

DOGS AT SCHOOL POLICY - LINK POLICY

Statement

At Bellaire Primary School we believe that all our students should learn in an environment that:

- Offers an extensive engaging learning program for all students
- Ensures that all students become literate and numerate to enable them to fully participate in the workforce and society
- Provides the opportunity for students to develop and extend their cultural, artistic and sporting achievements
- Develops responsible, caring community members
- Prepares students to be technologically literate global citizens

The aim of this project is to improve wellbeing for students.

POLICY

This is a pilot program in place relating directly to student wellbeing. This policy governs the program, ensuring that the program maximises its full potential.

About the dog

Link is a 2-month-old Miniature Groodle who currently weighs 4 kilograms. Link generally remains calm and interacts well with the students. Link will be an incredible asset to the school to calm different students to a point where daily learning is noticeably more settled.

Link has additionally assisted students at different times of the school day who were displaying signs of distress and calmed children who have been hurt or upset in the schoolyard. Link has a natural ability to neutralise and distract students who may be feeling upset for a variety of reasons.

- Link is under the constant supervision of Mrs Prendergast.
- Link has rest time in the Leadership Office.
- Students are reminded to wash their hands after patting Link.
- The students are / will be taught around the guidelines including no more than two children patting Link at once.
- Any 'mess' made by Link is cleaned up straight away.

Risks in having a dog in a school environment

This policy covers all aspects of having a dog in a school environment; careful management abiding by this policy ensures there is a very low risk of harm.

Context

- Dog is owned by Mrs Prendergast
- Vet costs and general expenses are paid by the owner
- Dog is a Groodle, he has been chosen for his temperament, intelligence and his hypoallergenic non-moulting coat
- Dog will be based in Mrs Prendergast's office
- Student's will be educated on dog management
- Visitors to school will be informed of Dog at the school reception

Daily management of Dog

- Not allowed in school if unwell
- Will be kept on lead when moving between classrooms
- Be under the supervision of Mrs Prendergast or trained Dog monitors / staff at all times
- Continue to be trained in obedience, including release time inside the school grounds. Once Link is old enough he will be trained by Lead the Way.
- Be up to date with all vaccinations, worming and grooming
- Will not be taken off the site without Mrs Prendergast
- Will have a safe area inside the school and outside the school

- Dog will wear training vest to ensure he is recognised as a therapy support dog

Student expectations

- Will not have sole responsibility for Dog
- Will be reminded of appropriate behaviours around Dog with each contact
- Will always be reminded to respect Dog and remain calm around him at all times
- Be gentle and not make sudden movements or attempts to physically contact to Dog
- Not to stare into Dog's eyes
- Not to put their face near Dog
- Always approach Dog standing
- Always approach Dog in a calm slow manner
- Do not disturb Dog while eating, drinking or sleeping
- Never to feed Dog
- Continue beneficial learning into Dog's development
- Demonstrate collaboration of Dog's role with the whole school community, including; staff, parents, students, family members
- Dog pack to be carried by Dog monitors containing; excrement bags, rubber gloves and hand sanitiser
- Vests to be worn by Dog monitors, identifying them
- Will abide by the rule 'we don't hurt the Dog' Health and Safety
- All persons should always wash their hands after handling Dog
- Any dog excrement to be cleaned and disposed of appropriately by Mrs Prendergast or Dog monitors
- Where possible - External gates to the school to remained closed at all times while Dog is on site

If Dog is hurt or injured (accident or by student)

- Dog will be removed by Mrs Prendergast calmly from the situation if required
- Dog to be moved to his safe area
- Mrs Prendergast to take Dog to the Vet if required, South Valley Road Vet
- Parents informed if harm caused by student
- A full investigation from Principal / Assistant Principal

Opt Out

Parents will have the opportunity to 'opt-out' for their child by emailing the office.

SUPPORT FOR POLICY

- Lead the Way (therapy dog training) - <http://www.ltw.com.au/>
- Assistance Dogs Australia (advice and training) <http://www.assistedogs.org.au/>

REVIEW CYCLE

This policy was last updated in 2021 and is scheduled for view in [month/year].

APPENDIX 1: THERAPY DOG POLICY

PURPOSE

A variety of animals, including dogs, are becoming an ever-popular and worthwhile addition to schools across the country.

Children can benefit educationally and emotionally, increase their understanding of responsibility and develop empathy and nurturing skills through contact with a dog.

In addition to these benefits, children take great enjoyment from interaction with a dog. At Bellaire Primary School, we value the development of children's well-being along with their social education as highly as we value academia. We believe a school dog will be a unique way to enrich all areas of the children's wider education, skills and wellbeing. This policy applies to the approved school dog only (Link, a Groodle). It does not affect the school's right to prohibit other dogs on school property in accordance with our Dogs in School Policy.

