

Dogs at School Policy

Summary

Table 1 - Document details

Publication date	August 2023
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Related legislation/applicable section of legislation	Common law duty of care Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic) Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic) Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) Rowville Secondary College Visitors Policy
Related policies, procedures, guidelines, standards, frameworks	Duty of Care Policy
Approved by	Principal
Approval date	August 2023
Noted By	School Council
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1. 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.

2. POLICY

Assistance Dogs

Rowville Secondary College 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 and)
- 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. Rowville Secondary College 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 one of the Assistant Principals at the College.

Wellbeing Dogs

Rowville Secondary College 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, and to promote engagement and connectedness within the school community, while under the guidance and supervision of their handler and other school staff.

Rowville Secondary College has wellbeing dogs who supports our students' mental health and engagement. Our wellbeing dogs are suitably trained and integrated into the school community through Dogs Connect, delivered as part of the Department's Mental Health initiative.

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.

Rowville Secondary College will only engage with low-allergen wellbeing dogs. Rowville Secondary College 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.

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 each campus, at any given time.
- When a 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 to 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 other 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 triangular Dogs Connect Bandana.
- 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.

Pet dogs

Rowville Secondary College is not a public place, and our principal has the authority to permit or decline entry to school grounds and impose conditions of entry.

Whilst Rowville Secondary College understands that many families in our school community keep dogs as pets, to ensure that our school remains a safe and inclusive place for everyone, pet dogs are not permitted on school grounds under any circumstances.

Rowville Secondary College has wellbeing dogs on site who will be appropriately identified. Pet dogs have the potential to cause risk to the wellbeing dog and the wellbeing dog program. As such, we ask that families please leave their pet dogs at home or safely tether them outside school grounds when attending our school or school events.

Teachers/other staff, are not permitted to bring pet dogs to school without the prior approval of the principal or an assistant principal. Due to Rowville Secondary College's wellbeing dog program, no staff will be granted permission for dogs on site on days where wellbeing dogs are on site.

The conditions for teachers/staff granted permission to bring pet dogs to school are;

- pet dogs must be leashed at all times and in the control of a responsible adult
- pet dogs must not be tied up on school grounds or left unaccompanied
- teachers/staff that bring dogs to school that exhibit signs of aggressive behaviour, bark, or jump may be asked to remove the dog from school premises immediately.

The Principal has the authority to prohibit certain 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.

Stray dogs

Unaccompanied or stray dogs sighted at our school should be reported immediately to the school office. School staff will contact one of the following 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;

- Rowville Veterinary Clinic
- Knox City Council
- Victoria Police

Additional to this, the core wellbeing dog team will be notified as soon as possible.

3. MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REVIEW

- This policy will be reviewed in May 2026
- This policy will be approved by the College Principal through consultation with the RSC School Council
- This policy will be monitored and evaluated by the RSC Policy and Planning Sub-committee

4. COMMUNICATIONS

This policy will be communicated to our school community in the following ways:

- Available publicly on our school's website
- Included in staff induction processes
- Discussed at annual staff briefings/meetings
- Discussed at parent/carer information nights/sessions
- Hard copy available from school administration upon request

5. DEFINITIONS

Parent – includes a guardian and every person who has parental responsibility for the child, including parental responsibility under the *Family Law Act 1975 (Cth)* and any person with whom a child normally or regularly resides.