifically considered and complied with. The responsibility for providing any necessary information in this regard (including from any accreditation agency), and for ensuring and satisfying the College that any applicable requirements have or can be met rests with the person seeking that a therapy/assistance dog be permitted to enter the College. If those requirements are unable to be met or are unable to be properly identified and/or clarified as necessary, permission for the dog in question to work at the College will not be granted.

In almost all cases, therapy/assistance dogs may only work under the supervision of a qualified handler. A qualified handler will generally be required to be individually trained and registered/accredited. The handler will assume full responsibility for the dog's care, behaviour and suitability for interacting with



students and others at the College while the therapy/assistance dog is on College property or at College events, camps or excursions (which may require direct physical control).

There may be significant costs involved with meeting any applicable requirements (for example, the costs involved with training of and/or supervision by a handler). These costs are not a budgeted item of the College and in most cases will be required to be met by other means (which may involve funding being met in whole or in part by the person seeking the contact with the dog in question).

Further detail in this respect is set out below.

Requirements - before approval

Subject to the College reserving its right to flexibly apply this policy as any individual circumstances demand (see below), the following requirements must be satisfied before a therapy/assistance dog will be allowed in College buildings, on College property or at College events, camps or excursions:

Request

A person who wishes to obtain permission for a therapy/assistance dog to enter College property or attend College events, camps or excursions, (**Applicant**) must submit a completed written request form to the Principal or Principal's delegate, for approval.

The request must, amongst other things, expressly address the relevance of the therapy/assistance dog to the educational program and learning needs of the student in question. Documentation may be required in this respect, which may include information from the student's treating health practitioner advising of the student's medical condition and how the requested therapy/assistance dog will alleviate the effects of the student's medical condition, in the context of the student's educational program and learning needs.

The request shall be submitted for approval each school year and/or whenever the handler wishes to use a different therapy/assistance dog. Such approval may be rescinded at any time at the sole discretion of the Principal or Principal's delegate. After appropriate consultation, once the Principal or Principal's delegate approves a request, a plan for dog visits shall be developed with the Principal or Principal's delegate. If the request is denied, the Principal's decision is generally final.

Training and Registration

A request for a therapy/assistance dog to be permitted to enter College property or attend College events, camps or excursions must, where relevant and appropriate, include proof of the relevant dog's registration as a therapy/assistance dog handler. Such registration will be from Guide Dogs Victoria, Seeing Eye Dogs Australia or such other therapy/assistance dog registering organisation (which, generally, will be an organisation that requires an evaluation of the therapy/assistance dog and handler prior to registration and at least every two years thereafter) as determined by a representative of the College. The registration of a therapy/assistance dog, where required, must remain current and in good standing at all times.

Evidence of the training of a therapy/assistance dog must include evidence that the dog has been trained to assist the student in question with his or her specific medical condition, and that the dog has been trained to meet standards of hygiene and behaviour that are appropriate for an animal in a public place.

Health and Vaccination

The Applicant must submit proof from a licensed veterinarian that the therapy dog is in good health and has been immunised against diseases common to dogs. Such vaccinations shall be kept current and up to date all times.



Licensing

Where required, the Applicant must submit proof of license from a local dog licensing authority.

Insurance

The Applicant must submit a copy of an insurance policy that provides liability coverage for the work of the handler and therapy dog while the two are on College property or at a College event, camp or excursion.

Working with children and/or Police check

A handler must have a current working with children check and where relevant Police check.

Requirements - post approval

Once a handler has been approved to bring a therapy dog onto College property or attend College events, camps or excursions, its handler must adhere to the rules of his/her registering organisation and the following rules of the College:

Identification

The handler and therapy dog must wear appropriate identification issued by the registering organization identifying them as a registered handler and therapy/assistance dog. The handler shall bring only approved therapy dogs onto College property or to College events, camps or excursions, and may bring only one such dog at a time.

Health and Safety

The handler must ensure that the therapy/assistance dog does not pose a health and safety risk to any student, employee, or other person at College and that the therapy dog is brought to the College only when properly groomed, bathed, free of illness or injury, in circumstances where the dog is of the temperament appropriate for working with children and others at the College.

