

Skye Primary School
395 Ballarto Road,
Skye 3977

Therapy Dogs in School



Policy 2023



Help for non-English speakers

If you need help to understand the information in this policy, please contact Skye Primary School via phone 03 9786 1555 or email skye.ps@education.vic.gov.au

PURPOSE

To explain to our school community the rules and procedures we have in place in relation to Murphy & Lenny, our Therapy 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 **therapy dog** is a dog that has been suitably trained to provide affection and comfort to members of the public in facilities such as schools, hospitals and retirement homes, 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.

POLICY

Skye Primary School supports the use of therapy dogs for the benefit of our students, subject to the conditions of this policy. The role of the therapy dog is to support the social and emotional needs of our students, under the guidance and supervision of their handler and other nominated school staff.

Skye Primary School has two therapy dogs who support our student's mental health and engagement. Our therapy dogs, Murphy & Lenny, are suitably trained and will be integrated into the school community.

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 Murphy & Lenny include:

- petting them when invited to do so

- speaking and reading to them
- brushing them
- giving them commands that they are trained to respond to including sit, drop, stay & fetch.

Skye Primary school 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 parents/carers in relation to any such health or safety concerns so that appropriate arrangements can be made on a case-by-case basis.

Parents/Carers will be asked to sign an **Opt-Out** Consent form to help the school identify any students who cannot be in contact with the dog due to concerns with allergies or asthma, a fear of dogs or for cultural reasons.

STANDARDS

- Murphy & Lenny will be the only Therapy dogs onsite at any given time.
- When they are on the school grounds, they will be under the supervision of their handlers Jane Briffa (Principal) & Tim Bernau (AP) or a secondary nominated staff member. They will not be unsupervised or alone with students. Their safe area will be the Principal's offices, where they will spend time with their handler when not working with students.
- Their handler will ensure that they do not pose a health and safety risk to any student, employee, or other person at school and that they are brought to school only when properly groomed, bathed, free of illness or injury. In the event the school is made aware that the dog triggers a student's health condition (eg. allergies or asthma), the school will notify the student's parent/carer(s) and ensure appropriate steps are implemented to minimise health risks.
- Murphy & Lenny will be identified while on school grounds by wearing a green Therapy Dog jacket.
- No student or staff member will be required to interact with Murphy or Lenny. 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, unless the parents/carers have signed to opt out.

PROCEDURES

- When arriving for work and leaving work and coat is OFF, Murphy & Lenny may meet and greet all staff, ensuring low levels of excitement for all. Calm greetings, and goodbyes.
- When Murphy & Lenny have their coat ON, all commands are to be given by her handler and students when invited to do so. Some of her commands will include:
 - ❖ Come (when you want the dog to come to you)
 - ❖ Leave it (when you want the dog to leave an item/person alone)
 - ❖ Stay (Hand in front of dogs face in a stop command)
 - ❖ Sit (hand fully extended parallel and lifted)
 - ❖ Drop (Point to floor)
 - ❖ Rest (tap knee for her to rest her head)
 - ❖ On your mat (for her to sit/drop on mat)
 - ❖ Up (to jump into car or onto a surface)
 - ❖ Wait (to stop and pause while you open a door)

- Murphy & Lenny will only work 2 to 3 times a week and only on alternate days.
- They will need to rest throughout the day in the office and toileted every two hours. They will respond if the given the command to 'go wee'.

Murphy & Lenny's wellbeing is paramount. They will only be available to work with students and will not be subjected to hostile or upset adults. Signs of them feeling uneasy or stressed will include panting, looking away, or blinking. If they display these signs they will be removed back to the office for a rest.

Students will be also be taught to:

- Remain calm and ignore Murphy or Lenny when they enter a learning space by remaining seated.
- To only come up to Murphy & Lenny when they are invited to do so.
- To always ask if they can pat them before reaching out and to only pat them on the back, not their head.

COMMUNICATION

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

- Publicly on the school's website
- Included in staff induction processes and staff training
- Included in transition and enrolment packs
- Discussed at parent information sessions
- Reminders in our school newsletter & Connect
- Hard copy available from school administration upon request

RELATED POLICIES AND RESOURCES

DUTY OF CARE

VISITORS POLICY