

## Case studies

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# Keeping Alpaca in a secondary school



### Summary

This is a case study on how Alpaca are used to support the curriculum in a secondary school, in two subject areas.

### School/organisation

Cardinal Wiseman School and Language College  
Coventry, West Midlands

### Type of institution

Secondary school

### Curriculum fit, if any

Science (Land & Environmental GCSE)  
Animal Care (BTEC)

### Topic

GCSE - Animal Husbandry  
BTEC - Animal Handling, Animal Health, Exotics

### School size

1,400 pupils

### Free meals

21%

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## Expiry date

Ongoing

## Creator

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## Brief description of the project

Alpaca are members of the llama and camel family. It is most unusual to have alpaca at a school, but they provide a wealth of material for teaching purposes.

The school offers two directly relevant courses. These are GCSE Land and Environment Science and BTEC Animal Care (Level 2).

Both courses require students to learn about and care for a wide variety of animals. The school already has ponies, goats, poultry, pigs and sheep. The addition of alpaca has enabled the pupils to:

- Learn about diversity in farming
- Care for an 'exotic' large animal
- Increase their knowledge of animal husbandry
- Learn about natural fibres other than wool and the processes involved in spinning
- Ties in with the Outdoor Learning Manifesto (DfES 2006).

All pupils on the relevant exam courses are involved in caring for the alpaca and watch them being sheared in June by a specialist shearer. Funding came from the specialist school budget (Cardinal Wiseman is a Language College with Rural Dimension).

Help came from alpaca breeders and in particular the breeder in Devon from where they were purchased.

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

- Who looks after them at weekends and in holidays
- What arrangements are made for veterinary treatment (funding)
- General health & safety issues surrounding keeping farm animals.

### Outcomes of the project

Keeping alpaca at the school has been a great success. The animals are great favourites with both pupils and staff. Pupils with behavioural problems often work really positively with them. Having them has enhanced the whole school profile and they are used in photographs by the local press, making the school unique.

### Transferability

A school would do well to start off with sheep or goats first and then move to keeping alpaca if they have room, and when staff have expertise with larger livestock. In many ways, alpaca can be easier to care for than sheep.

### Challenges

This was a new learning experience for the school, particularly as alpaca are not kept in schools elsewhere. One misconception was that these animals spit at people. Alpaca very rarely do this and in nearly two years the school's alpacas never have.

### Context

Cardinal Wiseman is a specialist school (Language College with Rural Dimension) and also has Investors In People accreditation. The school is situated in the northeast of Coventry drawing its catchment from one-third of the city. Nearly all pupils are from urban areas around Coventry. The school is an 11 – 18 comprehensive with a range of socio-economic backgrounds including some of the most deprived in Coventry. Recent years have brought an influx of Catholic children from Poland and Central Africa in particular.