

1.0 School Administration

1.A. General

1.A Animals in Schools

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POLICY

Lakeshore School Division welcomes animals in the classroom as long as guidelines below are followed.

Excerpt from: “Appendix C: PETS IN THE CLASSROOM”, Province of Manitoba Curriculum

When we think of classroom pets, we often imagine small mammals such as gerbils, hamsters, or guinea pigs. While these are interesting creatures to observe, hamsters and gerbils are nocturnal animals and, as such, tend to be rather sleepy during the day. In fact, one group of Grade 1 students once questioned whether or not there was a real animal in the hamster cage. The children would occasionally annoy the hamster into activity, but for the most part, he remained an unseen fixture of the classroom.

Generally speaking, most animals in the classroom are best left as visitors, rather than residents. It is expected that students will have opportunities to observe living creatures, but this can be accomplished by having animals as special visitors for a period of time. Of course, teachers should outline strict guidelines for the safety of the animals, ensuring that they undergo as little stress as possible. Teachers must also be aware of allergies the students might have, especially to fur-bearing animals.

Teachers who are planning to maintain a “classroom pet” for any period of time need to recognize that all vertebrate animals have important dietary and housing concerns that require time, expertise, and care to address. Birds, for the most part, do not make good classroom pets. Some, like the budgie or any member of the parrot family, can be carriers of parrot fever and should not be housed in a school or classroom. Other birds, such as finches, canaries, or pin quail, are sensitive to temperature changes and require large flight pens to move around comfortably.

Reptiles and amphibians require very specific environments and carefully designed diets. Being cold-blooded, these animals will endure a slow death of starvation if their dietary needs are not met. Turtles, of course, must be avoided in classrooms, due to concerns regarding salmonella. Amphibians, such as frogs, are sensitive to temperature and humidity changes and require large environments so that they have suitable ranges for movement.

Exotic pets of all types need not be resident in schools or classrooms. Large and small snakes, tropical birds, monkeys, and reptiles are interesting creatures for students to observe. However, with the availability of media today, there is no reason for these animals to be long-term “classroom pets.”

Wild animals may carry potentially dangerous pathogens, and must not be brought into classrooms unless under the care of a knowledgeable expert. Animals found by students and brought into school (such as raccoon babies, injured squirrels, small snakes, and other creatures) should be directed to a local humane shelter or wildlife rescue organization.

Small fish make good classroom pets. With proper housing, feeding schedules, and cleaning, an aquarium can house a collection of small fish, readily available from most pet stores. Teachers should avoid keeping fancy tropical fish in their classrooms. Fish can be sensitive to light and temperature changes — some schools turn down their heating over the weekends in wintertime, making heaters essential for aquaria. Feeding schedules must be maintained. While it may seem that classroom fish can make it through a holiday weekend without being fed such fasting periods put undue stress on the fish and make them far more susceptible to diseases.

*Source: Adapted from “Keeping Animals in the Classroom: A Guide.” Implementation Planning Workshop for The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: Science and Technology. © Queen’s Printer for Ontario, 1998. Adapted with permission. Grades 5 to 8 Science: A Foundation for Implementation 8 Invertebrates can make good classroom pets. These pets are relatively easy to maintain. They require minimal amounts of space and small quantities of food. Of course, teachers have to be aware of their environmental and dietary needs. The following guide provides some general classroom care information regarding the needs of a variety of living things. This guide should be used prior to having animals in the school.