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Yarram Secondary College  
**Dogs at School policy**

**2022**

Date ratified by Staff: September 2022  
 Date ratified by School Council:

Review date: September 2025

**Dogs at Yarram Secondary College**

**Help for non-English speakers**

If you need help to understand the information in this policy please contact the YSC front office on 5182 55 22.

**Purpose**

To explain to our school community the rules and procedures we have in place in relation to dogs attending our school grounds.

**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**

Yarram Secondary 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 to alleviate the effects of a disability (e.g., 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. Yarram Secondary 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 the Principal on 51825522.

**Wellbeing dogs**

DUTY OF CARE AND OTHER LEGAL OBLIGATIONS:

It is recommended that schools develop a risk management plan in order to identify foreseeable risks of harm associated with having a wellbeing dog at school and take reasonable steps to fulfill their duty of care, and other legal obligations.

**Occupational Health and Safety:** Principals have a legal responsibility to provide a healthy and safe environment for staff and others on the premises in accordance with the legislative requirements of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* and the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2007*.  This means, for example, that the school will need to consider the needs of staff members and students in relation to the wellbeing dog and should consult with staff and the parent community to ensure there are no safety concerns that you should take into account.  We also recommend that steps are taken to verify that the animal has undergone adequate behavioural training (for example, by engaging a professional wellbeing dog trainer) and is properly restrained around staff and students to avoid injuries.

**Liability in the event of attack or injury**: Under section 29 of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994,* the person ‘in apparent control’ of the dog at the time that a dog attacks or bites any person (or even if the dog ‘rushes at or chases any person’) is guilty of an offence, **whether or not they are the owner of the dog**. Various penalties can be imposed under the section, and a court may require the payment of compensation if a person is found guilty. Any staff members responsible for the supervision of a dog on school premises should be made aware of these obligations and the school should ensure they feel comfortable with this responsibility and managing the dog.

Schools should adapt this sample risk management template to reflect their program implementation and specific circumstances

Yarram Secondary College supports the use of wellbeing dogs for the benefit of our students subject to the conditions of this policy. The role of the wellbeing dog is to support the social and emotional needs of our students, under the guidance and supervision of their handler and other school staff.

SCHOOL USES A WELLBEING DOG THROUGH ARRANGEMENTS OTHER THAN A MENTAL HEALTH MENU PROVIDER

Yarram Secondary College has a wellbeing dog who supports our student’s mental health and engagement. Our wellbeing dog is suitably trained and integrated into the school community.

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).

Examples of activities students may engage in with the wellbeing 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.
* Walking the dog

Where possible, Yarram Secondary College will only engage with low-allergen wellbeing dogs. Yarram Secondary 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 colour 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.

**Pet dogs**

Yarram Secondary 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.

Whilst Yarram Secondary 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 remove the dog from school premises.

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 r=the front 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:

* Included in staff induction processes and staff training
* Included in staff handbook/manual
* Discussed at parent information nights/sessions
* Hard copy available from school administration upon request

**POLICY REVIEW AND APPROVAL**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Policy last reviewed | August 2022 |
| Consultation with School Council |  |
| Approved by | Principal |
| Next scheduled review date | August 2026 |

Therapy Dog Program Template - School Risk Register

**Instructions**

The purpose of a school risk register is to **identify, document, and manage or control** risks when implementing a therapy dog program at your school.

This register will help you:

* inform those involved (for example, the therapy dog handler) of their roles and responsibilities for the therapy dog program.
* Ensure the dog is appropriately trained and cared for.

**Before** completing this school risk register, you should:

1. Consult with school staff, students, and the school community (including families, volunteers and school council) about any risks they have identified. You may be able to do this through existing channels, including school council, parent club, or student representative council or any third-party service providers.
2. Consider risks in the physical school environment as well as to the health and safety of the school community.
3. Consider risks that might be specific to vulnerable cohorts, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, children with disability, and international education students.

When completing any school risk register, you should:

1. **Add** any risks - strategic, operational or project that **are relevant** to your school.
2. **Add** existing risk management strategies (controls) that your school is already undertaking.
3. **Choose** the risk assessment ratings that apply to the risk in your school (refer to [Risk Rating Matrix (PDF 56kb)](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/spag/safety/riskmatrix.pdf)).
4. Where the risk rating is **low** and the existing risk management strategies (controls) are effective, you do **not** have to undertake new risk management strategies (treatments).
5. Where the risk rating is **medium or above**, **add** new risk management strategies (treatments) that your school will undertake
6. **Add** the name and position title of the person in your school who will be responsible for the new risk management strategies (treatments) and completion due date.
7. **Add** a date (and diarise) the next review of the risk register (it is recommended that Extreme and High risk are monitored, reviewed, and reported on quarterly.
8. **The principal** should **sign** the risk register.

**Refer to the Department’s** [**Risk Management policy**](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/risk-management-schools/policy) **on PAL for further guidance, or contact the DET Risk team at risk.in.education@edumail.vic.gov.au for help to complete this risk register**.

