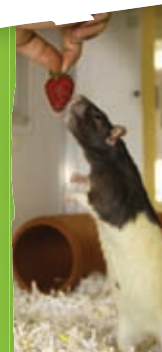


Animals **in** schools



A guide to animals
living happily in primary
and secondary schools

WOOD GREEN
The Animals Charity

Registered Charity No. 298348.



Animals in schools

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Starting **your** journey

It has long been a tradition to keep animals in schools and many of us will have early memories of having our turn of looking after the class hamster for a weekend and the excitement and fun that this brought. However, from the animal's perspective, being a school pet wasn't always a happy experience and as times have changed, so too has our knowledge of animal care and wellbeing.

Wood Green recognises the value that animals in schools can bring, not only the fantastic benefits they offer the children but also the unique opportunity they offer to teach responsible pet ownership and model best practice in animal welfare. As a result, this is our modern day guide to keeping animals happily in schools and at the highest welfare standards.



Happy school animals are an incredibly enriching experience for everyone involved and this guide will help support you right through this exciting journey and beyond!

Keeping **happy** animals



When considering having animals living in a school, there are many points to think carefully about first. Follow our easy to use checklist below to find out if school animals are suitable for you.

- ✓ **Do you have a named person who will take on legal responsibility for the animals?**
- ✓ **Do you have appropriate care set in place for weekends and school holidays?**
Sending a class pet home to different families every weekend will not result in happy animals.
- ✓ **Do you have a realistic budget set that includes accommodation, food, bedding, insurance and vet bills and do you have a recommended vet in place for unplanned treatment if required?**
- ✓ **Have you considered allergies within school including allergies to hay, fur, seeds and nuts?**
- ✓ **Have you considered the temperature of your school overnight if you are considering indoor animals and if so, is it appropriate?**
- ✓ **Have you considered the security and safety of your animals at night, from both humans and predators, if you are considering outdoor animals?**
- ✓ **Have you considered how you will co-ordinate feeding, cleaning out and ensuring adult supervision around the animals at all times during interaction with young people?**
- ✓ **Are you familiar with the five welfare needs and how they relate to the animal you may be considering?** To keep animals happy and healthy we need to provide for their five welfare needs.

THE 5 WELFARE NEEDS...

The Animal Welfare Act states that by law, an animal's owner has a duty of care to provide these five needs. If these needs aren't met, it can result in the law being broken. **These needs are...**

THE 5 WELFARE NEEDS...

Home



Need for a suitable environment...

Animals need to have the right type of home, including shelter and space. They need the opportunity to exercise and somewhere comfortable to rest or hide.



Diet



Need for a suitable diet...

Animals need to be given the right type and amount of food to keep them healthy. They also need access to fresh, clean water at all times.



Natural behaviour



Need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns...

Animals should have enough space and exciting things to do, to be able to show their normal behaviour.



Friends



Need to be housed with, or apart, from other animals...

Some animals need the company of other animals of their own kind and some should be housed on their own.



Vet care



Need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury & disease...

Pets need to be kept healthy and taken to the vets when ill or injured. Some animals require preventative vet care, such as flea and worming treatment and vaccinations.



If you have answered **yes** to all of these points then congratulations, you have in place some fantastic groundwork in your quest for happy school animals and your journey has well and truly begun!

Animal match

When looking at the wide range of animals that are kept as pets, our experience suggests there are some animals that would have a very happy experience living in schools and other animals for whom school life would be a very unhappy experience.

On considering your species, it is important to first consider your aims for having an animal living at the school.

If animals are to be regularly interacted with and you would like students to get hands on with tasks such as cleaning out, feeding and socialising, then four main species stand out as being excellent choices:

♥ Chickens

♥ Rats

♥ Guinea pigs

♥ Mice

These species are already living happily in schools up and down the country and can cope well with living in a school environment as long as all of their welfare needs are provided for. All are happy to be handled using appropriate techniques and provide an excellent opportunity to model empathy and care when students are working closely with them.





However, if your aims for animals living at school are more for observational requirements and there will be limited interaction with students, two additional species also stand out as possible choices:

♥ Gerbils
♥ Rabbits

These species are different from the group overleaf in that they generally aren't happy to be handled and can only cope well living in a school environment if handling is kept to routine health checks undertaken by trained adults. However these animals are fascinating to watch when living in a spacious environment and offer excellent opportunities for children to engage and learn from them without direct handling. Read on to explore each species and find the right match for you!

We feel all of the animals listed on these two pages could have a happy place in a school environment. If however you are considering an alternative species and would like support and guidance from our experienced animal specialists as to whether they would be an appropriate choice for your setting, please feel free to get in touch.

