

# School Support Dogs



At Paws Pet Therapy, we receive many enquiries from teachers keen to have dogs in their classroom. Dogs used in schools to provide emotional and wellbeing support, companionship, or more specific Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) are referred to by NSW Department of Education as **School Support Dogs** as outlined in the document: [Support Dog Guidelines](#).

The guidelines state, “The role of school support dogs is to react and respond to people and their environment, under the guidance and direction of their handler.” Further it clarifies that, “School support dogs are not the same as assistance dogs that are accredited and specifically trained to assist an individual person with a disability”. These guidelines ensure the Companion Animals Act, Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and Animal Research Act are all adhered to.

The outcomes associated with school support dog programs include improved school attendance, increased classroom engagement, happier, kinder, and less anxious students, and calmer school environments.

## Things to consider when introducing a support dog program:

- School support dogs work with multiple people.
- There is no recognised accreditation for support or therapy dogs in NSW.
- Dogs are prohibited on school grounds unless the Principal grants permission.
- Only a person 18 years or older can be responsible for the dog.
- The dog’s handler must be additional to the classroom teacher whenever the dog is working with the class.
- The dog must be on a lead at all times.
- The dog must not be owned by the school.
- A support dog should be on duty at a school for a maximum of three days in any seven day week.
- All dogs used as support dogs must be desexed, microchipped and registered with their respective council.
- To comply with animal welfare requirements schools must identify the purpose and the justification for a having a school support dog including outlining expected outcomes, the duties of the dog and responsibilities of the owner and school.
- When selecting a school support dog, it is necessary to consider the breed, allergy rating, size, age, temperament, and training required to ensure student and teacher safety.
- Parental permission is needed for students to interact with a dog.

If a school support dog is provided under agreement by a reputable pet therapy organisation many of these factors have already been taken into consideration. The team, a dog and its handler will have completed comprehensive training, be insured, and fully supported by their parent organisation. The team will be rostered to visit at set times and for specific purposes and guided by a professional educator.

If a school wishes to have their own support dog, there are a growing number of privately owned companies which can help to introduce a dog into the school setting. Alternatively, the school can follow the guidelines above to implement a program to suit their needs.

## References:

**School Support Dog Guidelines:** [education.nsw.gov.au](http://education.nsw.gov.au) (search “support dog guidelines”)

**Companion Animals Act:** <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-1998-087>

**Animal Research Act:** <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-1985-123>

**Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act:**

<https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/current/act-1979-200>

*The information provided in this Fact Sheet is for general informational purposes only. Please consider your personal circumstances and always do your own research to ensure the right outcome for you.*

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