



Swallowcliffe School P-6 Wellbeing Dog Policy

Rationale

At Swallowcliffe School, we are committed to supporting the social and emotional wellbeing of all students. Over recent years, we have observed an increase in the number of students experiencing anxiety and other emotional challenges. Our school continually seeks effective, evidence-based strategies to promote student wellbeing, foster resilience and create a safe, supportive learning environment.

The implementation of a Wellbeing Dog program is one such strategy. Research and school-based evidence demonstrate that wellbeing dogs can provide a range of benefits to students, including but not limited to:

- Reducing levels of anxiety, stress, and depression
- Providing comfort and emotional support during difficult times
- Easing feelings of loneliness and social isolation
- Encouraging physical activity, exercise and playfulness
- Promoting a sense of belonging and connection to the school community
- Improving students' confidence when reading, presenting, or participating in group activities
- Supporting the development of social and emotional skills, such as empathy and teamwork

Wellbeing dogs are gentle, non-judgemental companions who can offer unique emotional support to students. At Swallowcliffe School, the wellbeing dog's roles may include accompanying identified students on walks to help manage anxiety, participating in classroom sessions to encourage confidence in reading or speaking, and providing reassurance or support during emotional or challenging situations.

The Wellbeing Dog Policy aims to ensure that the introduction of a wellbeing dog is managed safely and responsibly, with the wellbeing of students, staff, and the dog as the highest priorities. This policy outlines the procedures, roles, and responsibilities required for a successful program at Swallowcliffe School.

Department of Education Policy

Definitions and conditions for dogs and animal assisted interventions

Group	Type	Definition	Example of service, intervention or interaction	Conditions
Service Animal	Assistance dog ¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A dog trained to provide assistance to a person with a disability • The handler of an assistance dog must be over 18 years of age and must be present at all times. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guide dog • Hearing dog • PFD dog 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certified handler must be with dog at all times.
	Animal Assisted Therapy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivered by a professional for an individual • Planned and structured intervention • Progress is measured and professionally documented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • psychologist with certified therapy animal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certified handler is with dog at all times • on site for the planned intervention only
Animal Assisted Interventions (AAI) ²	Animal Assisted Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivered by an educational professional or allied health professional • Academic or social and emotional goals • Measured by academic or social and emotional progress • Not professionally documented for an individual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog assisted reading program • Delivered by a certified volunteer with set hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certified handler is with dog at all times • only on site for the planned education activity
	Animal Assisted Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal interaction with a trained handler and certified canine team • Motivational, educational or recreational • AAA teams may work more formally with a professional educator or allied health service on specific goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visiting companion animals • Crisis response animals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certified handler is with dog at all times • only on site for the planned activity
Wellbeing animal/facility animal		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog is formally trained and of appropriate age (over 18 months; DFE recommendation) • A handler or approved member of staff is with the dog at all times, this person is responsible for all interactions with students and staff • Works to a clear timetable with a dedicated space for rest and relaxation without interruption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Library dog • Wellbeing dog 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approved handler is with the dog at all times • Time on site is rostered appropriately and is not more than 3 hours per school day • A dedicated rest space and outdoor toileting space is provided away from students and staff

¹ The Dog and Cat Management Act 2000
² IANAO (2018). The IANAO definitions for animal assisted intervention and guidelines for wellness of animals involved in AAI. Retrieved from https://iaiao.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/iaiao_well_updated-2018-#na

Department for Education policy around conditions for dogs and animal assisted interventions on DfE sites below. Please note that in our circumstance Duke would be considered as a Wellbeing animal / Facility animal (final row in table.)

DfE School or preschool considerations

The following considerations should be undertaken before deciding to introduce a service animal or animal assisted intervention:

<https://edi.sa.edu.au/educating/programs->

[initiatives/animal-ethics/suitable-animals](https://edi.sa.edu.au/educating/programs-initiatives/animal-ethics/suitable-animals)

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What the DfE Policy Means for Duke at Swallowcliffe School P-6

- A team of staff will train as the Wellbeing Dog Core Group through Dogs Connect.
- An official handler will be with Duke at all times, responsible for ensuring safe interactions with students, staff and members of the community.
- Duke has a clear timetable and is not rostered on for more than 3 hours in the school day.
- Duke has a dedicated rest space (Mrs. D's office, and a sign will be on the door when it is rest time) and an outdoor toileting space (outside the front staff entrance) away from students and staff for rest and relaxation without disruption.
- Duke's owner is responsible for all costs associated with the dog (food, regular vet checks).
- The school is responsible for costs for training the staff and Duke for his role at school.

