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Dogs in Schools

1. Background

- 1.1 As the number of students with additional learning and behavioral needs, including those with trauma backgrounds and heightened levels of anxiety, increases in schools, it is necessary to explore alternative strategies beyond traditional support methods like learning and behavioral differentiation strategies, classroom-based one-on-one support, and wellbeing programs. Over the past few years, the use of 'Educational Support' and 'Therapy' dogs has become increasingly popular and widespread in the education sector. These dogs are used to work with individual students who have diagnosed or observed mental, emotional, and behavioral needs and who may benefit from interacting with them.
- 1.2 Christian Schools Tasmania has for some time had a trained 'Therapy Dog' working across the Schools under the direct supervision of Christian Schools Tasmania's Counsellor. This policy aims to outline the expectations and guidelines for schools that wish to allow other dogs on their premises to be used as part of their Learning Enrichment or Student Wellbeing programs.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- provide guidelines to schools wishing to use a dog (or dogs) as part of their Learning Enrichment or Student Wellbeing programs;
- define the qualifications for individual dogs that will be working at individual schools.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all Christian Schools Tasmania schools.

4. Definition of Terms

Christian Schools Tasmania (CST) means an Association of Christians who, through their Board of Directors, are legally responsible for Calvin Christian School, Channel Christian School, Emmanuel Christian School and Northern Christian School.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is the person appointed to the position of Chief Executive Officer of the Association, or a person acting from time to time in that position.

Principal means the person charged with responsibility for the operation of an Association (Christian Schools Tasmania) school, or a person acting from time to time in that position.

Learning Enrichment Staff are staff employed by Christian Schools Tasmania to provide pastoral care and/or learning enrichment to students who have additional learning and/or behavioural needs.

Pastoral Care Staff are specialist staff employed by Christian Schools Tasmania to work as either Counsellors or Chaplains.

Compliance Manager is the person appointed to the position of Compliance Manager of the Association, or a person acting from time to time in that position.

Parent is a person who is the legal guardian of a child enrolled at a Christian Schools Tasmania school.

Child means any student enrolled at a Christian Schools Tasmania school.

Companion Animal is usually used to identify an animal that provides companionship for those who might be isolated or living alone or struggling with other challenges within a 'personal life' sphere.

School Support Dog is a dog who has either been trained to provide specific therapeutic intervention to students (i.e. 'Therapy Dog') or a highly trained dog used to provide students in the School with emotional support, recognising signs of anxiety, and helping improve concentration and communication skills as well as reducing the incidence of antisocial behaviour and bullying (sometimes referred to as an 'Educational Support Dog'). This dog must be owned and be the sole responsibility of a Learning Enrichment or Pastoral Care staff member.

Assistance Dog is a working animal that has been specially trained to help people who are living with physical disabilities to move around, do everyday activities and tasks, and be more independent. They are also called service dogs and include Guide Dogs and Hearing Dogs.



5. Policy

5.1 Dogs allowed on Christian Schools Tasmania School Premises

- Assistance Dogs assigned to an individual student or staff member with a disability that necessitates the use of such a dog;
- School Support Dogs under the direct supervision and care of a member of the School's Wellbeing or Learning Enrichment team.

5.2 Dogs not allowed on Christian Schools Tasmania School Premises

Dogs who do not fall under the category of either an 'Assistance Dog', or a 'School Support Dog', including 'Companion Animals'.

5.3 Dogs permitted on Christian Schools Tasmania School Premises with conditions

Dogs owned by a parent or a friend of the family e.g. dogs accompanying a parent to pick a child up from school or a dog/puppy to bring in for show and tell etc.

5.4 Authorisation and Approval

Learning Enrichment and/or Pastoral Care staff wishing to use their dog as part of the School's Learning Enrichment or Student Wellbeing program may only do so if prior approval has been given in writing by the CEO and the School's principal.

5.5 Stakeholder Consultation

Prior to a Christian Schools Tasmania school allowing a dog to be used as part of that School's Wellbeing or Learning Enrichment program, an engagement survey will be conducted with the School Communities.

Objections by members of the School's parent or staff community will be taken into account by the Principal and CEO when determining whether use of a dog as a part of their Learning Enrichment or Wellbeing program is appropriate.

5.6 Risk Management

Schools have a duty of care to students and must take reasonable steps to prevent an injury that is foreseeable.

Steps to meet duty of care requirements (in relation to the School having a dog/s on the premises) include the completion of a risk assessment to identify any immediate or associated hazards including:

- the development of a process for children who are allergic to dogs;
- development of safety procedures and zones where the dogs are not allowed, such as eating spaces;
- notification to parents about the School allowing dogs on site including days and times;
- ensuring reasonable adjustments are made for children and young people with a disability, in consultation with their parents;
- the welfare of the dog in the case of an emergency; and
- identification of toileting location for dog which is separate to children play areas.

Reasonable steps include:

- The dog must be on a leash at all times and supervised by a responsible adult.
- The dog must wear a collar that shows the name of the dog and contact number of the owner of the dog.
- The dog must not be within zones used for serving, preparing or consuming food.
- Students should not eat around the dog or feed the dog.
- Only a person 18 years of age or older can be responsible for the dog.

