

SCHOOL DOG POLICY

Related Merici Policies

Student Safety and Wellbeing, <https://www.merici.act.edu.au/school-policies/student-safety-and-wellbeing>

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 Merici College, we value the development of children's well-being along with their social education as highly as we value academia. We believe school dogs will be a unique way to enrich all areas of the children's wider education, skills and wellbeing.

In summary, academic research has shown that dogs working and helping in the school environment can achieve the following:

1. Improve academic achievement
2. Increase literacy skills
3. Calming behaviours
4. Increase social skills and self-esteem
5. Increase confidence
6. Teach responsibility and respect to all life
7. Help prevent school refusing
8. Motivate children who are often less attentive

This policy applies to the approved school dogs only. It does not affect the school's right to prohibit other dogs on school property.

Rationale

There are numerous benefits to having dogs in school, including but not limited to:

- The presence and care of school dogs enables children to put our school values into practice: Kindness, Resilience, Respect;
- Children with low attendance can be encouraged to come to school with the incentive of a meet and greet from a 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 dogs 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. 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 calm and well-trained dogs, students may find increased social support and peer interaction;
- As a focus or context for learning, school dogs can provide an excellent resource and tangible motivation for children in all subject areas;
- The presence of school dogs may also be seen as an incentive for personal growth and achievement - with time caring or playing with the dog seen as a reward;
- Dogs may give confidence to children as they make amazing listeners, providing the children with a sense of comfort and love. Dogs 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;
- Numerous local schools are using dogs to help students build self-esteem; learn about positive and negative reinforcement, responsibility, and boundaries. They are reporting that dogs help with communication, teach kindness, and empower students;
- With dogs 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-anxietydepression/9564120>

Policy

Merici College currently has a few fully vetted and approved school dogs. There will be appropriate adult supervision at all times when the dogs are present with pupils.

Notices will be displayed to inform children, staff and visitors of the dogs' presence.

Students will be reminded of what is appropriate behaviour around the dogs. The College staff will review information from the RSPCA and Responsible Pet Ownership Program to guide conversations and lessons with children.

Children should remain calm around the dogs. They should not make sudden movements and must never stare into their eyes as this could be threatening for the dogs. Children should not put their face near a dog and should always approach it standing up. Children should never go near or disturb the dogs if they are sleeping or eating. Students will not be allowed to play too roughly with the dogs.

If the dogs are surrounded by a large number of children, the dogs could become nervous and agitated. Therefore, the adult in charge of the dogs 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 dogs are feeling angry or threatened. Flattened ears, tail lowered or between their legs, hiding behind their owner, whining or growling are signs that the dogs are frightened or nervous. If the dogs are displaying any of these warning signs, they will be immediately removed from that particular situation or environment.

Children should not feed the dogs or eat close to the dogs.

The dogs will not be allowed to enter the school kitchen, or any classroom where food is being prepared.

Children should always wash their hands after handling the dogs.

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.

Procedures

Parents/Carers will be informed by letter that the College has dogs. There will be an 'opting-out' of contact for students who do not wish to have any direct contact with the dogs. Parents will also be requested to advise if their child/ren has an allergy to dogs. The school dogs will be 'low allergen' dogs. Merici College staff will take reasonable care to avoid, as far as possible, any contact between the school dogs 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 College of any known or suspected health concerns. Staff will be mindful of any student who has an allergy and monitor this on a case by case basis according to advice from the family.

The dogs' health and well-being is prioritised along with that of the children and staff. The dogs will be insured. All vaccinations, worming treatments and vet checks will be up-to-date and paid for by the dogs' owners. If one or both of the dogs are ill at any given time, they will not be allowed into school.

Anyone with a fear of dogs will be respected and never be forced to interact with the dogs. They can receive coaching in a controlled environment with the dogs to help them overcome their fears if they so wish.

Parents will also have access to the School Dog Policy and Risk Assessment on the College's website.

If someone reports having an issue with the dog/s, this information must be passed to the Principal or a Deputy Principal as soon as possible.

Processes for students to access time with the school dogs will be developed by the House Coordinators and School Counsellor. Where possible, the name of the student, date and time spent with the school dog/s, as well as observations of the child's interaction with the school dog/s, will be recorded.

Risk Assessment

Area: Interaction with pupils and staff				
Reason: To ensure the school dogs interact appropriately at all times				
Step 1 Identify the hazards	Step 2 Who might be harmed & how?	Step 3 What are you already doing?	Risk Rating Trivial / low / medium / high / stop	Step 4 Is anything further needed?
School dog biting a child or adult	Child or adult could be hurt if the school dog bites	<p>The school dog is being trained not to bite. When the dog is approached in the correct way there is very limited danger.</p> <p>Roxie lives with Mrs Masters (Principal) and her husband, as well as visiting children who handle her all the time to ensure that she is used to interaction with people.</p> <p>Milo lives with Mrs Harrold-Carter (Head of Mission and Community) and her family.</p>	Low	Ensure that children and adults do not interact with the school dog without supervision. Ensure that all interaction with the school dog is completed in the agreed way
Running loose	If the school dog was to run loose, the dog could accidentally hurt children/adults or damage property	The school dog will be contained at all times either in an office (with a clear sign on the door), in a dog cage or on a lead	Low	Monitor that the equipment used to contain the school dog is appropriate and effective.
Direct interaction with children/ staff	If the school dog is allowed to interact when not in the correct frame of mind children/ staff could be scratched	No interaction is allowed without authorisation. Interaction will be cancelled if the school dog shows signs of incorrect behaviour. Rewards/praise will be given to reinforce the desired behaviour	Medium	Ensure that the dog is approached in the agreed manner

