Sheriffhales Primary School and Preschool

Animals in School Policy

Date policy last reviewed: May 2025

Signed by:

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Last updated: 17 August 2022

Statement of intent

Sheriffhales Primary School and Preschool understands that there are numerous ways that staff and pupils may encounter animals on the school premises, whether it be wild animals or animals brought to or kept at the school for educational purposes. Sheriffhales Primary School and Preschool believes that keeping animals is an effective way of maximising the educational opportunity and attainment of our pupils.

Whilst keeping animals at our school is particularly beneficial to our pupils, we understand that we have a legal duty of care towards any animals we are responsible for, and that this must be a priority at all times. This policy has been created in order to outline the key responsibilities and procedures for pupils and staff when looking after our animals, and to ensure the safety of our school community when dealing with wild animal encounters.

1. Legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- The Pet Animals Act 1951
- The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981
- The Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976
- The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- The Animal Welfare Act 2006
- The Animals Act 1971
- The Environmental Protection Act 1990
- The Road Traffic Act 1988
- The Dangerous Wild Animals (DWA) Act 1976

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Health and Safety Policy
- First Aid Policy
- COSHH Policy

2. Roles and responsibilities

The governing board is responsible for:

- Ensuring the effective implementation of this policy.
- Ensuring staff roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and monitored.
- Consulting the headteacher and staff animal handler on managing animal welfare.
- Ensuring that the staff animal handler puts effective measures in place to protect staff, pupils and the animals on the school's premises.

The headteacher is responsible for:

- Conducting a risk assessment with the staff animal handler prior to the arrival of any animals to ensure all risks are manageable and controlled.
- Establishing cleaning and feeding rotas for animals that live on the school premises.
- Assigning a staff animal handler to take responsibility for the welfare of each animal.
- Ensuring the staff animal handler has sufficient knowledge to take on the role.
- Organising training for the staff animal handler where necessary.

The staff animal handler is responsible for:

- The welfare and husbandry of animals on the school premises at all times.
- Conducting a risk assessment with the headteacher prior to the arrival of any animals to ensure all risks are manageable and controlled.
- Organising relevant training for staff members and pupils regarding the care of animals in the school.

- Ensuring that the school keeps an adequate supply of food, water, and housing equipment for the animals in the school at all times.
- Finding a sufficient and reliable supplier for the food and equipment needed.
- Liaising with the attending vet where necessary.
- Devising a veterinary health plan in conjunction with the attending vet.
- Keeping up with the animal's vaccinations and treatments where necessary.
- Keeping the headteacher informed of the animals' health and welfare.

All staff members are responsible for:

- Completing the relevant training set up by the staff animal handler.
- Fulfilling their cleaning and feeding duties in accordance with the rotas created by the headteacher.
- Supervising pupils' interaction with the animals where necessary.
- Teaching pupils about the needs of the animals and how to handle and care for them where appropriate.
- Reporting any concerns regarding the animals, their welfare, and pupil interactions to the staff animal handler.

3. Duty of care

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 places a duty on schools to make provision for the welfare of any animal that they are responsible for.

Under this Act, the components of an animal's welfare include the need for:

- A suitable environment.
- A suitable diet e.g. food and fresh water.
- The ability to exhibit normal behaviour patterns.
- Suitable housing with, or away from, any other animals.
- Protection from pain, suffering and disease.

The headteacher and a staff animal handler responsible for the animals will conduct a risk assessment prior to the arrival of any animals to ensure that all risks are manageable and are controlled.

Where animals are brought in for a short period, e.g. for a day, an appropriate and detailed protocol will be implemented that ensures the wellbeing of the animal, and the health and safety of others, for the duration of its visit.

This will include the provision of assurances from the owner as to the means of transporting and housing the animal, and the responsibility to bring any equipment, food or water likely to be required during the day. Where the animal belongs to a pupil, advice from parents will be sought whenever necessary.

A named person will be responsible for the welfare and husbandry of the animals at all times.

The school will establish a written care programme for each species of animal kept on the premises, which will be implemented by the designated, trained member of staff, and will be communicated to all other members of staff.

