



Animal welfare in the National Curriculum

TOGETHER WE CAN... IMPROVE ANIMAL WELFARE

Key facts...

- ★ The inclusion of animal welfare within the National Curriculum would increase public understanding of the Animal Welfare Act 2006, ensuring children leave school with respect for animals and a basic understanding of how to care for them.
- ★ By utilising their desire to learn more about animals and how humans can help them, educating children from an early age will result in positive change for animals and society as a whole.
- ★ The inclusion of animal welfare in science and citizenship subjects will encourage empathy for living things. This is an important factor for the effective integration of young people within society.

Introduction

In 2016, the RSPCA ran courses in 19 universities and colleges in England and Wales for 1,250 teachers and student teachers wanting to learn how to deliver animal welfare schemes of work linked to the National Curriculum. We also trained 43 volunteers to deliver assemblies to over 12,000 primary school children, and 129 youth offending team members and social workers on how to address animal cruelty issues. Our Reaching Communities programme, hosted at our Mallydams Wood Wildlife and Education centre, helped 349 pupils from deprived schools and 44 troubled families.

The RSPCA, along with the majority of education and child development professionals, believes that to include specific reference to the welfare needs of animals in the curriculum 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. For example, the RSPCA estimates that irresponsible dog ownership alone costs the taxpayer over £80m per year, with specific councils estimating enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act in relation to dogs to be as high as £60,000 a year. Although many European countries allow for the voluntary inclusion of animal welfare at the discretion of the teacher, England has the opportunity to be one of the first countries to formally include animal welfare within the National Curriculum.

The need for animal welfare in the National Curriculum

In a survey in 2011, 53% of the public thought that animal welfare should be taught as part of the Curriculum.¹ A further survey carried out on behalf of the Pet Food Manufacturers Association in 2012 of 2,500 adults and 400 teachers found that 89% of adults, 78% of primary teachers and 70% of secondary teachers agreed it was important to teach younger children responsibility through learning how to care for pets.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 ensuring young people integrate effectively with society. The subjects of Science, PSHE and Citizenship may be the most appropriate for the inclusion of animal welfare, with the RSPCA being well placed to assist with the drafting of such a programme.

¹ PFMA/TFA survey 2012

² Susan Dawson (2012): Researcher in human communications at Manchester Metropolitan University (pers.comm.)

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The Animal Welfare Act 2006

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 all living things under human control, as set out in the Animal Welfare Act 2006. It cost the RSPCA £44m in 2016 to enforce the Act through investigation, caring for case animals and prosecution,³ an expense that would otherwise fall on the Government.

There needs to be a 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 31% of people are aware of the Animal Welfare Act and the five welfare needs.⁴

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.⁵

³ Trustees' report and accounts 2016.

⁴ PDSA Animal Wellbeing Report 2015

⁵ Families Insight Executive Overview, January 2016