

Bridgewater Primary School



Animals in School Policy and Guidance

Introduction

This summary details the basic health and safety issues associated with handling and keeping animals in school.

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 mammals and other small animals is most important; the animals should be restrained sufficiently so that they cannot damage themselves or the handler.

Therapy dogs

We have a therapy dog in the school. The dog belongs to the school and the school has responsibility for it.

Therapy dogs aren't assistance dogs. Assistance dogs focus on their owners to the exclusion of all else. For example assistance dogs are trained to provide specific support for individuals with disabilities such as visual or hearing difficulties.

The role of the therapy dog in our school is to react and respond to people and their environment, under the guidance and direction of its owner. For example, our children might be encouraged to talk to the dog to teach sensitive touch and help them be calm. Research into the effects of therapy dogs in schools is showing a range of benefits including:

- Improved attendance
- Confidence building
- Reduced anxiety that can lead to improved learning outcomes
- Better motivation
- Enhanced relationships with peers and teachers due to experiencing trust from a therapy dog. This in turn helps students learn how to express emotion and enter into more trusting relationships.

Physical injuries

There is always the danger of bites and scratches, staff should always check that any animal kept/brought is docile, friendly and gentle in the presence of the children.

Small fingers poked towards the mouths of normally non aggressive animals may be interpreted as an offering of food and obligingly bitten.

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 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 animals and the affected person are kept apart; in extreme cases seek medical advice.

Salmonella bacteria may be carried by reptile; good hygiene is again required. Good general hygiene and hand washing essential for risk reduction.

Children under five should not have contact with such reptiles or the environment they live or exercise in.

Bringing pets into and Other Animals into School

In addition to the general guidance given above it is important that suitable arrangements are made in advance for the well-being of animals for the short time they are to be on the premises.

Animal Suppliers

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 disease 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 be no longer possible to guarantee that the animals will remain in a disease free environment.

Any animal looking sick or injured will be examined by a vet as soon as possible.

During weekends and holidays only members of staff will be able to take the animal's home. They will keep them in a suitable environment and attend to their everyday needs. Whoever is caring for the animals must have all the necessary information, equipment, food and skills to care for them.

Cleaning and Hygiene

This is clearly important, both for the health of the animals and for those people looking after them. Hands must be washed before and after cleaning cages, tanks etc. rubber or plastic gloves should preferably be worn.

Unsuitable Animal

Common sense should be used when bringing animals into school. If any animal is likely to present a high level of risk to anyone in the school it should not be brought in.

Wild animals taken, even if legally, from the wild, must not be brought into schools directly as they may be harbouring diseases or parasites transmissible to humans.

Pets must not be brought onto the school premises at any time, including when dropping off and picking up your child.

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