RATIONALE

There are numerous benefits to having a dog in school, including but not limited to:

- The presence and care of a school dog enables children to put our school values into practice including: Kindness, Resilience, Respect;
- Children with low attendance can be encouraged to come to school with the incentive of a meet and greet from the school dog;
- With the Australian pet dog population around 4.8 million (RSPCA, 2018), children and adults are bound to come in contact with dogs at various points in their lives. Children without pet dogs have the opportunity to learn valuable life skills at school about how to safely interact with dogs when they are out in the community;
- With a dog to care for, children may be more mindful of their behaviour. Disruptive behaviours may be reduced; with children generally more aware of the impact of their behaviour and choices;
- We prioritise assisting children to develop a growth mindset: to be resilient learners who aren't afraid to make mistakes and persevere to acquire new skills. A dog is an excellent role model for this as training dogs takes time and repetition;
- Reading programs with dogs are becoming more prevalent and successful. Children who might be embarrassed to read aloud to the class or even adults are likely to be less scared to read to a dog. It might be less stressful for a child to read aloud to a dog than to a teacher or a peer. Dogs are used to encourage struggling readers to practise reading aloud and reluctant writers to read aloud what they have written;
- With the presence of a calm and well-trained dog, students may find increased social support and peer interaction;
- As a focus or context for learning, the school dog can provide an excellent resource and tangible motivation for children in all subject areas;
- The presence of a school dog may also be seen as an incentive for personal growth and achievement - with time caring or playing with the dog seen as a reward;
- A dog may give confidence to children as they make amazing listeners, providing the children with a sense of comfort and love. The dog can work with students on a one-one basis and will especially help those students who are feeling vulnerable, have suffered trauma or are going through upsetting/difficult times;
- Students may develop increased empathy through a connection with an animal;

- Numerous local schools are using dogs to help students build self-esteem; learn about positive and negative reinforcement, responsibility, and boundaries. They are reporting that dogs help with communication, teach kindness, and empower students;
- With a dog in the school, students have the opportunity to learn how to care for the animal. This includes walking and grooming. Involving students in the daily care of school dogs is a positive experience, promoting their own daily care;

Further information regarding research in this area can be found in this 2018 Article published by the ABC. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-20/therapy-dogs-can-help-reduce-stress-anxietydepression/9564120>

IMPLEMENTATION

- The dog is owned by Principal Suzanne Prendergast. There will only be one school dog at any given time.
- Parents/Carers have the right to remove consent for their child to have any direct contact with the dog. Any such wishes will be respected and upheld by the school. These wishes will be communicated by 'opting out' of contact with the school dog.
- Parents will be given the opportunity to send notification to the school to 'opt out'.
- Goodles are classified as 'low allergen' dogs. Bellaire School staff will take reasonable care to avoid, as far as possible, any contact between the school dog and pupils, other staff and visitors where allergic reactions are a known risk, however, the cooperation of all staff, visitors and pupils is requested in notifying the School of any known or suspected health concerns.
- Staff will be mindful of any student who has an allergy and monitor this on a case by case basis according to advice from the family. The dog's health and well-being is prioritised along with that of the children and staff. The dog will be insured. All vaccinations, worming treatments and vet checks will be up-to-date and paid for by the dog's owner. If the dog is ill, it will not be allowed into school.
- Anyone with a fear of dogs will be respected and never be forced to interact with the dog. They can receive coaching in a controlled environment with the dog to help them overcome their fears if they so wish.

EDUCATION AND STANDARDS

- There will be appropriate adult supervision at all times when the dog is present with pupils. Notices will be displayed to inform children, staff and visitors of the dog's presence. Pupils will be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dog.
- We will use information from the RSPCA and Responsible Pet Ownership Program to guide our conversations and lessons with children. Children should remain calm around the dog. They should not make sudden movements and must never stare into a dog's eyes as this could be threatening for the dog. Children should not put their face near a dog and should always approach it standing up. Children should never go near or disturb the dog if it is sleeping or eating. Students will not be allowed to play too roughly with the dog. If the dog is surrounded by a large number of children, the dog could become nervous and agitated. Therefore, the adult in charge of the dog must ensure that they monitor the surroundings at all times.
- Dogs express their feelings through their body language. Growling or baring of teeth indicate that the dog is feeling angry or threatened. Flattened ears, tail lowered or between their legs, hiding behind their owner, whining or growling are signs that the dog is frightened or nervous. If the dog is displaying any of these warning signs it will be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment.
- Children should not feed the dog or eat close to the dog. The dog will not be allowed to enter the school canteen, Stadium kitchen or any classroom where food is being prepared. Children should

always wash their hands after handling the dog. Any dog waste will be cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately. If any 'accidents' occur in areas where children have access to, appropriate measures will be taken to disinfect the affected site.

RELATED POLICIES

- Bellaire Primary School Dogs in Schools Policy
- Victorian Department of Education Teaching with Animals Policy.
<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/curriculum/Pages/animals.aspx>
- Related legislation and regulations
- Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1986)
- Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulations (2008)
- Wildlife Act (1975) and Regulations (2013) Review Cycle and Evaluation