

POLICY TITLE: Dogs at School

DATE DEVELOPED: October 2023

REVIEW DATE: October 2026

ENPS MISSION: We maximise the potential of all; empowering independence, excellence, innovation and engagement with the world.

Critical Engagement
with the World

Academic Excellence

Inclusive Learning
Environment

Personal and Social
Wellbeing

PURPOSE

To explain to our school community the rules and procedures we have in place in relation to dogs attending on or around our school grounds. This includes the procedures in place for our therapy dog program to support student engagement and mental health.

POLICY

Definitions

An **assistance dog** is trained and certified by a registered organisation to perform tasks or functions that help a person with a disability to alleviate the effects of the disability.

A **therapy dog** is a dog that has been suitably trained to provide animal-assisted therapy programs under the control of his/her handler.

A **handler** is a volunteer/employee in the school who is responsible and in control of a therapy dog while on school grounds and when facilitating the animal therapy program.

A **pet dog** relates to any dog that is privately owned in the community for companionate reasons, rather than as a support function that requires specific skills or training.

A **stray dog** is any dog that is not accompanied by their owner.

Assistance dogs

Essendon North Primary School understands its obligations under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) and the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic) and will make reasonable adjustments for members of our school community with a disability who require an 'assistance animal' to help alleviate the effects of their disability. Assistance animals are permitted to attend our school with their handler. Our school Principal can lawfully ask a person to produce evidence that an animal:

- is trained specifically to assist a person alleviate the effects of a disability (eg seeing eye dogs)
- meets standards of hygiene and behaviour appropriate for a school environment.

We understand that in some circumstances, students may require an assistance animal to attend school to help them to participate in their educational program. Essendon North Primary School will consider a request by a student with a disability to allow an assistance animal to attend school with them on a case-by-case basis. If you would like to discuss this further, please contact our Student Engagement and Wellbeing Coordinator or Principal.

Pet dogs

Essendon North Primary School is not a public place, and our Principal has the authority to permit or decline entry to school grounds and impose conditions of entry.

Whilst Essendon North Primary School understands that many families in our school community keep dogs as pets, to ensure that our school remains a safe and inclusive place for everyone, pet dogs are not permitted on school grounds under any circumstances.

Our school community is diverse, and may include people that are allergic or uncomfortable around dogs. We are also conscious of the health hazards that may be posed by dogs. We ask that families please leave their pet dogs at home or **wait with their dogs four metres away from school gates**.

Therapy dogs

Essendon North Primary School supports the use of therapy dogs for the benefit of our students subject to the conditions of this policy. The role of the therapy dog is to support the social and emotional needs of our students, under the guidance and supervision of their handler and other school staff.

Essendon North Primary School uses a therapy dog through arrangements other than a Mental Health Menu Provider.

Essendon North Primary School has a therapy dog who supports our student's mental health and engagement. Our therapy dog is suitably trained and integrated into the school community.

Recognised benefits from working or visiting with a therapy dog include:

- reduced stress and anxiety, including decreased learner anxiety behaviours
- improved physical and emotional wellbeing
- improved self-esteem, empathy and interpersonal skills
- improved relationship building and ability to pick up on social cues
- improved attendance (for disengaged students or students at risk of disengaging).

Examples of activities students may engage in with the therapy dog include:

- petting and/or hugging the dog
- speaking and reading to the dog
- giving the dog commands that the dog is trained to respond to.

Where possible, Essendon North Primary School will only engage with low-allergen therapy dogs. Essendon North Primary School will take care to avoid, where possible, contact between the therapy dog and students, staff, and visitors where the school is aware they have allergies to dogs.

Staff, students and visitors are requested to notify the school of any health or safety concerns about the therapy dog. We are committed to consulting with students and parent(s)/carer(s) in relation to any such health or safety concerns so that appropriate arrangements can be made on a case-by-case basis.

Therapy dog standards and procedures

- There will be a maximum of one school therapy dog at any given time.
- When the therapy dog is on school grounds they will be under the supervision of a handler or staff member. The therapy dog will not be unsupervised or alone with students. A safe area separate to the school classrooms and offices will be allocated to the therapy dog and their handler where they will spend time when they are not working with students.
- The handler will ensure that the therapy dog does not pose a health and safety risk to any student, employee, or other person at school and that the therapy dog is brought to school only when properly groomed, bathed, free of illness or injury and of the temperament appropriate for working with the school community. In the event the school is made aware that the dog triggers a student's health condition (for example, allergies or asthma), the school will notify the student's parent/carer(s) and ensure appropriate steps are implemented to minimise health risks.
- The therapy dog will be appropriately identified while on school grounds by wearing a blue jacket.
- No student or staff member will be required to interact with the therapy dog. If a student indicates that they wish to overcome any fear of dogs, they can be supported to do so with coaching in a controlled environment with the therapy dog and their handler.
- The therapy dog program will be communicated to parent/carer(s) at the beginning of the year in the school newsletter, and on student enrolment. In these communications, parent/carer(s) will be given the opportunity to 'opt out' of the program for their child, raise any concerns or update student medical information (such as allergies or asthma) which may be triggered by a visit from the therapy dog.

Stray dogs

Unaccompanied or stray dogs sighted at our school should be reported immediately to the school office. School staff will contact municipal authorities and/or Victoria police for assistance in managing and removing a stray dog from school grounds, and ensure staff and students remain safe at school.

COMMUNICATION

This policy will be communicated to our school community in the following ways:

- Available publicly on our school's website
- Included in staff induction processes and staff training
- Included in staff handbook/manual
- Included in transition and enrolment packs
- Discussed at parent information nights/sessions
- Reminders in our school newsletter
- Discussed at student forums
- Hard copy available from school administration upon request.

RELATED POLICIES

- [DET Respectful Behaviours within the School Community Policy](#)
- Statement of Expectations
- Visitors in Schools Policy
- Volunteers Policy
- Community Code of Conduct

HELP FOR NON-ENGLISH SPEAKERS



If you need help to understand the information in this policy please contact Essendon North Primary School on (03) 9379 3979.

POLICY REVIEW AND APPROVAL

Policy Last Reviewed	October 2023
Consultation	Student Wellbeing Team Disability Inclusion Team Parent Information Evening Staff School Council
Approved By	Kate Barletta
Next Scheduled Review Date	October 2026