**Use of Therapy and Assistance Dogs in our School**

St Thomas More Parish School supports the use of therapy & assistance dogs for the benefit of its students, subject to the conditions of this policy.

**Policy:**

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 dog. Without discrimination and fully aware of Government and Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools policies, St Thomas will always look first and foremost towards assisting children with all of their needs, in a loving and caring way; at the same time, not alienating or risking the health and wellbeing of other children sharing the school.

We are aware that some of the benefits from working or visiting with a therapy & assistance dog, include reduced stress, improved physical and emotional wellbeing, lower blood pressure, decreased anxiety, improved self-esteem and normalization of the environment. But consideration must also be given to other therapies or options that are also available.

**Therapy Dog:**

A therapy dog is a dog who has been trained, evaluated and registered with his/her handler or nominated responsible person to assist with activities. Therapy dogs are not “emotional support” animals or assistance dogs (service animals), that assist with disabilities.

Therapy dogs that provide Animal Assisted Interactions are non-goal-driven interactions where the specific content of the visit is meant to provide motivational, educational and/or recreational activities that enhance quality of life.

A handler is an individual school staff member who owns a therapy dog and who has been individually trained, evaluated, and registered with his/her therapy dog to provide animal assisted activities, animal assisted therapy and animal assisted interactions within a school or other facility. Note: The handler can delegate the role to a person of responsibility within the school, the person of responsibility for 2022 is Acting Principal, Declan McDermott.

**Supervision of Bailey:**

In 2022 Bailey will attend school on Thursday, he is to be always supervised by Declan McDermott or a staff member delegated, while Declan may be completing other duties. Bailey must remain in the school office and the office door must be shut to avoid him wandering. Declan will take Bailey out for regular bathroom breaks; this will be done using a lead restraint. Students may visit Bailey in the office with permission from their classroom teacher and supervised by a Learning Support Office or another member of staff. They must adhere to the following requests of the handler.

The following notes have been requested by Bailey’s handler:

- He needs toilet breaks every 2-3 hours
- He needs access to water at all times
- No food to be supplied at school
- Staff/Students are to be restricted to patting him one at a time, with waiting students approx. 2 meters away (this reduced stress for him).

**Complaints Handling:**

Please see Acting Principal Declan McDermott if you have any areas of concern regarding the above policy. If you are unsatisfied with any responses, please follow the Complaints Handling Policy on our website or request one from the Acting Principal.

Declan McDermott

Acting Principal