



**November 2018**

# **Therapy and Assistance Animals Policy**

## **PREAMBLE:**

St Michael's Parish School supports the use of therapy and assistance animals for the benefit of its students, subject to the terms of this policy.

## **RATIONALE:**

The school is aware of the special needs of certain children and that some of their needs may be met with the aid of a therapy or assistance animal. Without discrimination and fully aware of Government and Catholic Education Melbourne policies, St Michael's Parish School will always act to promote the welfare and development of each child in accordance with their individual needs, in a loving and caring way, whilst acknowledging the need to ensure the health and wellbeing of other children sharing the school.

Staff at St Michael's Parish School are aware of their legal obligations under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) (the **Act**) and other applicable anti-discrimination legislation. This policy is intended to help guide the staff of St Michael's Parish School in meeting the obligations prescribed by the Act, which treats the use of assistance animals in the same manner as a disability (regulating matters such as direct and indirect discrimination and making reasonable adjustments), whilst making provision for proper regulation of the use of assistance animals to ensure the health and safety of all concerned.

## **PRINCIPLES:**

St Michael's is aware that, for people with certain special needs, contact with a therapy/assistance animal may be beneficial. St Michael's Parish School will, to the extent it is reasonably able and it is appropriate to do so, accommodate contact with a therapy/assistance animal for students, if requested. In considering whether St Michael's is able to reasonably accommodate contact with a therapy/assistance animal, consideration will be given to:

- whether the request for contact with a therapy/assistance animal appropriately links with the educational program and learning needs of the student in respect of whom the request is made; and

- whether there may be available alternative therapies which would meet the student's needs (in the context of the needs of the school community as a whole).

The final decision on allowing a therapy/assistance animal to enter the school rests with the Principal (or acting Principal). The key considerations in this regard are:

- the best interests of the student requesting the assistance and other students in the school, in the context of the overall operational requirements of the school; and
- the school's non-delegable duty to ensure, so far as practicable, the health and safety of students and its employees, or of the public generally.

### **Therapy animals**

A therapy animal is an animal who has been individually trained, evaluated and registered with its handler to provide animal assisted activities, animal assisted therapy and animal assisted interactions within a school or other facility. Examples of activities that students may engage in with a therapy animal may include petting and/or hugging the animal, speaking to the animal, giving the animal simple commands that the animal is trained to respond to or reading to the animal.

### **Assistance animals**

An assistance animal is any animal that is specifically trained to perform tasks or functions that help a person with a disability. Assistance animals include seeing eye and hearing dogs, animals trained to assist people with physical disabilities, and animals trained to assist people who suffer seizures, amongst other things.

### **Overview of supervision, training, registration, hygiene and other requirements**

There are a number of supervision, training, accreditation, hygiene and other requirements that necessarily apply to the use of therapy and assistance animals, and which, where they apply, must be complied with. A failure to comply with these requirements may have significant adverse consequences, ranging from the loss of accreditation for the use of the animal to the risk of physical harm.

The person who seeks permission for a therapy/assistance animal to enter the school, must satisfy St Michael's that all requirements (and/or restrictions) have been and will continue to be met for the duration of the period of the permission granted. St Michael's may, at its discretion, review compliance with applicable requirements and restrictions on an ad hoc or periodic basis.

If those requirements are unable to be met, or are unable to be properly identified and/or clarified as necessary, permission may not be granted.

In almost all cases, therapy/assistance animals may only work under the supervision of a qualified handler. A qualified handler will generally be required to be individually trained and registered/accredited. The handler will assume full responsibility for the animal's care, behaviour and suitability for interacting with students and others in the school while the therapy/assistance animal is on school property (which may require direct physical control).

There may be significant costs involved with meeting any applicable requirements (for example, the costs involved with training of and/or supervision by a handler). These costs are not budgeted for by the School and in most cases will be required to be met independently of the School.

Further detail in this respect is set out below.

**REQUIREMENTS:**

St Michael's may at its discretion or as required by law, give permission for a therapy/assistance animal to enter the school.

**Request:** A person who wishes to seek permission for a therapy/assistance animal to enter school property (**Applicant**) must submit a completed written request to the school Principal (or the Acting Principal), for approval (the request form is attached to this policy).

The request must, amongst other things, expressly address the relevance of the therapy/assistance animal to the educational program and learning needs of the student in question. The School may request additional documentation, to support the request.

The request shall be submitted for approval each school year and/or whenever the handler wishes to use a different therapy/assistance animal. Such approval may be rescinded by the Principal (or Acting Principal) at the Principal's discretion or as required by law.

After appropriate consultation, once the school Principal or the Principal's designee approves a request, a plan for animal visits shall be developed with the Principal or the Principal's designee.

**Training and Registration:** A request for a therapy/assistance animal to be permitted to enter school property must, where relevant and appropriate, include proof of the relevant animal's registration as a therapy/assistance animal handler. Such registration may be from Guide Dogs Victoria, Seeing Eye Dogs Australia or such other therapy/assistance animal registering organization as determined by a representative of the school (which, generally, will be an organization that requires an evaluation of the therapy/assistance animal and handler prior to registration and at least every two years thereafter). The registration of a therapy/assistance animal, where required, must remain current and in good standing at all times.

