

POLICY

ANIMALS IN SCHOOLS

Responsibility of:	School Support Services	FILE2017/544
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Target Audience:	School staff, school councils and the community	

1. POLICY

Animals may only be brought to school with the prior approval of the principal or their delegate.

The care and use of animals in the Department of Education schools must be in accordance with the Northern Territory *Animal Welfare Act*.

Consideration must be given to particular student and staff medical conditions prior to allowing animals on school grounds. Principal approval must be sought before considering the use of animals within an educational context.

Schools are not permitted to use animals for “*scientific teaching purposes*” as outlined in section 29(3) of the *Animal Welfare Act*. Schools may run educational programs involving the use of animals such as classroom pets and animal husbandry. Advice should be sought from the department’s Legal Services Unit if schools are unsure whether intended use of animals is permitted.

Schools must consider if they can replace, reduce or refine the use of animals for educational programs. All animals must be treated with respect and consideration and ensure the level of care for animals is maintained over weekends and school holidays.

No live animals may be acquired or bred for the sole purpose of dissection. Dissection of animals in schools is prohibited. If there is a need to examine organs, then only food grade organs (kidneys, liver, brains, stomach, heart, lungs, tongue, and eyes) should be used.

Procedures to address the presence of unauthorised animals on school premises must be implemented in all schools for the health and safety of students, staff and visitors. This includes:

- limiting the risk of unauthorised animals entering school premises,
- managing stray animals and wildlife on school grounds,
- where required, determining defined animal free areas within the school.

Service animals used by people with disabilities are exempt from this requirement.

2. BUSINESS NEED

The objectives of the *Animal Welfare Act* are to ensure that animals are treated humanely, to prevent cruelty to animals and to provide community awareness about the welfare of animals. All staff, students and visitors must adhere to the requirements of the *Animal Welfare Act* when handling animals.

The Department of Education (DoE) is required under sections 19 and 20 of the *Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011*, to take reasonable measures to ensure the safety of students, staff and visitors.

This policy will ensure a consistent approach for the management of and to prevent potential health and safety issues that arise as a result of the presence of animals in schools.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to all Northern Territory Government schools.

In implementing the requirements of this policy principals should, where possible, without compromising on health and safety requirements, seek to accommodate cultural beliefs within the school community.

4. DEFINITIONS

Animal: means a live member of any vertebrate species including an amphibian, bird, mammal (other than a human being) or reptile. Also includes live fish in captivity or dependent on a person for food.

Animal husbandry: is the branch of agriculture concerned with the care and breeding of domestic animals such as cattle, pigs, sheep, and horses.

Defined animal free area: is an area of a school, or school grounds, where animals, including pets are excluded, with the exception of service animals used by people with disabilities. Defined animal free areas will be determined by the principal in consultation with the school community, but will usually include eating areas, early childhood areas and most indoor areas of the school. Defined animal free areas should be clearly marked with appropriate signage and/or fencing.

Service animal: is an animal used as a companion to compensate for a physical impairment such as sight, hearing or mobility.

5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Principals

Principals are responsible for:

- approving the use of animals in any educational program and ensuring that any use is conducted in accordance with this policy
- ensuring adequate funding is available to run animal husbandry programs humanely to ensure the welfare of animals.

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- ensuring arrangements are in place for the daily care of animals including weekends and school holidays
- ensuring evaluation and emergency plans include information and procedures to safeguard the welfare of animals in the event of flooding, cyclones, fire etc.
- implementing appropriate procedures to limit the presence of unauthorised animals on school premises. This includes reasonable measures to ensure the health and safety of students, staff and visitors and where appropriate having animal/s removed e.g. by contacting the relevant council or wildlife authority. In high risk areas school procedures should provide for students to be educated about personal health and safety on school premises, particularly relating to the presence of animals.
- ensuring that the school community is aware that animals may only be brought to school with the prior approval of the principal or their nominated delegate. Service animals used by people with disabilities are exempt from this requirement; however principals must manage the presence of service animals to ensure the ongoing health and safety of students, staff and visitors.
- determining, in consultation with the school community, defined animal free areas within the school when this action is considered appropriate.

Teachers

Teachers undertaking activities involving animals are responsible for the welfare of the animals at all times.

6. RELATED POLICY, LEGISLATION AND DOCUMENTS

[Animal Welfare Act](#)

[Emergency Preparedness and Continuity Management](#)

[Work Health and Safety \(National Uniform Legislation\) Act 2011](#)

[Science Guidelines – Occupational Health and Safety Manual](#)

7. GUIDELINES FOR RISK MANAGEMENT

Schools must undertake a risk management process prior to allowing animals to be present on school grounds. This will help to identify areas where action may need to be taken to ensure the health and safety of students, staff and visitors. In an educational context the risk management plan would address issues such as (but not limited to):

- ensuring the school has adequate funding and facilities for the appropriate care and welfare of the animals, e.g. funds for veterinary care etc.
- adequate security to ensure the safety of animals, including weekends and school holidays
- emergency situations such as vandalism, flooding, cyclones

In the case of unauthorised animals, a [Risk Management](#) plan can identify any potential issues that may occur such as health risks, including the spread of diseases, or animals becoming frightened and/or aggressive and identify reasonable steps to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of students, staff, animals and others. Risk management plans should be subject to regular review.

Suggested control actions include (but are not limited to):

- defining animal free areas within the school

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- ensuring food scraps are appropriately disposed of and taps and drinking troughs are well maintained and do not leak, as they can attract animals
- promoting good hygiene practices
- where a school has fencing, actions to limit the presence of unauthorised animals should include ensuring gates are closed and that fencing is well maintained
- ensuring actions to be undertaken during and following a critical incident involving animals on school grounds are included in the school's emergency management plan
- installing fencing (perimeter fencing or fencing of high risk areas such as early childhood or canteen areas) as a long-term solution to minimise animal access to school grounds in high risk schools