

MONTPELLIER PRIMARY SCHOOL

DOGS AT SCHOOL POLICY



Help for non-English speakers

If you need help to understand this policy, please contact the Language Loop: Phone 03 9280 1955 for interpreters or call our school office on (03) 5243 2521.

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 Story Dog dog program to support student engagement and literacy.

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 **story dog** is a dog that has been suitably trained and placed into the school to deliver one-on-one reading sessions with children in our early years school community. For further information, please visit <https://www.storydogs.org.au/>

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

Montpellier 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 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. Montpellier 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 the school office on 5243 2521.

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Story dogs

Montpellier Primary School supports the use of story dogs for the benefit of our students subject to the conditions of this policy. The role of the story dog is to support the engagement in literacy of our students, under the guidance and supervision of their handler and other school staff.

The story dogs are suitably trained and integrated into our early years school community.

Recognised benefits from working or visiting with the story dogs include:

- reduced stress and anxiety, including decreased learner anxiety behaviours
- 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 story dogs include:

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

Where possible, Montpellier Primary School will only engage with low-allergen wellbeing dogs. Montpellier Primary School 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 story 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.

Story dog standards and procedures

- There will be a maximum of one school story dog at any given time.
- When the story dog is on school grounds they will be under the supervision of a handler or staff member. The story dog will not be unsupervised or alone with students. A safe area separate to the school classrooms and offices will be allocated to the story dog and their handler where they will spend time when they are not working with students.
- The handler will ensure that the story dog does not pose a health and safety risk to any student, employee, or other person at school and that the story 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 story dog will be appropriately identified while on school grounds by wearing a colour jacket.



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Pet dogs

Montpellier 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.

Whilst Montpellier Primary School 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.

Our school community is diverse, and may include people that are allergic or uncomfortable around dogs. We are also conscious of the health hazards that may be posed by dogs. 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.

Stray dogs

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

- Available publicly on school website
- Hard copy available from school administration upon request.

RELATED POLICIES AND RESOURCES

- Duty of Care Policy
- MPS Visitors policy

POLICY REVIEW AND APPROVAL

Policy last reviewed	29/05/2023
Approved by	Principal
Communication and feedback	This policy is always accessible on the school website and feedback from the community can be directed to the school at any time for the School Council to consider.
Next scheduled review date	2027

If changes from the Department of Education occur or if there is feedback from the community, this policy will be reviewed.