

Dogs in school policy

Help for non-English speakers



If you need help to understand the information in this policy please contact the General Office.

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 dog program to support student engagement and mental health.

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

A handler is a volunteer in the school who is responsible and in control of a wellbeing dog while on school grounds and when facilitating the animal wellbeing program.

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.

RATIONALE

Research has shown major benefits to students from having dogs at school. Having a visiting companion dog can help reduce blood pressure, help with pain management and provide tactile stimulation.

Having a dog around helps boost self-esteem, stimulates discussion and helps promote interaction with others (particularly student/staff interaction).

A dog companion helps stimulate game playing, problem solving and memory.

Dogs tend to lift spirits, and promote self-esteem.

POLICY

Assistance dogs

Mickleham Secondary College 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. Mickleham Secondary College 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 general office.

Wellbeing dogs

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

Mickleham Secondary College has wellbeing dogs who supports our student's mental health and engagement. Our wellbeing dogs are suitably trained and integrated into the school community.

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

- petting and/or hugging the dog
- speaking and reading to the dog
- giving the dog commands that the dog is trained to respond to
- walking with the dog

Where possible, Mickleham Secondary College will engage with low-allergen wellbeing dogs. Mickleham Secondary College will take care to avoid, where possible, contact between the wellbeing dog and students, staff, and visitors where the school is aware they have allergies to dogs.

Staff, students and visitors are requested to notify the school of any health or safety concerns about the wellbeing 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.

Wellbeing dog standards and procedures

- There will be a maximum of two school wellbeing dogs at any given time.
- When the wellbeing dog is on school grounds they will be under the supervision of a handler or staff member. The wellbeing dog will not be unsupervised or alone with students. A safe area separate to the school classrooms and offices will be allocated to the wellbeing dog and their handler where they will spend time when they are not working with students.

- The handler will ensure that the wellbeing dog does not pose a health and safety risk to any student, employee, or other person at school and that the wellbeing 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 dog will be appropriately identified while on school grounds by wearing a colour harness.
- The handler will be responsible for picking up after the dog and ensuring its welfare is considered at all times.
- No student or staff member will be required to interact with the wellbeing 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 dog and their handler.
- The dogs shall not be present in kitchen or staffroom areas.
- The wellbeing dog program 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 the program for their child, raise any concerns or update student medical information (such as allergies or asthma) which may be triggered by a visit from the wellbeing dog.

Pet dogs

Mickleham Secondary College is not a public place, and our principal has the authority to permit or decline entry to school grounds and impose conditions of entry.

Whilst Mickleham Secondary College 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, pet dogs are not permitted on school grounds under any circumstances.

Our school community is diverse, and may include people that are allergic or uncomfortable around unknown dogs. We are also conscious of the health hazards that may be posed by dogs and the issues it can create for our school wellbeing dogs. We ask that families please leave their pet dogs at home or safely tether them outside school grounds when attending our school or school events.

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 general 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.

COMMUNICATION

This policy will be communicated to our school community in the following ways:

- Available publicly on our school's website
- Discussed at annual staff briefings/meetings
- Discussed at parent information nights/sessions
- Discussed at student forums
- Hard copy available from school administration upon request

POLICY REVIEW AND APPROVAL

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