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Royal Education Council  
Paro : Bhutan



REC/Adm/Circular(20)2016-2017/1292

April 17, 2017

To,  
Chief DEOs/ TEOs,  
All Dzongkhags/ Thromdes.

**Subject: Downsizing of School Bags**

Dear Sirs/ Madams,

Let me draw your kind attention to the appeal I made to all the participants at the end of the last day of the 18<sup>th</sup> National Education Conference held at Tashi Namgay Grand, Rinchening, Phuntsholing on December 9-12, 2016.

My appeal, to all the Dzongkhag and Thromdey Education Officers, and the principals and teachers attending the conference, in presence of the officials from the Ministry of Education led by the Hon'ble Director General, Department of School Education, was on the genuine need to reduce the weight of the school bags that our school children are required to carry to and from schools every school day for nine to ten months every year till they graduate from schools. Our school children, at this critical and formative stage of physical growth and mental development, have to carry loads weighing anything between five kilograms to even close to 10 kilograms over long distances of rough and arduous routes, for many of them. This practice is in contravention to the recommended load carrying limit of 15% (some sources say only 10%) of one's body weight, meaning that a child weighing 20 kilograms can carry a load that weighs less than or equal to 3 kilograms (only 2 kg if the ratio is 10%). Besides, many have to carry their lunch packs and drinking water making the total weight much heavier than not only the accepted limit but also much beyond what many of them actually can physically handle.

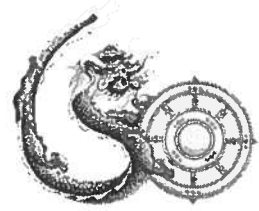
What literature says about what happens to a child, when he/she carries a load beyond the accepted limit over a long period of time, is starkly alarming. One of the reasons why children dread going back to school after a vacation can be attributed to the heavy schoolbags they have to carry on their backs. This stress can not only cause revulsion of school and low attention span leading to poor performance in studies but it also can result in detrimental physical and health problems in life.

Some impending ill-effects of carrying excessive weight include the following:

1. Causes pain in the back, shoulders and neck (physical torture);
2. Causes forward bending and side-ways deviation of the spine leading to bad posture and slouching;
3. Causes poor lung function making breathing harder;
4. Damages bone growth-points resulting in abnormal or stunted growth; and
5. Causes psychological stresses that hamper learning and intellectual development.



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The possible long-term implications of excessive load children carry are equally disturbing:

1. Leads to producing physically under-developed and abnormal individuals;
2. Causes huge burden on the nation's health system in terms of resources on healthcare services; and
3. Results in under-developed human capital because of abnormal physical growth and poor intellectual development.

Knowing that there are unquestionable risks and implications on our children for carrying heavy school bags, we must come up with measures to prevent them from getting severely affected. While we cannot totally stop them from carrying school bags, our children should not be made to carry bags that weigh beyond the critical ratio of the weight of bag to the their body weight 10-15 percent.

Some of the alternatives ways of limiting the weight of load our children to the acceptable range could include:

1. Reducing the number of books students carry by
  - a. preparing the Class Timetable in such a way that only a few subjects have classes in one day, rather than having periods for all subjects on a given day,
  - b. implementing homework policies that requires students to do homework only in one or two subjects in a day,
  - c. not requiring students to use or carry multiple notebooks for a single subject (some teachers make students to buy as many as four notebooks (one each for home work, class work, grammar, essay, etc.) for one subject, and
  - d. installing lockers/ shelves in their classrooms to keep the books that are not required to be carried home.
2. Reducing the weight of books by
  - a. not requiring students to buy unnecessarily thick notebooks (children can buy No.6 notebooks instead of No.8, 10 or 12), and
  - b. not requiring children to unnecessarily cover notebooks that are already very well decorated and have glossy hard covers.
3. Reducing the load children carry to school by
  - a. providing clean drinking water from school, and
  - b. requiring parents to reach lunch to school (this may not be practical).
4. Educating/ sensitizing children and parents on ill-effects of carrying excessive loads and measures to reduce the weight of bags.

I had, therefore, taken the opportunity during the conference to request the participants that when they go back to their Dzongkhags/ Thromdes and schools, they could explore the possibilities of reducing the size and weight of the bags our children have to carry. However, my observations on the school going children after the commencement of the 2017 academic session suggest that not much has been done on this front. Our children are still carrying heavy bags, some of which weigh close to 10 Kg (I tried measuring some of them). While taking full cognizance of our own priorities, I am of the view that a small initiative to reduce the weight of the burden that our children have to carry today will make a tremendous difference in their lives in future.



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As such and keeping in view of the numerous negative impacts on the physical, psychological and intellectual wellbeing of our students, I reiterate my request to all the Dzongkhag and Thromde Education Offices to work with schools to come up with appropriate ways and means to reduce the risks that our children are vulnerable to. You may also want to explore the appropriateness of implementing some of the strategies suggested above. The efforts, however, should not come at the cost of the teaching-learning process in our schools.

Thanking you for your continuous cooperation and support

Yours Sincerely

(Kinga Dakpa)

**Director**

Copy to:

- ✓ 1. The Hon'ble Sherig Lyonpo, Ministry of Education, Thimphu for kind information.
2. Dasho Drungchen, Ministry of Education, Thimphu for kind information.
3. The Director General, Ministry of Education, Thimphu for kind information and necessary support.
4. Dasho Thronpoens, all Thromdes for kind information and necessary support.
5. Dasho Dzongdags, all Dzongkhags for kind information and necessary support.
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