Evidence of the training of a therapy/assistance animal must include evidence that the animal has been trained to assist the student in question with his or her specific medical condition, and that the animal has been trained to meet standards of hygiene and behaviour that are appropriate for an animal in a public place.

**Health and Vaccination:** The Applicant must submit proof from a licensed veterinarian that the therapy animal is in good health and has been immunized against diseases common to animals. Such vaccinations shall be kept current and up to date all times.

**Licensing:** Where required, the Applicant must submit proof of license from a local animal licensing authority.

**Insurance:** The Applicant must submit a copy of an insurance policy that provides liability coverage for the work of the handler and therapy animal while the two are on school property.

Once a handler has been approved to bring a therapy animal on school property, its handler must adhere to the rules of his/her registering organization and the following rules of the school:

**Working with children and/or Police check:** A handler must have a current working with children's and where relevant Police check, certificate or card.

**Identification:** The handler and therapy animal must wear appropriate identification issued by the registering organization identifying them as a registered handler and therapy/assistance animal. The handler shall bring only approved therapy animals onto school property and may bring only one such animal at a time.

**Health and Safety:** The handler must ensure that the therapy/assistance animal does not pose a health and safety risk to any student, employee, or other person at school and that the therapy animal is brought to the school only when properly groomed, bathed, free of illness or injury, in circumstances where the animal is of the temperament appropriate for working with children and others in the schools.

**Control:** In general, the handler must ensure that the therapy animal wears a collar or harness and a leash no longer than 1.5 metres and must maintain control of the therapy animal by holding the leash at all times that the therapy/assistance animal is on school property, including during breaks, unless holding a leash would interfere with the therapy/assistance animal's safe, effective performance of its work or tasks. In any event, the handler must maintain appropriate control of the therapy animal at all times.

**Supervision and Care:** The handler will be solely responsible for the supervision and humane care of the therapy/assistance animal, including any feeding, exercising, toileting and cleaning up after the animal while the animal is in a school building or on school property. The handler must not leave the therapy/assistance animal unsupervised or alone on school property at any time. In the absence of approved guidelines to the contrary, the handler must limit the therapy/assistance animal's work to two consecutive hours at a time. The school is not responsible for providing any care, supervision or assistance to the therapy animal.

**Authorized Area(s):** The handler must ensure that the therapy animal has access to only such areas of the school buildings or properties that have been authorized by school's administrators.

**Allergies and Aversions:** In circumstances where any student or staff member has an allergy or other medical condition which may be adversely affected by contact with animals, a therapy/assistance animal will only be permitted to enter school property where expressly

agreed to by the school Principal and where approval has been given from the person with the medical condition or his/her family as appropriate. Where this approval has been given, the handler must comply with any direction given to him/her including, amongst other things, by ensuring the therapy/assistance animal is confined to any separate area as designated by the school administrator.

**Recordkeeping:** Handlers must sign themselves and their animal in upon arrival at any school and out on departure from the school.

**Photographs:** The handler must not take any photographs of students or staff without first obtaining a photo release.

**Fees and Gratuities:** The handler must not charge a fee for the work they perform with the therapy/assistance animal, must not borrow money or personal items or receive any personal gratuity, gift or tip, such as money or jewellery from students or employees of the school.

**Multiple Therapy Dogs on Site:** The handler must confirm whether or not there will be any other therapy animal(s) on site prior to scheduling any visit with a therapy animal and must take steps with appropriate staff to ensure that the animals do not engage inappropriately while on school property. When multiple therapy animals are engaged in a planned activity on school property, the handlers must ensure that the animals have an opportunity to greet each other prior to entering the school building. Once inside the building, the handlers must, as appropriate, ensure that the animals are each on a 1.5 metre leash, given work space at least 3 metres from each other and are given no opportunity for contact or socialization with each other while working.

**Damages and Injuries:** The handler will assume full responsibility and liability for any damage to school property or injury to school staff, students or others in the school caused by the therapy/assistance animal.

**Exclusion or Removal from School Property:** Without limiting circumstances in which exclusion may be required, a therapy animal must be excluded from the school if a school administrator determines that:

1. The handler does not have control of the therapy animal;
2. The therapy animal is not housebroken;
3. The therapy animal presents a direct and immediate threat to others in the school;  
or
4. The therapy animal's presence otherwise interferes with the educational program.

The handler must immediately remove his/her therapy animal from school property when instructed to do so by a school administrator.

#### **APPLICATION OF THIS POLICY:**

This policy sets out the requirements that St Michael's Parish School expects will be generally required where a request is made for a student to have access with a therapy/assistance animal. St Michael's Parish School will, however, assess each

application/circumstance on its merits and, in this context, reserves the right to depart from any particular part of this policy to the extent reasonably required or appropriate in all of the circumstances.

The key considerations in this regard are:

- the best interests of the student requesting the assistance and other students in the school, in the context of the overall operational requirements of the school; and
- the school's non-delegable duty to ensure, so far as practicable, the health and safety of students and its employees, or of the public generally.

This Policy will be reviewed in accordance with the St Michael's Parish School 's Policy Review Schedule.

#### **History of Updates to Policy**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Comment (e.g. major review, minor review)</b>
2018	Written and ratified