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A Powered Wheelchair in School!

Information and advice for schools and settings



Advisory Teaching Service

PD Team



 Gloucestershire
COUNTY COUNCIL

What is it?

- A battery powered wheelchair
- It enables a child to move independently
- It enables a child to access a variety of activities and places
- It may be a way of providing support sitting
- It is a way to save the user's and carer's energy

When is it used?

This needs to be considered carefully. Things to think about include:

- The child and their mobility needs
- The environment
- The child's timetable
- Height of work surfaces
- Format of lessons and activities
- Other children and staff

Opportunities for the child to be out of the powered wheelchair should be planned for every day

Why is it used?

- To enable independent mobility
- To give the choice to move when and where they want
- To give a good sitting position—so that the child may use their hands more easily
- To provide mobility for children who are unable to propel a manual wheelchair themselves

Useful Tips

- Managing a powered wheelchair is a complex skill, which requires practice and concentration. Allow time for these skills to develop.
- Be aware that the controls on wheelchairs are very sensitive.
- When asking younger 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.
- Consider terminology carefully—there is a huge difference between the phrases “wheelchair bound” and “wheelchair user”!!
- All powered wheelchairs have motors which can be easily disengaged (refer to the manual). This means that the wheelchair can be pushed as a manual wheelchair.
- However, do not forget that this affects the brakes and braking system and the manual brake will be required.
- Most powered wheelchairs are very heavy to push for anything other than short distances.
- Most powered wheelchair users will also have a manual wheelchair.
- The powered wheelchair may also be used at home. Transport arrangements will need to be considered.

Things to think about when planning for school activities

Physical Education

A powered wheelchair can enable the user to take part in all types of sports activities and dance. Try Wheelchair Slalom, Power Wheelchair Football or Boccia.

Swimming

Never take a powered 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 powered or manual wheelchair would be the most appropriate as part of the risk assessment process.

Additional Information

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

There is an increasing number of children's literature, which portray disability in a positive way. Good stories about powered wheelchair users include: Scribble Boy by Philip Ridley and Me and My Electric published by Asbah.

Contact Numbers

Gloucestershire Wheelchair Assessment Centres 0300 421 7170

Charging a powered wheelchair

- Every powered wheelchair needs to have its batteries regularly recharged using the charger provided.
- Recharging frequency depends on the amount of use.
- Never charge the chair with the child seated in it.
- Most models have an indicator of low battery status on the controller.
- An instruction manual for charging the wheelchair is always delivered with the chair. Consult with parents and carers to plan charging arrangements.
- Follow health and safety guidelines for the safe use of electrical appliances. It may be useful to designate a specific charging area.
- Most powered wheelchair users will also have a manual wheelchair.

Using a powered wheelchair at school

- Check with the Wheelchair Service to find out where the powered wheelchair may be used safely.
- Agree with the child things like
 - routes through school
 - speed limits in the corridor
 - appropriate behaviour in school and the playground
 - emergency procedures
- The wheelchair user should be aware of the safety of other people at all times.

Where does a powered wheelchair come from?

A wheelchair therapist will have assessed a child's mobility needs and prescribed an appropriate chair and given initial training.

The Gloucestershire Wheelchair Service arranges this and maintains the equipment.

Some children may have a powered wheelchair which is privately purchased and maintained. Check service schedule and insurance are in place.

Maintenance

All powered wheelchairs have an annual service arranged by the Gloucestershire Wheelchair Repair Service. Any faults or wear should be reported immediately to them:

Telephone 0300 421 7170

The frame and upholstery of the chair should be kept clean

Most tyres are puncture-proof. If the chair has inflated tyres, remember to maintain these at the recommended pressure **using a hand or foot pump only.**



Safety issues

Footplates should always be used.

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A lap strap must be firmly fastened at all times. This offers postural support as well as security in their chair. If children are conscious of the lap strap, arrange their clothing, e.g. sweatshirt or jumper, to cover it.

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All powered wheelchair users are trained to make emergency stops, by letting go of the controls.

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The control panel should always be switched off before the child gets out of the chair. This activates the braking system and prevents the wheelchair moving accidentally.

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Heavy school bags will make the chair unstable and likely to tip.

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The powered wheelchair has been provided for the individual child and should not be used by any one else.

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The wheelchair has been fitted to suit the individual child. No alterations or adjustments should be made to it.

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When the child gets in and out of the chair, move the footplates out of the way.

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Remember to only use the cushions and accessories which are supplied with the chair.

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Please monitor width of doorways due to the risk of grazing to the child's hands and also any additional width caused by the fitting of communication aid mounts or other accessories