

Health and Safety Policy

Safe Use of Wheelchairs

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1. Overview

This policy documents provides: -

- examples of the risks and risk reduction measures that should be considered when carrying out a risk assessment for work activities involving the use of wheelchairs;
- practical advice and guidance on the safe use of manual and electrically powered wheelchairs;
- information on the appropriate manual handling requirements;
- advice on appropriate maintenance;
- advice and procedures surrounding transportation;
- advice on fitting of accessories; and
- information on the risk assessment requirements.

Use of wheelchairs by employees is covered by the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER). For more detailed information on these regulations please also refer to the Safe Use of Work Equipment Health and Safety Policy.

2. Definitions

In this guidance the terms drivers and escorts include all employees and volunteers who undertake driving of passenger carrying vehicles and who support pupils on transportation.

3. Hazards

There have been several adverse incidents involving wheelchairs that have led to injury and even death. Most of these incidents were due to inappropriate use of the equipment, inadequate information or instruction, or fundamental human errors, including incorrect maintenance and modification. The main source of this information is the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

Examples of hazards associated with wheelchairs include:

- Manual handling issues;
- Instability of the wheelchair;
- Persons falling out of wheelchairs;
- Injury from inappropriately fitted accessories;
- Inappropriate operation of electric wheelchairs;
- Crush injuries;
- Entrapment injuries; and
- Work environmental hazards

4. Risk Assessments

A risk assessment surrounding the use of wheelchairs must be completed for each wheelchair user who presents hazards to themselves; others or using the wheelchair. This assessment must include any aspects of manual handling identified.

- An Individual Risk Assessment should be used to record the findings of the risk assessment.
- A manual handling (care related) risk assessment must be completed for all pupils who may require assistance from employees to move them whilst in a wheelchair.
- A manual handling risk assessment for inanimate objects must be completed for all activities related to the manual handling of the wheelchair when unoccupied; for example, lifting a wheelchair into a vehicle.

Attached to this guidance note are two general risk assessments detailing the safe use of manual and electric wheelchairs. These general assessments do not replace the need to undertake specific individual risk assessments when a hazard relating to the safe use of a wheelchair is identified. These general assessments can be added to and modified as necessary.

All employees that could have cause to operate or handle a wheelchair with or without occupant, must be familiar with these risk assessments.

5. Safe Use of Wheelchairs

5.1 Manual Wheelchairs

Before using a manual wheelchair, the following points must be considered;

5.1.1 General

- Ensure that all wheelchairs are visually inspected prior to handling by employees to ensure it is in safe working condition. Attention should be paid to brakes and tyres.
- Ensure the wheelchair is unfolded and locked in the open position.
- The brakes are applied when the wheelchair is not in motion.
- Bags and holdalls etc. are not placed on the handles of the wheelchair, as this alters the centre of gravity and makes them less stable. Also, during transportation there is a risk of the bag and contents becoming loose and causing injury. The only exception being bags that are an approved manufacturers accessory.
- If the wheelchair has posture straps pupils should be requested to use them at all times.
- Lap straps should only be used where a risk assessment identifies the need for their use, in that the pupil is confused and does not understand that they need to remain seated when in the wheelchair and presents a danger to themselves and or others. If they refuse, an individual risk assessment should be completed and signed by the pupil and/or carer where they agree.
- Ensure the correct footrests are in place, correctly adjusted, and feet are on the footrests during transportation. Where this is not possible due to the health of the pupil, an individual risk assessment should be completed documenting the safe use in these circumstances.
- All accessories are to be compatible with the type of wheelchair and fitted correctly.

- Employees need to wear appropriate clothing and footwear for all conditions.
- Privately owned/NHS supplied wheelchairs must only be used by the pupil who owns/was supplied with the wheelchair.

5.1.2 Handling

- The weight of the pupil should be considered for distances wheeled.
- Plan the route and ensure access is appropriate.
- Use ramps or dropped kerbs where available.
- Use tipping lever on the back of the wheelchair to assist with going up a step or kerb.
- When transporting an unoccupied collapsible wheelchair in a vehicle, it needs to be stored securely to prevent it becoming loose during transportation/impact.

5.2. Use of Electric Wheelchair

It is important to remember that electric wheelchairs are originally designed to give independence to the occupant. The standard design does not take into consideration the hazards that will be presented to an employee or carer operating the electric chair on behalf of the occupant. Therefore, the risk of serious injury to the occupant or the person operating the electric wheelchair, on behalf of the occupant, is greatly increased due to the difficulty of operating the controls. This will increase the risk of impact injury to the operator or any others in the vicinity, and if being operated onto a passenger tail lift will increase the risk of falls from height. In addition, there is an increased risk of sustaining a manual handling injury due to poor posture that is adopted whilst doing this task.

