



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 Bonbeach Primary School, we believe a school dog will be a unique way to enrich all areas of the children's wider education, skills and well-being.

This policy applies to the approved school dog only (Bodhi, a Labrador/ Retriever). 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:

- The presence and care of a school dog enables children to put our school values into practice: Getting Along, Persistence, Resilience, and 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 (Story Dogs). 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;
- 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-anxiety-depression/9564120>

Policy:

The dog is owned by Teacher Kylie Middleton. Parents/Carers will be informed of the intention to have a school dog before it comes to school. They will receive copies of the dog policy and risk assessment.

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.

Bonbeach Primary 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 Bonbeach Primary School of any known or suspected health concerns. Staff will be mindful of any student who has an allergy and will 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.

Students 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.

Students 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. Students should not put their face near a dog and should always approach it standing up. They 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, 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.

REVIEW CYCLE AND EVALUATION

This policy was last updated on October 2020 and is scheduled for review in October 2021.