



Dogs at Viewbank College Policy



Help for non-English speakers

If you need help to understand the information in this policy, please contact Viewbank 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 or assistance dog owner** 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

Viewbank 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 dog 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 dog to attend school to help them to participate in their educational program. Viewbank 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 team.

Wellbeing dogs

DUTY OF CARE AND OTHER LEGAL OBLIGATIONS:

It is recommended that schools develop a risk management plan 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. 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.

Viewbank 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.

Wellbeing Dog visits arranged through Mental Health Menu Provider

Viewbank College has a wellbeing dog visit the school occasionally under the Wellbeing Dog Provider program. Wellbeing Dog Provider is delivered under the Department's initiative to support student's mental health.

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.

Where possible, Viewbank College will only engage with low-allergen wellbeing dogs. Viewbank 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 two school wellbeing dogs 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, staff, 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

Viewbank 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 Viewbank 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 several rules that we expect all families to follow if they wish to bring their pet dog/s onto school grounds:

- pet dogs must be always leashed and in the control of a responsible adult

- pet dogs must not be tied up on school grounds or left unaccompanied
- families that bring pet dog/s to school that exhibit signs of aggressive behaviour, bark, or jump may be asked to remove the dog/s from school premises.
- Families that bring their dog/s onto school grounds are responsible for the removal of excrement.

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 Reception. 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 school newsletter
- Hard copy available from school administration upon request

POLICY REVIEW AND APPROVAL

Policy last reviewed	20/08/2024
Approved by	Principal
Next scheduled review date	20/08/2028