Control

In general, the handler must ensure that the therapy dog wears a collar or harness and a leash no longer than 1.5 metres and must maintain control of the therapy dog by holding the leash at all times that the therapy/assistance dog is on College property or at College events, camps or excursions, including during breaks, unless holding a leash would interfere with the therapy/assistance dog's safe, effective performance of its work or tasks. In any event, the handler must maintain appropriate control of the therapy dog at all times.

Supervision and Care

The handler will be solely responsible for the supervision and humane care of the therapy/assistance dog, including any feeding, exercising, toileting and cleaning up after the dog while the dog is in a College building or on College property, or at College events, camps or excursions. The handler must not leave the therapy/assistance dog unsupervised or alone on College property or at College events, camps or excursions at any time. In the absence of approved guidelines to the contrary, the handler must limit the therapy/assistance dog's work to two consecutive hours at a time. The College is not responsible for providing any care, supervision or assistance to the therapy dog.



Authorised Area(s)

The handler must ensure that the therapy dog has access to only such areas of the College buildings or properties that have been authorised by the Principal or Principal's delegate.

Allergies and Aversions

In circumstances where any student or workplace participant has an allergy or other medical condition which may be adversely affected by contact with dogs, a therapy/assistance dog will only be permitted to enter College property or attend College events, camps or excursions where expressly agreed to by the Principal or Principal's delegate and where approval has been given from the person with the medical condition or his/her family as appropriate. Where this approval has been given, the handler must comply with any direction given to them including, amongst other things, by ensuring the therapy/assistance dog is confined to any separate area as designated by the Principal or Principal's delegate.

Recordkeeping

Handlers must sign themselves and their dog in upon arrival and out on departure from the College.

Photographs

The handler must not take any photographs of students or workplace participants without first obtaining a photo release.

Fees and Gratuities

The handler must not charge a fee for the work they perform with the therapy/assistance dog, must not borrow money or personal items or receive any personal gratuity, gift or tip, such as money or jewellery from students or workplace participants of the College.

Multiple Therapy Dogs on Site

The handler must confirm whether or not there will be any other therapy dog(s) on site prior to scheduling any visit with a therapy dog and must take steps with appropriate workplace participants to ensure that the dogs do not engage inappropriately while on College property or at College events, camps or excursions. When multiple therapy dogs are engaged in a planned activity on College property or at a College event, camp or excursion, the handlers must ensure that the dogs have an opportunity to greet each other prior to entering the College building. Once inside the building, the handlers must, as appropriate, ensure that the dogs are each on a 1.5 metre leash, given workspace at least 3 metres from each other and are given no opportunity for contact or socialisation with each other while working.

Damages and Injuries

The handler will assume full responsibility and liability for any damage to College property or injury to students, workplace participants or others in the College caused by the therapy/assistance dog.

Exclusion or Removal from the College

Without limiting circumstances in which exclusion may be required, a therapy dog must be excluded from the College if the Principal or Principal's delegate determines that:

1. The handler does not have control of the therapy dog;
2. The therapy dog is not housebroken;
3. The therapy dog presents a direct and immediate threat to others in the College; or
4. The therapy dog's presence otherwise interferes with the educational program.

The handler must immediately remove his/her therapy dog from College property when instructed to do so by the Principal or Principal's delegate.



Application of This Policy

This policy sets out the requirements that the College expects will be generally required where a request is made for a student to have access with a therapy/assistance dog. The College will, however, assess each application/circumstance on its merits and, in this context, reserves the right to depart from any particular part of this policy to the extent reasonably required or appropriate in all of the circumstances.

The key considerations in this regard are:

- the best interests of the student requesting the assistance and other students at the College, in the context of the overall operational requirements of the College; and
- the College's non-delegable duty to ensure, so far as practicable, the health and safety of students and workplace participants, or of the public generally.

This Policy will be reviewed in accordance with the College 's policy review schedule.



Document Control

Date Approved: 28 March 2024

Name: Anna Negro, Principal

Signature: 

Date presented at Advisory Council Meeting: 27 March 2024

Sponsor: Deputy Principal - Student Development

Person responsible for implementation: Deputy Principal - Student Development

Reviewed by:

- School Committee: OHS Committee
- Sub Committee of the College Council: N/A
- Student Leadership House Focus Team: N/A

Location checklist: Staff Handbook Student Space Parent Portal Website

VERSION HISTORY

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