

ST FRANCESCA CABRINI PRIMARY SCHOOL

Keeping Animals & Handling Animals at School Policy

We at St Francesca Cabrini School are dedicated to providing the animals in our care with the appropriate care, housing, diet and welfare in line with local authority guidance and recommendations set down by animal welfare charities (RSPCA)

Our curriculum around handling animals and caring for them currently centres around small mammal care (Rabbits) and hens.

Introduction

1. This summary details the basic health and safety issues associated with handling and keeping animals in schools.
2. Further advice is provided in a variety of CLEAPSS guidance documents and other information sources detailed at the end of this document.
3. Animals can provide important opportunities for learning and as with many other areas any assessment of the potential risks associated with this should be considered alongside benefits of the activity for pupils. Often the health and safety issues may be of less significance than the well-being of the animals brought into school.
4. A risk assessment is reviewed when any changes are made to current curriculum or procedures.
5. Notification will be given by parents who **do not** wish their children to partake in the 'animal care curriculum' at school.

Handling animals

6. Careful handling of small mammals and other animals is most important, animals should be restrained sufficiently so that, they cannot damage themselves or the handler.
7. Where animals will be handled by pupils then it should be checked that the :
 - animal is used to being handled;
 - animal is not likely to be stressed by excitable children;
 - correct way to hold any animal is taught to children from the outset (e.g. fingers poked towards the mouths of normally non-aggressive animals may be interpreted as an offering of food and obligingly bitten)
 - handling of small animals should be carried out over a table or preferably some form of soft surface to minimise the risk of injury caused by falling or being dropped.
8. In order to minimise the risk of infection basic good hygiene should be followed when handling animals:
 - do not consume food or drink;
 - cover any open cuts or abrasions on the exposed skin of hands and arms with waterproof adhesive dressings;
 - wash hands with soap and water before and directly after handling animals (very young pupils should be supervised to ensure this is done properly);
 - keep animals away from the face;

- any contaminated surfaces should be properly washed and disinfected.
9. Mammals should be handled daily if possible (unless breeding or nursing when they should be disturbed as little as possible). In this way they will normally become quite tame and accustomed to being handled.
 10. **Physical injuries**
There is always the potential risk of bites and scratches, and staff should check that any animals kept / brought in are docile, friendly and gentle in the presence of children.
 11. **Phobias**
Where pupils have fears or phobias about particular animals, these should be respected and appropriate arrangements made to ensure the separation of the animal from the pupil(s) concerned.
 12. **Diseases, parasites and allergies**
The likelihood of diseases being passed on from pet animals is low. However allergic reactions to mammals, birds and a few other animals cannot be discounted. These might result from handling the animals or just from being near them and be detected by the development of skin rashes, irritation to the eyes and nose or breathing difficulties.
 13. Hand washing soon after handling animals will help.
 14. Staff should watch for the development of possible symptoms of allergic reactions in pupils who come into contact with the animals.
 15. Children known to have allergic reactions to specific animals must, of course, have restricted access to those that may trigger a response. In most cases, an allergic reaction will subside once the animal and the affected person are kept apart; in extreme cases, seek medical advice.
 16. Salmonella bacteria may be carried by reptiles; good general and hand hygiene are required, especially if aquatic reptiles, such as terrapins, are kept. Children under five should not have contact with such reptiles or the environment in which the reptiles live or exercise.

Visitors bringing animals into school / animal events

17. Prior to booking a visit from a provider the school should seek assurance that they are reputable and knowledgeable in animal handling and can provide adequate briefing, supervision and instructions to all concerned.
18. Obtain information about the animals that will be shown in advance in order to identify any potential problems, such as phobias or allergies.
19. In order for there to be minimal risk to humans of diseases being transmitted from animals kept in schools, it is important that animals are obtained from accredited or high-quality sources.
20. Should conservation groups for example bring rescued animals into schools it would be advised to confirm with them that such animals have been kept in captivity for long enough to have benefited from proper treatment against diseases and parasites. It may not be appropriate for children to handle such animals.

Animal Health

21. Suitable arrangements must be in place for the wellbeing of animals even when only on site for a short time.
22. The Animal Welfare Act contains legal obligations to ensure animals needs are met. These include the need to :
 - a suitable environment;
 - a suitable diet (food and fresh water);
 - exhibit normal behaviour patterns;
 - be housed with, or apart from, other animals;
 - be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.
23. These responsibilities continue as long as the animal remains at school. Thus suitable arrangements must be made for their normal feeding, watering and cleaning during school holiday periods.
24. If animals have to be taken out of school during holiday periods then they should only be sent home with pupils if all of the following considerations can be satisfied.
 - It can be guaranteed that the animals will be looked after as well as usual.
 - Whoever is caring for the animals must have all the necessary information, equipment, food, skills, etc.
 - Parents must have been informed and given their consent.
 - Steps will be taken to ensure that small mammals cannot come into contact with pet animals (cats, dogs, rodents or other mammals) or wild rodents (mice, rats, etc.) while off the school premises.
25. Animals must be housed properly, in clean conditions with appropriate containers used to transport them which retain the animal(s) securely.
26. Hands should be washed *before* and, of course, after cleaning cages, tanks etc. rubber or plastic gloves should preferably be worn.
27. Where animals are not kept in scrupulously clean conditions, or come into contact with other animals from dubious sources, it will no longer be possible to guarantee that the animals will remain in a disease-free condition.

Unsuitable animals

28. It goes without saying that certain animals present unacceptable risks and should not be brought into schools. The ASE's 'Be Safe!' 4th Edition (section 10 keeping animals) provides some advice on particular animals and those which are suitable for schools.
29. Wild birds and mammals taken, even if legally, from the 'wild' should not be brought into schools directly as they may be harbouring diseases or parasites transmissible to humans.

Farm animals in school

30. Schools keeping a small number of farm animals (e.g. chickens, goats, sheep or pigs) to encourage children to learn about animals and their care and to teach them about the sources of our food should consider the following:
 - who has the experience in the housing, feeding, handling and care requirements.

- that continuous animal care will be available at all times, including at weekends and over the holidays.
 - that funding for setting up and maintaining stock, including veterinary fees is available.
 - that anyone that may be affected by the animals, e.g. other members of the school and neighbours are happy with arrangements.
 - that suitable secure housing and containment is provided for the animals
31. Registration as an agricultural holding with The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is required if keeping or moving sheep, goats, pigs, cows, horses and significant prior experience would be required.
32. DEFRA also keep a poultry register, its compulsory to register if you keep more than 50 birds (and anyone keeping poultry is encouraged to do so in order they can be notified of disease outbreaks).
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/poultry-registration>
33. Advice on health conditions of poultry and information on diseases is available here
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/poultry-health>

Further information / Links

ASE 'Be Safe!' 4th Edition (section 10 Keeping Animals) provides some advice on particular animals and those which are suitable for schools.

HSE guidance on *Avoiding ill health at open farms*

Advice to farmers (with teachers' supplement): Agriculture Information Sheet number 23 (revised) provides good practice guidelines for contact with animals. This can be downloaded from:

www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ais23.pdf

CLEAPSS produce a number of guides e.g. L56 Housing and Keeping Animals, L52, Small Mammals; L71, Incubating and Hatching Eggs; L124, Aquaria in Primary Schools etc.

CLEAPSS Laboratory Handbook (section 14.1)

Countryside classroom Get your hands dirty –a guide to growing plants and keeping animals in schools

<http://www.countrysideclassroom.org.uk/resources/view?id=629>

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