

# SCHOOL VISITS PROVE AN EDUCATION FOR ALL

RECENTLY I've been fortunate enough to have visited our local primary schools to give short presentations on *Responsible pet ownership* and *What happens at the vets*.

It's been a fair few years since I was last at primary school but I have to say that nothing would prepare me for the excellent behaviour, brilliant questions and all round fun that I was due to experience!

All the schools I've visited have been really keen to fit me into their busy assembly rotas and so incredibly welcoming. The presentations have taken the format of me and often a veterinary nurse providing a half-hour interactive session to a few classes, or even the whole primary school.

The concept of talking in front of groups of sometimes a few hundred children had never seemed daunting until five minutes before I was due to

speak! Fortunately I had nothing to worry about as I was greeted consistently with an assembly room full of enthusiastic, smiling faces and attentive listeners.

The aim was to encourage the next generation of responsible pet owners and reinforce their knowledge of pets' requirements. However, I was pleased

**GREG ELLIOTT-MOUSTACHE** has been visiting primary schools local to his practice to educate the next generation on how to look after pets responsibly - and found it both enjoyable and challenging



to see that most of the children were already very familiar with the existence and need for vaccinations, microchipping and regular health checks.

The first question I'd open with, "What does an animal need?" almost always was overwhelmingly met with the answers of food and water – although I was a bit taken aback with the immediate and specific answer of "pineapple!" from one child.

This led to a discussion on the five freedoms that are required to be met for an animal to be happy and healthy – hunger and thirst, discomfort, pain, injury and disease, normal behaviour and fear and distress.

Following this, I'd ask what kind of things vets and nurses did on a day to day basis: the children mentioned every point I had included and more and I especially liked the answer of "nurses help the vets when the vets don't know what to do" because this is often all too true.

Next would follow a story about a case involving one of our patients and the noises from the crowd were relief and joy upon the happy endings. I'd dress up in a surgical gown, hat and gloves fully aware that I was looking very silly indeed in the children's eyes and then a quick game of "guess the animal's body part" using model props taken from the consult room would always be a lot of fun. I was so impressed with such a detailed early knowledge of anatomy!

Finally, my favourite part would involve the questions. I clearly had underestimated the imagination



(questions ranged from "Why are you wearing that purple shirt?" to "How many bear cubs have you treated?" and "Is that nurse your wife?") and the impressive standard of everyone's queries.

The kids were always so keen to tell me about their experience at the vets, their pets' conditions (from cats with nosebleeds to one-legged chickens) and whether I knew their cat Patch or their dog Scooby. Unfortunately, we always ran out of time for questions but I could have stayed and answered them all day; hopefully I get a chance to go back soon.

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