

Hi Cheryl

I did a bit of research and the consensus around school back pack weights for children is between 10 and 20% of their body weight. The variation comes in the natural strength of a child - i.e. a fit 40kg child will be able to cope with an 8kg bag but an unfit child may only manage 4kg. When the load is on the back for significant periods like during a hike, the weight should be less than 10%. However, this does not apply to the short haul between the car and the classroom.

I weighed my girls bags and to start with an empty bag weighs 1.2kg. The book sack, when carrying a normal days books (for Caitlin there are 8 writing books), weighs 2.4 kgs. Add to that the pencil case, lunch and an item of clothing and the standard bag for her gets to 5.6kg. This is within the 20% range for her.

However in a small child weighing under 30kg and yet having a similar requirement in terms of writing books etc the weight of the bag would go over the 20% top end.

The other situation worth thinking about is where children have to take an inordinate number of books on a one off basis, for example at the end of last term, Jenna had to bring all of her books home, presumably to empty her desk for some reason. This bag weighed 11kgs - significantly over the 20% range for her.

By the time the kids are in grade 6, this all becomes a non-event because they are all over 40kgs so the average day bag of about 5kgs is fine. The concern I have always had is for the tiny ones. Day in and day out lugging in excess of 20% of their body weight will have a detrimental effect of some kind.

I believe that the school should communicate that there is a joint responsibility for this issue:

1. Advise parents to weigh the child and the bag, if the weight ratio is higher than 20% on a regular basis (i.e. 3-4 days a week) then the parent should take action to reduce the weight. They could consider buying a trolley designed to take this kind of school bag. We got one for Robyn when she had the fractured vertebrae - and they are available at Game. However, our experience of this was not good because dragging the trolley upstairs was a problem of its own - for classes on the ground floor though it works well.
2. Spread the weight into another hand held bag - for example the music books, instruments etc could be in a separate bag carried in the arms.
3. Make teachers aware of the bag weight issue and when a large load is anticipated, the teacher should consider sending books home in batches.
4. When moving between class, the teacher should also remind kids to carry the bag with both straps, not just on one side which may cause neck and lower back pain.
5. Parents should also ensure that the bag does not hang more than 10cm below the waist line as this will cause the child to bend forward too much.

I think a redesign of the bag is overkill and in any case does not change the weight of the bag which is the main issue.

I hope this helps.

Kind regards
Gareth