



Animals in School Policy September 2025

Handling Animals

If animals are to be handled, the most important issue is the maintenance of good hygiene

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 your hands with soap and water before and directly after handling animals
- keep animals away from the face

Careful handling of small animals and other animals is most important; the animals should be restrained sufficiently so that, they cannot damage themselves or the handler. Gloves will not normally be worn unless it is known that an animal for one reason or another is likely to bite or scratch. In this situation a pair of rubber gloves, which does not particularly reduce dexterity, is a sensible precaution. Handling small animals should always be carried out over a table or trough filled with a soft material such as sand / sawdust. Any stroking or handling of the animal must only take place when the staff are happy that the children and animals feel confident enough.

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. Hand washing soon after handling animals will help. Teachers should watch for the development of allergic reactions in pupils who come into contact with the animals. 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. Certain children may have allergies to consider; therefore letters will be given out to parents, with permission slips obtaining permission for their child to be involved in the care of an animal.

Salmonella bacteria may be carried by reptiles; good hygiene is again required, especially if aquatic reptiles, such as terrapins, are kept. Good general hygiene and hand washing are essential for risk reduction. Children under five should not have contact with such reptiles or the environment in which the reptiles live or exercise.

The majority of animals available through reputable suppliers present no hazards that good hygiene procedures cannot address. 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. Unless these are known to have originated from a reliable source, it will not be possible to be confident that they are disease-free.

Animal Health

If 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. Holiday times, can obviously create real difficulties. It is preferable that the animals remain at school and suitable arrangements made for their normal feeding, watering and cleaning. If, however, this is not possible and animals have to be taken out of school at holidays, they should not be sent home with pupils or other people unless 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.
- Steps will be taken to ensure that the school's animals will not be able to come into contact with pet animals (cats, dogs, rodents or other mammals).

Cleaning and Hygiene

This is clearly important, both for the health of the animals and for those people looking after them. Hands should be washed before and, of course, after cleaning cages, tanks etc. rubber or plastic gloves should preferably be worn. Any disposal of waste and equipment should be carried out immediately and in an appropriate manner.

When cuddling a familiar adult, a hormone named Oxytocin is released into the bloodstream causing feelings of happiness and contentment. Research proves that stroking or cuddling an animal triggers the release of the same hormone, causing anxiety levels to decrease and the child to become more willing to socialise, therefore bringing a wide range of health and emotional benefits to both adults and children. Having a pet within the school benefits children's cognitive and language skills, encouraging qualities such as kindness, responsibility, sharing, loyalty and love.

Just a few of the health benefits Oxytocin may bring include; stimulation of the immune system, deeper sleeping patterns, reduced anxiety and stress, increase of appetite, better attention span and memory, increased confidence and self-esteem and improved communication and reading ability. Pet therapy is actively used to support our Thrive and ELSA work.