



## South Thornlie Primary Dogs on School Premises Policy

**INTRODUCTION:** *This policy applies to the approved school dogs only. It does not affect the school's right to prohibit other dogs on school property in accordance with our Dogs in School Policy.*

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 South Thornlie 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 students' wider education, skills and well-being.

**POLICY:** This policy outlines the guidelines for the school dogs being in the school and for his/her care and care of the students and staff. By following the guidelines of this policy we believe that the risk to having a dog on the premises is minimised.

**AIM:** To provide guidelines for dogs in the school, their use, suitability and well-being, and to provide students with applied learning opportunities and the companionship of an animal in the school grounds.

**RATIONALE AND BENEFITS:** There are numerous benefits to having a dog in school, including but not limited to:

- **Attendance** - Students experience a greater willingness to be active in the school environment when there is a school dog. Evidence demonstrates attendance rates improve as students look forward to seeing a dog and interacting with them. For students with low attendance, they can be encouraged to come to school with the incentive of a meet and greet from the school dog.
- **Communication**- A dog in school gives students a shared interest with other members of the school community. This helps them interact and build connections that they may have struggled to do otherwise. Wellbeing dogs can even be used with literacy programs as students may be less self-conscious reading to dogs than teachers or their peers.
- **Leadership** - A school dog may give students a sense of responsibility. They learn how to take care of the dog and how to delegate care which can help grow their leadership skills.
- **Behaviour** - Students can see the impact of their actions on their wellbeing dog. This helps them understand how their behaviour impacts people around them. As a result, children learn to be more empathetic and understanding. 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 being seen as a reward or incentive.
- **Students dealing with trauma** - Dogs can assist students who have anxiety or communication difficulties, have experienced trauma, or need help to bolster their resilience. They can also help with sensory processing, stress management and emotional literacy.
- **Confidence and empathy** - A dog may give confidence to students, as they make amazing listeners, providing the students with a sense of comfort and love. The dog can work with students on a one-one basis and may be especially helpful to those students who are feeling vulnerable or are going through upsetting/difficult times. Students may develop increased empathy through a connection with an animal.
- **Student engagement**- For children, animals can help with emotional regulation, social connection, and communication. They can help engage students in many curriculum areas by supporting them in feeling less self-conscious than they may feel around teachers and peers. With the presence of a calm and well-trained dog, students may find increased social support and peer interaction.

**Curriculum** - As a focus or context for learning, the school dog can provide an excellent resource and tangible motivation for children in all subject areas. Several Western Australian schools are using dogs in their learning programs, allowing students to have the opportunity to learn how to care for the animal. Involving students in the daily care of a school dog is a positive experience, promoting their own daily care and self-management.

- **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 practice reading aloud and reluctant writers to read aloud what they have written.

## **ASSESSMENT & IMPLEMENTATION:**

The integration of a dog as a support to school programs must meet the following requirements:

- Approval must be sought from the Principal before a dog may enter school grounds.
- The teachers/trainers will have familiarised themselves with the Department of Education 'Use of Animal in Schools' policy.
- It must be deemed that a dog is necessary for the educational outcomes of the activity.
- The dog must be clean, groomed, wormed and be free of any parasites such as fleas.
- All dogs will have been successfully assessed for sound nature, interaction with children, cats and other dogs, well as being in general good health before being allowed on school grounds.

## **INDUCTION**

Approved dogs will go through a familiarisation induction with students. Such dogs will be introduced to the students ensuring that they are aware of how to behave when they are around a dog.

## **RESPONSIBILITY**

Care of the dog on school premises will be responsibility of a designated staff member. The dog will not be left solely in the vicinity of students, staff or visitors without the nominated staff member being present.

### **The designated staff member will ensure the dog:**

- is kept in a secure location, has access to water and a comfortable place to rest.
- does not come to school if he/she is unwell.
- is kept on a lead when moving between rooms/classrooms during high traffic times.
- is monitored at all times.
- has a safe area where he/she can rest away from students/staff.
- is well cared for, fed and watered during the day.
- is regularly be taken to an appropriate location for toileting and any scat is disposed of appropriately.
- a 'dog pack' containing excrement bags, rubber gloves and hand sanitizer will be with the dog at all times.
- is always be treated with care and respect for its health and well-being.

