



DIRECTORS GENERAL

LETTER CIRCULAR

Information: X **Date:** 26/10/2011
Action Required: X **Ref:** DES/DQSE/09/2011
To: All Heads of Schools (State & Non-State) and Sections
From: DG, DES and DG, DQSE **Tel:** 2598 2404
Fax: 2598 2504
E-mail: dg.des.educ@gov.mt
dg.dqse.educ@gov.mt
Subject: School Bags Policies & Procedures

We would like to draw the attention of all schools regarding policies and procedures with regards to children's school bags. To this effect, we are forwarding again Circular DES/DQSE 05/2009 which explains thoroughly the guidelines to be adhered to.

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Ms. Micheline Sciberras
Director General
Educational Services



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Information: X **Date:** 25 August 2009
Action Required: X **Ref:** DES/DQSE/05/2009
To: All Heads of Schools (State and Non-State Schools) and Sections
From: DG, DES and DG, DQSE **Tel:** 2598 2404
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Subject: School Bags Policies & Procedures

Heads of school are requested to give priority to the problem of heavy school bags and endorse the need to educate and inform parents, students and members of staff on the subject, especially at this time of the year when a sizable percentage of students and their parents tend to invest in the school bags to use during the coming scholastic year.

Following the report of the year 2000 on handling of heavy school bags and confirmed by a study conducted last year by the Health and Safety Unit, Year 4 and Form 1 students were earmarked as the categories most at risk and thus must be given particular attention.

It is recommended both by the above mentioned report and even by the Pediatric Orthopedic Society of America that backpacks, which are practical for school children and teenagers to carry their school books and supplies, have to be used correctly to distribute the weight of the load among some of the body's strongest muscles and avoid injury to muscles and joints. They should have the following features: two wide padded shoulder straps, a firm padded back, waist straps and it should be lightweight. The bag should be compartmentalized and the straps buckled tightly. Heavy books should be closest to the centre of the bag. When carrying a backpack, bending should be done by using both knees, not over the waist. Students must also be encouraged to carry out back strengthening exercises, even during PE lessons, that help to build up the back muscles involved in carrying the backpack.

Wheeled carriers should not be allowed as these constitute a hazard to students during transportation especially up and down stairs and buses and tend to be excessively heavy even when empty. One strap bags and 1 strap carrying style have to be avoided.

Ideally, the weight of the schoolbag and contents should not exceed 10% of the student's body weight. The weight of the bag should definitely never exceed 20% of the student's total body weight.

The school should follow a text-book based timetable and the timetable should take into account the relative combined weight of books and related equipment and stationery. A list with the weight of

text books currently being utilised is attached to this circular in order to facilitate the implementation of this measure.

In order to decrease the load carried by students, recommendations include:

- On a longer term, adopting the use of soft format work will drastically reduce the need to carry heavy weight to and from school; this has got the added advantage of being environmentally friendly;
- Where lockers are available, the system should be well managed, encouraging students to check the contents of their bags and remove them into lockers;
- Educating students to leave at home unnecessary items;
- Considering making available a second set of textbooks at school, if and where available;
- The selection of textbooks should take into consideration the associated weight involved and perhaps only targeting text contents relevant to that particular scholastic year and have accompanying e-versions;
- The adoption of a file system by each student at home so that students will only be required to carry the relevant few pages to and from school, hence avoiding the daily carriage of heavy files. Schools can help in developing this idea by facilitating a one-time provision of a file with dividers. Educating parents and students in its use helps in the successful adoption by students.
- Teachers are to be asked to refrain from asking students to get thick packs of notes for class use - packs of notes are to be avoided. Module style notes can be used/adopted and students will have less weight to carry.

It is important to take into consideration students with particular needs such as those who suffer from scoliosis or other medical conditions, which imply restricted capabilities to carry loads. Advice can be sought from Education Health Services about these cases.

Schools are strongly encouraged to educate the students and their parents about the importance for them to control school bag weight and about methods of decreasing it.

Ms. Micheline Sciberras
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