



The Weight and Carriage of Schoolbags

1. Reducing Stress

At times learners take all their books to school irrespective of the demands of their timetable. Young learners need to be helped to overcome their fear that makes them take unnecessary books and/or copybooks to school.

Schools can reduce this feeling of fear through effective transition programmes which build a culture of acceptance and trust where children will not be faced with dire consequences should they genuinely forget to take set books on the timetable to class.

2. Scheduling the timetable

Use of timetables is commendable in the primary, middle and secondary levels. Curriculum planning that can result in the avoidance of certain subjects on the same day in order to reduce bag weight is helpful. Additionally, where possible, if the layout of schools permits, clustering of learners in middle and secondary schools, in rooms as close as possible can be carried out to avoid the unnecessary carrying of schoolbags when moving from one class to the next.



3. Use of Files

Files need to be used judiciously. Unless there is collaboration about the modality and frequency of the bringing of files to school, their use will create issues. It is recommended that learners bring loose sheets in light plastic sheets and taught how to manage them well to avoid filing the loose sheets incorrectly or losing them.

4. Use of Light Study Materials

Teachers often create their own teaching materials and resort to handouts. In such contexts, care needs to be taken to avoid clipping together the programme of a whole year, with only small sections being bound together to ensure that these materials are indeed light.

5. The School Diary

It is now customary for schools to produce their school diary. Attention needs to be given to ensure that this publication is as slim as possible to ensure that no unnecessary additional weight results from its printing.

6. Use of Digital Technology

There is a vast array of tools available in classrooms that can be used to create a shift from teacher-centred learning to a learner-centred approach where students learn in an innovative manner. Apart from a change in pedagogy, these tools can be conducive to help reduce the weight of heavy schoolbags.

7. Lockers in Schools

The provision of locker facilities can reduce schoolbag weight, and these are to be used where available. Lockers, however, will not eliminate the carriage of books to and from school if these are required for homework or studying purposes. Additionally, their installation depends on, space, supervision and maintenance. If access to these lockers is flexible, with enough time between lessons, they will have achieved their purpose.

8. Drinking Water Fountains

The carriage of water bottles to school would be eliminated if drinking water fountains are available in schools. Learners would simply need to carry a lightweight bottle to school. Care, however, needs to be taken to place these fountains in adequate places that can be easily supervised.

9. Carrying out campaigns at the College/ School Level.

Various initiatives can be taken at the College/ School Level specifically aimed at raising awareness on the issue of keeping healthy particularly through participating in sport activities and physical exercises. Emphasis can also be made on the risks involved in relation to the carriage of heavy schoolbags with steps being taken when learners are carrying heavy schoolbags. There could also be information sessions with learners and parents on the effects of schoolbag type, on posture and how one can look after one's back.

10. Enacting School Policies

Schools are encouraged to form policies on the issue in question. In this context, Heads of School can consider linking the National Homework Policy (MEDE, 2018) thereby focusing on the wellbeing of learners while catering for the learning needs of all students. Effective communication, collaboration and co-operation among the different stakeholders, in particular, schools, students and parents can help address this issue.



GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS ATTENDING PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS



The Weight and Carriage of Schoolbags

1. Reducing Stress

- Avoid taking books to school that do not form part of your timetable.
- Do not be afraid if you genuinely forget to take set books on the timetable to class.
- Check your timetable in the evening and make sure that you do not carry any unnecessary copybooks or books to school.
- Do NOT leave empty copybooks in your schoolbag. These can be left in class or given to the class teacher or alternatively placed in lockers.
- Try to find extra copies of textbooks which were used by your relatives or friends in the past. These can be kept at home and the same textbooks given to you by the school can be left in class.
- If you are told to use files, use thin plastic folders and then file your work promptly to avoid heavy files.
- Do not take unnecessary items such as raincoats to school. Primary School students are also to avoid taking games and toys.
- Make good use of lockers if these are available.
- Students attending Primary Schools are not to put the tablet inside the schoolbag, but are to use the case provided.
- Library books should be kept and read at home. They can be brought back to the school library when their due date expires.





2. Carriage of Schoolbags

- Wear bags about 5 cm above the waist.
- Adopt correct lifting techniques, through the bending of legs, rather than the bending of the back.
- Take care when lifting schoolbags on your back. Swinging the schoolbag onto the back applies a combination of twisting and side bending of the spine which could cause harm.
- When fitted correctly, the backpack should contour to your back and not hang off the shoulders.
- Place the heaviest items closest to your back. The backpack's compartments need to be used to pack items securely and minimize the load moving around.
- During assembly place your schoolbag on the ground – carry your schoolbag only when you have to.
- Avoid walking to school carrying a heavy schoolbag; using school transport would be the best option in case you live far from school.
- Do NOT run in the corridors/yard or rush up the stairs while you are carrying your schoolbag. This can result in back pain or injury.
- Since you are carrying some weight, it is imperative that you wear adequate footwear which can help prevent back pain.

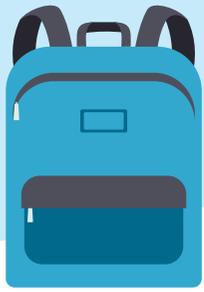


The Weight and Carriage of Schoolbags

1. Reducing bag weight

- Make sure that your child does not take books and/or copybooks to school that do not form part of the daily timetable.
- Unnecessary items such as raincoats (when the weather is fine), extra stationery, games and toys, the latter, applicable in the case of Primary School students, are to be avoided.
- Bulky lunch cases are to be avoided.
- Lightweight water bottles are to be used.
- Checking your child's bag goes a long way in reducing the weight of schoolbags.
- Look for second hand textbooks or textbooks which had been previously bought by their relatives (brothers/sisters/cousins etc.) and/or friends. These can be kept at home. There will be no need for the students to carry heavy books to school since the copy given by the school can be left in class.
- Make sure that in the case of Primary School students, the tablet is carried in its proper case and is not put inside the schoolbag.





2. Choice of Schoolbags

- Backpacks, rather than traditional school bags or sports bags, allow the load to be carried evenly over both shoulders.
- The purchase of well-designed backpacks with well-padded, wide, adjustable shoulder straps helps to prevent back pain.
- Backpack materials can add to the weight, so the most lightweight but durable options need to be considered.
- Bags should be equipped with two straps and worn on both shoulders.
- Double-strap backpacks help in ensuring that spinal posture is not altered even when climbing steps with a load of 10% of body weight.
- Bags with waist belts are particularly useful when bags are heavy.
- Bags with wheels are to be avoided if stairs are present since these would need to be carried.
- A bag that is too big or that has not been adjusted to fit correctly will result in discomfort and a greater feeling of effort.
- Schoolbags with several extra compartments will encourage the students to carry more items with them to school.

3. Carriage of Schoolbags

Help/remind your child that:

- Bags should be worn about 5cm above the waist.
- Correct lifting techniques, through the bending of legs, rather than the bending of the back need to be adopted.
- Care needs to be taken when lifting schoolbags on the back. Swinging the schoolbag onto the back applies a combination of twisting and side bending of the spine which could cause excessive stress or strain on the spine.
- When fitted correctly, the backpack should contour to the child's back and not hang off the shoulders.
- The heaviest items should be placed closest to the back of the learner.
- The backpack's compartments need to be used to pack items securely and minimize the load moving around.
- Students living far from school should avoid walking to school and carrying their schoolbag.
- Provide your son/daughter with adequate footwear to prevent back pain while carrying the schoolbag.