## CATEGORIES OF ANIMAL USE

The *Categories of Animal Use* shown in Table 1 will assist school staff to identify whether a proposed ‘teaching with animals’ activity requires the approval of the Victorian Schools Animal Ethics Committee (VSAEC).

For all animal use categories, schools are required to comply with animal welfare obligations outlined in [**department policy**](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/teaching-with-animals/policy) and the [**Victorian Codes of Practice**](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/australian-code-care-and-use-animals-scientific-purposes). **The** [**Wildlife in schools**](https://www.vic.gov.au/wildlife-schools) guidance may also apply. Regardless of the category, schools must provide for the lifetime welfare of animals, and their offspring.

By law, any use of animals in schools that constitutes a 'scientific procedure' requires an ethics application to the VSAEC, and the project must not begin until the school has received VSAEC approval.

A **scientific procedure** is defined as *a technique employed when caring for or using animals for scientific purposes. One or more procedures may be used in an activity* by the [**Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes**](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/australian-code-care-and-use-animals-scientific-purposes).

**Pre-Approved Activities**

There are **eight Pre-Approved Activities** detailed on the [Resources tab](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/teaching-with-animals/resources) of the Policy and Advisory Library. If a school is undertaking one of these activities, the school must submit a [**Notice of Intent**](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/teaching-with-animals/guidance/forms-record-keeping) to the VSAEC.

**If your planned activity is not a pre-approved activity,** please consider which of the four categories of animal use it falls under (refer to Table 1). *Note the definition of scientific purposes below.*

**Scientific purposes definition**

All activities conducted with the aim of acquiring, developing, or demonstrating knowledge or techniques in all areas of science, including teaching, field trials, environmental studies, research (including the creation and breeding of a new animal line where the impact on animal wellbeing is unknown or uncertain), diagnosis, product testing and the production of biological products.

**Table 1: Categories of Animal Use**

| **Category of use** | **Description** | **Conditions which apply to teachers and students** | **Example activities** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Category 1 activities do not require VSAEC approval** | | | |
| 1. Observational studies of animals in their normal environment.   **Animal welfare laws still apply. See also** [**Wildlife in Schools**](https://www.vic.gov.au/wildlife-schools) **guidance on the** [**Teaching with Animals PAL page**](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/teaching-with-animals/policy)**.** | No direct contact with animal(s)  No disturbance to animal’s normal activity | Teachers and students are responsible for not interfering with the animal’s environment and complying with animal welfare laws. | Wildlife observation (e.g., identifying birds in a local park)  Excursion to a zoo, wildlife facility or farm. |
| **Category 2 activities require VSAEC approval if the activity is for scientific or educational purposes or objectives** | | | |
| 1. Basic handling, feeding and care of mature animal(s).   **Animal welfare laws apply in all cases. See also** [**Wildlife in Schools**](https://www.vic.gov.au/wildlife-schools) **guidance.** | Animal(s) are subject to normal handling, feeding and care, including grooming, training, and vet visits.  No breeding of animal(s). | Ethical sourcing, appropriate care and ongoing welfare of the animal(s) must be ensured in accordance with animal welfare laws.  Teachers care for the animal(s), as such they need to be competent in the feeding and housing of the specific animal. This may require teachers receiving training or expert support.  Maturity level of students considered, and suitable instructions provided by teachers before activity. | *Example activities that* ***do not require*** *VSAEC approval:*  Keeping hens in a school garden or coop  Keeping animals as class pets  *Example activities that* ***do require*** *VSAEC approval:*  Class pets that are also used to achieve an educational objective. |
| **Category 3 activities require VSAEC approval** | | | |
| 1. Disruption to animal’s normal conditions or behaviour | Any kind of procedure, test, experiment, inquiry, investigation, or study using the animal(s).  Moderate impact, some disturbance to animal(s).  The animal(s) are subjected to minor intervention for monitoring conditions and responses. Animal(s) may be restrained, but discomfort or stress is minimal.  Activities may involve changing the physical environment and monitoring the animal’s responses. | Teachers care for the animal(s), as such they need to be competent in the feeding and housing of the specific animal. This may require teachers receiving training or expert support.  Students are given appropriate instructions and training before activity. | Weighing and monitoring of growth.  Measuring of body characteristics, e.g., tail length in mice.  Monitoring and care of very young or vulnerable animal(s) e.g., day-old chicks up to 5 weeks old.  Controlled breeding of small animal(s), e.g., breeding mice, rabbits, guinea pigs.  Non-invasive experiments and investigations of animal responses.  Changing physical conditions and monitoring animal responses, e.g., breathing rates and temperature. |
| **Category 4 activities are prohibited in all Victorian early learning, and primary and secondary school settings** | | | |
| 1. Invasive procedures; procedures involving pain, risk to the animal and/or recovery. | High impact.  Invasive techniques that may cause some pain and distress to animal(s).  If necessary, such activities must be taught using alternatives to live animals, such as computer models, models or parts of dead animals. | Not Applicable  Refer to the [**‘prohibited activities’**](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/teaching-with-animals/guidance/vsaec-application-and-approval-process) in the Policy and Advisory Library for details. | |

**Note:**

The department has provided general guidance on common types of animal use in schools and whether approval is required.

Table 1 is not exhaustive and there may be uses of animals that constitute a scientific procedure that fall outside the category definitions.

If you are unsure whether your project meets the definition of a ‘scientific procedure’ and requires approval, contact [animalethics@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:animalethics@education.vic.gov.au).