5.2.1 General

- The pupil should have received instruction on use of the electric wheel chair from the supplier; this can often be difficult to determine as they may have already used an electric wheelchair before coming to the academy. In these situations, the pupil should demonstrate their ability to manoeuvre the electric wheelchair allowing an assessment to be completed. If this raises any concerns, then a reassessment by the providing NHS Trust should be undertaken. A reassessment should be made if changes in the pupil' physical capabilities or comprehension become apparent.
- The wheelchair should appear to be in good general condition.
- Bags and holdalls etc. are not placed on the handles of the wheelchair, as this alters the centre of gravity and makes them less stable. Also, during transportation there is a risk of the bag and contents becoming loose and causing injury. The only exception being bags that are an approved manufacturers accessory.
- Bags, holdalls etc should not obstruct the use of the hand controls or be placed on the arm containing the controls.
- If the wheelchair has posture straps the pupil should be requested to use them at all times.

- Lap straps should only be used where a risk assessment identifies the need for their use. If they refuse an individual risk assessment should be completed and signed by the pupil and/or carer where they agree.
- Ensure the pupil's feet are on the footrests during transportation.
- Employees need to wear appropriate clothing and footwear for all conditions.

5.2.2 Battery Charging

- Ensure battery is not damaged.
- Only charge battery following manufacturers guidelines.
- Ensure the battery charger cables are not trailing across the floor.
- Ensure that there is adequate ventilation during the charging process.
- Ensure the battery-charging unit receives annual electro-test.

5.2.3 Handling

If it is necessary to operate an electric wheelchair for a pupil, the wheelchair should be placed in to manual mode to ensure that the electric controls are not accidentally activated as this could result in injury to both employees and pupils.

When assisting pupils with personal care or undertaking manual handling activities, it is essential that the electric wheelchair control pad is isolated or if this is not possible the wheelchair is placed into manual mode. This is to ensure that the electric controls are not accidentally activated as this could result in injury to both employees and pupils. It is acknowledged that moving an electric wheelchair in manual mode may present manual handling issues due to the overall weight of the occupied wheelchair. It is also acknowledged some pupils' ability to operate their electric wheelchair in a confined space is limited.

5.2.4 Braking Systems

Employees should be made aware that when operating electric wheelchairs in manual mode the braking system may be affected depending on the type and model of wheelchair. It is therefore essential that the manufacturer instructions are referred to prior to this operation. For wheelchairs that have no manual brake the clutch must be engaged with the power switched off.

6. Ensuring Safe Working Condition of both Manual and Electric Wheelchairs.

Regular maintenance of wheelchairs, seating and accessories is important for the safety of the user; maintenance of the brakes is of obvious importance as inadequate braking could result in a variety of accidents. The effective operation of the brakes is essential during transportation as the brakes prevent the wheelchair rolling off a raised platform. Many wheelchair brakes act directly on the tyres; therefore, correct inflation and pressure are essential to retain performance.

It is essential that all wheelchairs handled by county council employees are in effective working order. This can be achieved by annual servicing, weekly inspections and visual inspections.

6.1 Annual Servicing, Maintenance and Repairs as necessary.

- Wheelchairs owned by the academy must receive an annual service and maintenance to ensure their serviceability. Defective wheelchairs must be taken out of use until repaired or disposed of. Donated wheelchairs must receive a service and maintenance check prior to being put into use.
- Wheelchairs supplied by an NHS Primary Care Trust are serviced every 12 months. Their approved contractor can be contacted via The Wheelchair Services at the appropriate hospital that supplied the wheelchair.
- If a wheelchair is privately owned, the family/carer should be encouraged to have a servicing contract in place. A leaflet is available for pupils, which provides advice and guidance on the safe use of wheelchairs and detailed information about servicing and maintenance. Employees who need to handle a privately-owned wheelchair should complete a visual inspection prior to handling to ensure it is in safe working condition. If employees notice any defects they must report them to the pupil/their family and carers to ensure that it is repaired. Defective wheelchairs must not be transported.
- When arranging for the servicing of wheelchairs it is important to remember to have all accessories such as lap/posture belts, headrests etc serviced with the wheelchair.
- All servicing must be documented, and the records must clearly detail the individual serial number of the wheelchair. Where a wheelchair has no legible serial number, it must be given its own unique number. Repairs undertaken must also be documented and traceable to the individual wheelchair by the written records.
- Records of all servicing and repairs must be in line with The Shaw Education Trust.