Yarram Secondary College

Risk Register for Therapy Dog

**School: Yarram Secondary College**

**Location(s):**

**Responsible staff member:**

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**Approved by school principal**: [signature]

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**Date reviewed:**

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**Next review due: [insert review date, no longer than 1 year from date reviewed]**

| **Risk Title & Description** | **Risk Causes & Consequences** | **Existing risk management strategies (controls)** | **Risk Assessment** | | | **New risk management strategies (treatments)** | **Who is responsible?** | **Completion date of new risk management strategies (treatments)** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Define the risk including a title and a short description  *What can go wrong?* | Describe the risk cause/s and consequence/s  *What would cause it to go wrong? (causes)*  *What are the impacts if it does go wrong? (consequences)* | Describe any existing policy, procedure, practice or device that acts to minimise the risk  *What is in place now that reduces the likelihood of this risk occurring or its impact if it did occur?* | **Risk Consequence**  *How big would the impact of this risk be if it occurred?*  *(choose one)* | **Risk Likelihood**  *How likely is this risk to occur?*  *(choose one)* | **Risk Rating**  *What is the current risk level based on the risk rating matrix* | Describe the actions to be undertaken for those risks requiring further treatments | List the name and position who is responsible for each new risk management strategy (noting that the principal is ultimately responsible) | The date each new risk management strategy (treatment) action should be completed by |
| **Risk:**  **Physical or psychological injury**  Student or staff may be bitten/scratched or otherwise injured by the dog | **Causes**   * The dog is agitated or frightened because of a person’s behaviour (for example, a student pulls the dog’s ears, tail, or otherwise startles the dog that results in a display of aggression).   **Consequences**   * The dog responds in a way that results in physical or psychological injury to a person | * Comprehensive training by certified dog trainer/animal behaviourist or Department of Education and Training Mental Health Menu animal wellbeing program provider, with a specific emphasis on contact with children and large groups * Documented research into breed/sex of dog * First aid kit available in classroom * Consider whether a second member of staff should be on standby for first few days/weeks dog is in the classroom to assist in monitoring how the dog/children adjust to the change * Protocol to remove dog if he/she becomes agitated in classroom (i.e. call office staff or neighbouring classroom teacher to assist, instruct students to move into “x” area) * Staff member or person in control of handling the dog are aware of their responsibility and potential liability should an attack occur under their supervision | Severe  Major  Moderate  Minor  Insignificant | Almost certain  Likely  Possible  Unlikely  Rare | Extreme  High  Medium  Low |  | * [name and position] | * Date/Month/Year |
| **Risk:**  **Allergy**  Students or staff may be allergic to dog, or the presence of the dog may trigger an asthma attack | **Causes**   * Dog hair/dander   **Consequences**   * Person experiences symptoms of allergy, caused by inflammation to the nasal passages, skin (also known as allergic dermatitis) or asthma. | * Ensure school has up to date medical information for all students and staff who may be in contact with dog * Obtain informed consent from parents of students with documented allergies/asthma and consider protocol for situations where students may not be able to be placed in the class because of their allergies or medical conditions * Documented research into breed of dog, i.e. consider suitability of non-shedding or hypoallergenic dog breeds | Severe  Major  Moderate  Minor  Insignificant | Almost certain  Likely  Possible  Unlikely  Rare | Extreme  High  Medium  Low |  | * [name and position] | * Date/Month/Year |
| **Risk:**  **Fear of dogs**  Staff or students may be fearful or anxious in the presence of dogs | **Cause**   * Existing mental health concerns * Experiences of trauma - person may have been exposed to dangerous dogs or experienced injury by a dog in the past, or for some other reason developed a fear of dogs or other animals.   **Consequences**   * Person may experience symptoms or poor mental health including heightened anxiety trigger a ‘fight/flight/freeze’ physiological response. This may their ability to perform at school/work. | * Identify at risk students and identify protocols to protect/distance concerned persons from dog * Obtain informed consent, prepare protocols to protect/distance concerned persons from dog * Consult with dog trainer/behaviourist to ensure dog understands commands to back away/drop/sit * Consider strategies to “transition” the dog into the school / classroom setting (i.e. one day per week initially and increasing over time) * Consider “trial period” * Ensure dog is able to be removed from presence of person in the event of an incident * Community consultation | Severe  Major  Moderate  Minor  Insignificant | Almost certain  Likely  Possible  Unlikely  Rare | Extreme  High  Medium  Low |  | * [name and position] | * Date/Month/Year |
| **Risk:**  **Cultural safety**  Staff or students may feel uncomfortable in presence of a dog because of cultural background | **Causes**   * Some cultures traditionally do not engage with dogs according to their faith. For example, some people of Islamic faith may view dogs as forbidden.   **Consequences**   * Students and their families may not feel comfortable with the therapy dog at school * Students who do not interact with the therapy dog according to their faith may feel excluded or ‘othered’ * Staff may not feel culturally safe in their workplaces | * Community and staff consultation. This may include working with multicultural aids and prominent community members to understand their views and agree on how to provide a safe environment * Regular communication to staff on Therapy Dog Policy and ‘opt out’ consent processes/invitation to raise concerns * Regular communication of ‘opt out’ consent process for therapy dog program in school newsletters or letters home (including translated letters where required) | Severe  Major  Moderate  Minor  Insignificant | Almost certain  Likely  Possible  Unlikely  Rare | Extreme  High  Medium  Low |  | * [name and position] | * Date/Month/Year |