

Dogs at School Policy - Therapy Dogs Link and Vinnie



Help for non-English speakers

If you need help to understand the information in this policy please contact our office reception staff.

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

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

POLICY

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

About the dogs

- Link, a 3-year-old Miniature Groodle, shares his role as a wellbeing dog at the school alongside another furry companion named Vinnie, a 7-year-old Groodle.
- Both dogs exude a sense of calm and effectively engage with the students.
- Their presence is expected to greatly benefit the school environment, contributing to a more tranquil learning atmosphere.
- Moreover, Link and Vinnie have proven to be invaluable in aiding students throughout various points in the school day, particularly those who exhibit signs of distress. They both are trained through Lead the Way, and have a Level 2 accreditation.
- They both have a special talent for soothing children who are upset or injured on the school grounds. Their innate ability to defuse tense situations and redirect students' attention is quite remarkable.
- It's worth noting that Mrs Prendergast diligently supervises Link, and Mr Raidme supervises Vinnie, ensuring their well-being and behaviour. The dogs take designated rest breaks in their leadership offices.
- To maintain hygiene, students are reminded to wash their hands after interacting with the dogs.
- Adhering to certain guidelines, no more than two children are allowed to pet the dogs simultaneously.
- In the event of any accidents or messes caused by the dogs, they are promptly cleaned up.
- With Link presence, the school community can look forward to an improved emotional atmosphere and enhanced learning experiences.

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

- Dogs are owned by Mrs Prendergast and Mr Raidme respectively. Dogs will be based in their office spaces
- Vet costs and general expenses are paid by the owner
- Breed is a Groodle. They have been chosen for his temperament, intelligence and his hypoallergenic non-moulting coat

- Student's will be educated on dog management
- Visitors to school will be informed of the dogs at the school reception

Daily management of Dog

- Dogs will be kept at home if feeling unwell.
- While transitioning between classrooms, the dogs will remain on a leash.
- Continuous supervision is imperative, either by Mrs Prendergast, Mr Raidme or by trained dog monitors/staff.
- Ongoing obedience training will be provided, including practicing controlled release within the school premises.
- Maintaining updated vaccinations, worming, and grooming is a requirement.
- The dog will not leave the premises without the accompaniment of Mrs Prendergast and Mr Raidme
- Designated safe zones both inside and outside the school will be allocated for the dog.
- A training vest will be worn by the dogs at times to clearly indicate his role as a therapy support dog.

Student expectations

- Individual students will not bear sole responsibility for the dog.
- Each interaction will serve as a reminder of appropriate behavior around the dog.
- Consistent reminders will emphasise the importance of respecting the dog and maintaining a calm demeanor around him.
- Interactions with the dog should be gentle, avoiding sudden movements or attempts at physical contact.
- It's advised not to stare directly into the dog's eyes.
- Refrain from positioning one's face close to the dog.
- Always approach the dog while standing.
- Approach the dog in a composed and unhurried manner.
- Avoid disturbing the dog during its eating, drinking, or sleeping times.
- Under no circumstances should anyone feed the dog.
- The ongoing learning process should contribute to the dog's development.
- The dog's role should be demonstrated as a collaborative effort involving the entire school community, including staff, parents, students, and family members.
- Dog monitors will carry a dog pack containing waste bags, rubber gloves, and hand sanitizer.
- The principle of "we don't hurt the dog" must be adhered to for health and safety reasons.
- Proper hand hygiene is crucial; all individuals should wash their hands after handling the dog.
- Any dog excrement must be appropriately cleaned and disposed of by Mrs Prendergast / Mr Raidme or the dog monitors.
- Whenever possible, external school gates should remain closed while the dog is on the premises.

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

- If necessary, Mrs Prendergast or Mr Raidme will calmly remove the dog from the situation.
- The dog will be relocated to its designated safe area.
- If needed, Mrs Prendergast or Mr Raidme will take the dog to the veterinarian, specifically South Valley Road Vet.
- Parents will be notified in cases where a student has caused harm to the dog.
- A thorough investigation will be conducted by the Principal and/or Assistant Principals

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.assisteddogs.org.au/>

REVIEW CYCLE

This policy was last updated in 2023.

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-student-stress-anxietydepression/9564120>

IMPLEMENTATION

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'.

Groodles 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/spaq/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