



Supporting Veganism in Education:

A Guide for Educators

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About this guide

The Vegan Society has produced this short guide to support educators and help them accommodate the needs of vegans in education.

This guide explains what veganism is and how veganism is protected under human rights law and the Equality Act 2010. It also provides practical guidance on how to be vegan-inclusive and how to support vegan learners and staff.

What is veganism?

“Veganism is a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude—as far as is possible and practicable—all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of animals, humans and the environment. In dietary terms it denotes the practice of dispensing with all products derived wholly or partly from animals.”

- The Vegan Society

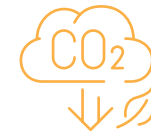
Veganism is more than just a diet; it is a moral philosophy that grounds a compassionate way of life. A vegan is someone who avoids all animal products (meat, fish, dairy, eggs, honey, gelatin, fur, leather, wool, silk, etc.) and excludes any involvement with the exploitation of animals from their lifestyle: including all mammals, insects, amphibians, birds and fish. Vegans avoid visiting businesses and places that exploit animals for human entertainment, such as zoos, safaris, aquaria and animal circuses. Vegans will also avoid products that have been tested on animals, such as cleaning products and cosmetics.

Reasons why people might be vegan

There are four main reasons why people are, or will become vegan:



Animal rights: The belief that all nonhuman animals have the right to live and be free.



Environment: Avoiding products derived from other animals significantly lowers our carbon footprint and tackles the biodiversity crisis by releasing agricultural land for wildlife.



Health: Research has linked plant-based diets with lower blood pressure and cholesterol, as well as lower rates of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancer.



Human rights: Plant-based eating requires less land than meat and dairy production and is considered a more sustainable way of feeding people across the globe.

For more information visit:

vegansociety.com/go-vegan/why-go-vegan

The legal protection of vegans

Veganism attracts protection under Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right is made available under the Human Rights Act 1998:

- Vegans have the right to practice veganism in their daily lives, free from unlawful interference.

Under Human Rights law, schools must respect the parental right to ensure that education and teaching conform with their philosophical convictions:

- You should ensure that vegan values are included in all aspects of school life.

Under human rights law, everyone has the right to adopt a belief of choice and be free from coercion.

- Those transitioning to veganism should be supported and not discouraged.

Ethical veganism is a 'protected characteristic' for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010:

- It is unlawful to directly or indirectly discriminate against ethical vegans.

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires you to routinely integrate inclusive thinking and equality in everything your institution does.

- You should ensure that the needs of vegans are considered when developing policies and practices concerning school functions and activities.

What should you do?

Below is a checklist to help you integrate inclusive thinking and equality into your practice:

- Ensure you have an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy in place which includes veganism as a protected philosophical belief.
- Consider the needs of vegans in decision-making processes.
- Facilitate opportunities for vegan learners and staff to express and discuss their views.
- Use your inclusion policy to state (a) the measures you have put in place to eliminate the disadvantages vegans face and support vegan learners and staff members, and (b) how you intend to foster good relationships between vegans and non-vegans.
- Plan for regular, scheduled reviews of your inclusion policy to ensure you are adequately and appropriately dealing with inclusion issues.
- Provide staff with CPD accredited vegan-inclusive training.
- Add "vegan" to your list of denominations on equality monitoring forms.
- Ensure that educators understand that inclusion is a matter of personal and professional conduct.
- Ensure that your Board of Governors (or equivalent) is clear about the legal protection of vegans and the Public Sector Equality Duty.

How to support vegan learners

To prevent discrimination, it is vital that institutions create a positive and inclusive environment which both affirms and supports the vegan lifestyle.

Vegan learners can feel uncomfortable and isolated if expected to cope in an environment which contradicts their beliefs and lifestyle.

Key considerations:

Topics

- Do use topics that celebrate nonhuman animals in their natural habitats e.g., pond, forest, swamp.
- Be considerate of vegan perspectives when teaching about cultures, religions, traditions and their use of other animals e.g., animal sacrifice, methods of slaughter, bullfighting.
- Avoid uncritical and biased topics about animals in captivity e.g., zoos, aquaria, animal farms or animal circuses.
- When discussing healthy eating and wellbeing use nutritional rather than traditional language – e.g., ‘protein’ instead of ‘meat/fish’, ‘calcium’ instead of ‘dairy’, etc.

Nonhuman animals in learning

- Visit other animals in sanctuaries or in their natural habitats.
- When observing nonhuman animals in their natural habitats leave them undisturbed.
- Use online videos or life-size models to discover the animal kingdom.
- Encourage learners to empathise with nonhuman animals in captivity (zoos, aquaria or farms) and avoid these on school trips.
- Refrain from having class ‘pets’, organising hatchery projects and visiting other animals in captivity (petting zoos, donkey rides etc.)

Language

- Use inclusive language such as ‘soya milk and dairy milk’ rather than ‘vegan milk and normal milk’.
- Provide an alternative to stories, songs and idioms geared towards the exploitation of other animals e.g., “12345 Once I Caught a Fish Alive” or “There’s more than one way to skin a cat”.
- Avoid speaking about nonhuman animals in a derogatory way or using texts that do.
- Refrain from calling nonhuman animals ‘it’ as this implies an inanimate state.

Food

- Provide healthy, balanced and varied plant-based options at mealtimes (including plant milk at breakfast/breakfast clubs) and during any cooking/baking/extra-curricular activities.
- If sweets or treats are distributed remember vegan treats.
- Ensure that food and nutrition teaching and subsequent displays include plant-based options of each food group.

