

ANIMALS ON SCHOOL GROUNDS



Help for non-English speakers

If you need help to understand the information in this policy please contact the school office on ripponlea.ps@education.vic.gov.au or 9527 5728.

POLICY

Ripponlea Primary School (RPS) seeks to ensure the safety of all students, staff, parents and visitors to RPS, through both direct and indirect contact with all animals.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to:

- provide for the safety of students, staff, parents and visitors at RPS;
- ensure access to the school grounds for people with a disability requiring the use of dogs.

DEFINITIONS – specific to dogs

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.

IMPLEMENTATION

Pet dogs

RPS is not a public place, and our Principal has the authority to permit or decline entry to school grounds and impose conditions of entry. Animals are not permitted within the RPS grounds or within RPS school buildings at any time, unless prior approval has been obtained by the Principal, and:

- the animal is for educational purposes; or
- a dog that assists a person with a disability.

Our school community is diverse and may include people that are allergic or uncomfortable around dogs and other animals. We are also conscious of the health hazards that may be posed by dogs and other animals.

Whilst RPS understands that many families in our school community keep dogs and other animals 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 pets onto school grounds. If approval is given for an animal to be on RPS grounds or within a school building, the pet owner must ensure:

- pet dogs must be leashed at all times and in the control of a responsible adult.
- an adult must accompany the animal and ensure that it always remains under their control (a dog must be on a leash) whilst it is on RPS grounds or within a school building.
- pet dogs or any other animals must **not** be tied up on school grounds or left unaccompanied.
- families that bring any animals including dogs to school that exhibit signs of aggressive behaviour, bark, or jump may be asked to remove them from school premises.
- If dog owners choose to tie their dog up outside the RPS grounds, they are entirely responsible for the dog's behaviour and for cleaning up any mess left by the dog.

The Principal has the authority to prohibit certain dogs or other animals 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.

Assistance dogs

Ripponlea Primary School (RPS) 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 and)
- 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. RPS 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 school Principal.

Wellbeing dogs

RPS 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.

RPS has a wellbeing dog who supports our student's mental health and engagement. Our wellbeing dog is suitably trained and integrated into the school community. (see Risk Assessment)

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.

Where possible, RPS will only engage with low-allergen wellbeing dogs. RPS 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 one school wellbeing dog 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/carers and ensure appropriate steps are implemented to minimise health risks.
- The wellbeing dog will be appropriately identified while on school grounds by wearing a labelled jacket.
- 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.
- A wellbeing dog program will be communicated to parent/carers at the beginning of the year in the school newsletter, and on student enrolment. In these communications, parent/carers 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.

Stray dogs

Unaccompanied or stray dogs sighted at our school should be reported immediately to the Principal and/or 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.

- RPS promotes and supports the [Responsible Pet Ownership Program for Primary Schools](#) to educate students in the knowledge and understanding needed for responsible pet ownership and animal care.
- The use of animals as part of teaching at RPS will comply with the requirements of the Department of Education and Training policy on the [Care and Use of Animals in Victorian Schools](#).

COMMUNICATION

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

- Available publicly on our school's website
- Included in staff induction processes and staff training
- Included in staff handbook/manual
- Included in transition and enrolment packs
- Discussed at parent information nights/sessions
- Reminders in our school newsletter
- Discussed at student forums
- Hard copy available from school administration upon request

RELATED POLICIES

- Occupational Health and Safety
- Playground Supervision
- Visitors to the School
- Duty of Care

APPROVAL AND REVIEW

Created date	30 August 2022
Consultation	Governance Committee 19/10/22 School Council – 6 September 2022 Staff update – 10/11/2022
Endorsed by	Ripponlea School Council
Endorsed on	25 October 2022
Next review date	October 2025