



Hedingham School & Sixth Form

Small Animal Policy and Risk Assessment 2024

These procedures are reviewed annually to ensure compliance with current regulations.

Approved/Reviewed by Mr David Nash, Assistant Headteacher and Mr D Batch, Leader of Vocational Education – November 2024

Approved by the Curriculum and Personnel Committee on:	-
It was ratified by the Full Governing Body on:	4 December 2024
Next review due by:	November 2025

INTRODUCTION

Hedingham School and Sixth Form 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 well-being and care of the animal should also be in line to ensure the best possible conditions for the animal.

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

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

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.

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. When students are handling small animals, this should always be carried out whilst they are sat down with the animal on their lap to prevent dropping the animals.

Standard Operating Procedure

Daily and weekly records must be kept of standard procedures that are completed to ensure the small animals are kept, handled and exercised appropriately and regularly. See Appendix II for a copy for the SOP.

Physical injuries

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.

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 from 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 animal and the affected person are kept apart; in extreme cases, seek medical advice.

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 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.

Animal health

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.

Cleaning and hygiene

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

After removing soiled litter material, cages should be cleaned thoroughly.

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.

SOILED LITTER DISPOSAL

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

Appendix I

Likelihood	Rating Given	Severity of Outcome	Rating Given	Multiply values from Severity and Likelihood to quantify risk of hazard					
Highly Unlikely	1	First Aid Injury or Property Damage	1						
Unlikely	2	Minor Injury	2						
Medium	3	Short term ill health	3						
Likely – may occur regularly	4	Major Illness	4						
Highly Likely - almost certain to occur	5	Fatal or disabling Injury	5						
Hazard	Risk	Likelihood	Severity	Rating	Control Measures	Likelihood	Severity Rating	Rating	Further Action Required
Allergic reactions	Student or staff are allergic to the small animals and this causes anaphylactic reaction	3	3	9	All parents requested to notify school. Information shared with all relevant adults. Children or adults with allergies to specific animals have restricted access to them, whilst still able to participate in the learning experience safely.	1	3	3	Ensure all parents have signed e-consent form prior to students coming into contact with animals
Scratches, bites, nips etc	Animal bites, scratches or nips a student or staff member	2	1	2	Children taught how to safely hold and look after each animal type to limit animals becoming stressed. Scratches etc cannot be avoided altogether.	1	1	1	Appropriate first aid precautions and training in place. Children only allowed to handle any animal under staff supervision.

Appendix II

Daily Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Cleaning and Maintaining Guinea Pigs

w/b _____

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<p>Visual Health Check</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Inspect each guinea pig for signs of illness or injury. ○ Check for clear eyes, clean ears, and normal breathing. ○ Look for any changes in behavior or eating habits. 					
<p>Feeding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide fresh hay and fresh vegetables ○ Pellets: Supply a measured amount of guinea pig pellets. ○ Fresh water: Refill water bottles with clean, fresh water daily 					
<p>Cage Cleaning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Spot clean the cage: Remove soiled bedding and droppings. ○ Check the food and water area for spills and clean as necessary. 					
<p>Exercise and Enrichment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure guinea pigs have time outside of their cage for exercise. ○ Provide chew toys and tunnels to stimulate mental activity. 					
<p>Interaction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Spend time interacting with the guinea pigs to keep them 					

socialized and comfortable with human contact.					
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Weekly Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Cleaning and Maintaining Guinea Pigs

w/b _____

	Date	Signed
<p>Deep clean the cage and replace bedding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Remove guinea pigs and place them in a safe, temporary enclosure. ○ Take out all bedding, toys, and accessories. ○ Clean the cage with a mild, pet-safe disinfectant. ○ Add fresh bedding to the cage. ○ Ensure the bedding is appropriate and safe for guinea pigs. 		
<p>Clean Food Dishes, Water Bottles, Toys and Enrichment Items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Wash food dishes and water bottles with hot, soapy water, rinse and refill. ○ Rinse thoroughly and allow to dry before refilling. ○ Wash all toys, tunnels, and other accessories. ○ Ensure they are dry before placing them back in the cage. 		
<p>Nail Trimming and Coat Maintenance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Check and trim guinea pig nails as needed. ○ Use small animal nail clippers and be careful not to cut too close to the quick. ○ Brush long-haired guinea pigs to prevent matting. ○ Check for any signs of parasites or skin issues. 		
<p>Weight Check:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Weigh each guinea pig to monitor their health. ○ Record the weight to track any significant changes. 		

Additional Notes

- **Emergency Preparedness:** Have a first aid kit and the contact information for an exotic pet veterinarian readily available.
- **Observation:** Always observe guinea pigs for any changes in behaviour, appetite, or physical condition, and consult a veterinarian if any concerns arise.
- **Record Keeping:** Maintain a log of daily and weekly activities, health checks, and any incidents or observations.