Chickens make fantastic school pets!

Chickens are becoming increasingly popular as school pets as they are straightforward to look after, have great personalities and offer huge learning opportunities in relation to where food comes from and animal welfare standards.

Meet their five welfare needs and you will have a happy, clucking group of animals that can run to you when called and can even show off their skills on a mini agility course (if you are dangling some tasty treats in front of them!)

Home

- A large shed makes a secure night time coop for a small group of chickens. Pop some perches and nest boxes in the shed and attach this to a secure walk in aviary or enclosed garden and you have a perfect chicken home. Poo pick the shed out daily and give it a full clean once a week.

Friends

- Chickens need chicken friends and we would recommend a group of at least 3 hens together with an optional small cockerel.
- Ex-caged hens, retired from a commercial egg laying life at the age of 18 months are perfect for school pets. Living outside after living in a farm cage is paradise for these girls and they get a whole new lease of life! They love being stroked, will fall asleep on your lap, are great at chicken agility and will come running to their name – who couldn't resist their charms!





Diet

- Layers pellets fed alongside corn, grit and greens are all chickens need but these ladies deserve some treats and will devour strawberries, grapes, raspberries and even bananas!

Natural behaviour

- Chickens are fascinating to watch when allowed to behave as chickens should so give them plenty of opportunities to scratch, peck and dust bathe. Log piles make great minibeast areas for inquisitive hens and old tables, chairs and sun loungers make popular outdoor perches.

Vet care

- Chickens generally require minimal vet care, although when they display signs of being poorly they are usually very ill and need urgent vet care.





- Simple daily health checks are essential plus a more thorough weekly health check should ensure any health issues are picked up nice and early making them easy to treat.

Handling

- Ex-caged hens are generally super friendly and very easy to pick up using a safe and stress free approach.

Our staff can provide full training in chicken handling and if you are rehoming from us we can also offer this to children at your school involved in their care!

KEY FACTS:

-  **Fantastic school pets!**
-  **Need a shed together with an enclosed aviary or secure garden**
-  **Group size of at least 3**
-  **Happy to run to you by name and even have a go at chicken agility!**

Guinea pigs

Guinea pigs are fabulous pets with big personalities and can learn to really enjoy interaction with children when managed carefully. Delightfully chatty, watching them charge around and squeal with excitement at the prospect of breakfast will put a smile on everyone's faces!

Home

- A large, wooden wendy house or shed together with a large mobile run to go out on the grass on dry days makes for ideal guinea pig accommodation.
- An indoor cage could also be offered for selected guinea pigs to come indoors for a session of story time.
- The shed / wendy house needs poo picking out daily and a full clean at least once a week depending on herd size.



Friends

- Guinea pigs need guinea pig friends and we would recommend a minimum of a pair or small group. Bigger groups can be more confident with people and ensures handling isn't focussed on just one or two animals.



Diet

- Easy to feed, guinea pigs need a small handful of guinea pig pellets per animal plus LOTS of hay available all of the time.
- Daily extras can include fresh fruit and veg but why not grow your own forage to feed too such as basil, lemon balm, dandelions and willow.

Natural behaviour

- Guinea pigs like to hide if startled so their shed and run need plenty of safe bolt holes which can be made from cardboard boxes, tunnels, plastic pet shop igloos or even piles of hay for hiding under.

Vet care

- Guinea pigs generally require minimal vet care, although when they display signs of being poorly they are usually very ill and need urgent vet care.
- Mites and lice can be common, using hay as bedding rather than sawdust is brilliant at addressing this.





- Guinea pigs need their nails clipped regularly – older students can be taught how to do this as once trained it is an easy task to undertake under supervision.



Handling

- Handling is best carried out sitting on the floor with a towel on the lap to minimise the risk of guinea pigs falling.
- We would recommend each animal has a couple of rest days each week when they aren't handled, although many will still be happy to come up to you and be hand fed some fresh forage daily – use a sprig of herb leaves and most guinea pigs will happily munch away sat right next to you.

KEY FACTS:

-  **Fantastic school pets!**
-  **Group size of at least 2**
-  **Need a shed/wendy house together with run**
-  **Happy to be hand fed fresh forage daily**





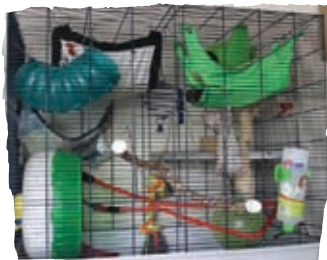
Rats



Rats are a hugely under-rated pet and firm favourites at Wood Green. Perfect for a school environment they can live indoors, get to know the daily timetable and will be ready and waiting for handling time if carried out at the same time every day! Hugely intelligent you can even teach rats tricks plus there are endless possibilities when getting creative in making their cage fun for exploring.

