



**LORETO SECONDARY SCHOOL,
CLONMEL**

My Canine Companion (MCC) Therapy Dog Policy

**Ratified by
The Board of Management
on 16th December 2024**

My Canine Companion (MCC) Therapy Dog Policy

Mission Statement

The Loreto Philosophy of Education is centred in God, rooted in Gospel values and derives its objectives and specific expression from the insights and vision of St. Ignatius of Loyola and Mary Ward. It underpins our Missions Statement, which states:

‘Our school is a caring Christian Community in which students have the opportunity to achieve academic excellence and to grow spiritually, emotionally, socially, creatively and physically in a healthy environment.’

Rationale

There is an increasing body of research to support the benefit of a therapy dog in school. My Canine Companion (MCC) have placed therapy dogs in schools around Ireland providing comfort and reassurance to children with anxiety and self-confidence issues. Dogs have proven to increase the wellbeing of staff and students. **“School Therapy dogs, they simply put a smile on your face”**. They are an additional resource for the school that benefit students and staff.



Increasingly in schools, it is becoming recognised that children's emotional wellbeing is at the root of positive behaviour and success with socialising, as well as in the classroom.

A dog can support children who are anxious about school and could be the reason that they want to come in every morning. Dogs can be beneficial to assist children with difficulty transitioning into the school. Reading to dogs can help boost children's confidence and fluency. Caring for an animal can teach children responsibility and how to treat animals safely and with compassion.

Dogs are great fun to have around and can bring a caring atmosphere to a school.

Who is our My Canine Companion (MCC) Therapy Dog and who is the lead handler?

Loreto's My Canine Companion (MCC) Therapy Dog is called Gino. His lead handler is Ms Deirdre Kirby. There is a team of handlers who work with our MCC Therapy Dog, under the direction of Ms Deirdre Kirby.

Preparations for having an MCC School Dog

School leaders have taken advice from My Canine Companion (MCC), who provide training and guidance about the necessary risk assessments and insurance which must be in place, as well as practical guidance.

Ms Deirdre Kirby as lead handler undertakes for Loreto Secondary School, Clonmel training to ensure the school is competent in handling the MCC therapy dog. Ms Kirby, on behalf of the school, receives training and guidance in dog behaviour enabling her to understand the dog's temperament and decimates this information to other handlers and the staff in general.

Training has ensured:

- A designated chill-out zone is in place for our therapy dog, this has been agreed by the handler in consultation with My Canine Companion (MCC) instructor. This is in the Inclusion Office or the Staffroom.
- Handlers remove the MCC therapy dog to its designated chill-out zone if the MCC therapy dog shows any signs of stress during interactions. MCC instructor will be notified if this occurs.

- A toilet area is designated within the school's grounds away from the students' play areas. This is on grass areas. Any dog litter is bagged up by the handler.
- Parents/Guardians have been informed that an MCC therapy dog is a member of our school community.
- Parents/Guardians who do not want their child to interact with the dog have been asked to inform the school.
- If a child has a phobia of dogs the lead handler may offer opportunities for the child to be slowly introduced to the MCC therapy dog, to reduce their fear.
- A picture of the My Canine Companion (MCC) school therapy dog will be placed prominently in the school reception to inform everyone that there is school therapy dog working in the school. Under the picture it states: My Canine Companion (MCC) school therapy dog "Gino" together with Ms Deirdre Kirby (lead handler).

Interactions

There will always be a responsible adult in charge of the dog during interactions with students.

Interactions with students will be very carefully monitored to avoid students being hurt by play scratches and mouthing, and to avoid undue stress to the dog.

All MCC school therapy dogs undergo the **My Canine Companion (MCC) School Dog Therapy Program** and receive ongoing aftercare and support for the duration the MCC therapy dog is in school.

Students and adults are required to adhere to the following:

- Always approach the MCC school therapy dog calmly and slowly.
- MCC school therapy dog should always be encouraged to keep four paws on the ground.
- Interactions must always be calm, with the authorised adult in control at all times.
- Students must wash their hands before and after they have been handling the dog.
- Interactions with MCC school therapy dog will not happen in corridors; as this encourages undesirable dog behaviour. Interactions will only occur in controlled environments as set out by the lead handler in consultation with MCC instructor.
- The number of interactions the MCC school therapy dog can have will be dependent on the length and quality of these interactions on any given day. The lead handler will decide this in consultation with MCC instructor.
- Timetables for MCC therapy dog are discouraged by MCC. If a timetable is in place, it will be ensured that the timetable is flexible and agreed by the lead handler and MCC instructor, with the welfare of MCC therapy dog being the primary consideration.
- **All interactions are subject to approval of the team of handlers who is responsible for the MCC school therapy dog's welfare while working in the school.**

MCC School Therapy Dog Welfare

The welfare of the MCC school therapy dog shall remain the primary concern. All MCC school therapy dogs, although allocated to the school, remain under the ownership of My Canine Companion. MCC will remove a MCC school therapy dog where they feel the welfare of the dog is not adequately catered for.

A MCC school therapy dog that is unwell should preferably be left at home, if this is not possible the dog can remain in their chill-out zone. The dog shall not have any interactions with students when they are unwell.

Frequently Asked Questions

What will the MCC school therapy dog do on a day-to-day basis?

The MCC school therapy dog may visit different rooms around the school during a day, but will have its own chill-out zone designated where the dog can have downtime. This chill-out area will be designated by the lead handler in consultation with MCC instructor. The MCC school therapy dog will always be kept under effective control.

How do I know that my child will be safe around the dog?

A risk assessment and policy will be in place and will be available on the school website. When moving around the school, the MCC therapy dog will always be under effective control. Students will receive instruction on how to interact safely with dogs.

Will my child pick up infections from the dog?

The MCC therapy dog will be fully vaccinated, treated regularly for worms and fleas and will not work in school if ill. Students will be required to wash their hands before and after handling the dog. There will be a dedicated MCC school therapy dog toilet area away from areas that student's access. There is also a dedicated bin for dog waste, which is labelled.

What if a student is allergic to dogs or afraid of them?

Parents/Guardians can request that the student has no contact, or restricted access to the MCC school therapy dog in these situations.

This policy was agreed on the date noted below.

Signed: Acting Chair: Barry Gavigan
Chairperson of Board of Management

Date: 16th December 2024

Signed: Anne McGrath
Ms. Anne Mc Grath, Principal
(Secretary to the Board of Management)

Date: 16th December 2024