6.2 Weekly inspections

All wheelchairs transported by the academy or where assistance is provided to support the pupil must have a weekly inspection. The weekly Inspection checks of each wheelchair must be completed, and the findings documented (see Weekly Inspection Checklist Form).

- The individuals completing the weekly inspections must make themselves familiar with the record form and the guidance and instructions it provides for completing the checks appropriately.
- A record of these inspections should be recorded, and any defects identified must be noted and rectified.
- Defects to wheelchairs which are privately owned or supplied by the NHS should be informed to the pupil/parent or carer so that they can be rectified.
- Records of all weekly inspections must be kept in line with The Shaw Education Trust Retention Schedule.

- Where a defect has been identified with the structure or safety of the wheelchair it must not be used until the defect has been rectified.
- The manager should sign the completed checklist form.

7. Posture Belts and Lap Belts

Lap belts and posture belts should be selected and purchased to meet the needs of the end user and, where appropriate, their carer. This includes the type and length of adjustment and the method of fastening and releasing the belt. Users or carers with poor co-ordination or limited strength in their hands may not be able to operate some types of mechanisms which require firm grip or dexterity to adjust, release and fasten the belt. Many lap and posture belts have facilities to adjust length over a wide range; however, this is not required for most users. Careful selection of the adjustment, release and fastening mechanism will reduce the risk of the user slipping down in the seat until the belt is pressing against the user's neck. The risk can occur if the belt is incorrectly adjusted by as little as 150mm from the correct position. The risk is increased for users who have limited comprehension, reduced co-ordination or insufficient strength to push themselves back into the wheelchair.

Lap and posture belts should be fitted and adjusted in line with manufacturer's instructions to provide an appropriate sitting position. The belt adjustment should be regularly checked to ensure that the required posture is maintained. Inspection and maintenance of the belts and their fittings should be included within the annual servicing of the wheelchair.

8. Manual Handling

Transferring from a wheelchair to a vehicle seat is generally the preferred option for transporting pupils. This does create a manual handling task for drivers/escorts and should be documented as a manual handling (care related) risk assessment. Drivers and escorts should be trained on the correct manual handling technique to be used and follow the pupils individual risk assessment and guidance detailed below.

Driver/Escort should always ensure that: -

- The wheelchair brakes are on:
- The small front wheels (castors) are swept forward to make the wheelchair more stable;
- They do not lift the pupil but follow safe handling techniques;
- Empty wheelchairs are safely stowed during transportation.

There may be times when it is necessary to transport an unoccupied manual wheelchair in a private vehicle, having first considered alternative arrangements. Where the manual lifting of a wheelchair is required a moving and handling inanimate object risk assessment is to be completed. This risk assessment will identify any specific hazards presented by the wheelchair in relation to the vehicle it is being transported in.

Procedure for lifting a manual wheelchair into or out of a vehicle.

- Decide whether the wheelchair is to be stowed in the boot of the vehicle or behind the passenger seat
- Position wheelchair as close to vehicle as possible before collapsing it.
- The wheelchair must be made into its smallest component by removing all accessories, footrests etc.

Boot

- Before lifting the chair into the boot place a rug or blanket over the sill, this will protect the cars bodywork and the wheelchair from any damage, it can also be used as an aid to slide the wheelchair into the boot.
- Take a firm grip of the wheelchair and following good back care principles lift the chair so it is resting on the sill of the boot.
- The chair can then be slid into the boot.
- To remove the wheelchair from the boot again place a rug / blanket over the sill.
- Pull the wheelchair towards you until only the castor and wheels are resting on the sill.
- Check your posture ensuring one foot is forward of the other, as the weight of the wheelchair is taken it is necessary to step back, this will distribute the weight and ensure a smooth movement when lowering the chair to the ground.

Behind Passenger seat

This technique is usually used when it is not possible to physically lift the wheelchair into the boot due to individual capabilities or the vehicle structure.

- Slide the front passenger seat forward to ensure there is adequate space
- Fold down the handlebars, **do not apply the brakes.**
- It may be necessary to use a rug / blanket, to protect the wheelchair and sill.
- Tilt and rest the front castors on the sill, roll the wheelchair forward until safely positioned in the rear footwell.
- If the wheelchair will not fit in the footwell it **is not to** be transported on the seat as the wheelchair would not be restrained in the event of an accident.

Under no circumstances are electric wheelchairs to be manually lifted

9. Accessories Compatibility

To maintain integrity, it is important that only compatible accessories are used on wheelchairs. It is not appropriate to switch wheelchair parts from one wheelchair to another as this may affect the integrity of the wheelchair.

