

Media Release

The Hon Ben Carroll MP
Deputy Premier
Minister for Education
Minister for WorkSafe and TAC



Friday, 28 March 2025

SUPPORTING OUR STUDENTS WITH FOUR-LEGGED FRIENDS

There's about to be more four-legged friends at schools across Victoria as part of an Allan Labor Government program to give students the wellbeing and mental health support they need.

Deputy Premier and Minister for Education Ben Carroll visited Jacana School for Autism this week to announce that 101 schools across Victoria will receive a grant as part of the Animal-assisted Wellbeing and Engagement Program.

The schools will each share more than \$1.7 million to implement new or expand existing animal-assisted wellbeing and engagement programs.

The initiative aims to help students build confidence and social connections, enhance empathy and strengthen emotional regulation.

Existing animal-assisted wellbeing and engagement programs in schools are already delivering these benefits and helping students to engage in learning more effectively, leading to improved attendance.

Most of the programs support students through activities involving dogs and horses which are trained to work alongside their handlers.

At some schools, students are improving literacy skills by reading books to dogs, others are building confidence and trust by working with horses.

Some schools have a support animal trained to work at their school under the care of a certified handler, while other schools work with certified external providers to tailor weekly wellbeing and engagement activities for students.

The Labor Government is investing \$4.8 million over three years to ensure more students can benefit from animal-assisted wellbeing and engagement programs at their school and prioritising services for students with disability and additional needs.

Round two grant applications will open to schools in Term 2.

Quotes attributable to Deputy Premier and Minister for Education Ben Carroll

"School can be a stressful time for some students and we know animals have a remarkable ability to help students feel safe and calm, so we're making sure students who need this support most – can get it."

"Our schools have a vital role to play in boosting the wellbeing of all our students, and this program will no doubt help our students in the classroom."

Quote attributable to Member for Broadmeadows Kathleen Matthews-Ward

"These support animals have a huge impact on the wellbeing and engagement of local students, helping them to participate, learn and succeed at school."

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