



DOGS AT FOSTER SECONDARY COLLEGE POLICY



Help for non-English speakers.

If you need help to understand the information in this policy please contact Foster Secondary College on 03 5682 2066.

PURPOSE

To explain to our school community the rules and procedures we have in place in relation to dogs attending our school grounds.

SCOPE

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** 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.

A **stray dog** is any dog that is not accompanied by their owner.

Assistance dogs

Foster Secondary College understands its obligations under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Commonwealth) 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. Foster Secondary 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 School Administration team at the College.

Visiting Wellbeing dogs

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 that you should consider. 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 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.

Foster Secondary College supports the use of visiting wellbeing dogs for the benefit of our students subject to the conditions of this policy. The role of the visiting 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.

Foster Secondary College welcomes and hosts several wellbeing dogs who visit with external agencies such as YAC (Youth Assist Clinic, South Gippsland Hospital) and YSAS (Youth Support and Advocacy Service, Bass Coast Health). These visiting dogs actively supports our student's mental health and engagement with the practitioner who work one to one with the young people. These visiting dogs are suitably leashed and trained and integrated into the school community.

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, Foster Secondary college will only engage with low-allergen wellbeing dogs. Foster Secondary College will take care to avoid, where possible, contact between the visiting 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 any visiting 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 one school wellbeing dog 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.
- The handler will ensure that the wellbeing 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/carers and ensure appropriate steps are implemented to minimise health risks.
- 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.

Pet dogs

Foster Secondary 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 Foster Secondary 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, pet dogs are not permitted on school grounds under any circumstances.

Our school community is diverse and may include people that are allergic or uncomfortable around dogs. We are also conscious of the health hazards that may be posed by dogs. We ask that families please leave their pet dogs at home or safely tether them outside school grounds when attending our school or school events.

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 front 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 (or insert other online parent/carer/student communication method)
- Hard copy available from school administration upon request

POLICY REVIEW AND APPROVAL

Policy last reviewed	25th day of October 2023
Approved by	Principal Dean Duursma
Next scheduled review date	October 2026 (Review cycle for this policy is 3 years)