

MORNINGTON SPECIAL DEVELOPMENTAL SCHOOL

Dogs and Animals on School Grounds



PURPOSE

To explain to our school community the rules and procedures we have in place in relation to dogs & animals attending our school grounds. This includes the procedures in place for any wellbeing dog/animal-assisted therapy or wellbeing program to support student engagement and mental health.

SCOPE

POLICY

Definitions

An **assistance dog/animal** 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/animal** 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/animal while on school grounds and when facilitating the animal wellbeing program.

A **pet dog/animal** relates to any dog/animal 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/animal** is any dog/animal that is not accompanied by their owner.

Assistance dogs/animals

Mornington Special Developmental 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/animals)
- 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. Mornington Special Developmental 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 Principal David Newport.

Wellbeing dogs/animals

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

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

- petting and/or hugging the animal
- speaking and reading to the animal
- giving the animal commands that the animal is trained to respond to.

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

Staff, students and visitors are requested to notify the school of any health or safety concerns about the wellbeing dog/animal. 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 animals standards and procedures

- There will be a maximum of one school wellbeing dog/animal at any given time.
- When the wellbeing dog/animal is on school grounds they will be under the supervision of a handler or staff member. The wellbeing dog/animal 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/animal and their handler where they will spend time when they are not working with students.
- The handler will ensure that the wellbeing dog/animal does not pose a health and safety risk to any student, employee, or other person at school and that the wellbeing dog/animal 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/animal 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/animal will be appropriately identified while on school grounds by wearing a colour jacket or bandana, this will ensure staff are aware that this is a therapy visitor.
- No student or staff member will be required to interact with the wellbeing dog/animal. If a student indicates that they wish to overcome any fear of dogs/animals, and with parent

permission, they can be supported to do so with coaching in a controlled environment with the wellbeing dog/animal and their handler.

- The wellbeing dog/animal 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/animal.

Pet dogs/animals

Mornington Special Developmental 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/animals prohibited

Whilst Mornington Special Developmental School understands that many families in our school community keep dogs/animals as pets, to ensure that our school remains a safe and inclusive place for everyone, pets are not permitted on school grounds under any circumstances.

Our school community is diverse and may include people that are allergic or uncomfortable around certain animals. We are also conscious of the health hazards that may be posed by animals. We ask that families please leave their pets at home.

The Principal has the authority to prohibit certain pets 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/animals 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.

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
- Discussed at student forums
- Hard copy available from school administration upon request

RELATED POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Duty of Care and *Visitors* policies is available on our webpage. www.morningtonds.vic.gov.au

POLICY REVIEW AND APPROVAL

Policy last reviewed	24 th August 2022
Consultation	Leadership
Approved by	Principal David Newport
Next scheduled review date	24 th August 2026