Home

- A large cage with big opening doors for easy cleaning. When it comes to a rat cage, the bigger the better! The 'Explorer' cage pictured here makes a fabulous rat house.



Friends

- Rats need rat friends so we would recommend a minimum of 3 rats.
- Rats have very individual personalities so any mix of sex can work as long as any males are neutered if living in mixed sex groups.

Diet

- Easy to feed, rats need a small handful of homemade, easy to make rat mix together with occasional treats of boiled eggs, broccoli and even strawberries!





Natural behaviour

- Rats love to climb and explore. Home made ladders made out of plaited material offer lots of fun.
- Litter trays can be provided for toilet training.
- Hammocks are very important as sleep areas and are easy to make yourself.

Vet care

- Rats need good ventilation as they can get breathing problems – weekly health checks are important to catch these early. Avoiding using sawdust as bedding also helps – home made shredded paper is an ideal and free alternative!
- Lumps and bumps are common in older rats and may not be anything serious but always need checking by a vet.

Handling





- We would recommend each rat is handled at least a few times every week to maintain their friendly nature and most would enjoy being handled every day!



- Handling is best carried out sitting down – rats will often climb on to a shoulder or lap for some relaxation and stroking time.
- For extra fun set up a mini agility track in the classroom and teach the rats to go over jumps and even weave through poles!



KEY FACTS:

-  **Fantastic school pets!**
-  **Need a large cage with plenty of room for toys, ladders & hammocks**
-  **Group size of at least 3**
-  **Happy to sit on laps or shoulders for stroking time**



Amazing mice

Mice are often overlooked as pets but have so much to offer. Gentle, fun to watch and stroke, mice have delightful personalities and weekly clean outs offer fabulous opportunities for getting creative with new toys and sleep areas!



Home

- A large, indoor cage with small mesh and a large door for easy cleaning, such as the Barney cage above, is ideal.



Diet

- Easy to feed, a small handful of homemade mouse mix can be scattered daily around the cage to encourage natural foraging behaviour.
- Tasty treats are fun to feed and can include broccoli, grapes, boiled eggs, millet and even live yoghurt!

Friends

- Mice need mice friends and we would recommend a minimum of 2 mice of the same sex, although a larger group means handling is less focussed on 1 or 2 individual animals.





Natural behaviour

- Mice love to climb and explore so providing fun toys that offer these opportunities are perfect and don't even need to come from a pet shop. Children's small plastic toys such as garages, dolls houses and even pirate ships can be turned into climbing frames with fun, tucked away sleeping compartments.
- Use the weekly clean out as an opportunity to get creative and add new toys each time. Toys don't even have to cost money – tissue boxes, kitchen roll tubes and even cat food boxes are all great for exploring time.

Vet care

- Mice generally require minimal vet care, weekly health checks should pick up any issues early for easy treatment.





- Sawdust can be too dusty for mice and can carry unwanted lice or mites so use shredded paper instead and save some pennies at the same time!
- Lumps and bumps can be common in older mice and may not be anything serious but always need checking by a vet.

Handling

- We would recommend each mouse is handled at least a few times every week to maintain their friendly nature and most would enjoy being handled every day!
- Handling is best carried out sitting down to minimise the risk of mice falling as this can cause serious injury.



KEY FACTS:

-  **Fantastic school pets!**
-  **Need a large indoor cage with plenty of room for toys and climbing**
-  **Group size of at least 2**
-  **Happy to sit on hands for stroking time**

Gerbil fun

Gerbils are inquisitive and active creatures that can make interesting pets. Fascinating to watch when digging and burrowing, they are well suited to a school environment where handling isn't a priority – they can be fun to read to and are ideal for teaching the needs of pets.

Home

- Gerbils will need a large glass tank with a secure lid, together with shredded paper as bedding mixed with hay.
- Cages will normally need cleaning out only around every 3 – 4 weeks.

Friends

- Gerbils need gerbil friends and we would recommend a minimum of at least 2 gerbils of the same sex.

Diet

- Easy to feed, a small handful of gerbil mix can be scattered daily around the cage to encourage natural foraging behaviour.





Natural behaviour

- Gerbils love to dig and burrow so a deep layer of shredded paper is great at encouraging this behaviour.
- Toys to explore and nibble on can all be made from recycled objects such as toilet roll tubes, cardboard boxes, old ceramic plant pots filled with dried herbs and even apple tree branches. Plastic tunnels and toys need to be avoided as they can be eaten and cause injury.







