

## The Star : Lighter schoolbags good for posture

Written by Administrator

Friday, 11 September 2009 12:38 -

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FOR many years, parents and non-governmental organisations have been complaining about heavy schoolbags, but to little avail, until now. Finally, the Education Ministry is going to issue guidelines on how many books, in particular activity books, pupils need to take to school to help lighten their burden.

The weight of schoolbags depends entirely on the number of textbooks, exercise books and other things required in class. There are so many things carried at present that sometimes two bags are needed to hold them all. It has been shown that heavy schoolbags carried over a long period by young children can affect their posture and may lead to backaches later in life. For many, their tender bodies are just too fragile to handle such bags. While the ministry and teachers are aware of this problem, the latter, especially, did not bother to tell their pupils what to bring daily for lessons. What is worse is that those who did not bring the books needed for the day were punished.

Without proper guidance, parents tended to play safe and ensure their children brought along as many as possible. Though the required textbooks can be determined based on the timetable, the introduction of activity books complicates things. Quite often, there are several activity books for just one subject. Finally, the ministry has decided that enough is enough; and in future, pupils will need to bring only one activity book for each subject. This will be a big help in reducing the weight of schoolbags. But it must be remembered that while the ministry proposes, it is the teacher who disposes. If the teacher should decide to ignore the new ruling, then this issue will not go away. Surprisingly, some parents too are to blame as they may insist that their loved ones take along more activity books, just to make sure. If they are to err, it is better to be on the side of caution, they believe. The popularity of activity books is a recent phenomenon, as those who make use of such material are seen to have an advantage over others. It has become a huge industry, as many parents buy them in the hope that their children's academic performance will improve. The use of workbooks is pure rote learning and does not provide the children with the chance to enhance their creativity and original thinking. Doing the exercise over and over again will definitely help the pupil to remember facts and figures and those who follow this method will certainly score good grades. Schools must also ensure that Year One classes should be located on the ground floor so that pupils would not have to carry their bags upstairs, which can be quite strenuous. It may come as a surprise to many that some schools, though not many, have their Year One classes on the second or even third floor. The reason? Senior teachers do not wish to walk up and down the stairs to get to the classrooms. To them, it is all right for seven-year-olds to go up and down several times a day.

COMMENT BY V.K.CHIN