The only exception is with footrests, to enable you to do this you must:

1. Check that the footrest is from the same model of wheelchair.
2. That they are in good condition.
3. That they match each other.
4. They clip securely into the correct position.

In all cases where posture belts and lap belts have not been fitted by the manufacturer of the wheelchair, the belt supplier should provide adequate information. This includes compatibility information which shows clearly the types of wheelchair that the belt is intended to be used with and fitting, adjustment and maintenance instructions.

10. Transporting Wheelchair Users

Due to the varying range of wheelchairs available a wheelchair assessment must be made by a competent person as to the correct restraining system to be used.

The above-mentioned assessments are not necessarily completed in the vehicle used for transportation, and Managers are required to ensure that in addition to the wheelchair assessment, they complete an individual risk assessment for these passengers to ensure safe entry and exit from the vehicle and safe transportation. The manual handling requirements and impact on wheelchair user and driver/escort must also be considered.

When transporting pupils on passenger transport the following standards must be adhered to:

1. It is strongly recommended that where possible, wheelchair user transfers to a fixed seat, and for the wheelchair to be securely stored during the journey. This poses less risk in the event of an incident than being transported in the wheelchair. Where this is not possible the wheelchair users may remain in their wheelchair during the journey provided that the wheelchair is secured following manufacturers safety recommendations.
2. Ideally wheelchairs should be in a forward-facing position, with the wheelchair secured ideally using a four-point webbing restraint. Wheelchair users must not travel with the wheelchair at an angle or facing sideways. There must also be enough free space around the wheelchair and user to avoid the user contacting other vehicle passengers, unpadding parts of the vehicle, wheelchair accessories, or the wheelchair tie down anchor points.
3. Ramps used for the boarding and alighting of wheelchair users must only be used following suitable assessment that they can be used safely both at establishments and in the community. This assessment needs to consider the height of the vehicle tailgate, the incline of the ramp (absolute maximum incline of 1:8 where a wheelchair user is assisted, otherwise 1:12 should be achieved for safe use), the environment where it will be used, and the individual capabilities of the drivers/escorts. The ramps used must be wide enough to accommodate the wheelchair safely. The use of ramps for electric wheelchairs is discouraged and passenger tail lift is preferred.
4. Wheelchairs must have their parking brakes applied and electric wheelchairs must have their power units switched off and placed in manual mode. It must be stressed that wheelchair brakes are not designed to withstand forces such as braking,

cornering, acceleration and therefore wheelchair restraints and passenger restraints are always required to be used .

5. Pupils who lack or have difficulty with head and upper body control must have a risk assessment completed to determine if a headrest is required for use with the wheelchair during transportation. If the wheelchair does not incorporate a headrest then any headrest accessory must be compatible for use with the wheelchair and installed correctly. Failure to use upper body restraints or using inadequate/ inappropriate restraint could allow sideways movement under normal vehicle movement. This could result in injuries to the passenger through contact with other equipment or vehicle structure or in extreme cases tipping or falling from the wheelchair
6. Wheelchairs should not block gangways and exits for other passengers travelling in the vehicle.
7. To minimise the risk of injury in a rear end collision whilst travelling in a minibus or adapted vehicle, passengers must not be transported within 0.5 metre of the rear of the vehicle.
8. Drivers and escorts required to transport passengers in their wheelchairs must be competent to use the equipment required, and in the securing of wheelchairs and passenger restraints. They must also have access to the wheelchair risk assessment which details how to secure the individual and their wheelchair safely and other relevant individual risk assessments.
9. An individual pupil risk assessment must document the wheelchair tie down and passenger restraint procedure to be followed, which must be in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. The procedure should be communicated to the passenger so that they will know what the driver/escort is going to do.
10. When transporting wheelchair users, an assessment to determine staff levels on each route must be undertaken and regularly reviewed to ensure that the individual service user's needs and the group dynamics risks are adequately controlled.
11. The wheelchair manufacturer must confirm that it is suitable for being transported. Some wheelchairs, such as those designed for sport use are unsuitable for travelling in.
12. With a passenger tail lift it is essential that the electric wheelchair's power is switched off and the drive clutch is disengaged so that the wheelchair can be pushed on/off the lift platform as if it were a manual wheelchair. This reduces the chance of the wheelchair overshooting and allows the driver/escort to sense if the tail lift fails and to allow them to control the wheelchair back into the vehicle. Once in position

on the lift, the brakes should be used, or re-engage with the power still off the clutch, to stop the wheelchair from moving. When in position inside the vehicle re-engage the clutch, as putting the wheelchair in gear provides brakes. The power should be switched off whilst the wheelchair is in the vehicle.

