



Nanyang Girls' High School students getting up close with animals on a school field trip to the SPCA. PHOTO: SPCA

# Animal welfare included in syllabus on building character

By DAVID EE

BOTH primary and secondary students will learn the importance of animal welfare in the new upcoming Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) syllabus to be introduced next year.

Through this, they will gain an understanding of “how they can contribute towards developing a caring society”, using their daily experiences as a guide, an Education Ministry (MOE) spokesman said.

MOE was responding to queries from The Straits Times, after Minister for Foreign Affairs and Law K. Shanmugam – who has championed animal rights in recent years – revealed in an interview with a magazine this month that the CCE syllabus would teach students about animal care and handling.

He had said: “I’m a strong believer that children are automatically interested and loving towards pets, so we should encourage them and educate them so that the future generation will be even more loving or at least tolerant of animals.”

MOE did not provide more details about the syllabus content.

Education Minister Heng Swee Keat had announced last November that the CCE syllabus – begun in the 1990s to teach val-

ues – would from 2014 no longer focus solely on textbook learning, and that schools would be given more flexibility to design their own CCE programmes.

The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) had written to Mr Heng last December, asking him to consider including an animal welfare module in the new CCE syllabus.

Animal welfare groups were pleasantly surprised by the news. Despite few details being made available, they said this could be “a big step forward” in changing mindsets towards animals.

Mr Ricky Yeo, president of Action for Singapore Dogs (ASD), said: “If a child grows up learning about animals, it would not consider them foreign and alien. For those who don’t, it would be very hard to change their minds.”

SPCA executive director Corinne Fong added: “This is more than just about pets. It’s about being compassionate to any living thing, including our fellow human beings.”

But for the syllabus to be meaningful, they said that it would have to include interaction with animals, not just classroom lessons, and be taught to children from a young age.

The SPCA hosts up to 100 school field trips a year at its shel-

ter, where students as young as pre-schoolers interact under staff supervision with rabbits, hamsters, dogs and cats. ASD occasionally brings dogs to schools for students to learn how to interact with them.

Both groups said they hoped these opportunities for students continue, whether under the new CCE syllabus or not. They welcomed the MOE to make use of the experience animal welfare groups here have.

Educators similarly hailed the move. “I view this as very timely,” said Mrs Jacinta Lim, principal of Yangzheng Primary. “We have to start with the younger generation. That’s where impressions are made. If you want to mould a child, you have to start right when they’re young.”

She added that the inclusion of animal welfare under CCE “underscores its importance”.

Supplementing CCE lessons with, for example, attachments to animal welfare groups, is important, said Ang Mo Kio Secondary principal Abdul Mannan.

In the future, this may even lead to improved pet care and a fall in animal abuse cases, said Mr Yeo. “You will see the effects of it a generation later, when these kids grow up.”

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