



M35/05

To the Managerial Authorities of Second-Level Schools

WEIGHT OF SCHOOLBAGS

The Minister for Education and Science wishes to once again direct the attention of Managerial Authorities of Second-Level Schools to [circular letter M41/98](#) which issued to all schools in October 1998 along with a copy of the [Report of the Working Group on the Weight of Schoolbags](#) and an information leaflet. One of the main recommendations of the Report was that a campaign of heightened awareness of the problem of overweight schoolbags should be initiated.

In view of the above recommendation it is important that the potential health hazards posed by overweight schoolbags are once again highlighted. While it is acknowledged that positive action has been taken by many schools by implementing a range of measures to minimise the weight children are obliged to carry to and from school, it is important that schools, where problems persist, re-examine their position in this regard. To this end the attention of school authorities is drawn in particular to the actions it is recommended they should take in tackling the problem of overweight schoolbags as outlined on page 4 of the Report.

It is incumbent on school authorities from a health and safety viewpoint to identify this problem where it exists and take whatever steps are appropriate to deal with it.

The Report acknowledges that many factors contribute to the problem and it therefore follows that any solution requires action not just from the Department of Education and Science or school authorities, but also from parents, publishers of educational books and indeed from children themselves.

Recommendations of the Working Group.

The following is a summary of the recommendations of the Working Group contained in the information leaflet which issued to all schools:

Recommendations for Schools:

- *Create awareness of the issue*
- *Assess the extent of the problem in the school*
- *Promote home/school cooperation on the issue*
- *Liaise with publishers*

- *Formulate suitable homework policies which take this issue into account*
- *Address timetabling issues (see Report)*
- *Encourage the development of pupils' organizational skills*
- *Include back care in health education programmes*
- *Explore the feasibility of providing duplicate copies of some textbooks*

Recommendations for Parents:

- *Raise awareness of the issue*
- *Liaise with the school in finding solutions*
- *Purchase correct schoolbag design*

Recommendations for Publishers:

- *Consider the weight of schoolbags when designing textbooks*
- *Liaise with school communities in finding solutions*

The leaflet further pointed out that many schools have alleviated the problem by encouraging students to leave books in school overnight and that teachers and parents, particularly at second level, should liaise with Irish educational publishers in order to reduce the size and weight of textbooks.

Please provide a copy of this circular to the appropriate representatives of parents and teachers for transmission to individual parents and teachers.

Any enquiries regarding this circular should be directed to Post Primary Administration Section, Department of Education & Science, Portlaoise Road, Tullamore, County Offaly. Telephone 0506-24328

The Report of the Working Group is available on the Department of Education & Science website at www.education.ie

M. Ryan
Principal Officer
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