Schools that keep a wide variety of animals will ensure a proper care programme is available for each creature, establishing the maintenance of minimum welfare standards.

4. Training for pupils and staff

All pupils and staff will undergo training on a termly basis to ensure that they are aware of their responsibilities when looking after the animals kept on the premises, including:

- Feeding.
- Hygiene.
- Handling.
- How to spot signs of infestation and disease.

Where there is a risk of wildlife entering onto the school premises, pupils and staff will be informed about, and given strategies for the safe coexistence with, the specific wildlife they may encounter on the school grounds.

5. Food

The class teacher will establish a rota for feeding animals that live in their classroom during and after the school day, as well as during holidays and weekends. This rota will be given to all members of staff and will be posted in the staffroom.

The school will remain aware that the type and quantity of food required varies not only with species, but also with age, stage of life, e.g. lactating females have different requirements from other adults, and breed. The dietary requirements of each type of animal will be ascertained by consulting a vet or a livestock nutrition consultant.

Food for the animals will be sourced from a reputable supplier to ensure it is of appropriate nourishment suitable to their age and breed.

A dry, vermin-proof container will be used to store animals' food, keeping it dry and preventing waste.

Food will be provided accordingly, depending on the animal, by a member of staff and/or pupils supervised by a member of staff.

Food not consumed in 20 minutes will be taken away or covered to prevent attracting pests.

All animals will have continuous access to a supply of clean, fresh drinking water that will be changed regularly by a member of staff in accordance with the rota set up by the headteacher. Troughs and other containers must be suitable for the animals using them, e.g. the correct height and dimension to allow easy access, and must be easy to clean.

The school will ensure that there is an adequate supply of food available at all times to avoid any drought of food. Food for animals who are brought onto the school site for the purposes of a visit will be the responsibility of the animals' owner.

Pupils will be informed not to feed wildlife on the school grounds.

6. Housing and environment

The school will only consider keeping animals if they have suitable housing, space and/or fields for keeping the animals away from the noisy educational environment. All animals kept outdoors, e.g. farm animals such as poultry, must have access to suitable shelter at all times. All buildings or shelters will be adequately ventilated, whilst ensuring animals are protected from draughts.

Each animal house will be designed, sited and constructed to provide a suitable environment, including any special requirement for exercise or social contact for the species, and will incorporate facilities sufficient for the activities carried out within it.

Specific recommendations for space allowances for each species will be sought from relevant agricultural or welfare organisations.

All animals will have access to a comfortable, solid-based lying area, with plenty of suitable bedding material. It must be replaced or replenished regularly to ensure that it remains dry in accordance with the 'Cleaning and maintenance' section of this policy.

Any fencing used must:

- Be strong enough to contain the species in question.
- Be frequently inspected and properly maintained.
- Not have the potential to cause injury to the animals.

Farm animals will be given company of their own kind and will never be isolated from the sight, sound or smell of other farm animals. Poultry will have access to a suitable area for exercise, with enough space to ensure that they can move around freely and express their natural behaviour patterns.

Species that are incompatible, e.g. predator and prey, or animals requiring different environmental conditions will not be housed in the same room or, in some cases, within a distance where scent or sound can be detected. Different species, or individuals of the same species from different litters, will not be housed together in the same space. This is to ensure that:

- The return of each animal to the correct owner, where applicable.
- The risk of transmission of disease from one creature to another is minimised.
- The likelihood of aggression or conflict between incompatible animals is reduced.

Aquariums pose particular safety hazards, such as electric shocks, which will be addressed with a risk assessment. Regular maintenance checks will be carried out by a competent person to ensure that such hazards are effectively controlled.

Fish, and other aquatic animals, will be properly looked after in accordance with advice received from the supplier, including undertaking regular checks on water cleanliness and temperature.

Where school-based animals are taken home by pupils, a suitable home-school agreement will be devised to encourage the observation of the same principles at home as those

governing their husbandry in schools – both from the perspective of pupil safety and animal welfare.

