



Ascot Vale West Primary School

The school strives to ensure that our students will become responsible, motivated, life-long learners who can confidently face future challenges.

Dogs on School Grounds Policy

1. PURPOSE AND RATIONALE:

This policy aims to ensure the safety and well-being of all members of the Ascot Vale West Primary School community by clearly communicating the rules and procedures in relation to dogs attending the school grounds.

The school respects the significant role that dogs play in the community and the educational experience they can provide. While the School understands the extremely positive impact they have on mental and physical health, it also acknowledges that some members of the school community can find contact with dogs stressful.

The Ascot Vale West Primary School community is diverse, consisting of children with a various needs and families with a range of backgrounds, beliefs and values. Members of the School community therefore have varied experiences with dogs. Some individuals are unfamiliar with, afraid of and / or allergic to dogs. This uncertainty and nervousness can also lead to anxiety in dogs, creating a higher risk of a negative incident.

School grounds are naturally unpredictable locations. There are many unexpected noises, sudden movements and heightened activity levels. The increased foot traffic during drop-off and pick-up times only compounds this, leading to an increase in the risk of injury to children through biting, scratching or jumping incidents.

It should also be noted that Ascot, the School Cat currently resides on the school grounds, and as her caretakers, the Ascot Vale West Primary School community is obligated to provide a safe and nurturing home for her. The presence of dogs on the school grounds can be stressful for Ascot and illicit a negative reaction from dogs, thereby placing Ascot and the general School community at risk.

This policy will also outline how therapy dogs are used within Ascot Vale West Primary School, specifically pertaining to the "Paw Pals" Program, currently being implemented in the school.

2. POLICY:

2.1 Pet Dogs

Pet dogs are not permitted to enter School grounds during the hours of 8:00 am to 4:30 pm on School days.

Pet owners must ensure the responsible handling of their dogs near school gates to provide for safe and comfortable movement of families. Gate access cannot be impeded in any way by the dog's presence. It is therefore requested that owners with pet dogs hold their dog securely on a short leash when in close proximity of the school and stand at a reasonable distance from entry / exit points to the school, allowing children and their families clear access to these points.

Dog owners should carefully consider the suitability of their dog's temperament around children, large groups of people and in busy locations prior to bringing a dog near the school grounds. Dogs who have a history of any aggression towards humans or other dogs should not be brought near the school.

Dog owners wishing to bring their dogs onto School grounds outside of School hours are expected to adhere to the Guidelines pertaining to Dogs on School Grounds Outside School Hours (see item 4 below).

2.2 Therapy Dogs

The school supports the use of therapy dogs for the benefit of its students subject to the conditions of this policy. Benefits from working or visiting with a therapy dog include reduced stress, improved physical and emotional well-being, lower blood pressure, decreased anxiety, improved self-esteem and normalisation of the environment, increasing the likelihood of successful academic achievement by the student.

Ascot Vale West Primary School currently offers The Paw Pals Animal Assisted Education program, created by MacKillop Education Services for students who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging from education.

The program focuses on building student engagement and confidence through animal assisted activities and individualised learning sessions working alongside trained therapy dogs and program facilitators. Paw Pals is a planned and structured student intervention with specific academic and educational goals.

Through group learning sessions students work in partnership with a therapy dog and program facilitator to develop enhanced skills in the areas of behaviour regulation, social and emotional learning, numeracy and literacy.

The aims of the PawPals program will address through a targeted focus on are:

- Increased social confidence and emotional intelligence
- Improved self-regulation and behavioural management skills
- Increased student engagement in academic based learning tasks
- Delivering positive learning experiences and opportunities for student success

Therapy Dog Standards and Procedures

- The handler / program facilitator assumes full responsibility for the therapy dog's care, behaviour and suitability for interacting with students and other members of the school community while the therapy dog is on School grounds.
- The handler is responsible for ensuring the therapy dog does not pose a health and safety risk to any student, employee, or any other member of the school community and that the therapy dog is brought to the school only when properly groomed, bathed, free of illness or injury and of the temperament appropriate for working with children and others in the school.
- The handler shall be solely responsible for the supervision and humane care of the therapy dog, including any feeding, exercising, and cleaning up after the therapy dog while it is in a School building or on School grounds. The handler shall not leave the therapy dog unsupervised or alone on School property at any time. The school is not responsible for providing any care, supervision or assistance to the therapy dog.

2.3 Stray Dogs

Unaccompanied or stray dogs sighted on school grounds should be reported immediately to the Ascot Vale West Primary School office. School staff will contact the relevant municipal authorities for assistance in managing and removing a stray dog from the school grounds, ensuring the safety of staff and students.

3. DEFINITIONS:

- A **therapy dog** is a dog that has been individually trained, evaluated and registered with his/her handler to provide animal assisted therapy.
- A **handler** is a volunteer who owns a therapy dog and who has been individually trained, evaluated and registered with his/her therapy dog to provide animal assisted therapy.
- A **stray dog** is a dog that does not appear to have an owner in sight, has been separated from its owner, is lost or unaccompanied by an owner or handler.
- A **declared dangerous dog** is a dog that has been listed as such due to the fact that they have previously attacked, are kept to guard an industrial property, or have been trained to attack.
- **School hours** are defined as those times when students and the greater school community are unlikely to be onsite and have therefore been identified as 8:00 am – 4:30 pm on school days.

4. GUIDELINES: Dogs on School Grounds Outside School Hours

Dogs are permitted on School grounds outside of School hours (School hours are defined as 8:00 am – 4:30 pm on school days) under the following conditions:

- Dog owners are requested to be mindful that Ascot Vale West Primary School is open to the wider community outside School hours and it is therefore an environment where children are commonly present.
- Dogs are not permitted on School grounds outside of School hours during Principal approved events where Ascot Vale West Primary School students will be present, such as Working Bees, Parents' and Friends' Association events, Parent Teacher Interviews, Multicultural Night and all other School events.
- Dogs must be on leash at all times when on School grounds.
- Dogs are not permitted in the playground area at any time.
- Declared dangerous dogs are not permitted on School grounds at any time.
- Dog owners are asked to respect the school grounds by cleaning up after their dog.

Dog owners are requested to evaluate whether their dog's demeanour is suitable to attend a community space before entering the school grounds outside of school hours and are requested not to enter the school grounds if their dog is not suited to an environment where children are present.

Dog owners must be familiar with their legal responsibilities and be aware that the school takes no responsibility for the behaviour or actions of their dogs.

5. MONITORING, REPORTING AND REVIEW:

Staff will actively monitor the presence of dogs on school grounds and at gates to ensure adherence to this policy.

Matters in breach of this policy can be confidentially reported to the Principal or Vice Principal.

7. REFERENCES:

- City of Moonee Valley Domestic Animal Management Plan 2017-2021:
<https://mvcc.vic.gov.au/local-laws/>
- Animal Welfare Victoria, legal requirements for dog owners:
<https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/livestock-and-animals/animal-welfare-victoria/dogs/legal-requirements-for-dog-owners>
- Mackillop Family Services Paw Pals Program:
<https://www.mackillop.org.au/programs/paw-pals>

REVISION HISTORY:

This policy was ratified by School Council on 13 September 2021. It will be reviewed as determined by School Council or every 3 years.