Summary

This is a case study on how rabbits are used to support the curriculum in a primary school, in a variety of subject areas.

School name

Edwalton Primary School

Region

East Midlands

Curriculum fit

Science:
- Moving and growing
- Variations on how animals adapt to their environment
- Growing
- Nutrition/Animal/human needs (how diets differ)
- Interdependency and adaptations
- Food webs

Literacy:
- Story writing and setting
- Characterisation

Numeracy:
- Number trails
Case studies

- Key Stage 1 basic numeracy skills (addition, subtraction, multiplication)
- Key Stage 2 numeracy skills (data handling, break-down of running costs etc)

P.S.H.E.
- Respect for all life
- Caring for others
- Key Stage 1 basic numeracy skills (addition, subtraction, multiplication).

Topic
Sustainable development

School size
237 pupils

Free meals
9.7%

Expiry date
Ongoing

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Brief description of the project
We currently have 6 Guinea Pigs in classrooms around our school. They are a firm favourite with our pupils and are an ideal first animal for the novice. The School Ethos allows students of all ages to care for a wide variety of animals should they wish to do so.

School Farms Network: Get Your Hands Dirty
Older children work in pairs on a rota system to care for the animals for a week. The School already has Rabbits, Sheep, Saddle-back piglets, Goats, Kune Kune pigs and three beehives. This variety of animals enables the pupils to:

- Respect the diversity in farming,
- Hands-on experience and care for a larger animal,
- Increase their knowledge of animal husbandry,
- Sustainability and Eco-schools.

Funding for this project comes from school fund-raising events organised by the pupils such as ‘bag-packs’, sponsored walks and cake sales, donations from the Parents Association and from local companies.

Issues that are raised by this project are the same as keeping any animal:

- Who looks after them at weekends and in holidays?
  All animal care is done by children and their family on a voluntary basis,
- What arrangements are made for veterinary treatment?
  Our farm unit is supported through fund-raising events within school. We are fortunate to have a parent who is a veterinary nurse who helps us to administer inoculations. We have also made links with a local veterinary drugs representative who has on occasion, provided us with necessary medicine at cost price.
- General health & safety issues surrounding keeping farm animals
  All children who care for the animals are instructed in the appropriate skills in order to keep themselves and the animals safe and well. We are fully compliant with all the requirements for keeping animals, we are regularly updated and inspected by DEFRA. We have an animal handling policy which all staff and pupils are made aware of. We regularly undertake risk assessments on the jobs carried out by our pupils. All schools wishing to keep large animals, (pigs, goats and sheep) must register with DEFRA and be given a holding number which you need to quote on all communications with them. You are then legally required to keep an “animal file” with all relevant details recorded such as animal movement to and from the premises and medicines administered. All feed has to be kept separate in metal bins which are clearly labelled and have there
own dedicated scoop so that there is no cross contamination of feed. We have produced a leaflet for children and their parents to keep them informed of jobs that need to be done and all aspects of health and safety, not only in regard of the children but also the animals. Families who undertake animal care during the school holidays are also given this leaflet to advise them. We use a specific biocidal hand wash which is readily available for the children and adults to use after caring for the animals. We have installed a galvanised metal tap, sink and water trough specifically for animal carers use.

Outcomes of the project
Keeping Guinea Pigs in our classrooms has been a great success. They are a popular animal with our pupils. Children who might be more wary of some of our larger animals can feel involved and are happy to help look after them. They are happy to be handled and enjoy being groomed. Visiting local playgroups regularly use our campus for a variety of purposes. Pupils with behavioural problems often work really positively with them. Having a farm-unit has enhanced the whole school profile and they are used in photographs by the local press, on local and national television (Blue Peter’s Animal Care Awards). We have also recently been awarded a “Green Guardians living for tomorrow” award for our work with sustainability. One of our year 6 pupils has also been awarded “Young Green Guardians” award for her work with the animals and our thriving eco club. We have also featured in recent TES articles highlighting our efforts and featured in a four page article in the “Living for tomorrow” magazine making the school unique.

Transferability
Guinea Pigs are an ideal first animal to have for novice animal carers. They require a suitable sized cage, preferably made of plastic which can be easily kept clean. I would recommend that they be cleaned out at least twice weekly. The cage should be emptied and any dried on matter scraped off. The cage should then be disinfected with a disinfectant specially made for animal use. This should be used under adult supervision.
Case studies

After leaving the disinfectant to dry the cage can then be lined with a few sheets of newspaper before being filled with an inch thick layer of shredded paper. Pet bedding can be bought from local pet shops but it is expensive and most schools will have a shredder that can provide free bedding. We use a dried feed supplemented with fresh greens, such as apple or carrot which the guinea pigs like. They should always have access to fresh water. It is nice if you have an area where they can move freely especially in the summer months when they like to graze on the grass. But if leaving them out in a portable run they must have a sheltered area that they can get in if it becomes too hot or wet. Guinea pigs will require their nails trimming at regular intervals if they are not able to wear them down naturally on rough ground. This may appear daunting at first but is very easy to do just clip away small amounts from the end of the nail. It does not cause any discomfort to them and is much preferable to over grown nails.

Challenges
The School has had many benefits from its variety of animals. We are the only primary school (to our knowledge) to have a Farm-unit alongside a three-acre wood and pond on our campus. We had a long tradition of animal care going back over thirty years which enhances children’s learning opportunities greatly.

Context
Edwalton Primary School has recently received an outstanding OFSTED report for, amongst other things our environmental education. We have had eco schools status for a number of years recently being awarded “international eco school” status. We also hold investors in people, and have the gold award for “healthy schools”. We are also a hub school for sustainability.

The school is situated in the South of the Nottingham City conurbation. Our pupils are from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. We have 13.5% of pupils with English as a second language, 9.7% with free school meals entitlement, 9% of pupils regarded as being Gifted and Talented, and 22% of pupils with Special Educational Needs.