Destruction of materials	If allowed the school dog may chew/destroy some school materials/resources	The school dog will be contained at all times. The school dog will have her own toys to play with and normal school resources will be removed	Low	Monitor that the equipment used to contain the school dog is appropriate and effective
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Area: Student and staff interaction with the school dog

Reason: To ensure the school dog is effectively supported to interact appropriately at all times

Step 1 Identify the hazards	Step 2 Who might be harmed & how?	Step 3 What are you already doing?	Risk Rating Trivial / low / medium / high / stop	Step 4 Is anything further needed?
Incorrect / inconsistent interaction with dog	If a child/adult interact with the school dog in the incorrect or inconsistent way this will affect the school dogs training and have a negative impact on future interaction	Agreed guidelines that must be followed at all times when interacting with the school dog. There cannot be any interaction with the school dog without authorisation	Medium	If there are any inconsistencies in approach with the school dog the adult/child will have the interaction stopped
Use of rewards / treats	Children and adults could be harmed if the school dog is over excited when receiving a reward/treat. Children/adult must clean their hands after handling treats	Hand wash and sanitiser will be available to all adults and children. Treats will only be given to the school dog with authorisation	Low	Reminders to the children to wash hands. Treats to be locked away to ensure they can only be used after authorisation
Student/staff knowledge of interaction with a puppy / dog	If adults and children have limited knowledge of how to interact correctly this could result in harm to the school dog or themselves	The Principal will direct and instruct staff and students who to interact with the dog.	Medium	There will be an agreed format for how to interact with the school dog

Area: Hygiene / Health				
Reason: To ensure that students, staff and the school dog do not have an increased risk of illness as a result of the school dog being in school				
Step 1 Identify the hazards	Step 2 Who might be harmed & how?	Step 3 What are you already doing?	Risk Rating Trivial / low / medium / high / stop	Step 4 Is anything further needed?
Worms / fleas	If the school dog is not treated for worms there is a danger that germs can be transferred to humans	The school dog will follow a flea and worming programme as agreed by the vets.	Low	Monitor that vet visits happen promptly and take actions suggested by the vet
Faeces	If a child/adult come into contact with the school dog's faeces some germs could be transferred	The school dog will only be walked under supervision. No child will be asked to pick up the dog's faeces, this will always be undertaken by the adult in supervision	Low	The school dog will be walked outside of the school premises.
Allergies	If a child is allergic to dogs, they could become unwell	Children will not be in contact with the school dog if we have received a negative response form from parents/guardians. If a child has an allergy the school dog will not carry out tasks near the child	Medium	
Children's access to school dog's resource	If a child has access to the school dog's treats/food and eats some they could become unwell	All of the school dog's resources will be locked away. No child will be allowed to enter the school dog's area without authorisation	Low	Remind children not to enter area

Contact with food preparation areas	If the school dog enters a food preparation area this could be unhygienic	The school dog will be in a contained area or on a lead at all times around school. The dog will never enter the school kitchen	Trivial	
Cleaning hands after interacting with the school dog	If hands are not cleaned children/adults could become unwell	All adults and children will clean their hands after interaction with the school dog	Low	Remind children and adults to clean their hands

Area: Activities involving the school dog, including walking

Reason: To ensure that the school dog has a meaningful and safe impact on the school community

Step 1 Identify the hazards	Step 2 Who might be harmed & how?	Step 3 What are you already doing?	Risk Rating Trivial / low / medium / high / stop	Step 4 Is anything further needed?
Walking the dog on and off the site	Children could be harmed during a walk offsite if they are not focussed. Children might be harmed if they do not interact correctly when the school dog is on a walk	If the school dog is taken off site normal risk assessed procedure will take place. No children will take the lead when the school dog goes for a walk unless authorised to do so by accompanying adult. No children will be allowed to interact with the school dog when she is on a walk unless permission is given	Medium	Careful consideration needs to be given to the amount of time the school dog is allowed to walk around school during play/lunchtimes
Visits to classroom	If the school dog visits a class and the children do not follow the correct procedure the dog may become over excited	The school dog will initially only make classroom visits with a member of teaching staff. The children in classrooms will follow the agreed procedure or interaction will stop	Medium	Careful consideration will be given to when the school dog can visit classrooms and be under the control of the class teacher or LSA

Being fed	If a child tries to interact when the school dog is eating, the dog may respond aggressively	No child will be allowed in the school dog's contained area when the dogs are eating. Children may prepare the food for the school dog (washing their hands afterwards). All feeding will be supervised	Low	Reminders to the children feeding the school dog to not interact when the dog is eating
School events	If the school dog is overwhelmed, the dog may become boisterous	The school dog will only attend school events if they are appropriate and will be under the control of a supervising adult	Low	Monitor the school dog's reaction to school events. If the school events are too overwhelming the school dog might not attend school on that day
Other dogs (on and off the site)	If the school dog is overwhelmed, the dog may become boisterous	No other dogs will be allowed on the school premises without constant adult supervision	Low	Monitor the school dogs' reaction when out walking
		At no time will the school dog be walked by a child and as a result if another dog is seen this will be dealt with by the supervising adult		

Approved by: Merici College Board and Executive

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