



McKinnon Primary School

Dogs at School Policy

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

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.

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 **stray dog** is any dog that is not accompanied by their owner.

Pet dogs

We recognise that many parents live locally and like to walk their children to and from school. While this is great for family relationships and physical health, it is also good for pet health too, therefore it is a great opportunity to bring pets along. MPS parents, carers and the community are reminded that the School is not a public place, and our principal has the authority to permit or decline entry to the school grounds and impose conditions of entry, if they wish.

Our school community is diverse, and may include people that are allergic or uncomfortable around dogs. Whilst the MPS leadership team understands that many families in our school community keep dogs as pets, we have a number of rules in place that we expect all families to follow, if they wish to bring their pet dog onto our school grounds:

- a responsible adult must be in control of the pet dog
- pet dogs must be leashed at all times
- pet dogs must not be tied up, either inside or just outside the school grounds or be accompanied by a minor
- families that bring dogs to school that exhibit signs of aggressive behaviour, bark, or jump may be asked to leave
- pet dogs should be kept to open areas so as any students, staff or parents with allergies or who may be uncomfortable can maintain a safe distance walking through the school
- pet dogs should not be led through walkways or between buildings where other community members are unable to avoid the dog
- the responsible adult that is in control of the pet dog is required to pick up and appropriately dispose of any excrement



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The principal has the authority to prohibit certain breeds and individual dogs 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

McKinnon 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 or a member of principal class 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)
- 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. McKinnon 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 Assistant Principal.

Wellbeing dogs

McKinnon 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.

McKinnon Primary School 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.

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, McKinnon Primary School will only engage with low-allergen wellbeing dogs. McKinnon 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 to dogs.



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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 from 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 another 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 colour 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.
- The 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 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 ensuring 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/carers/student communication method)
- Included in staff induction processes and staff training
- Included in transition and enrolment packs
- Reminders in our school newsletter
- Hard copy available from school administration upon request



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RELATED POLICIES AND RESOURCES

[McKinnon Primary Visitors Policy](#)

McKinnon Primary Duty of Care Policy

For information about Council Laws please visit <https://www.gleneira.vic.gov.au/services/pets-and-animals/problems-with-animals/dogs>

POLICY REVIEW AND APPROVAL

Policy last reviewed	November 2018 Reviewed March 2023
Consultation	Ed Sub Committee – April 2023 School Council – April 2023
Approved by	Principal – April 2023
Next scheduled review date	March 2027