



Pets in School – Code of Practice

Research shows that pets can help to build a child or young person’s empathy, responsibility, and life skills,

- Having animals to care for ties in with the school curriculum of emotional and social needs – empathy, care, love, compassion, understanding, commitment and building confidence.
- Pets can encourage a child or young person’s learning needs, especially in reading, communication, observation and speaking and particularly helpful for those with special educational needs (SEN).
- For many children, it will be their only contact with a pet as they don’t have them at home.

Preparation is key - We must always consider the needs of the pet first, which includes the five key welfare needs:

- Research of the choice of animal, including which gender, breed and how many (pets such as guinea pigs need to live in pairs) would be the most suited to our school.
- Cost of the initial purchase and ongoing costs including food and vets’ bills.
- The nominated key contact in relation to the animals (confirming food and bedding requirements for purchasing and whether an animal is to visit the Vet), in the first instance, is **Ruth Kellett**
- Care sheets and charts are to be created and completed to ensure that the welfare of the pets is properly undertaken and managed.
- Appropriate safety precautions are in place for hand washing etc.
- All handling is supervised, and staff should have training on this beforehand.

What not to do:

- Breeding pets in school is not advisable as the environment is not ideal for the mother to give birth and rear her young (small pets such as rabbits and hamsters will eat their young if they are stressed). There is added responsibility for the staff involved and then the rehoming of the offspring can be problematic.
- Nocturnal pets such as hamsters should be left in a quiet place during daylight and so may not make suitable school pets.

Rehoming:

If it is decided that a pet needs to be rehomed as it is unhappy or we can no longer keep it, then APTCOO will find a home where the pet is going to be healthy and happy for the rest of its life.

Examples of pets that we may have in school:

- **Fish**, as they are seen as easy to keep, we will ensure that the tank is of a good size, well positioned (by an electric supply and out of direct sunlight), has the correct equipment to monitor water quality and has plenty of enrichment and places to hide.
- **Rabbits and Guinea Pigs**; these need to live in a pair and need a large house and exercise area with a constant supply of hay and lots of enrichment, including areas to dig. They will need protection from predators such as foxes, and an area to access where they won't be disturbed by the learners. *These animals don't tend to be keen on handling – so this should be kept to a minimum – and should always be supervised.*
- **Dogs** need to have an owner and go home with them at night and must be trained in the environment, they should be well socialised and fully insured to be in school. Dogs need to be under control and supervised at all times; they require a quiet place where they can choose to go for alone time (dogs like regular sleep and rest throughout the day). Like all dogs, they will need to be well exercised, given a good diet and provided with enrichment to keep them happy. **Only dogs that have been approved by the senior leadership team, have the relevant health passports, risk assessments and insurance are allowed at any of the school premises.**
- **Birds** – they need to live in the correct sized cage, this should be large enough so that the bird can spread its wings, even with any other birds or items that may be in the cage. Remember that the smaller the cage, the more time the bird will need to spend outside of it to get the necessary exercise and mental stimulation. Make sure that there are enough perches in the cage so that the bird is free to walk and jump around the cage. If positioned correctly, a bird should be able to fly between perches too. Natural wood and rope perches are ideal. Birds also need plenty of toys in their cage to enable to play with – these will need to be taken out of the cage for cleaning regularly. Birds also need to have options for bathing – either a specific bird bathtub or a spray bottle which provides a 'shower' alternative (the water should be on a mist setting and should be aimed above the bird and not directly at it). Food and water should be readily available and changed regularly....and birds love interaction on a regular basis.

Animals have very acute hearing. Loud bangs and whistles may cause them actual pain in their ears. But by following these simple guidelines your pets need not suffer.

Small pets and fireworks

Rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, gerbils, and birds all need to be treated with special care when fireworks are being let off. These animals are easily frightened; you should follow these precautions:

- Hutches, cages and enclosures should, if possible, be brought into a quiet room indoors, or into a garage or shed.
- Give your pet extra bedding to burrow into so they feel safe.
- If you cannot bring your pet's hutch inside, you should turn their enclosure around so that it faces a wall or fence instead of the open garden.
- Cover any aviaries or hutches with thick blankets or a duvet to block out the sight of the fireworks and deaden the sound of the bangs, but make sure there is enough ventilation.

.Dogs, cats and fireworks

- Always keep dogs and cats inside when fireworks are being let off.
- Make sure dogs are walked earlier in the day before the fireworks start.
- Close all windows and doors and block off any cat flaps to stop pets escaping and to keep noise to a minimum. Draw curtains/close blinds and, if the animals are used to the sounds of TV or radio, switch them on and increase the volume a bit (but not too loudly) to block out some of the noise of the fireworks.
- Ensure dogs are always wearing some form of easily readable identification (ID). They should have at least a collar and tag.
- Make sure that pets are fitted with a microchip and that the relevant contact details are up to date, so that if they do run away, they have a better chance of being quickly reunited with you.
- Prepare a 'den' for your pet where they can feel safe and comfortable – perhaps under a bed with some of your old clothes. They may like to hide there when the fireworks start.
- Let the pet pace around and hide in a corner if they want to. Do not try to coax them out – they're just trying to find safety and should not be disturbed.
- Stay calm and act normally. This might be hard to do if you are worried about the pet, but it will help them if they see that you are not concerned. It's OK to cuddle and stroke your pet if it helps them relax, but if they prefer to hide, then let them do this instead.
- Excessive panting and yawning can indicate that your dog is stressed.

