



ANIMALS IN EDUCATION INCLUDING GUIDANCE ON FARM VISITS HEALTH, WELFARE, LEGAL NOTES AND FCAT POLICY PROCEDURES FOR STAFF

Introduction

Many staff will know from experience the positive benefits which can accrue from the responsible observation of living creatures at close quarters, both in terms of securing an engaging delivery of the science curriculum and of enhancing students' personal, social and moral development. This briefing explores the context in which animals may be encountered by students in our academy – whether in the classroom, the school grounds or on a farm visit.

Animals in Schools – Legal Considerations

The **Pet Animals Act 1951** prevents the sale of animals to children under 12 years of age. This should be borne in mind if the sale, by a school, of surplus animals to children is contemplated at any stage.

The **H&S at Work, etc. Act 1974** places a duty on employers to safeguard the health, safety and welfare at work of teachers, students and visitors. This includes an obligation to minimise the risk of the transfer of disease from animals to people. Schools should satisfy themselves that animals are sourced from reputable providers, are kept in a good state of health, and that suitable hygiene precautions are followed by anyone coming into contact with the animals. Sick animals should be isolated and advice sought from a veterinary surgeon.

The **Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981**, as amended, has implications for the study of animals and plants outside the classroom, such as on nature walks and field trips. This Act – and a number of related laws – affords strict protection to a wide range of species, such as:

- wild birds, including their nests and eggs;
- some amphibians such as natterjack toads and crested newts;

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- red squirrels, bats and badgers;
- common otters, seals and deer; and
- Some reptiles, fish, butterflies, moths, crickets, dragonflies, beetles, grasshoppers, spiders and snails.

Many other creatures have partial protection which may allow their temporary removal to a classroom for observation, but requires that they are returned as soon as possible to a suitable habitat – preferably to the site from which they were originally taken.

Dangerous animals, as defined by the **Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976**, may not be brought into school. This includes most monkeys and apes, crocodiles, alligators and poisonous snakes. It does not include domestic dogs and cats. Further information on these changes, and the Act itself, can be found on the DEFRA website.

Finally, the **Scientific Procedures Act** outlaws any act causing pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm to vertebrates unless licensed and carried out in ‘designated premises’. Schools are not eligible to be licensed in this way.

An animal which has been humanely killed, however, may be used for dissection and other related purposes in schools. The RSPCA stresses, though, that animals should never be killed as part of a lesson, or in front of students. Where it is deemed necessary to ‘put down’ a sick animal, such procedures should only be carried out by a trained person – preferably a vet.

Animal handling

Students will naturally wish to handle animals, but certain considerations need to be addressed in advance of any such activities. In particular, it should be checked that

- the animal is used to being handled;
- the animal is not likely to be stressed by excitable children;
- where there is a correct way to hold any animal, this must be taught to children from the outset; and
- 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.

The handling of certain animals should be avoided altogether. Those which are nervous, nocturnal or prone to biting or scratching should be observed and not touched. Other creatures, such as invertebrates, are too fragile to be handled any

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more than absolutely necessary. Sometimes any handling of a pet should be limited to the owner, who will have the necessary expertise to do it properly.

Hygiene, Diseases, Parasites and Allergies

The likelihood of diseases being passed on to humans from pet animals is low. In all cases, good hygiene will reduce the risks even further.

- Children and adults should always wash their hands soon after coming into contact with any animal or its equipment.
- Cuts and abrasions on hands and arms should be covered to minimise the risk of infection.
- Cleaning routines and arrangements for the disposal of animal waste should be carried out with due regard for good hygiene standards. Pregnant staff and anyone with suppressed immunity should exercise particular caution and avoid all contact with animal waste products.
- Contaminated surfaces should be properly washed and disinfected.

For cats and dogs, it is sensible to check their general health, and whether or not they have recently been wormed and treated for fleas. Where staff and/or children are known to have allergies to particular animals, it is of course sensible to restrict their exposure to any animals which might provoke an allergic reaction. In an emergency, medical advice should be sought without delay.

Physical Injuries

It may be sensible to err on the side of caution and restrict animal visitors to those least likely to cause injury. In cases where animals prone to biting, scratching, or causing irritation to skin, eyes etc. are allowed in the classroom, suitable precautions should be taken to minimise the risk of injury occurring. Such precautions might necessitate checks such as:

- The level of protection afforded by the animal's housing; and
- The need for any rules which may be required about approaching, touching or handling animals with such tendencies.

Where students have fears or phobias about particular animals, these should be respected and appropriate arrangements made to ensure the separation of the animal from the student(s) concerned.

