



## Southbourne Junior School Pet Hamster Policy

### Purpose of the Policy

At Southbourne Junior School, we recognise the educational, social, and emotional benefits of keeping a small animal as a school pet. The purpose of this policy is to ensure the safe, humane, and responsible care of our school hamster while safeguarding pupils, staff, and visitors. This policy reflects the school's legal responsibilities under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, which places a duty of care on those responsible for animals to ensure their welfare needs are met.

### Rationale for having a school pet

Encouraging children to take an interest in animals can have a positive effect on them and can be used to improve both human and animal wellbeing. Children naturally identify with animals; we use children's interactions with animals to teach them how to respect each other and show empathy. Teaching children to respect and protect even the smallest animal is vital to ensure that we support the development of adults who will continue to protect our environment, animals, and plants for generations to come. A child's attitude toward animals can help shape future behaviour; therefore, we actively teach kindness and empathy towards animals.

Examples of how our school hamster will be a positive addition to the school community:

- Contribute toward the caring ethos within the school community
- Foster a sense of responsibility in children
- Teach compassion, to nurture and respect life
- Support emotional regulation by providing calm, predictable interactions that help pupils manage strong emotions
- Improve self-esteem and support social interaction with peers; lightening the mood and provoking laughter and enjoyment
- Serve as a positive shared topic for conversation, helping to ease pupils who find arriving at school in the morning challenging
- Support pupils in pastoral sessions to teach empathy and responsibility
- Boost motivation and pride in learning, as pupils who demonstrate the school's PRIDE values in their academic work are rewarded with time caring for or interacting with the hamster."

### Duty of Care and Animal Welfare

This policy has due regard to current Government statutory legislation, including the Animal Welfare Act 2006. We understand that we have a legal duty of care towards animals we are responsible for, and that this must be a priority at all times. Southbourne Junior School takes a zero-tolerance approach to children who are intentionally unkind towards the hamster. Any deliberate mistreatment will be addressed in line with the school's behaviour policy.

The Act requires that the following five welfare needs are met:

1. The need for a suitable environment
2. The need for a suitable diet
3. The need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
4. The need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals as appropriate
5. The need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury, and disease

#### **Application at Southbourne Junior School:**

- The hamster will be housed in a suitably sized, secure, and well-ventilated cage.
- Bedding will be cleaned regularly, and enrichment (exercise wheel, tunnels, chew toys) will be provided.
- The hamster will have constant access to fresh water and appropriate food.
- The hamster will be allowed uninterrupted rest during the day, respecting its nocturnal nature.
- The hamster will only be handled under direct adult supervision.
- Daily monitoring will ensure that any signs of illness, stress, or distress are identified promptly.

#### **Looking After a School Pet**

At Southbourne Junior School, we aim to promote good practice in animal care. Children are taught correct procedures in handling and caring for animals under the direct supervision of adults. They are encouraged to take shared responsibility for the care of the hamster, under direct supervision.

Children are taught how to:

- Interact gently and calmly with the hamster
- Handle the hamster safely while seated
- Respect the hamster's need for rest
- Recognise signs that the hamster may be stressed or uncomfortable

#### **Hygiene and Handling**

- Only calm, seated children may handle the hamster.
- The hamster will not be woken abruptly.
- Pupils and staff must wash their hands thoroughly after handling the hamster/cleaning the cage.
- Protective gloves will be worn when cleaning the cage.
- Good hygiene will be practiced whenever animals are handled.
- All animals must be kept away from the faces of pupils and staff.
- Any cuts must be covered before handling the animals.

#### **Allergies and Health Monitoring**

- The likelihood of diseases being passed on from pet animals is low. However, allergic reactions to mammals, birds, and other animals cannot be discounted.
- Allergic reactions may result from handling hamsters or being in close proximity and may present as skin rashes, irritation to the eyes and nose, or breathing difficulties.
- Staff will monitor pupils for the development of allergic reactions when they come into contact with the hamster.
- Parents will be notified in writing before the hamster is introduced and encouraged to inform the school of any known allergies to small rodents.

### **Injury reporting**

- Any bites, scratches, or injuries sustained to pupils or staff during the looking after of the hamster will be cleaned immediately and recorded in line with the school's First Aid Policy.
- All incidents will be logged and reviewed as part of the ongoing risk assessment process.

### **Emergency Procedures**

- In the event of an emergency evacuation, staff are responsible for supporting pupils to evacuate safely and efficiently.
- When it is deemed safe to return to the building, an appropriate person will be assigned to check on the welfare of the animals.
- It is not school policy to evacuate the animals during an emergency situation.

### **Care During Holidays**

A rota of responsible staff members will ensure appropriate care during school holidays.

If the hamster goes home with a member of staff:

- The hamster must be transported safely in a secure carrier
- The member of staff accepts responsibility in line with the school's duty of care under the Animal Welfare Act 2006
- The hamster will not be sent home with pupils.

### **Risk Assessment**

A formal risk assessment, see appendix below, will be reviewed annually or following any incident.

### **Monitoring and Review**

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure continued compliance with the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and best practice guidance from organisations such as the RSPCA.

## Southbourne Junior School – Risk Assessment

<b>Establishment:</b> Southbourne Junior School	<b>Assessment By:</b> K.Lowrey <i>Deputy Head</i>	<b>Date:</b> 26.2.26
<b>Review Date:</b> 26.2.27	<b>Approved By:</b>	<b>Date:</b>

<b>HAZARDS/RISK</b> What could cause harm and the type of harm?	<b>WHO IS AT RISK?</b>	<b>CURRENT CONTROL MEASURES IN USE</b> The control measures actually used, not supposedly used	<b>RISK RATING</b> H/M/L	<b>FURTHER CONTROL MEASURES</b> What further control measures are needed if risk level is too high?
Bites or scratches from hamster Minor injuries, infection	Pupils, staff	Only calm, seated children may handle the hamster; adults supervise at all times; clean minor wounds immediately and follow First Aid Policy; log incidents	<b>M</b>	Review handling procedures annually
Allergic reactions to small rodents  Skin rashes, eye/respiratory irritation, breathing difficulties	Pupils, staff	Parents informed in writing before hamster introduction; monitor for allergic reactions; children with known allergies restricted from contact	<b>M</b>	Update allergy information regularly
Disease transmission Low risk of infection	Pupils, staff	Wash hands after handling; gloves for cage cleaning; cage cleaned regularly	<b>L</b>	Reinforce hygiene routines
Cuts, open wounds, abrasions Infection	Pupils, staff	Cover wounds before handling hamster	<b>L</b>	Reinforce safety expectations

Improper handling / hamster stress/injury/pupil injury	Hamster, pupils	Teach correct handling under adult supervision; do not wake hamster abruptly; respect nocturnal rest periods	L	Observe hamster behaviour daily
Escape Hamster lost or injured	Hamster	Cage is secure, well-ventilated, and appropriate size	L	Check cage locks daily
Emotional distress / anxiety Pupils feeling stressed, upset	Pupils	Hamster provides a calm, friendly presence; supports emotional regulation; friendly discussion topics at morning arrival	L	Review emotional support regularly
Emergency evacuation Delay or confusion; hamster at risk	Pupils, staff, hamster	Staff evacuate children first; hamster checked when safe to return; hamster not evacuated	L	Emergency plan reviewed annually
Holiday care Hamster welfare	Hamster	Staff rota for care; transport in secure carrier	L	Review staff rota regularly