7. Cleaning and maintenance

The school will establish a written cleaning rota to ensure each animal is cleaned and cared for to a specified standard.

When carrying out cleaning duties, the staff animal handler will wear personal protective equipment, such as plastic gloves, at all times.

Hands will be washed before and after cleaning cages, tanks, etc. Rubber or plastic gloves will be worn whenever possible.

Litter trays will be cleaned daily. After removing soiled litter material, cages will be scrubbed with hot water and liquid detergent. Solid litter will ideally be incinerated; more conveniently, it can be sealed in strong plastic bags and placed with other waste in dustbins.

Pregnant staff members will never carry out tasks involving litter material due to the risk of toxoplasmosis. Pregnant staff and anyone with suppressed immunity will exercise particular caution and avoid all contact with animal waste products.

The school will purchase appropriate cleaning materials such as a shovel, bucket, stiff brush and detergent cleaner. Detergent cleaner will be used to clean each animal house. The detergent cleaner, as well as any other chemicals purchased, will be checked in accordance with the school's COSHH Policy to ensure that they are not hazardous to the animals or to the members of staff using them.

All bedding will be removed and replaced, and all droppings will be scraped into the bucket provided. Both the bedding and droppings will be disposed of appropriately by the member of staff carrying out the cleaning duties.

Contaminated surfaces will be properly washed and disinfected. Water and food feeders will be cleaned on a weekly basis to avoid any build-up of green algae which can be harmful to animals.

When cleaning each animal house, the member of staff will ensure that it is weather- and predator-proof, and will check for any repairs that are needed.

Any works required will be reported to the site manager, who will make appropriate repairs or will report to the headteacher if new equipment is needed.

Cleaning routines and arrangements for the disposal of animal waste will be carried out with due regard for good hygiene standards.

8. Animal handling

There must always be adult supervision when pupils are in contact with animals. Pupils will be taught that they are not to handle any animals without adult supervision and permission.

The following considerations must be checked in advance of any such activities:

- The animal is used to being handled.
- The animal is not likely to be stressed by excitable pupils.
- Where there is a correct way to hold any animal, this is taught to pupils from the outset.

Supervising staff will ensure that good hygiene is maintained consistently throughout any handling of animals. While handling animals, pupils and staff must:

- Not consume food or drink.
- Cover any open cuts or abrasions on the exposed skin of hands and arms with waterproof adhesive dressings.
- Wash their hands with soap and water before and directly after handling animals.
- Keep animals away from their face.

Pupils must be taught by staff the correct way to hold each animal.

Supervising staff will ensure that all individuals handling small mammals are aware of the importance of handling them carefully; the animals will be sufficiently restrained, so that they cannot damage themselves or the handler. Mammals will be handled daily where possible to ensure they become accustomed to being handled.

Gloves will not be worn unless it is known that an animal is likely to bite or scratch. In this situation a pair of rubber gloves, which does not particularly reduce dexterity, will be worn as a sensible precaution.

Handling small animals will always be carried out over a table or trough filled with a soft material such as sand/sawdust.

The handling of certain animals will be avoided altogether. Those which are nervous, nocturnal or prone to biting or scratching will only be observed and not touched.

Other creatures, such as invertebrates, can be too fragile to be handled any more than absolutely necessary. Sometimes any handling of an animal should be limited to a staff animal handler, who will have the necessary expertise to do it properly.

Animals will be given adequate rest periods away from disturbances.

9. Breeding

Animals will not be bred at the school, in keeping with RSPCA opposition to such practice. This includes the use of egg incubators, butterfly and snail breeding kits, worms, ants and frogspawn.

10. Infestation and disease

All members of staff are responsible for identifying ill health of animals and reporting any concerns to the designated staff member, who will then contact the attending vet and inform the headteacher.

A veterinary health plan will be developed in conjunction with the attending vet in order to arrange the following:

- Monthly visits and check-ups
- Any additional check-ups as required
- Treatment for prevention of external and internal parasites, including vaccinations
- Response to, and provision for, seriously ill or deceased animals
- Any other procedures necessary for the maintenance of the animals' health, e.g. trimming claws and grooming

The school is aware that, while the likelihood of diseases being passed on to humans from pet animals is low, some individuals, e.g. pregnant people and those with a weakened immune system, are at a greater risk of infection. In all cases, good hygiene practices will be observed to reduce the risks even further.

