



ST BRIGID' S CATHOLIC PIMARY SCHOOL

Wellbeing Dog Policy

Benefits of a Wellbeing Dog

Here at St Brigid's Primary School, Middle Swan, we have identified an increase in the percentage of students who are exhibiting signs of anxiety and other social and emotional concerns. A Wellbeing Dog will become another strategy that we can draw upon in order to reduce the level of anxiety in our students.

The benefits of a wellbeing Dog at school are endless. They can reduce stress, anxiety, depression, ease loneliness, encourage exercise and playfulness and even improve your cardiovascular health. Caring for a dog can help children grow up more secure and active while providing valuable companionship.

Philosophy intentions of a Wellbeing Dog

The intentions of the Wellbeing Dog are to try and reduce and alleviate the amount of stress, anxiety and other social and emotional concerns, and develop a sense of belonging within our children at St Brigid's Primary School. We as a school, are doing everything we can to help lower the impact of these conditions by having a Wellbeing Dog at school. We know pets are kind, nonjudgmental and a great companion to share and care with. Our Wellbeing Dog will always be your friend.

Program- what the Wellbeing Dog will do within the school:

The Wellbeing Dog can be used in a variety of ways within the school including:

1. Being with individuals or small groups of children to provide comfort.
2. Being walked by identified children to reduce anxiety.
3. Listening to children's speeches or reading
4. Supporting them in any emotional situation

Where will the dog be housed during the day whilst at school?

The Wellbeing Dog will be based at school during school hours under the care of its owner or handler/s. The Wellbeing Dog will visit classrooms or spaces around the school as needed during the day. It may also spend time in the Administration area for rests.

Involvement of staff and students

Involvement of the staff and students is vital for the Wellbeing Dog to learn how to behave in and around the classrooms. Staff will email the carer to book the dog into a session if they feel it will benefit the students in their classroom. At times, the dog will become part of real-life learning for the children. If a child is experiencing any difficult times, they will be a priority to come and see the dog when they are at school.

Role of owner/carer

The role of the owner:

1. will provide a safe, calm, happy environment for both the Wellbeing Dog and students. Shelter, food, water, (along with lots of love) is to be provided.
2. will take the Wellbeing Dog home each night and care for the dog.
3. will keep a full vaccination record. If the Wellbeing Dog is unwell or injured, it is the responsibility of the owner to visit a vet at their discretion to ensure the dog is cared for appropriately.
4. will arrange for Pet Insurance of the Wellbeing Dog with an approved Insurance company and the school will pay the insurance premium.
5. will ensure the dog is registered with their Local council as per the Council bylaws in regard to the ownership of dogs.
6. will sign an agreement signed by the School Principal together with the Owner to abide by the Wellbeing Dog Policy. (see below)

Protocol dog

The school and owner will be responsible for the wellbeing and safety of the children, as well as the Wellbeing Dog whilst at school.

The Wellbeing Dog will be vet checked regularly, vaccinated, consistently treated for fleas and worms, washed and groomed regularly, trained and cared for by the carer and family.

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 dog will wear a special vest when working within the school and a separate garment when in training mode. Sessions will be conducted in areas that will suit both the students and the dog.

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 the ELC to Year Six will be explicitly taught about safety around dogs prior to being introduced to our Wellbeing Dog. We will enforce the **Approach, Ask, Pat, Goodbye** method (see below)

Hygiene

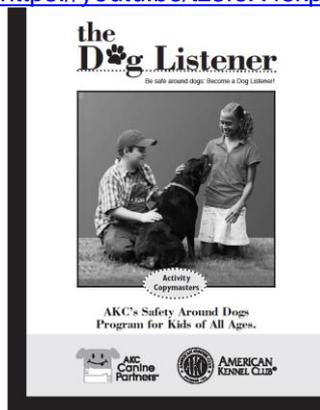
Hygiene is essential for all participants. Children will be taught the correct hygiene around hand washing after touching the dog. The dog is not to lick faces or lips of any student. Where possible the handler/owner will toilet the dog in a designated area at the school in a safe and clean manner whilst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

Classroom visits

Within the classroom setting, the Wellbeing Dog aims to comfort students that are having social or emotional difficulties. The Wellbeing Dog must wear a vest and lead at all times; however, it is at the owner or handler's discretion to decide to take off the lead or not. 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 handler will stay for the classroom visit if requested by the teacher.

Activities on how to approach a dog (video and handbook)

<https://youtu.be/tz3foX4skp4>



Training of the Wellbeing Dog

The Leadership team at St Brigid's Primary School recognises that 'on the job' training may take 1 – 2 years before the Wellbeing Dog can be accredited. For accreditation to be approved, the Wellbeing Dog will attend and work at the school during school hours

To ensure there is an accountability during this process"

1. A non-accredited Wellbeing Dog is not expected to perform to the level of an accredited dog.
2. Students are informed that the Wellbeing Dog is in training.

Approach, Ask, Pat, Goodbye

This is a 4-step behaviour expectation when the Wellbeing Dog is working around the school.

- Approach – Always walk slowly to the Wellbeing Dog and the handler. Leaving a classroom or jumping out of a class line are not responsible times to approach a dog. When students approach the Wellbeing Dog, they need to walk up slowly. This is especially important at recess or lunch where students run from place to place. Another part of this expectation is that the Wellbeing Dog can have up to **three** students with it. If there are already three students around the dog, students know they need to wait for someone to leave before they approach.
- Ask - This is a key safety measure both for the dog and the students. Students must ask to pat the Wellbeing Dog and permission will be granted before they pat it. This ensures that the handler is aware of both the dog's behaviour and the students' actions. We discuss that people always need to ask the owner to pat the dog.
- Pat - For this expectation we discuss that the dog likes to smell a closed hand first and then get scratched under the chin. The dog will be in the sit or down position for greeting children. Students will be encouraged to tell the dog to sit, so it is paying attention to them and is not surprised by having a small hand in its face.
- Goodbye - This expectation has been added to keep a line moving. Sometimes, the dog may have a larger group of students who want to say hi. Since only three are allowed around it at a time, we set an expectation that saying hi to the dog is a quick process, if there are others present that would like a turn.