

Dogs at Diamond Valley SDS



Help for non-English speakers

If you need help to understand the information in this policy please contact Diamond Valley SDS on 9432 1022.

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.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all employees, students and community of Diamond Valley SDS and includes requirements that must be adhered to. This policy particularly pertains to dog handlers, dogs and those who interact with dogs at Diamond Valley SDS.

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 programs under the control of his/her handler and used within the dog care and handling program as part of the horse-riding program

A **therapy dog** is a dog that has been suitably trained through a certification program and has their official title deemed as a visiting therapy dog through this program. A therapy dog can be utilised in the following:

- Animal-assisted Activities (AAA): Informal interventions usually recreational in nature and aimed at increasing the wellbeing of participants.
- Animal-assisted Interventions (AAI): A range of social, emotional, cognitive or educational rehabilitative interventions that are assisted by the deliberate inclusion of a therapy dog.
- Animal-assisted Therapy (AAT): Formal interventions that are goal-focused and part of a clinical treatment plan. They are conducted (or directed) by professionals within the scope of their professional practice and outcomes are recorded.

A **horse riding program dog** is a dog that has been suitably trained and is utilised as part of the Horse Riding teams programs, often used to interact in the same skills as the horse riding program but when the weather is not suitable for the horses to ride.

A **handler** is a volunteer in the school who is responsible and in control of a wellbeing or therapy dog while on school grounds and when facilitating the animal wellbeing program or dog care and handling program as part of the horse-riding 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.

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.

Assistance dogs

Diamond Valley SDS 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)
- 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. Diamond Valley SDS 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 Anthony Rosenthal, Principal, anthony.rosenthal@education.vic.gov.au

Therapy Dogs

DUTY OF CARE AND OTHER LEGAL OBLIGATIONS FOR ALL DOGS ONSITE:

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

Diamond Valley SDS supports the use of therapy dogs and horse riding program dogs for the benefit of our students subject to the conditions of this policy. The role of the therapy dog and horse riding

program dog is to support the social and emotional needs of our students, under the guidance and supervision of their handler and other school staff.

Diamond Valley SDS has a therapy dog who supports our students' mental health and engagement. Our therapy dog is suitably trained and integrated into the school community through Lead the Way Institute, delivered as part of the Department's Mental Health initiative.

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, Diamond Valley SDS will only engage with low-allergen therapy dogs. Diamond Valley SDS 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. The therapy dog will not eat raw foods to keep risk to immunocompromised students low.

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. 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 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 therapy dog will be appropriately identified while on school grounds by wearing a blue jacket.
- A sign will be placed in the front office of Brentwick Drive when the therapy dog is onsite.

- 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.
- The therapy dog will have up to date C5 vaccination and undergo regular worming and flea prevention treatments.
- All person's interacting with the therapy dog will ensure they are following instructions from the handler throughout their interaction.
- The welfare of the therapy dog is of high importance and any interactions with the therapy dog are the discretion of the Certified Handler.

Horse Riding Program Dogs

Diamond Valley SDS supports the use of as an alternate program on extreme weather days or when the horses are unable to come to school the students participate in our Dog Care & Handling program. This program compliments the horse-riding program providing similar goals.

Horse riding program dog standards and procedures:

- The handler will ensure that the horse-riding program 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.
- No student or staff member will be required to interact with the horse-riding program 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 horse-riding program dog will have up to date C5 vaccination and undergo regular worming and flea prevention treatments.

Pet dogs

Diamond Valley SDS 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 Diamond Valley SDS understands that many families and staff 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 and staff 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 and staff that bring dogs to school that exhibit signs of aggressive behaviour, bark, or jump may be asked to remove the dog from school premises.
- Staff will only be permitted to bring pet dogs onsite when given explicit consent on each occasion by the Principal and when there are no students onsite. E.g student free day.

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 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
- Reminders in our school newsletter
- Discussed at student forums
- Hard copy available from school administration upon request

RELATED POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Diamond Valley S.D.S Dog Care & Handling Program Created July 2021

Risk Register Template Wellbeing Dogs July 2022

POLICY REVIEW AND APPROVAL

Policy last reviewed	03/03/2023
Consultation	Elyse Duggan (Speech Pathologist, Certified Therapy Dog Handler) and Robyn Griffiths (Teacher, Horse Riding Coordinator), Anthony Rosenthal (Principal)
Approved by	Principal
Next scheduled review date	03/03/2026