Role of the Owner

- The owner is responsible for providing a safe, calm, and happy environment for Duke, ensuring access to appropriate shelter, food, water, and affection at all times.
- Duke will receive regular veterinary check-ups, be kept up to date with vaccinations, and consistently treated for fleas and worms. Regular washing and grooming will be undertaken. Training and day-to-day care will be provided by the owner and their family. The owner will maintain a complete vaccination and health record for Duke.
- Should Duke become unwell or injured, it is the owner's responsibility to seek prompt veterinary attention and ensure Duke is appropriately cared for.
- The owner will ensure Duke is registered with the local council and adheres to all council bylaws concerning dog ownership.
- The handler (the designated person responsible for Duke while at school) is accountable for both the wellbeing and safety of students and the welfare of Duke during school hours and activities.
- All veterinary bills and grooming requirements will be paid by the owner.

Student and Staff Involvement

- Staff will supervise all interactions, ensure risk assessments are undertaken for dog-related activities, and obtain site leader approval as per the Animal care and welfare in schools, preschools and early childhood services procedure.
- Staff are required to report any incidents or concerns relating to animal welfare or student wellbeing to the relevant leader or committee.
- Participation must be voluntary and respectful, with parental/carer information and consent sought prior to involvement.
- Clear documentation and communication processes must be established for service delivery and incident reporting.

3 Expectations

- We say hello to the person, not the dog! - Please ignore Duke when you see him about the school or community. He is learning to only go to people when invited. There are people who are scared of dogs and have cultural and religious beliefs, so this is vital.
- We give lots of space when we pass the dog!
- We keep moving, we don't stand around and stare.

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You are very welcome to say hello to Duke, but please ask whoever is handling him or whose office he is in if you can do so. It is also an important part of his training, so if you see him around the school or in an office, initially ignore him and ask, 'Can I say hello to Duke?' It may not always be an appropriate time so please don't be offended if the handler says no. If it is fine to, then go down to his level and gently stroke behind the collar – this will be the information given to the students, so we all need to be doing the same.

Safety of Children

- Every child should be taught how to behave around dogs in general, including the family's own dog, to the neighbour's dog as well as the dog running around the park. They provide us with clues on their disposition or mood and understanding these clues will help children avoid any unnecessary tricky situations. All of the students from Reception to Year Six will be explicitly taught about safety around dogs prior to being introduced to Duke.
- Within the classroom setting, the Wellbeing Dog aims to comfort students that are having social or emotional difficulties. Prior to entering the classroom, the owner/handler must check to see if any child is afraid or allergic to the dog. The handler/owner will request permission from the teacher whether to enter the classroom or not and will check how long the Wellbeing Dog can stay for.
- The Wellbeing Dog will not be left alone with any student at any time and the Wellbeing Dog will be removed if it becomes distressed.
- The Wellbeing Dog must wear his bandana and be on lead at all times.

A full Risk Assessment has been completed.

Hygiene

Hygiene is essential for all participants. Children will be taught the correct hygiene around hand washing after touching Duke. Duke is not to lick faces or lips of any student. Where possible the handler/owner will toilet Duke in a designated area in a safe and clean manner whilst cleaning up after Duke. Should Duke toilet in an undesignated area, it will be disinfected as required.

Fear and Allergies

The safety of our students is our highest priority. Before entering a classroom, the handler must check if any child is afraid of, or allergic to, Duke. The handler will seek permission from the teacher before entering and clarify the duration of Duke's visit. If requested by the teacher, the handler will remain for the classroom visit. Duke will never be left alone with any student. Additionally, all students from Preschool to Year Six will receive explicit instruction about safety around dogs before being introduced to Duke.

Animals on School Grounds

No other animals will be allowed

Approved by Governing Council on 25th March 2026

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