

Animals in schools – policy

Policy statement

Animals may only be brought to school with the prior approval of the principal, or a staff member nominated by the principal.

The care and use of animals in Department of Education (the department) schools must be in accordance with the *Animal Protection Act 2018* (the Act) and the Animal Protection Regulations 2022.

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 may run educational programs involving the use of animals such as classroom pets and animal husbandry. Advice should be sought from the department's Quality Assurance Services division 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 schools must ensure the level of care for animals is maintained over weekends and school holidays.

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.

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

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 such as kidneys, liver, brains, stomach, heart, lungs, tongue and eyes should be used.

Purpose

The objectives of the Act are to ensure that animals are treated humanely, to prevent cruelty to animals and to promote community awareness about responsibilities and legal obligations associated with the care and protection of animals. All staff, students and visitors must adhere to the requirements of the Act when handling animals.

The department 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 to manage and prevent potential health and safety issues that arise as a result of the presence of animals in schools.

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.

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, such as funds for veterinary care
- adequate security to ensure the safety of animals, including weekends and school holidays
- emergency situations such as vandalism, flooding or 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 or aggressive, and identify reasonable steps to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of students, staff, animals and others. Risk management plans should be regularly reviewed.

Suggested control actions include, but are not limited to:

- defining animal free areas within the school
- 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 as a long term solution to minimise animal access to school grounds in high risk schools, this may include perimeter fencing or fencing of high risk areas such as early childhood or canteen areas.

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

- ensuring arrangements are in place for the daily care of animals including weekends and school holidays
- ensuring evacuation and emergency plans include information and procedures to safeguard the welfare of animals in the event of flooding, cyclones, fires, and all other situations where their welfare may be at risk
- 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 animals removed, such as 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 a staff member nominated by the principal. Assistance animals used by people with disabilities are exempt from this requirement, however, principals must manage the presence of assistance 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 are responsible for:

- the welfare of the animals at all times when undertaking activities involving animals.

Definitions

Term	Definition
Animal	A live member of a vertebrate species including an amphibian, bird, reptile and mammal, other than a human being. Also includes live fish in captivity or dependent on a person for food.
Animal husbandry	The branch of agriculture concerned with the care and breeding of domestic animals such as cattle, pigs, sheep and horses.
Assistance animal	An animal trained to assist a person with disability to alleviate the effect of the disability and meets standards of hygiene and behaviour that are appropriate for an animal in a public place.
Defined animal free area	An area of a school, or school grounds, where animals, including pets, are excluded, with the exception of assistance 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 fencing.

Related legislation, policy, documents and resources

Legislation

- *Animal Protection Act 2018* – <https://legislation.nt.gov.au/en/Legislation/Animal-Protection-Act-2018>

- Animal Protection Regulations 2022 – <https://legislation.nt.gov.au/Legislation/ANIMAL-PROTECTION-REGULATIONS-2022>
- Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011 – <https://legislation.nt.gov.au/en/Legislation/WORK-HEALTH-AND-SAFETY-NATIONAL-UNIFORM-LEGISLATION-ACT-2011>

Policy

- Assistance animals policy – <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/access-equity>
- Emergency management: school preparedness policy - <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/school-operations#school-preparedness>

Documents

- Animals in schools risk management plan – <https://elearn.ntschoools.net/policies/3974>

Resources

- ASSIST – Australian Science Teachers Association – <https://assist.asta.edu.au/>

Document title	Animals in schools - policy
Contact details	Regional Services, School Operations, schoolops@education.nt.gov.au
Approved by	Deputy Chief Executive Regional Services
Date approved	6 April 2023
TRM number	50:D22:88538

Version	Date	Author	Changes made
1	2009	Schools Policy and Operations	First version
2	April 2013	School Support Services	Minor review
3	April 2023	Quality Standards and Regulation – Operational Policy	Administrative amendments to align roles and responsibilities to the structural alignment in effect from 1 July 2022, including NTG template and minor formatting. Updated to include <i>Animal Protection Act 2018</i> and <i>Animal Protection Regulations 2022</i> in line with repeal of the <i>Animal Welfare Act 1999</i> and enactment of the new Regulations 1 November 2022.