Rabbits and guinea pigs are easily stressed by bangs and other loud noises:

1. Give your pet lots of extra bedding so they can burrow down in it and get cosy. You could put a cardboard box full of hay, with holes cut in for easy access and exit, in their hutch to give them an extra place to hide.
2. Bring your pets hutch or cage indoors. A quiet room is best, but an unused garage or shed is a good alternative if you can't bring them indoors.

3. If you can't bring your pets inside, turn their enclosure around so it faces a wall or fence instead of the open garden. This will help to stifle the sound and prevent them from seeing the flashes of light. Cover their hutch with thick blankets or a duvet to block out the sound of the bangs and the sight of the fireworks, but make sure your pet still has enough ventilation.

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 (England and Wales) and Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) 2006 make a pet owner legally responsible for making sure any domesticated animal under their care has their welfare needs met.

A pet's welfare needs will depend on their species;

What are the five welfare needs?

All domestic animals have the legal right to:

- live in a suitable environment.
- eat a suitable diet.
- exhibit normal behaviour patterns.
- be housed with, or apart from, other animals.
- be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

Pet owners must make sure their pet's welfare needs are met, otherwise they could be prosecuted.

Every domesticated animal who is owned by someone on a temporary or permanent basis has the right to be properly cared for by their owner.

All owners must make sure their pets' welfare needs are met, but these will be different for different pets because different species have different needs.

What is the punishment for breaking animal welfare law?

Pet owners who fail to ensure their pet's welfare needs are met face prosecution – but importantly, they run the risk of causing suffering to an animal who they have taken into their home and have a responsibility to care for. Failing to meet a pet's welfare needs could cause them to become sick, hurt, upset, or stressed.

Owners can be taken to court if they don't look after their pets properly and face a prison sentence of up to six months, and a fine of up to £20,000. They may also have their pet taken away from them or be banned from having pets in the future.

How can I make sure I am not causing my pet unnecessary suffering?

Most pet owners love their pets very much and wouldn't dream of doing anything that might cause their pet harm.

Are you making sure your pet:

- has a comfy environment to live in that is suitable for their species?

- gets enough of the right food for their species?
- has enough space and opportunities to move around as much as they need to?
- lives with or away from other pets of their own species if they need to?
- is unlikely to hurt themselves, get sick or suffer?

Please see below information from The Blue Cross in relation to keeping small animals stimulated and happy and ensuring that they have an enriched environment:

Rabbits:

- A happy rabbit is one that can display its natural behaviour and you can find ways to help them do this. They need to be able to hop, stretch and play and because rabbits live together in the wild it's important to keep them in a pair or compatible group otherwise, they're likely to get very depressed. Make sure your rabbits are neutered – this is important even if they're in a same-sex group to avoid them fighting.
- Rabbits' favourite things include climbing, tunnelling and digging and their instinct is to run and hide if they sense danger. There are lots of things you can do to allow them to do this. Make sure they have plenty of space and a private compartment so they can get a bit of privacy. Give them tubes to run through and hide in and a cardboard box, filled with shredded paper and with an entrance and an exit they can hop in and out of. They love a good piece of dirt that they can burrow into so they'll really appreciate a digging pit.
- Did you know that rabbits spend 70 percent of their waking hours feeding? You can make this fun by encouraging them to forage – hang some root vegetables on a string for them to nibble and scatter their food to encourage them to search for it. You can also put their hay in hanging baskets which they can reach up and nibble at like they would do in the wild.
- You can give your rabbit safe things to chew, like apple wood or willow, or buy edible wooden chews from a good pet supplier.

Guinea pigs

- Guinea pigs are curious critters and love to watch what's going on around them. As well as a roomy indoor hutch they also need an outdoor run so they can have a bit of a nose and a good graze. Because they're quite shy they always need something to hide in when they're out in their run in case they get scared. Cardboard boxes, tubes or pipes are great for this and also lots of fun. They enjoy running free indoors too – make sure they're supervised and there are no escape holes!
- Guinea pigs aren't actually big fans of toys as a rule but hiding small amounts of food for them to search for can also keep them entertained.
- Guinea pigs love company of their own kind but not of others, like rabbits, so keep them in a same-sex or neutered pair or small group.

Hamsters

- While you're busy enriching your life during the day, most hamsters are snoozing happily but at night-time they're ready for action. They need lots of exercise and are well-known for merrily running on their wheels but don't get one with spokes because it can cause an injury. Instead, get a solid, wide wheel. People think they like exercise balls but they are really exhausting for hamsters and there's no way of escape for them, so it's actually more stressful than fun.
- You'll have a happy hamster if you give them cardboard tubes to run through and chew and they love to climb so wooden ledges will definitely go down well. They also adore rolling around in a sand bath – you can get special sand for this from pet shops.

Gerbils

- Gerbils are happiest when they're hanging out in tunnels, like they do in the wild. So make sure they have lots of material to dig and tunnel to their heart's content, like dust-extracted bedding, dried peat moss or a mixture of the two. The thicker the better as far as they're concerned. You can create a tunnel-environment by giving them cardboard tubes, like finished toilet rolls, which they'll have a whale of a time running through and chewing.
- Gerbils quite like to see what's going on so if you put a flat rock in the tank, you may find they use it as a lookout point. They also love climbing on fruit tree branches. They enjoy having a good roll around so a sand bath using special sand, which you can get from pet shops, will be popular. Gerbils are very sociable and would be unhappy on their own so make sure they've got at least one gerbil pal or live in a group of the same sex.

For any further information please visit the [Blue Cross website](#).