**PARKWOOD PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**Animals in School Policy**

It is our vision and aim to create a learning experience in which every child will achieve and realise their full potential. At Parkwood Primary school we create caring, confident and committed learners for life.

**Summary:**

Parkwood Primary recognises that the presence of animals in our school can provide a valuable learning experience but animals cannot be allowed to endanger student safety or disrupt learning. The wellbeing and care of the animal should also be in line with DEFRA guidance to ensure the best possible conditions for the animal.

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This summary details the basic health and safety issues associated with handling and keeping animals in schools. Further guidance is provided in CLEAPSS guidance documents L56 Housing and Keeping Animals and the Laboratory Handbook (section 14.1).

**2.0 HANDLING ANIMALS**

**2.1** 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.

**2.2** Careful handling of small mammals and other animals is most important; the animals should be restrained sufficiently so that, they cannot damage themselves or the handler.

**2.3** 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. Birds do not need to be handled daily, but should be handled on a regular basis such that they develop a familiarity with being handled and do not become panicked or aggressive when touched or handled.

**2.4** Gloves should 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.

**2.5** Handling small animals should always be carried out over a table or trough filled with a soft material such as sand / sawdust. This can be in an outdoor environment if more appropriate.

**2.6** Physical injuries

**2.6.1** There is always the danger of bites and scratches, and teachers or technicians should check that any animals kept / brought in are docile, friendly and gentle in the presence of children.

**2.6.2** Small fingers poked towards the mouths of normally non-aggressive animals may be interpreted as an offering of food and consequently bitten. Children should be made aware of this.

**2.7** Diseases, parasites and allergies

**2.7.1** 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 may be detected by the development of skin rashes, irritation to the eyes and nose or breathing difficulties.

**2.7.2** 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.

**2.7.3** 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. The school will always request formal medical evidence of allergy in order to ensure that medical guidance can be properly followed – all children with whom animal contact will be regular or pre-planned, will receive parental information about contact in advance of such eventualities.

**2.7.4** Where school is aware of known allergies and has received the proper medical advice, every effort should be made to ensure that contact between the child and animals is minimized. In the event of any contact occurring, the school should follow procedure with regard to allergies and anaphylaxis in accordance with local authority guidance.

**2.7.5** Salmonella bacteria may be carried by reptiles, birds and other animals; 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.

**2.7.6** All animals naturally carry a range of micro-organisms, some of which cause no illness in the animal but can be transmitted to humans. Diseases passed from animals to humans are known as zoonoses. Some zoonotic diseases may cause ill health; in some cases the diseases may be severe or life threatening. Equally, some are more amenable than others to treatment.

A range of zoonotic diseases can be acquired from animal contact in school, including:

• Verocytotoxigenic Escherichia coli or VTEC (including E. coli O157)

• Cryptosporidium parvum

• Chlamydophilia abortus (formally called Chlamydia psittaci)

• Toxoplasmosis

• Salmonella spp.

People can become infected with micro-organisms through consuming contaminated food or drink, through direct contact with contaminated animals, by contact with an environment contaminated with animal faeces or by being bitten. Very low numbers of micro-organisms can cause human infection. Normal hygiene procedures should effectively combat risk.

**3.0 BRINGING PETS AND OTHER ANIMALS INTO SCHOOL**

**3.1** 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 short visits to the premises

**3.2** When a variety of animals will be together, consider carefully the possibility of unwanted interactions. Animals must be housed properly and separately whilst on the premises; any containers used to transport them must be appropriate and retain the animal securely.

**4.0 ANIMAL SUPPLIERS**

**4.1** The majority of animals available through reputable suppliers present no hazards that good hygiene procedures cannot address.

**4.2** 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. Regular veterinary checks should be carried out – normally on an annual basis.

**5.0 ANIMAL HEALTH**

**5.1** 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. As such, all animal homes will be carefully cleaned on a regular basis with all bedding fully replaced with fresh material on each occasion. Where animals encounter a natural outdoor environment (e.g. grass) this should be within an enclosed area.

**5.2** Holiday times, particularly in primary schools, 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 impossible 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.

• Parents must have been informed and given their consent.

• 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 animals).

• That small mammals cannot come into contact with wild rodents (mice, rats, etc) while off the school premises.

**6.0 CLEANING AND HYGIENE**

**6.1** 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.

**6.2** After removing soiled litter material, cages should be scrubbed with hot water and liquid detergent.

**6.3** Frequency of cleaning (Small Mammals)

**6.3.1** As a general rule, this should be done at least every 10 days. Gerbils produce very little urine and so require relatively infrequent changes. Hamsters produce a little more urine; mice, rats, guinea pigs and rabbits urinate in relatively large amounts. These animals should be cleaned at least once a week. Your nose is always a good guide - cages which are even slightly offensive should already have been cleaned! Arrangements must be made for cages to be cleaned as regularly as normal at holiday times.

**6.4.1** Where small animals also have outdoor runs, these should be kept as clean as is reasonable possible. It should be noted that weather conditions and the natural environment will also contribute to relative cleanliness.

**7.0 SOILED LITTER DISPOSAL**

**7.1** Soiled litter should ideally be incinerated; more conveniently it could be sealed in strong plastic bags and placed with other waste in dustbins.

**7.2** Any animal carcases should be disposed of with 12 hours of discovery and no later than the end of the same school day on which the animal was known to be dead. DEFRA regulations should be adhered to with regard to disposal.

**8.0 UNSUITABLE ANIMALS**

**8.1** It goes without saying that certain animals present unacceptable risks and should not be brought into schools.

**8.2** 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.

**8.3** Any injured wild animals found on school premises should be quarantined immediately and kept out of contact with children or other school animals. The appropriate authorities should be contacted with regard to care or disposal (in the event of death). Any wild animals found dead on school premises should be disposed of in accordance with local authority guidance.

**Date reviewed: May 2014**

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