The staff animal handler, in conjunction with the attending vet, is responsible for the general health of animals, including keeping up with vaccinations and ensuring the appropriate animals have been treated for worms and fleas.

Pupils with known allergies to specific animals must 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, medical advice will be sought.

Where reptiles are kept the school will be aware that these animals can carry bacteria and will ensure that children under five will not have contact with such reptiles or the environment in which the reptiles live or exercise.

In any case of infestation or disease, appropriate treatment will be sought immediately and the animal(s) will be moved into a separate enclosure away from the others until they are back to full health.

If the animals are found to have any disease which is contagious to humans, the headteacher will inform parents/carers immediately and the animal(s) will be removed from the premises for appropriate treatment.

11. Animal-specific procedure (this section will be amended when a class animal is introduced to school)

The school has a duty of care to provide provision for the welfare of the guinea pigs they are responsible for.

The staff animal handler will be responsible for organising the welfare and husbandry of guinea pigs at all times.

The staff animal handler will organise adequate training for staff and pupils to ensure they are aware of their responsibilities when looking after guinea pigs.

The school will adhere to the following procedures when establishing care for guinea pigs:

- The headteacher and staff animal handler will ensure a risk assessment is completed to ensure that all risks regarding guinea pigs are manageable and controlled
- The school purchases feed for the animal from a reputable brand / supplier frequently to ensure it is in date.

- The animal's enclosure/s is cleaned weekly with cleaning products and equipment by the assigned staff member according to the rota. The bedding is freshly replaced.
- In circumstances where the school is temporarily closed and the animal remains on site, e.g. weekends and holidays, an assigned member of staff will visit the school site daily or take the animals home to care for them in accordance with the rota.
- The animal is handled no more than twice a day by pupils. Animal handling is supervised by the classroom teacher at all times.

12. Injuries sustained to pupils and staff

Any injuries sustained to pupils or staff during the looking after of the animals will be reported to the headteacher immediately, and will be dealt with in accordance with the school's First Aid Policy.

All incidents will be reported using the Animal Incident Log. Parents of injured pupils will be notified of the injury as appropriate.

13. Bringing pets 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 wellbeing of animals for the short time they are to be on the premises.

When a variety of animals will be together, the school will consider the possibility of unwanted interactions.

Animals must be housed properly and separately whilst on the premises and any containers used to transport them must be appropriate and retain the animal securely.

14. Injured animals brought in by pupils

Pupils will be told not to attempt to rescue any injured animals found on or outside of school grounds by bringing them inside the school. Pupils will be instructed that attempts to retrieve 'abandoned' animals in this way may damage the animals concerned and spread infection, and that they should instead report the injury so that others can act appropriately.

Where a pupil brings an injured animal into school, the following procedure will be implemented:

- Appropriate precautions, such as quarantining the animal, will be taken to minimise the risk of transmission of disease or parasites
- Scrupulous standards of hygiene will be maintained
- In all cases of doubt, expert advice will be sought from either a vet, the RSPCA or the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA)

15. Unsuitable animals

Animals that present unacceptable risks must not be brought into the school.

Wild birds and mammals taken from the 'wild' will not be brought into the school directly as they may be harbouring diseases or parasites transmissible to humans.

Dangerous animals, as defined by the Dangerous Wild Animals (DWA) Act 1976, may not be brought into school. These animals may present a risk to pupils and staff, and there may also be welfare risks to the animals themselves.

16. Monitoring and review

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis by the staff animal handler, in conjunction with the headteacher, who will communicate any changes to all members of staff.

The scheduled review date for this policy is June 2027.

Animal Incident Log

Date and time of incident	Reported by	Recorded by	Description of incident	Was property damaged? (Y/N)	Were pupils or staff placed in danger or harmed? (Y/N)	Recommended actions

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