Allergies

Allergic reactions can be triggered by a wide range of animals and indeed plants. Common examples of allergenic risks found in a school laboratory might include:

- working with small laboratory animals such as rats and mice;
- working with insects such as moths or locusts.

In all cases, a suitable and sufficient risk assessment must be undertaken before the work is commenced - to be suitable and sufficient, risks must be identified, and appropriate measures put in place to control the risks.

Farm Visits

The HSE has published advice on safe procedures when children are visiting farms. Two leaflets have been prepared. The first, *'Be Responsible – Keep Children Safe on Your Farm'* is aimed at farmers and gives details on precautions to take if and when children come on visits. The other, *'Farms Are Not Playgrounds – 10 Ways You Can Get Hurt on a Farm'* is primarily for children, especially those aged between 7 to 11, and presents key safety points in a clear and well-illustrated format, making it ideal for accompanying teachers and other adults to discuss with students prior to a farm visit. Both leaflets, available from the HSE website at www.hse.gov.uk, would moreover be useful reference material for anyone involved in carrying out a risk assessment for such a visit.

Unexpected Animal 'Visitors'

Some animal-related difficulties occur where dogs are routinely exercised on school property, and concern is expressed regarding the potential health and safety hazards which may arise from their presence¹. In such cases, schools should consider the possibility of taking legal action under Section 547 of the 1996 Education Act, which provides that trespassers who are making a nuisance or disturbance and refusing to leave school premises are committing a criminal offence. "Nuisance or disturbance" has a wide interpretation and includes, for example, riding motorbikes or exercising animals in such a way as to disturb the normal running of the school.

FCAT ACADEMY POLICY and PROCEDURES FOR VISIT LEADERS

All animals naturally carry a range of micro-organisms, some of which can be transmitted to humans, where they may cause ill health. Some of these, such as *Escherichia coli* O157 (*E. coli* O157) or *Cryptosporidium parvum* (a microscopic parasite), present a serious health hazard and have the potential to cause serious illness and health problems which may be particularly severe in young children. As with many other educational or recreational activities, visits can never be considered free from all risk. However, while the hazards are real, the risk of infection in children can be readily controlled by simple everyday measures. The following practical steps will help make the visit even more safe, healthy and enjoyable.

Before your visit, you should:

- **Obtain a Risk Assessment from the venue**
- Read and understand the advice in the industry Code of Practice, and discuss arrangements for the visit with the management at the site.
- Confirm that the control measures provided at the site match the recommendations in the industry Code of Practice.
- Seek advice on what the appropriate ratio of student / adult should be.
- Discuss and agree roles and responsibilities during the visit. In particular understand the need to make sure that the children wash, or are helped to wash, their hands thoroughly after contacting animals and before eating. Key points to cover with the children should include:
 - I. explaining the rules for the visit, stressing that they must not eat, drink or chew anything (including sweets) outside the areas in which you permit them to do so
 - II. explaining why they must wash their hands thoroughly after contact with the animals, and before eating or drinking anything;
 - III. demonstrating how to wash their hands properly;
 - IV. Discussing the requirements for appropriate clothing, including suitable footwear you should liaise with the attraction to ascertain what this is; checking that cuts, grazes etc. on children's hands are covered with a waterproof dressing.

During and after the visit, make sure that students:

- Are reminded of the rules/precautions to take upon arrival at the site.
- Do not kiss animals.
- Always wash their hands thoroughly before and after eating, after any contact with animals and again before leaving the site.
- Eat only food that they have brought with them or food for human consumption that they have bought on the premises, in designated areas.
- Never eat food that has fallen to the ground.
- Never taste animal foods.
- Do not suck fingers or put hands, pens, pencils or crayons etc. in mouths.
- Where practical and possible, clean or change their footwear before leaving.
- Wash their hands after changing their footwear.

Check that the children stay in their allocated groups during the visit, and that they:

- Do not use or pick up tools (e.g. spades and forks) or touch other work equipment unless permitted to do so by site staff .
- Do not climb on to walls, fences, gates or animal pens etc.
- Listen carefully and follow the instructions and information given by the site staff.
- Approach and handle animals quietly and gently.
- Do not chase, frighten or torment the animals.
- Do not wander off into unsupervised or prohibited areas e.g. manure heaps.

Remember the students are your responsibility during the visit:

- You should supervise them during the visit, especially during hand washing to make sure that each child washes thoroughly. Site staff may be able to help with this supervision.
- Allow plenty of time for hand washing before eating or leaving the site so that the children do not have to rush.

If a member of your group shows signs of illness (e.g. sickness or diarrhoea) after a visit, advise them or their parent/guardian to visit the doctor and explain that they have had recent contact with animals. Please also contact the attraction you visited and inform them of the illness.