

Advisory Teaching Service

BASES

Cheltenham

Advisory Teaching Service
1st Floor, Edinburgh House, Coronation Square
Cheltenham, Glos. GL52 6PZ

☎ 01452 324376
chelt.ats@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Forest of
Dean

Advisory Teaching Service
Dockham Road, Cinderford
Glos. GL14 2DB

☎ 01594 823102
forest.ats@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Gloucester

Advisory Teaching Service
4—6 Commercial Road
Gloucester. GL1 2EA

☎ 01452 426955
gloucester.ats@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Stroud

Advisory Teaching Service
Redwood House, Room F01, First Floor,
Beeches Green, Stroud, Glos. GL5 4AE

☎ 01452 583728
stroud.ats@gloucestershire.gov.uk

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A Manual Wheelchair in School!

Information and advice for schools and settings



Advisory Teaching Service

PD Team



 Gloucestershire
COUNTY COUNCIL

What is it?

- An aid to mobility: some pupils will use it all the time, others will use it as needed.
- It may be a way to provide supportive seating.
- It may be a way to save the user's energy or to avoid pain, discomfort or additional medical complications.

How is it used?

- Arrangements will need to be flexible depending on how much the wheelchair is used. Take into account things like the environment, activities or the child's stamina.
- Planning for using the wheelchair for school activities will involve the child, school staff, parents, carers and therapists.
- Some children may use their wheelchair for all or part of the day; others may only need access to use one occasionally, e.g. for school journeys, break time or when fatigued.

Maintenance

All NHS wheelchairs are repaired and maintained by Gloucestershire Wheelchair Repair Service. This service is free to the user and may be accessed directly (0300 421 7170). Repairs can be arranged at school or home.

Don't forget that the frame and upholstery of the chair should be kept clean.

If the chair has pneumatic tyres — remember to maintain these at the recommended pressure **using a hand or foot pump only.**



Useful Tips

- Managing a wheelchair is a complex skill, which requires practice and concentration. Allow time for these skills to develop.
- When asking pupils to 'line up' place the wheelchair user either at the front or end of the line.
- During times when pupils sit on the floor, e.g. assembly, consider seating pupils on chairs either side of the wheelchair user to prevent feelings of isolation.
- Think about protective clothing for wet or cold weather, involve the child's parents/carers.
- Cycling gloves may assist with grip and prevent blisters and keep hands clean.

Contact Numbers

Gloucestershire Wheelchair Assessment Centres

0300 421 7170



Safety Issues

- Plan strategies and routes for everyday access and emergencies.
- Brakes should always be on when getting in or out of the chair.
- Foot supports are provided.
- When the child gets in or out of the chair, you may need to move the footplates out of the way.
- A lap strap must be firmly fastened at all times. This offers postural support as well as security. If children are conscious of the lap strap, arrange clothing, e.g. sweatshirt or jumper, to cover it.
- Heavy school bags will make the chair unstable and likely to tip.
- The wheelchair has been provided for the individual child. Other children must not be allowed to ride in or on the chair—no passengers.
- The wheelchair has been fitted to suit the individual child. No alterations or adjustments should be made to it without consulting the wheelchair service.
- Only use the cushions and accessories that are supplied with the chair.
- If tyres are pneumatic keep them pumped up as soft tyres make the chair difficult to manoeuvre and brakes are not so effective.
- Consider strategies to reduce risks to the carer when pushing the chair, e.g. think about the terrain and manual handling issues.



Transfers

- If the child requires assistance to go up a kerb use the tipping lever. Anti tippers provide additional safety to prevent chair tipping backward
- It is vital to consider how the child will get in and out of the wheelchair. Transfers may be from —

taxi	↔	wheelchair
floor	↔	wheelchair
standing	↔	wheelchair
toilet	↔	wheelchair
chair	↔	wheelchair

- Transfers may include additional equipment such as transfer board, turntable or hoist, depending on therapist's advice.

Planning School Activities

There is an increasing number of text books which portray children with disabilities in a positive way.

Physical Education

A wheelchair can enable the user to take part in all types of sports activities.

Swimming

Never take a wheelchair to the side of a swimming pool.

Days Out and Residential

When organising school trips, remember to arrange suitable transport well in advance. Discuss whether the electric or manual wheelchair would be most appropriate.

Opportunities may need to be found if a child needs to practise or learn new skills in the manual

Wheelchair Courtesy

- Does the child mind if you lean or hold onto their chair when you talk to them? Have you asked them?
- Do they prefer you to stand or crouch beside them when talking together if another chair beside them is not available?
- Make the wheelchair unremarkable. Treat the user as one of the class.
- Make yourself familiar with the workings of the wheelchair, e.g. brakes, foot-plates. Do you know how to fold or dismantle the wheelchair?
- Never talk over the head of the person in a wheelchair, or ignore their presence.
- Remember a wheelchair user looks at things from a seated position. This may limit their view—plan accordingly.
- Will the user need help negotiating doors, steps and ramps?
- Consider terminology carefully—there is a huge difference between the phrases ‘wheelchair-bound’ and ‘wheelchair user’.

Things to Consider

- Can the pupil use the hand rims to propel themselves or do they need assistance to be pushed? Is this all or some of the time?
- Will the pupil transfer into a school chair in class? Where will the wheelchair be stored? Who will take and collect it?
- If the pupil works from their wheelchair is the work surface at an appropriate height?
- Plan strategies to enable the pupil to be as independent as possible in all curriculum areas.
- The wheelchair may also be needed at home. Transport arrangements should be considered.
- Does the chair have a tray or any other accessories? Would it be useful at school? Check with pupil, parents/carers.
- Posture is important. Check the child's position in the chair regularly—correct if needed. Involve the child if possible as contractures and orthopaedic deformities can develop surprisingly quickly. Remind the pupil to sit correctly. Don't nag — use gentle verbal prompt.
- Foot support can help maintain good posture.
- Is the child comfortable? Does his clothing need adjusting? Check the jumper or sweatshirt is pulled down at the back with no 'rucks'. As the child grows the wheelchair may need adjusting by the wheelchair centre or therapist.