5.7 Training and Licensing Requirements

All dogs being used as 'Assistance dogs' will most likely already have been trained and carry the appropriate tickets/licenses by a relevant authority. Prior to a dog that doesn't already have the appropriate ticket/license being introduced into a school as part of that School's Wellbeing or Learning Enrichment program (assuming that all other criteria above have been met), the School must organise the following:

- behaviour Veterinarian to visit the School to perform an assessment of the dog for his/her suitability to be used as a School Support Dog. This assessment should involve testing the dog with the owner/handler first and then observing the dog with students (at either recess or lunch time); and
- written report from the Behaviour Veterinarian outlining the dog's suitability to be at the School, including recommendations and suggestions.

5.8 Staff and Student Training

While any approved dog on Christian Schools Tasmania school property must have an owner, who is the primary handler, it is essential that the whole school staff are given the opportunity to learn about the use of the dog within the School. It may be appropriate for a dog trainer or provider organisation to come to the School on a staff development day and lead a presentation about the program, interacting with the dog and protocols associated with the dog within the School.

Students also need to be given guidance about how to interact with the dog and given clear instruction about not feeding the dog and hygiene procedures after handling the dog and before consuming or handling food. It is essential that students and staff are aware of the risk of transmission of zoonoses (diseases that can be transmitted to humans from animals) and the practices to reduce the risks.

5.9 Animal Welfare, Health Requirements and Ongoing Costs

As the dog is owned by an individual, it is recommended that the costs associated with the care and management of the dog should be largely met by the owner. The School may agree to assist with the cost of training, ongoing behaviour monitoring and any additional facilities required for the dog at the School, such as a crate for use of the dog when working at the School. These arrangements must be agreed to, recorded and signed by the dog owner and the Principal.

- A record of the days the dog attends the School should be kept and organised.
- The dog must be provided with an area where they can rest and have time away from the stimulus of the School through the day and be provided with water.
- Copies of the dog's health records, such as vaccination certificates, should be provided to the School and maintained.
- Toileting arrangements/cleaning up for the dog must be organised and not be the responsibility of the cleaning contractor.
- Advice about appropriate hygiene for students and opportunities for hand washing after handling the dog(s) and before eating food must be made available.
- No person other than the adult responsible for the dog should feed the dog while it is at the School.
- All dogs used as School Support Dogs must be de-sexed, microchipped and registered with the respective local council.

In order to maintain the physical health of School Support and Assistance Dogs, the following practices must be adhered to:

- annual vaccinations and documented check-ups with a veterinarian;
- maintenance of a balanced diet;
- daily exercise appropriate for the size and age of the dog;
- regular grooming and bathing as appropriate for the breed and climate; and
- safe travel to and from the School in an appropriate vehicle with appropriate restraints.

5.10 Monitoring of Dogs Allowed on Christian Schools Tasmania Premises and Continuous Improvement

It is essential that the physical, psychological and behavioural health of dogs permitted on Christian Schools Tasmania premises is monitored by external parties. The physical health can be monitored through an annual visit to the veterinarian for a check-up and vaccinations.

The psychological and behavioural health check should be done by the organisation provider or a professional trainer such as a Certified Professional Dog Trainer. This trainer should visit the dog at the School and observe the dog's behaviour and demeanour while it is working at least once every two years.

Christian Schools Tasmania, in consultation with all staff (as outlined in the WHS Policy), will regularly monitor, evaluate and review this policy, any guidelines, procedures and relevant records to ensure continuous improvement.

5.11 Dogs Permitted on Christian Schools Tasmania School Premises with Conditions

Christian Schools Tasmania understands that many families in our school community keep dogs as pets. To ensure that our schools remain a safe and inclusive place for everyone including our School Support Dogs, pet dogs are permitted on Christian Schools Tasmania school premises with conditions:

- pet dogs must be authorised by the School Principal prior to bringing onto Christian Schools Tasmania School premises;
- pet dogs must be on a leash at all times and supervised by a responsible adult;
- pet dogs must wear a collar with a visible council registration tag;
- pet dogs must not enter into a building without the authorisation of the School Principal;
- pet dogs for class 'show and tell' must be pre-organised and approved by the class teacher and Principal;
- pet dogs must be removed from school grounds immediately after the class 'show and tell';
- pet dogs must not be tied up on school grounds and left unaccompanied;
- parents are responsible for cleaning up any soiling by their dog on or near the School grounds;
- when bringing dogs to the School, parents do so with an absolute understanding that their dog has no behavioural issues around other people or other dogs, has never displayed any aggression towards children, and that the owner believes the dog is fully trustworthy in a school environment; and
- pet dogs that exhibit signs of aggressive behaviour, barking or jumping may result in the School Principal directing that the dog is not to be brought into the School grounds.



299 Macquarie Street
+61 3 6224 8300
admin@cst.tas.edu.au
cst.tas.edu.au