



DOGS AT HEATHMONT COLLEGE

PURPOSE

To explain to our school community the rules and procedures we have in place in relation to dogs attending our school grounds. This includes the procedures in place for our wellbeing 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 **wellbeing dog** is a dog that has been suitably trained to provide animal-assisted wellbeing programs under the control of his/her handler.

A **handler** is a volunteer in the school who is responsible and in control of a wellbeing dog while on school grounds and when facilitating the animal wellbeing 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

Heathmont College 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, hearing and physical assistance dogs and)
- 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. Heathmont College 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 Heathmont College on 9871 4888.

Therapy or Wellbeing dogs

Heathmont College has a wellbeing dog, Frances, that attends school on a daily basis. The dog works in three spaces across the school and has regular rest breaks and locations built into the daily routine.

Recognised benefits from working or visiting with a wellbeing 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).

Protocols for working with Frances:

- The aim of this project is to improve wellbeing for students. This will be achieved through improving socialising skills and self-awareness skills that are a part of the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies.
- These competencies are linked to Victorian Curriculum standards and it is expected that all teachers cover these learning outcomes and are able to assess them, as per expectations related to the entire Victorian Curriculum.
- Three areas will be the target group for this project to begin with, and as the action progresses it will be implemented more broadly across the school. ○ Well-being, Integration and Study Areas
- The objectives of this project are to improve teaching and learning practices related to SEL competencies, and to gather evidence to show improvement in student outcomes within a particular cohort of the school. If this project is successful we expect to see student knowledge and understanding to be clearly reflected in the data.

Where possible, Heathmont College will only engage with low-allergen wellbeing dogs. Heathmont College will take care to avoid, where possible, contact between the wellbeing 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 wellbeing 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.

Wellbeing dog standards and procedures

- There will be a maximum of one school wellbeing dog at any given time.
- When the wellbeing dog is on school grounds they will be under the supervision of a handler or staff member. The wellbeing dog will not be unsupervised or alone with students. A safe area separate to the school classrooms and offices will be allocated to the wellbeing dog and their handler where they will spend time when they are not working with students.
- The handler will ensure that the wellbeing dog does not pose a health and safety risk to any student, employee, or other person at school and that the wellbeing 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 wellbeing dog will be appropriately identified while on school grounds by wearing a red jacket.
- No student or staff member will be required to interact with the wellbeing 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 wellbeing dog and their handler.
- The wellbeing 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 wellbeing dog.

Risks in having a dog in a school environment:

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.

Context:

- Dog is owned by the staff member
- Vet costs and general expenses are paid by the owner
- Dog is a labradoodle, she has been chosen for her temperament, intelligence and hypoallergenic low-moulting coat
- Dog will be based in the staff members classroom/office
- Student's in the classroom will be educated on dog management, having a gradual release of responsibilities
- Visitors to school will be informed of Dog at the school reception, they will receive a small leaflet explaining Dog's role and requirements

About Frances:

Frances is a standard labradoodle. She will grow to approximately 30kgs and stand 40-50cm high. Her fur will be a woolly/wavy coat and she is a minimal shedder. She will shed some of her fur. She does obedience training with Eastern Companion Dogs and is wellbeing trained with Dogs Connect. The ultimate goal is to integrate into the community and help people achieve mental health success.

If you would like to discuss this further, please contact the College on 9871 4888.

Pet dogs

Heathmont College is not a public place, and our principal has the authority to permit or decline entry to school grounds and impose conditions of entry.

Dogs permitted with conditions

Whilst Heathmont College 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, we have in place a number of rules that we expect all families to follow if they wish to bring their pet dog onto school grounds:

- pet dogs must be leashed at all times and in the control of a responsible adult
- pet dogs must not be tied up on school grounds or left unaccompanied
- families that bring dogs to school that exhibit signs of aggressive behaviour, bark, or jump may be asked to leave.

The principal has the authority to prohibit certain dogs from school grounds or modify this policy to ensure the safety and wellbeing of staff, students and members of our school community at any time.

Stray dogs

Unaccompanied or stray dogs sighted at our school should be reported immediately to the College General 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.

RELATED POLICIES AND RESOURCES

[Duty of Care Policy](#)

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
- Discussed at parent information nights/sessions
- Hard copy available from school administration upon request

POLICY REVIEW AND APPROVAL

Policy last reviewed	August 2024
Approved by	Kerryn Sandford Principal
Next scheduled review date	August 2027