

Portland Bay School Therapy Dog



What is a Therapy Dog?

A trained Therapy Dog will form part of our wellbeing and engagement approach at Portland Bay School. In Term 3 of 2023, we welcome a trained therapy dog to our school.

Research continues to grow into the positive effects therapy dogs have in schools. They help children learn compassion, empathy, responsibility, and respect. Therapy dogs offer comfort and non-judgemental love. Studies have shown that even a short amount of time with a dog can decrease levels of anxiety and increase emotional security. Therapy dogs can be a powerful teaching tool in developing students' participation, confidence and independence in learning activities, self-care routines, motor skills, play and communication.

In 2023, we welcome our Therapy Dog, Willow.



Willow



Rashael and Willow

Willow (and her main handler, Rashael) has been trained by Pawfect Communities to become a Therapy Dog. Willow is a 3-year-old female Whippet.

Rashael and Willow have completed intensive training and assessment with Pawfect Communities. Willow has achieved a certificate of attainment to be a Therapy Dog. Willow will be gradually introduced into the school and work in both the primary and secondary areas with her certified handler.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is the dog safe around children?

Yes, Willow has been put through high level training under distraction. The trainer noted Willow's calm demeanour and temperament throughout the training. The dog will always be under the control of her trained handler. The dog is not permitted in food preparation areas, toilets, and bathrooms and first aid/treatment rooms.

What if my child is allergic to dogs?

Willow has a short haired coat and will be groomed daily and washed weekly. Willow's handler, Rashael, is a dog groomer. Willow's bed and toys will be regularly cleaned or replaced. There are air purifiers in all classrooms and daily standard school cleaning protocols in place. If for any reason you believe your child may be allergic to the dog, you may opt out of your child having direct contact with the dog, and the school will monitor this closely.

What if my child is fearful of dogs?

There will be no pressure for individual students to get close, pat, or interact with Willow. Students will be reassured that if they don't want to pet Willow, they can just look at her or talk to her. Please inform your child's teacher or speak with program coordinator, Briony, regarding any fears or dislike of dogs your child may have.

Does the dog stay at school?

No, the dog will return home each night with their handler. Willow has been living with her main handler since she was seven weeks old as a family pet.

How healthy is the dog?

The dog is up to date with vaccinations, flea, and worm treatments. Willow has a certificate from her vet stating that she is fit and healthy to be working in a school. If for whatever reason the dog is not well, she will remain at home.

Will the dog disrupt the classroom?

No, the dog will be under the instruction of the handler at all times and is not permitted to wander around the school or classroom unattended. When in class, she will be settled on her bed in a down stay, unless otherwise directed by her handler. Willow will also have a quiet place in an office for time away from student areas.

For any questions regarding Willow and the animal assisted therapy program, please feel free to contact, Portland Bay School Therapy Dog program coordinator, Briony Trace, on 5523 2218.