

## DOGS AT SCHOOL POLICY



### Help for non-English speakers

If you need help to understand the information in this policy please contact Sale Primary School on 03 5144 5545 or [sale.ps@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:sale.ps@education.vic.gov.au)

### PURPOSE

To explain to our school community the rules and procedures we have in place in relation to dogs attending our school grounds. This includes the procedures in place for our wellbeing/support dog to support student engagement and mental health.

### POLICY

#### Definitions

An **assistance dog** is trained and certified by a registered organisation to perform tasks or functions that help a person with a disability to alleviate the effects of the disability.

A **wellbeing/support dog** is a dog that has been suitably trained to provide animal-assisted wellbeing support under the control of his/her handler.

A **handler** is a volunteer or person/s within the school who is/are responsible and in control of the wellbeing/support dog while on school grounds and when facilitating the connect between the person and dog.

A **pet dog** relates to any dog that is privately owned in the community for companionate reasons, rather than as a support function that requires specific skills or training.

A **stray dog** is any dog that is not accompanied by their owner.

#### **Assistance dogs**

Sale Primary School understands its obligations under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) and the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic) and will make reasonable adjustments for members of our school community with a disability who require an 'assistance animal' to help alleviate the effects of their disability. Assistance animals are permitted to attend our school with their handler. Our school Principal can lawfully ask a person to produce evidence that an animal:

- is trained specifically to assist a person to alleviate the effects of a disability (e.g., seeing eye dogs, hearing and physical assistance dogs)
- meets standards of hygiene and behaviour appropriate for a school environment.

We understand that in some circumstances, students may require an assistance animal to attend school to help them to participate in their educational program. Sale Primary School will consider a request by a student with a disability to allow an assistance animal to attend school with them on a case-by-case basis. If you would like to discuss this further, please contact the Principal or Assistance Principal on 51445545 or via email [sale.ps@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:sale.ps@education.vic.gov.au)

#### **Wellbeing / Support Dogs**

DUTY OF CARE AND OTHER LEGAL OBLIGATIONS:



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It is recommended that schools develop a risk management plan in order to identify foreseeable risks of harm associated with having a wellbeing dog at school and take reasonable steps to fulfill their duty of care, and other legal obligations.

**Occupational Health and Safety:** Principals have a legal responsibility to provide a healthy and safe environment for staff and others on the premises in accordance with the legislative requirements of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* and the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2007*. This means, for example, that the school will need to consider the needs of staff members and students in relation to the wellbeing dog/support, and should consult with staff and the parent community to ensure there are no safety concerns that you should take into account. We also recommend that steps are taken to verify that the animal has undergone adequate behavioural training (for example, by engaging a professional dog trainer) and is properly restrained around staff and students to avoid injuries.

**Liability in the event of attack or injury:** Under section 29 of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*, the person 'in apparent control' of the dog at the time that a dog attacks or bites any person (or even if the dog 'rushes at or chases any person') is guilty of an offence, **whether or not they are the owner of the dog**. Various penalties can be imposed under the section, and a court may require the payment of compensation if a person is found guilty. Any staff members responsible for the supervision of a dog on school premises should be made aware of these obligations and the school should ensure they feel comfortable with this responsibility and managing the dog.

Sale Primary School supports the use of wellbeing/support dogs for the benefit of our students subject to the conditions of this policy. The role of the wellbeing/support dog is to support the social and emotional needs of our students, under the guidance and supervision of their handler and other school staff.

Sale Primary School has a support dog who helps our students' mental health and engagement. Our support dog is suitably trained and integrated into the school community.

Recognised benefits from working or visiting with a wellbeing/support dog include:

- reduced stress and anxiety, including decreased learner anxiety behaviours.
- improved physical and emotional wellbeing.
- improved self-esteem, empathy and interpersonal skills.
- improved relationship building and ability to pick up on social cues.
- improved attendance (for disengaged students or students at risk of disengaging).

Examples of activities students may engage in with the wellbeing/support dog include:

- petting and/or hugging the dog.
- speaking and reading to the dog.
- taking the dog for a walk and play with a staff member.

Staff, students and visitors are requested to notify the school of any health or safety concerns about the wellbeing/support dog. We are committed to consulting with students and parent(s)/carer(s) in relation to any such health or safety concerns so that appropriate arrangements can be made on a case-by-case basis.

Where possible, Sale Primary School will only engage with low-allergen wellbeing/support dogs. Sale Primary School will take care to avoid, where possible, contact between the wellbeing/support dog and students, staff, and visitors where the school is aware they have allergies to dogs.



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Students who have allergies to dogs must have an allergy management plan completed by the Dr and given to the school.

## Wellbeing/Support dog standards and procedures

- There will be a maximum of one school wellbeing/support dog at any given time.
- When the wellbeing/support dog is on school grounds, they will be under the supervision of a handler or staff member. The wellbeing/support dog will not be unsupervised or alone with students. A safe area separate to the school classrooms will be allocated to the wellbeing/support dog and their handler where they will spend time when they are not working with students – Assistant Principal or Principal's offices.
- The handler will ensure that the wellbeing/support dog does not pose a health and safety risk to any student, employee, or other person at school and that the wellbeing/support dog is brought to school only when properly groomed, bathed, free of illness or injury and of the temperament appropriate for working with the school community. In the event the school is made aware that the dog triggers a student's health condition (for example, allergies or asthma), the school will notify the student's parent/carer(s) and ensure appropriate steps are implemented to minimise health risks.
- The wellbeing/support dog will be appropriately identified while on school grounds by wearing a bright red collar which matches the colour of our school uniform.
- No student or staff member will be required to interact with the wellbeing/support dog. If a student indicates that they wish to overcome any fear of dogs, they can be supported to do so with coaching in a controlled environment with the wellbeing/support dog and their handler.
- The school having a wellbeing/support dog will be communicated to parent/carer(s) at the beginning of the year in the school newsletter, and on student enrolment. In these communications, parent/carer(s) will be given the opportunity to 'opt out' of their child/ren's interacting with the wellbeing/support dog, raise any concerns or update student medical information (such as allergies or asthma) which may be triggered by a visit from the wellbeing/support dog.

## Pet dogs

Sale Primary School is not a public place, and our Principal has the authority to permit or decline entry to school grounds and impose conditions of entry.

## Dogs permitted on school grounds with conditions

Whilst Sale Primary School understands that many families in our school community keep dogs as pets, to ensure that our school remains a safe and inclusive place for everyone, we have in place a number of rules that we expect all families to follow if they wish to bring their pet dog onto school grounds:

- pet dogs must be leashed at all times and in the control of a responsible adult (not child).
- pet dogs must not be tied up on school grounds or left unaccompanied.
- families that bring dogs to school that exhibit signs of aggressive behaviour, bark, or jump may be asked to remove the dog from school premises.

The Principal has the authority to prohibit certain dogs from school grounds or modify this policy to ensure the safety and wellbeing of staff, students and members of our school community at any time.

## Stray dogs

Unaccompanied or stray dogs sighted at our school should be reported immediately to the school office. School staff will contact municipal authorities and/or Victoria Police for assistance in managing and removing a stray dog from school grounds, and ensure staff and students remain safe at school.



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## POLICY REVIEW AND APPROVAL

Policy last reviewed	February 2024
Approved by	Principal
Review Cycle	3 to 4 years
Next scheduled review date	February 2027