Vet care

- Gerbils are generally very healthy animals with a longer life expectancy than most other small animals of up to 5 years. As such, gerbils generally require minimal vet care, weekly health checks should pick up any issues early for easy treatment.
- Sawdust can be too dusty for gerbils and can carry unwanted lice or mites so use shredded paper instead and save some pennies at the same time!

Handling

- We do not recommend handling of gerbils by young people as they can move extremely quickly and do not always enjoy being handled. However weekly handling by you will be important to carry out health checks and we can easily provide training to do this.

KEY FACTS:

-  Ideal school pets for observing and reading to but not for handling
-  Group size of at least 2
-  Need a large glass tank with plenty of room for digging and burrowing
-  Very healthy, long lived small animals

Reading to rabbits

Pet rabbits' personalities and needs are not so very different from those of their wild cousins – understanding these needs will give you the key to giving your school rabbits the healthiest and happiest life possible.



Home

- Rabbits need to live outside to be happy. A large shed or wendy house together with a secure walk in aviary or large run is ideal if on a concrete floor. The run should be accessed by the rabbits daily, regardless of weather.
- Housing needs a full clean once a week and litter trays will need emptying daily.
- You may like to offer an extra secure garden that children can sit in for story time with the rabbits hopping about and free to interact as they choose.



Friends

- Rabbits need rabbit friends and we would recommend a minimum group size of 2.
- All rabbits regardless of sex should be neutered as this ensures a much happier group harmony and healthier bunnies.

Diet

- A natural and varied diet will help your rabbits to lead long, healthy lives. Hay should be the biggest part of their diet and be available to munch on at all times, together with a small eggcup of dry rabbit pellets.
- Fresh veg and plants can also be fed daily and why not grow your own forage – apple branches, wild geranium, many herbs and even rose plants can all be fed safely.



Natural behaviour

- Rabbits are prey animals and like somewhere safe to hide – log piles, tunnels and cardboard boxes all make safe hidey holes.
- Encourage natural digging behaviour with plastic litter trays filled with soil or sand.
- Scatter dried herbs or hide them in paper bags to encourage natural foraging and even get creative and make hay forage trees!



Vet care




- Rabbits can be prone to overgrown teeth and need a diet that consists of at least 80% grass and hay to help wear down their constantly growing teeth.

- Rabbits need to visit the vet for regular vaccinations against deadly rabbit diseases – contact your vet for full details. Try and find a rabbit specialist that has been recommended by a rabbit owner.
- Many rabbit owners now take out a pet insurance plan for their rabbits which can be very cost effective.

Handling

- We do not recommend young people handling rabbits as they do not always enjoy being handled, children can get bitten or scratched. However, weekly handling by you will be important to carry out health checks, we can easily provide training to do this. Rabbits are naturally very inquisitive, hand feeding them daily with home grown treats and sitting in with them while reading or writing can be a fantastic way to interact with them on their terms.

KEY FACTS:

-  **Ideal school pet for observing and reading to, not for handling**
-  **Group size of at least 2**
-  **Need a shed or wendy house together with a secure run**



Where next – Wood Green!

So you have chosen a species that best suits your needs and answered yes to all the questions on page 4. Congratulations! Where next? Wood Green of course!

With small animal rehoming centres in Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire, rehoming a Wood Green pet offers many benefits that buying from a pet shop or from Facebook / internet sites can't:

- ♥ **FREE expert advice and support throughout the life of the pet.**
- ♥ **All rehomed animals are vet checked, all rabbits are neutered and you can be confident that male animals are males and female animals are females avoiding the risk of unplanned and surprise litters!**
- ♥ **A free mixing service for small animals so if in the sad event that an animal passes on leaving a lonely single animal behind, we will happily assist you in finding a suitable new companion.**
- ♥ **Free school visits to our Cambridgeshire Centre that can include learning more about your chosen species through practical activities.**
- ♥ **The knowledge that your school has rescued unwanted or abandoned animals raising awareness of responsible pet ownership. We truly believe rescue is best!**



We also produce a range of detailed care guides on each of the featured species alongside a variety of short animations and videos, visit woodgreen.org.uk for more information.





To continue your journey of finding the right school pet for you, and for support and guidance throughout the exciting process, please do not hesitate to get in touch:

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Call: 0300 303 9333

Visit: woodgreen.org.uk

Or Email: handson@woodgreen.org.uk

 [@wood_green](https://twitter.com/wood_green)

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