

Digitised books, balanced timetables help reduce load

Tech tools cut weight of schoolbags

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Calcutta: Schools are using technology to reduce the weight of schoolbags. They scan textbooks and upload them onto smart boards in classrooms so that students do not need to carry all their books every day.

Some are carefully arranging timetables so that the weight of textbooks is distributed evenly throughout the week rather than concentrated on a single day.

The Bengal government on Friday said the weight of the school bag in government-aided schools "should not exceed 10% of the child's weight".

Time and again, the weight of the schoolbag has been a bone of contention between schools and parents. Several private schools said that they have been working in various ways to reduce the weight of schoolbags.

The government's order says heavy schoolbags are a cause of "backache in school-children".

La Martiniere for Girls and Mahadevi Birla World Academy are some of the institutions where the textbooks are digitised.

At La Martiniere for Girls, students right up to Class VIII are told not to carry textbooks apart from those of the languages. "We have to move out of the mindset of studying from the textbook. Both teachers and parents need to understand that learning is concept-based," said Rupkatha Sarkar, principal, La Martiniere for Girls.

"We encourage parents not to send, and we have to reiterate it at the beginning of the session, else parents tend to slip into the habit of sending textbooks," said Sarkar.

Both the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE) and the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) are stressing critical thinking and competency-based questions.

"Such forms of evaluation do not require teaching from the book but understanding the concepts, which can be done even without referring to a textbook in class," a teacher said.

Several schools address parents during their orienta-

tion meetings and encourage them to check their schoolbags so that the children do not carry extra textbooks or things.

"Children sometimes have to climb up two floors, and we are conscious of it that their bags should not be heavy," said Loveleen Saigal, principal, Birla High School.

"At our end, we have told teachers to inform children beforehand if there is a language class, what topic they will be doing, so that they carry one book relating to that and not all. We also encourage children to share textbooks," said Saigal.

At Mahadevi Birla World Academy, parents can send photocopies of particular chapters that are being covered in class. It is not something that the school insists upon, but they are allowed to do so.

But the weight is not only of the textbook but also of the additional things that children carry in their bags and on their shoulders.

Sometimes the school bag weighs about a kilogram. Fancy pencil boxes, tiffin boxes and steel water bottles add to the weight of the bag.

In addition, students carry to school skating shoes, helmets, karate and swimming uniforms or towels, a guitar, a violin or any other musical instrument, which adds to the total weight they are carrying. School is also about curricular activities and not only reading texts.

Schools said they cannot make room for keeping the belongings of all 3,000 children in the school. "The entire school, right from Class III to X, is doing activities, and we cannot give lockers to all children. Parents are eager to get their children admitted because swimming and skating are integrated into the school routine, and children don't have to stay back," said Nupur Ghosh, vice-principal, Mahadevi Birla World Academy.

Ghosh said the school also cannot compromise on children's safety. For example, while skating, children have to wear helmets and naturally that makes a bag weighty on a day they have skating in the timetable.