



Teaching animal welfare in schools

TOGETHER WE CAN... IMPROVE ANIMAL WELFARE

Key facts...

- ★ The RSPCA believes that all children should be taught about the importance of animal welfare as part of their formal education.
- ★ Teaching animal welfare in schools would ensure children develop key life skills including compassion and empathy, as well as a respect for animals and a basic understanding of how to care for them.
- ★ The RSPCA believes animal welfare could make a significant contribution to children's and young people's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, something which all schools must promote and which Ofsted prioritises as part of their inspection regime in all schools in England. We would also like it to be included in the National Curriculum.
- ★ Education is a key plank in the RSPCA's prevention strategy. Teaching children and young people about animal welfare can help to contribute to reducing levels of animal cruelty - both deliberate and through lack of knowledge.

Introduction

The RSPCA believes teaching animal welfare in schools would ensure that far more children leave school with a basic understanding of how to care for and respect animals, which would result in a step-change improvement in some of the animal welfare issues which impact on our society today. It would also contribute to the development of crucial life skills - such as compassion and empathy for other living things.

Education is a key plank of the RSPCA's prevention strategy. In 2017, our education team trained 1968 new teachers in 22 sessions at 12 universities and colleges throughout England and Wales and delivered assemblies through our volunteer speakers to 12,967 primary school pupils. We trained 43 youth offending team professionals and completed our second year in our Lottery funded Reaching Communities programme, helping 2278 pupils from deprived schools and 353 troubled families through our Hastings Wild Things Project. We also held 15 foster carer training sessions reaching 173 carers and social workers.

The need for animal welfare education

There is strong public support for the inclusion of animal welfare learning in schools - between 84 to 90% of adults in RSPCA polls thought it was important that young people learn about the needs of animals. There is also clear evidence that pupils take these positive messages about health, lifestyle and social interaction back to their families.¹ A recent survey of young people, commissioned by the RSPCA, also showed a clear demand for animal welfare education in schools amongst school age pupils themselves with 97% of respondents agreeing that learning about animals' needs is important.²

The RSPCA, along with many education experts, believes that teaching children to care for and respect animals from an early age can bring about positive change for animals and society as a whole. Encouraging empathy and respect for living things is important for young people's personal development and ensuring young people integrate effectively into society.

¹ nfpSynergy Families Insight (January 2016), Executive Overview (see: <https://nfpSynergy.net/tracking-research/families-insight-monitor> (accessed 05.06.18))

² Beautiful Insights survey commissioned by the RSPCA, carried out between 23rd and 30th January 2018 (sample size: 1,500 10-18 year olds)

In England (education being a devolved matter), the RSPCA has long campaigned for animal welfare to be included in the National Curriculum and this is something that we would still welcome. However, we recognise that the development of new types of schools that are not subject to the demands of the National Curriculum - such as academies and free schools - mean that including animal welfare in this document alone would not lead to the improvement that we wish to see. Instead, we would like to see animal welfare taught as part of spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development; something which schools of all types in England must promote and which is prioritised and assessed by Ofsted in their inspections. This would ensure that all children are getting an equal chance to learn about animals and animal welfare as part of their formal education.

SMSC is not a standalone subject and is referenced throughout Ofsted's School Inspection Handbook³, though many of the topics it emphasises can overlap with subjects such as citizenship (which all schools in England have had to teach since 2002) or Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE).

Learning about animal welfare in general, and the Animal Welfare Act 2006 in particular, could be included in any of the four main areas SMSC is concerned with:

- As part of learning how to respect feelings and learning about the surrounding world in **spiritual** development;
- As part of learning to recognise right and wrong, respect the law, understand consequences and investigate ethical issues in **moral** development;
- As part of learning to engage with British values (as a 'nation of animal lovers') in **social** development;
- As part of learning about Britain's Parliamentary system in **cultural** development.

There are animal welfare topics that could be taught and discussed at every level of schooling and for every age of young people, ranging from simple issues around what an animal's basic welfare needs are up to more contentious political issues around, for example, methods of slaughter or hunting.

The Animal Welfare Act 2006

At the heart of animal welfare education, the RSPCA would like to see pupils challenged to have a basic understanding of their legal responsibilities to animals by learning about their duty of care to animals under human control, as set out in the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

This should focus on the five welfare needs of all animals:

- The need for a suitable environment,
- The need for a suitable diet,
- The need to exhibit normal behaviour,
- The need to be housed with or apart from other animals of the same species,
- The need to be protected from pain, injury or disease.

Currently only 39% of people are familiar with the Animal Welfare Act, the five welfare needs and their legal responsibilities under it.⁴ Teaching children and young people about the Act would be a significant first step to ensuring that the next generation of pet owners are more able to meet their pets' needs and that fewer animals suffer as a result of a lack of knowledge.

GET INVOLVED:

Show your support for our campaign by writing to the Secretary of State for Education to ask him to ensure that animal welfare is taught in all schools.

³ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-from-september-2015> (accessed 05.06.2018)

⁴ PDSA (2017) *PDSA Animal Wellbeing Report*: <https://www.pdsa.org.uk/get-involved/our-campaigns/pdsa-animal-wellbeing-report> (accessed 05.06.2018)