NB: Vet expenses are paid by the owner, and will not be the responsibility of the school at any time.

### **Teachers and other school staff will ensure the students:**

- don't have sole responsibility for the dog.
- are reminded of appropriate behaviours around the dog with each contact.
- are regularly reminded to respect the dog and always remain calm around them.
- are encouraged to be gentle and caring when interacting with the dog.

**In the event of accident or injury all normal school operational and notification procedures will be adhered to.**

## **Research papers on 'Dogs in Schools' Programs**

[Faculty of Health, Medicine, Nursing and Behavioural Sciences - Deakin University](#)

[Barbara Fisher - Avondale College of Higher Education](#)

[Dr Reesa Sorin - James Cook University](#)

Lloyd, J. & Sorin, R. (2014) "I liked that you can pat the dog and interact with it and read to it" – Engaging the imagination: The effect of the Classroom Canines™ program on reading and social/emotional skills of selected primary school students. 2014 Imaginative Education Research Group (IERG) 9th International Conference on Imagination and Education - Imagination: The Great workhorse of learning, July 2-4, 2014, <http://ierg.ca/how-we-can-help/conferences/conference-proceedings/> pp.1-5, Vancouver, Canada.

## **STORY DOGS**

STPS participates in the Story Dogs program, which is a fun and unique reading program that improves children's reading and communication skills by reading to a trained companion dog and its handler. The Story Dog program is primarily designed for students with reading challenges, however, students may be chosen by the classroom teacher to participate in the program as a reward or as an alternative reading activity. Identified students will spend a reading session of approximately 20 minutes with the Story Dog team once per week. In these sessions each student works one-on-one with the Story Dog team. Books are chosen to suit the student's reading level.

At STPS we have Dutch, a Great Dane, currently coming in twice a week with his owner. Dutch and his owner work with identified students across the school who have parental permission to participate in this program.

## **ASSISTANCE DOGS**

Disability **Discrimination Act** 1992 (WA) 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 including those who are being trained by South Thornlie Primary staff who are undertaking an accredited assistance animal program (such as Seeing Eye Dogs Australia).

The Principal can lawfully ask a person to produce evidence that an animal:

- is trained specifically to assist a person alleviate the effects of a disability (eg. seeing eye 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. South Thornlie 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.

## **PET DOGS**

South Thornlie Primary School is not a public place, and the Principal has the authority and responsibility to permit or decline entry to school grounds and impose conditions of entry to ensure the safety of the community. Whilst South Thornlie Primary School values the role dogs play in our community and the many benefits of family dog ownership, we also need to ensure that our school remains a safe and inclusive place for everyone. Dogs are not permitted on school grounds, in classrooms or other school buildings unless specific approval has been granted by the Principal.

## **STRAY DOGS**

Unaccompanied or stray dogs sighted at our school should be reported immediately to the school office. School staff will contact City of Gosnells Rangers for assistance in managing and removing a stray dog from school grounds to ensure staff and student safety.

## **Related Legislation/Guidelines**

- Use of Animals in Public Schools Policy (Education Department of WA)
- Animal Welfare Act 2002 (WA)
- Animal Ethics Committee of Western Australia Guidelines Related Policies
- Care and Use of Animals Policy
- Child Code of Conduct Policy
- Code of Conduct Policy
- Duty of Care Policy
- Occupational Health and Safety Policy

## **Additional Information**

If you require any additional information, please contact the school. We have some FAQs that we can make available to you upon request.

## **'Opting Out' of the 'Dogs in Schools' Program**

If your child has allergies, or cannot have contact with dogs for any other reason, parents/caregivers have the option to notify us so that we can ensure their child does not come into close proximity of the dog/s.

No child will be expected to interact with any dog if they do not wish to do so.

An 'opt out' form can be obtained from the front office at any time.