

DOGS AT RICHMOND PRIMARY

POLICY



Help for non-English speakers

If you need help to understand the information in this policy please the office at Richmond Primary School on 94281909.

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 or 'reading' 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** 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.

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

Assistance dogs

Richmond 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)
- 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. Richmond 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 Principal Megan Dell on 94281909 or richmond.ps@education.vic.gov.au.

Wellbeing dogs

Richmond Primary School (RPS) 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.

Reading Dogs

RPS has two reading dogs who support our students' mental health and engagement. Our reading dogs are suitably trained and integrated into the school community.

Recognised benefits from working or visiting with a reading 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 reading dog include:

- petting and/or hugging the dog
- speaking and reading to the dog.

Where possible, RPS will only engage with low-allergen wellbeing dogs. RPS will take care to avoid, where possible, contact between the reading dog and students, staff, and visitors where the school is aware they have allergies to dogs.

Staff, students and visitors are requested to notify the school of any health or safety concerns about the reading dogs. 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.

Reading dog standards and procedures:

- When the reading dogs are on school grounds they will be under the supervision of a handler or staff member. The reading dogs will not be unsupervised or alone with students. A safe area separate to the school classrooms and offices will be allocated to the reading dogs and their handler where they will spend time when they are not working with students.
- The handler will ensure that the reading dogs do not pose a health and safety risk to any student, employee, or other person at school and that the reading dogs are 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 dogs trigger 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 coloured vest.
- No student or staff member will be required to interact with the reading 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 reading dog and their handler.
- The reading 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.

Richmond Primary School has developed a risk management plan in order to identify foreseeable risks of harm associated with having a reading dog at school and take reasonable steps to fulfill our duty of care, and other legal obligations.

Pet dogs

Dogs are an important part of life for many RPS families, and as such, are often included in day-to-day activities such as walking children to and from school.

While the school appreciates this inclusion and values the wide-ranging benefits of pet ownership, it also acknowledges other families (and individuals) can find contact with dogs stressful, even frightening. Dogs can behave unpredictably when excited, and this can lead to accidents such as falls and even dog bites.

To ensure that our school remains a safe and inclusive place for everyone, we have in place a number of clear and fair rules that we expect all families to follow if they wish to bring their pet dog onto school grounds:

- Pet dogs must be under the control of a responsible adult and be leashed **at all times**.
- Pet dogs cannot be tied-up and/or left unattended at any time.
- Owners must pick-up, and appropriately dispose of, their dog's excrement.
- Families that bring pet dogs to school that exhibit signs of aggressive behaviour, bark, or jump may be asked to remove the dog from school premises.
- Pet dogs are not allowed inside school buildings at any time.
- Families with pet dogs should not linger near entry gates to allow families that do not wish to interact with pet dogs to enter and exit the school freely.

RPS is committed to teaching children appropriate behaviour when approaching and interacting with all pets, in a bid to further minimise the risk of accidents and injury.

Richmond Primary 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. Our principal can also modify this policy to ensure the safety and wellbeing of staff, students and members of our school community at any time.

Existing council by-laws already cover issues such as dog restraint and the need for owners to pick up their dog's excrement. For clarity these matters are also dealt with by this policy.

Stray dogs

Unaccompanied or stray dogs sighted at our school should be reported immediately to the school office in person or on 94281909. 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:

- Included in staff induction processes and staff training
- Available publicly on our school's website
- Included in staff handbook/manual
- Reminders in our school newsletter
- Discussed at annual communications
- Discussed at parent information nights/sessions
- Discussed at student forums
- Hard copy available from school administration upon request

RELATED POLICIES AND RESOURCES

[Duty of Care Policy](#)

[Visitors Policy](#)

POLICY REVIEW AND APPROVAL

Policy last reviewed	2015
Education and Policy School Council subcommittee	May 2024
Approved by	Principal
Next scheduled review date	2027