

Education Bureau Circular No. 17/2015

(Formerly referred as EDB Circular No. 24/2003)

Guidelines on Reducing the Weight of School Bags

[Note: This circular should be read by -

- (a) Heads of all Primary and Secondary Schools
- for necessary action
- (b) Heads of Sections - for information]

Summary

The purpose of this circular is to update the Guidelines on Reducing the Weight of School Bags, and call for the co-operation and action of schools and parents to adopt measures along these guidelines.

Details

2. The Education Bureau is very concerned about over-weight school bags, in particular the additional stress and fatigue that they may bring to primary and junior secondary students. In this regard, the Department of Health recommends that, as a precautionary measure, **students should avoid carrying school bags which exceed 10% of their body weight for long periods of time.** The Guidelines on Reducing the Weight of School Bags at Annex I has been updated to incorporate this information.

3. Schools should draw parents' attention to the adverse effect of over-weight school bags, and solicit the co-operation of Parent-teacher Associations to help disseminate the message. The pamphlet on "How to Help your Children Reduce the Weight of School Bags" has been uploaded to the website of Curriculum Development Institute (at <http://www.edb.gov.hk/perc>).

4. This circular supersedes the Education Bureau Circular No. 24/2003 dated 11 June 2003.

Enquiry

5. For enquiries, please contact the Kindergarten and Primary Section of the Curriculum Development Institute on 2892 5871 or 2892 5822.

Stephen YW YIP
for Secretary for Education

Guidelines on Reducing the Weight of School Bags

Overweight school bags will bring additional stress and fatigue to primary and junior secondary students. The Department of Health recommends that, as a precautionary measure, **students should avoid carrying school bags which exceed 10% of their body weight for long periods of time**. The following are some suggested measures for schools to help students reduce the weight of their school bags:

1. Give advice to students

It is essential that schools should explain to students the additional stress and fatigue that over-weight school bags may bring about. This can be done during lessons, class periods or school assemblies. To help students reduce the weight of school bags, schools should -

- (a) foster the habit of packing school bags every day, so that students bring to school only those textbooks, exercise books and stationery items which are definitely required. For lower primary pupils, the class teacher should give help and advice individually at the beginning of the school year;
- (b) advise teachers to give clear instructions for what books to bring for the next lesson before the end of sessions to avoid students from bringing any unnecessary textbooks, exercise books or stationery items to school;
- (c) encourage students to use school bags, pencil cases and other stationery items which are made of durable but light-weight materials; and
- (d) demonstrate to students the correct manner and posture in carrying school bags and explain the adverse effects that over-weight schoolbags will bring about.

2. Obtain co-operation of parents

Home-school co-operation is important. Schools should explain to parents the role they play in reducing the weight of school bags. Parents should help children select school bags and items which are made of light-weight materials, teach their children to pack school bags every day according to the timetable and teachers' instructions, and discourage their children from bringing unnecessary items to school. Parent pamphlet on "How to Help Children Reduce the Weight of School Bags" have been uploaded to the website of Curriculum Development Institute (at <http://www.edb.gov.hk/pere>) for the reference of parents and schools.

3. Review timetable

Schools should review if the timetable is suitably arranged. As far as possible, schools should minimise the number of subjects for each day and design the timetable in such a way that lessons requiring students to bring a large number of textbooks,

exercise books and heavy materials (such as atlas, drawing paper, cardboard, etc.) are evenly spread over the week. Chapter 2 “Whole-school Curriculum Planning” of the “Basic Education Curriculum Guide – To Sustain, Deepen and Focus on Learning to Learn” prepared by the Curriculum Development Council in 2014 gives some examples of time-tabling for the reference of schools. The revised Curriculum Guide has been uploaded to the website of the Education Bureau (at <https://cd.edb.gov.hk/becg/english/index-2.html>).

4. Choose appropriate textbooks

In selecting textbooks, schools should take the weight and size into account in addition to their educational value for teaching and learning. Schools should avoid using too many supplementary workbooks or additional exercises. Although an extra workbook for one subject may not weigh much, the total weight of workbooks for all subjects will be considerable.

5. Design a variety of approaches and styles of homework assignment

Using homework books or exercise books will definitely increase the weight of school bags. Teachers can use loose-leaf or single-page worksheets in giving homework assignments. The worksheets can be distributed to students one at a time so that they can be conveniently carried around. Teachers will also find them easy to collect and mark. Schools can design and adopt a variety of approaches and styles of homework assignment such as searching information from the Web, doing experiment, presenting oral report, etc. Chapter 8 “Meaningful Homework” of the “Basic Education Curriculum Guide – To Sustain, Deepen and Focus on Learning to Learn” gives some examples of homework for the reference of teachers.

6. Provide storage facilities and ensure proper usage

- The provision of storage facilities in schools will obviate the need for students to carry certain textbooks, exercise books, stationery items, instruments, water bottles and other articles to and from school every day. If space and resources permit, schools should review the adequacy of furniture items (such as lockers, bookcases and shelves), and make necessary adjustments.
- Schools furnished with students’ lockers should help students develop a good habit of using the lockers in a proper and effective manner.
- Schools may also consider choosing desk with drawer for the use of students.

7. Give positive support to students

Teachers should give allowance to students who fail to bring textbooks and exercise books. A more positive approach (such as giving clear instructions beforehand for the items required in each lesson) should be adopted. Parental support could be sought whenever appropriate.

8. Examples of good practice

The following practices adopted by schools are found effective to help reduce the weight of school bags:

- Conducting campaign on reducing the weight of school bags to draw the attention of teachers, parents and pupils to the issue.
- Conducting random check on the weight of school bags and informing parents if bags are found overweight.
- Mobilising parents to help weighing school bags to arouse awareness of the issue.
- Using other learning materials to replace textbooks in the learning of some topics.
- Reducing the use of workbooks and replacing them by loose-leaf worksheets.
- Keeping pupils' new exercise books and issuing them to pupils only when needed.
- Setting the maximum number of assignments for each subject as part of the homework policy.
- Allotting a tutorial period in the timetable for pupils to complete part of their homework at school.
- Scheduling Music, PE, Visual Arts, Home Economics and Design and Technology lessons for different days.
- Allowing pupils to wear sportswear or designated uniforms for days with PE lessons or activity days for uniformed groups.
- Encouraging students to use light-weight containers for carrying food or drinking water to school when necessary.

The above suggestions are not exhaustive. Schools may choose to adopt any of these practices, where appropriate, and are encouraged to draw up and implement other measures, which they consider practicable and effective in their own circumstances, with a view to reducing the weight of school bags. Moreover, schools should encourage pupils to participate actively in talks on spinal health as well as developing a healthy lifestyle by maintaining a balanced diet and doing regular exercise.