



WELLBEING DOG POLICY



Help for non-English speakers

If you need help to understand the information in this policy please contact Antonio Park Primary School.

PURPOSE

To outline the processes and expectations for the safe, appropriate and effective use of a trained wellbeing (therapy) dog at Antonio Park Primary School to support student wellbeing, engagement and emotional regulation.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all students, staff, visitors and members of the school community who may interact with the school's wellbeing dog while on school grounds or during school-related activities.

DEFINITIONS

Wellbeing Dog (Therapy Dog):

A dog that has been formally trained, assessed and certified by Lead The Way to work in educational or therapeutic settings to support emotional wellbeing, social development and engagement.

Handler:

A trained staff member who is responsible for the supervision, care and management of the wellbeing dog at all times while on school premises.

POLICY

Antonio Park Primary School recognises the positive impact that animal-assisted interventions can have on student wellbeing, engagement and school connectedness. The school supports the use of a trained wellbeing dog, to enhance our wellbeing programs and support students in a safe and structured manner.

Wellbeing dogs at Antonio Park will be fully trained and certified therapy dogs to work in a school environment.

The wellbeing dog program will operate in a way that prioritises the safety, wellbeing and comfort of all students, staff and the dog.

IMPLEMENTATION

1. Role of the Wellbeing Dog

The wellbeing dog may be used to:

- Support student emotional regulation and reduce anxiety

- Assist students during times of distress or dysregulation
- Encourage positive social interactions
- Support engagement in learning activities
- Provide comfort in wellbeing or support programs

The wellbeing dog will **not** be used in a way that replaces professional support services.

2. Supervision and Handling

- The wellbeing dog must be under the **direct supervision of a designated trained handler at all times** while on school grounds.
- The handler is responsible for:
 - The dog's behaviour, welfare and interactions
 - Ensuring all interactions are safe and appropriate
 - Removing the dog from any situation where safety or wellbeing may be compromised
- Students must **never be left alone with the dog**.

3. Student Interaction

- Interaction with the wellbeing dog will be:
 - **Structured and supervised**
 - Based on student needs and staff professional judgement
- Students will be explicitly taught:
 - How to safely approach and interact with the dog
 - When not to approach the dog (e.g. when resting, eating, or working)
- Participation is **voluntary**:
 - Students who are uncomfortable, fearful, allergic, or choose not to participate will **not be required** to interact with the dog.

4. Health, Safety and Hygiene

To ensure safety for all:

- The wellbeing dog will be:
 - Fully vaccinated
 - Regularly groomed and maintained in good health
 - Assessed as having a suitable temperament for a school environment
- Hygiene practices will include:
 - Encouraging students to wash or sanitise hands after interaction
 - Prevention of face contact and unsafe handling
- The school will:
 - Consider student allergies, medical needs and cultural factors
 - Communicate with families as required.

5. Risk Management

The school will take reasonable steps to minimise risks, including:

- Conducting a risk assessment for the program on an annual basis.
- Ensuring the dog only accesses appropriate areas of the school
- Monitoring student responses and wellbeing
- Responding promptly to any incidents or concerns.
- During brief times where the wellbeing dog handler isn't present, the wellbeing dog will be restrained in a closed environment, away from students.

In the event of:

- **Inappropriate behaviour by the dog** → the dog will be removed immediately from the situation. The behaviour will be reviewed by the handler, in consultation with the principal or delegate, and an appropriate course of action will be agreed on.
- **Unsafe student behaviour** → interaction will cease immediately and the student behaviour will be reviewed and managed according to APPS Behaviour Response Flowchart.

6. Consent and Communication

- Antonio Park Primary School will ensure that the families will be informed about the presence and role of the wellbeing dog
- Where ongoing or targeted interactions are planned, parent/carer awareness will be ensured
- Opportunities will be provided for families to raise concerns (e.g. allergies, fears, cultural considerations).

7. Animal Welfare

Antonio Park Primary School is committed to the wellbeing of the wellbeing dog. This includes:

- Providing rest breaks throughout the day
- Ensuring access to water, appropriate shelter and a safe space
- Monitoring for signs of stress or fatigue
- Limiting working hours and interactions as needed.

8. Roles and Responsibilities

Principal (or delegate):

- Approve and oversee the program
- Ensure appropriate risk management and compliance procedures are in place

Handler:

- Maintain control and supervision of the dog
- Monitor all interactions
- Ensure the dog's health and wellbeing

Staff:

- Follow this policy and support safe student interactions
- Report any concerns

Students:

- Follow instructions when interacting with the dog
- Treat the dog respectfully and safely.

COMMUNICATION

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

- Available on the school website
- Shared with staff through induction and internal platforms
- Communicated to families as part of wellbeing program information
- Available in hard copy from the school office upon request.

POLICY REVIEW AND APPROVAL

POLICY LAST REVIEWED	MAY 2026
CONSULTATION	MAY 2026
APPROVED BY	SCHOOL COUNCIL - POLICY SUBCOMMITTEE, PRINCIPAL
NEXT SCHEDULED REVIEW DATE	MAY 2028