



A **JOLLY** BACK IS A **HEALTHY** BACK

School Bags and Moving Equipment - Back Health Advice for Primary Schools

There are many frequently asked questions around school bags and pupils lifting and moving equipment. Here's some advice to help:

What is the recommended safe school bag weight?

- School bags should weigh a maximum of 15% of a child's body weight as studies have shown spinal damage can occur over this amount. It's safest to aim for 10%.
- Can you check how much pupils in your class are carrying? Studies have shown that children are often carrying a quarter of their body weight which is the equivalent of a 70Kg (11st) adult carrying 17.5kgs (2st 10lbs) in weight. Maybe have a class weighing session and notify parents/carers of any identified heavy bags?

How else can we limit school bags causing damage?

- Any advice regarding school bags needs to be practical and realistically achievable.
- A mono/single strap bag should be worn across the body (not on one shoulder) and children should remember to swap carrying sides regularly. A ruck sack should be worn over both shoulders – this will keep the spine symmetrical and upright.
- When packing, keep the bag balanced by packing the heaviest items first, closest to the spine.
- It's important to carry only what's needed, so encourage pupils to repack their bag each evening to keep it as light as possible. Is it possible for current school work to be placed in lighter folders, rather than children carrying all their subject work?
- Detentions for forgetting a book or piece of equipment are not helpful as this encourages children to over pack their bags.
- Lockers and safe storage areas are beneficial, especially once in secondary school. This is particularly helpful for Yr7 pupils who are often lightest but have to carry similar amounts to larger Year 10 pupils. Can "school bag advice" be given during Y6 transition to help pupils and their families prepare best?

Should pupils be lifting chairs and helping teachers move equipment?

Young, growing spines, like any spine, can be injured from incorrectly lifting, carrying and/or moving heavy or awkward objects (this includes school bags). If pupils do move chairs and equipment, do they know how to do it safely? Would your school be covered if a pupil injured themselves? As with most things, common sense needs to prevail.

5 steps for safer lifting:

- Get close to the object
- Place your feet wide apart to keep steady
- Get a good grip
- Move down and up using your hips and knees, not just your back
- Use a smooth action (avoid rushing or sudden twisting).

All the best and as always if we can help further, we'd love to hear from you,
Lorna Taylor, Physiotherapist and Director, Jolly Back