

# Dogs at School Policy

## Ascot Vale Primary School

### December 2023



#### Help for non-English speakers.

If you need help to understand this policy, please contact the Ascot Vale Primary School office in person or on 9370 6507.

## 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.

## 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 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** refers 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**

Ascot Vale 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 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. Ascot Vale 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 school on 9370 6507.

## Wellbeing dogs

Ascot Vale Primary School 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.

Ascot Vale Primary School has access to a wellbeing dog who supports our students' mental health and engagement. Our wellbeing dog is suitably trained and integrated into the school community through Dogs Connect, delivered as part of the Department's Mental Health initiative.

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 the dog
- speaking and reading to the dog
- giving the dog commands that the dog is trained to respond to.

Ascot Vale Primary School 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, fears/phobias and cultural barriers around engaging with dogs.

Staff, students, and visitors are requested to notify the school of any health or safety concerns, including matters of cultural safety, 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/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 purple jacket or bandana.
- 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 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**

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

AVPS acknowledges the important role that pets, dogs in particular, play in our community and the positive impact dogs can have on family life. For many community members, dogs are an important part of the family. The school also acknowledges the benefits of walking to and from school in a family group with a dog.

Whilst AVPS 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:

- All dogs entering AVPS must be on short leads (not extendable leads) that are controlled by an adult, not by a child.
- Dogs must be on leash at all times when on school grounds, not just during school hours.
- Dog owners are requested to always be mindful that children are the first priority in a school environment and that some children are unfamiliar with and/or afraid of dogs.
- Dog owners are requested to assess the demeanour of their dog before entering the school grounds and are requested not to enter the school grounds if the demeanour of the dog is not suited to an environment where children are present.
- Dog owners are requested to leave dogs at home during school events, such as family gatherings and fetes.
- Dog owners must be familiar with their legal responsibilities and be aware that the school takes no responsibility for the behaviour or actions of their dogs.
- Staff can request that dog owners remove their dog from the school grounds.
- Incidents involving dog bites or injuries to children, adults or other animals will be reported by the school to the City of Moonee Valley.
- Dog owners must remove and dispose of dog excrement.
- Dog owners must abide by the City of Moonee Valley on-leash laws, as follows:
  - A Council order, made under the Domestic Animals Act 1994, requires dogs to be kept on a leash at all times when in public places.
  - This law does not apply to a Declared Dangerous, Menacing or Restricted Breed Dog or a greyhound which must meet the restraint requirements specified under the Domestic Animal Act 1994.

In instances where Dog Owners choose to leave their dog restrained outside school grounds (e.g. tied to a nearby post or tree), it is requested that they do so a safe distance from the school gate to allow for safe passage for pedestrians.

## **Stray dogs**

Unaccompanied or stray dogs sighted at our school should be reported immediately to the school on 9370 6507. 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 (or insert other online parent/carer/student communication method)
- 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
- Hard copy available from school administration upon request

## RELATED POLICIES AND RESOURCES

<https://avps.vic.edu.au/policies--standards.html>

## POLICY REVIEW AND APPROVAL

Policy last reviewed	4th December, 2023
Consultation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Ascot Vale Primary School, Student Wellbeing Team, October 2023</li><li>2. Ascot Vale Primary School, Policy Sub Committee, November 2023</li><li>3. Ascot Vale Primary School, School Council, November 2023</li><li>4. Ascot Vale Primary School, Student Voice Team, November 2023</li><li>5. Ascot Vale Primary School, Community Notification (Opt Out), January 2024</li></ol>
Approved by	Principal
Next scheduled review date	December 2027