Materials

- Ensure uniform policies do not require the use of products derived from other animals, such as leather, suede or wool.
- Avoid the use of all products derived from other animals including wool (including felt), silk, fur, leather, suede and feathers.
- Check labels and ingredient lists for products derived from nonhuman animals (including additives).

Resources

- Incorporate vegan literature and representation within your library.
- Assess the suitability of required resources and adjust as necessary to include vegans: this includes exam questions, work sheets, reading books, etc.
- Avoid using nonhuman animals, dead or alive, as resources e.g., for dissection or drama props.

Bullying

Vegan learners are at increased risk of teasing and bullying because of their beliefs. Ensure all staff and learners understand that veganism is covered under the school's anti-bullying policy. Staff should also understand why certain actions and behaviours towards vegan learners may be upsetting and considered bullying, no matter how small.

Supporting the emotional wellbeing of vegans

Some aspects of school life can be distressing for some vegan learners. Additionally, some vegan learners may have non-vegan family members who do not support their vegan way of life. These vegan learners need to feel valued and included and have access to appropriate emotional support from school staff.

Some ways of supporting vegan learners include:

- Validate their feelings. For example, "It is okay to feel this way."
- Communicate empathy and understanding. For example, "I can see how hard this is for you and I understand why."
- Use active listening skills to truly listen to what they have to say.
- Help vegan learners to problem-solve to make things better/easier and find ways of managing their emotions.
- Ascertain and empower individual choices. For example, "Would you prefer to sit away from meat-eating peers or sit with them?"

How to support vegan staff

Thousands of educational institutions have vegan teachers and staff members. To ensure they feel included:

- Provide plant milk and vegan biscuits in the staff room.
- Provide vegan options at mealtimes, meetings, trips and training sessions.
- If you're treating your staff, avoid sweets with gelatin, milk chocolate etc. or offer a vegan alternative.
- Respect that vegan staff may not want to take part in activities or support trips that contravene their beliefs e.g., zoos, animal farms or aquaria, charities that support the use of nonhuman animals in laboratory experiments and manufacturers of non-vegan food and drinks.
- Respect that vegan staff will not want to deliver hatching projects, dissection classes or use non-vegan art or craft supplies. Adopt vegan-friendly alternatives.
- Educate all staff and learners so that they understand ethical veganism is a protected belief, covered by your anti-bullying and anti-harassment policy, and that inappropriate jokes are not acceptable.
- Reassure your vegan employees that their beliefs are respected at work.
- Share lists of any dietary requirements or allergies in class groups, including the teacher, so that parents are alerted when it comes to bringing in birthday treats or end of year gifts.
- Add veganism to your equal opportunities monitoring forms to make sure that you are aware of vegan staff/committee members.

Positive Case Studies

"One positive event that stands out is our Head Teacher providing two vegan Christmas lunches; One was for our son and although she wasn't vegan the other one was for her."

"I was amazed when my granddaughter's school emailed to ask for our opinion on using a service dog in school. The fact that the Head valued our opinion and world view was simply magical. We felt understood."

"Our students and staff know that their lifestyle decisions have an impact on the world around them. We want to support these choices."

"My daughter's nursery confirmed vegan meals would not be a problem. I provided some resources around providing balanced meals for a vegan child and they made her some wonderful vegan meals. Also discussed activities such as baking using plant-based ingredients. The director even called me one day saying that having a vegan pupil has been very easy."

"My son's childminder has been vegan-inclusive since the very first contact we made with her. She asked a lot of vegan-related questions such as about recipes, vegan-friendly treats and activities. To this day, she sends us pictures of foods she is uncertain about. My son is always given vegan versions of the meals and has been included at Christmas and Easter so that he does not feel like he is missing out. It has been delightful to have somebody so thoughtful and inclusive care for our son. The result is that our son absolutely loves spending time with her and never feels different to anybody else."

How we can help:

The Vegan Society can provide:

- Age-appropriate class sessions
- Age-appropriate teaching and learning resources
- CPD accredited vegan-inclusive staff training
- Online CPD accredited vegan-inclusive staff training
- Consultancy for vegan-inclusive teacher training programmes
- A speaker for extra-curricular events and activities
- Advice on vegan nutrition
- Information and guidance on rights and equality measures

Contact us

Laura Chepner (DBS certified qualified teacher and chair of The Vegan Society's Education Network)

Email: education@vegansociety.com

Telephone: +44(0)121 323 1802

The Vegan Society

Donald Watson House, 34-35 Ludgate Hill, Birmingham, B3 1EH

Email: info@vegansociety.com

Telephone: 0121 523 1730

Dietary guidance: nutrition@vegansociety.com

Law: knowyourrights@vegansociety.com

Contributors: *This guide was created by The Vegan Society's Education Network, which consists of a group of diverse education professionals from the United Kingdom.*

Cheryl Pryce, Head of School and CPD Lead

Debra Marsh, Learning Design/Naturopathy

Dr Jeanette Rowley, PG Cert. T&L in HE, The Vegan Society: Rights and Advocacy Manager and chair of the International Rights Network

Hayley Lugassy, BSc (Hons), MSc, MBPsS

Helen Long, BSc, Tutor at Camden Council and WEA, editor at Vegan Family Guide

Jonny Way, PGCE, QTS

Laura Chepner, QTS, Education Officer at The Vegan Society and chair of the Education Network

Lucy Courtman, QTS

Lynda M Korimboccus, MA, Postgraduate Researcher & Further Education Lecturer

Ruth Jenkins, Programme Co-ordinator at Vegan-Inclusive Education

Tina Newman, Author of vegan children's book series 'Vivi the Supervegan'

Victoria Simpson, BSc



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