PHYSICALLY DISABLED CHILDREN WITH MOBILITY DIFFICULTIES

INTRODUCTION

Most pupils with physical disabilities need ongoing medical management as their physical needs may be affected by the progress of their condition and/or their normal development. The following then are general management suggestions only. It is essential that specific advice is obtained from the Clinical Medical Officer (school doctor), Nurse, Physio/Occupational Therapists and from the Adviser (Special Educational Needs), Educational Psychologist, and Advisory Teacher.

DEGREES OF MOBILITY

There are three means of mobility to consider:

(i) Pupils able to move without mobility aids.
(ii) Pupils able to move using mobility aids.
(iii) Pupils needing a wheeled aid for all or part of a day, either by (a) self-propelled wheeled aids or by (b) powered wheeled aids.

Additional important factors regarding (iii) are that pupils confined to wheelchairs may need to stand for some time during the day. Thus, it will be necessary to check with parents and medical advisers whether this should be arranged at home, at school, or both.

A permanent sitting position gives a limited view of the environment. Besides an opportunity to stand, many pupils find the floor a comfortable place to work and play, although it may be necessary to protect against hazards such as rough surfaces and draughts.

Some children will need reminding to raise themselves from the wheelchair seat at regular intervals to prevent pressure sores.

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**PRACTICAL PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS**

*Organisation and improvement of space on a school campus*

(i) Not only may corridors be narrow but they may have obstacles that restrict movement flow.

(a) a pupil in a wheelchair may have to time his journey to avoid the main school lesson changes.

OR (b) it may be possible to arrange 'lay-bys' for him to wait.

OR (c) to move some of the obstacles.

(ii) Corridors and other areas of the school may be highly polished and the pride of the caretaker and his staff. Unfortunately, highly polished surfaces are hazardous to pupils with mobility difficulties. Diplomatic liaison may be necessary to ensure the protective floor surface is non-slip.

(iii) Classrooms and toilet areas need to allow sufficient space for a wheelchair to turn.

(iv) (a) Ideally, all stairs/steps, inside and outside a building, need handrails, at appropriate heights, on both sides.

(b) Lighting should be adequate on all stairs/steps in constant use.

(v) Outside:

(a) path/playground slopes may constitute a hazard if too steep, particularly in icy weather. It may be possible to find an alternative route for the pupil with mobility difficulties.

(b) The camber of a path should be appropriate for wheeled use.

(c) Pebbled, rough or uneven surfaces are difficult for both wheelchair users and those with poor mobility or using aids.