13. If placing the electric wheelchair in manual mode to put the wheelchair on or off the tail lift, presents other health and safety hazards, such as the wheelchairs braking system not working, or the wheelchair creates a hazardous manual handling operation. Then an individual risk assessment documenting the reasons why it is manoeuvred during transportation with the power on must be completed and advice taken from the manufacturers.
14. On manual wheelchairs the handbrake must be applied when it is on the tail lift and during transportation.
15. Whenever practicable passengers in wheelchairs should be facing the vehicle while the lift is in operation to reduce the feeling of insecurity.
16. Lap/posture belts fixed to wheelchairs are intended for posture control only and therefore the wheelchair user must be secured with a seatbelt (lap/diagonal belts or harness) attached to the vehicles tracking system.
17. The batteries on electric wheelchairs must be firmly attached to the wheelchair.
18. Accessories for use during transportation should be adequately secured to the wheelchair and may require padding to avoid user contact in normal vehicle movement or in an impact. If this is not possible they should be removed to avoid potential contact with the user or other passengers in an impact. Some accessories for example feeding/lap trays are not suitable to remain on the wheelchair during transportation and must be removed whilst in transit.
19. Bags and holdalls etc. must not be placed on the handles of the wheelchair, as this alters the centre of gravity and makes them less stable. Also during transportation there is a risk of the bag and contents becoming loose and causing injury. The only exception being bags that are an approved manufacturers' accessory.
20. Tracking for wheelchair restraint systems must be kept clean, and free from grit, etc, always.
21. Drivers and escorts must be trained in the care (loading, handling and alighting) of pupils in wheelchairs and in the use of tail lifts.

22. Wheelchair users should be informed that, if they are going to change their wheelchair it may be advisable to check with the academy beforehand that the new model can be transported safely.
23. Wheelchairs involved in a vehicle impact should not be used again until checked by the manufacturer or his approved repair agent.
24. The tail lift must only be operated when the vehicle is stationary, and the brakes are on. The safe working load of the tail lift must not be exceeded; therefore, it must be capable of carrying the combined weight of the wheelchair, the wheelchair user and the driver/escort. The tail lift will receive a thorough examination by a competent contractor every 6 months.
25. Drivers and Escorts must be given detailed instructions on entry and exit procedures during normal operation and in emergency situations. Evacuation procedures should be practiced regularly to ensure employees are familiar with the procedures to be followed.

Procedure for the safe use of Wheelchair Tie downs and Occupant Restraint Systems (WTORS)

- Wheelchair users should not travel in cars, taxis or minibuses unless the wheelchair is tied down and the user appropriately restrained.
- It is essential that WTORS are always used regardless of the speed or distance the vehicle is travelling.
- Enough WTORS must be carried to allow safe transportation of the intended wheelchair and passenger. One type of WTOR may not be suitable for all wheelchairs and passengers transported.
- It is the driver's responsibility to ensure that he is aware of the WTORS to be used with each individual wheelchair user and their wheelchair.
- A wheelchair risk assessment is to be completed by competent individual for all wheelchairs and users to be transported. This assessment will detail the wheelchair tie down to be used and the passenger restraint to be used. It will also identify any areas of concern that may need to be taken up with the wheelchair user, family or carer or the wheelchair provider.
- Employees using WTORS must have received training in the selection, assembly and fitting of WTORS.
- Drivers must ensure that WTORS are safely stowed when not in use during transportation.
- Drivers must not leave WTORS in the tracking systems as they can become damaged and present a trip risk to drivers, escorts and other passengers.
- Drivers must complete a weekly documented visual inspection of the vehicles tracking system.

- Manufacturers' Instruction Manuals should be accessible inside the vehicle as reference for staff when fitting/removing WTORS.
- Lap and posture belts attached to wheelchairs or seating units are usually provided to assist posture and are not vehicle occupant restraints. Additional passenger restraint is required. A lap or posture belt must never be used as the sole means of restraint.
- Drivers and escorts must be able to easily fasten and unfasten the restraints.
- WTORS must be maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
- WTORS involved in a vehicle impact should not be used again until checked by the manufacturer or their approved agent.

Transportation of unoccupied wheelchair

- If the wheelchair is to be transported as luggage, it must be adequately secured within the vehicle to stop it contacting the user or other passengers during normal vehicle movement or in an impact. The use of luggage straps is recommended.
- Gangways and exits must not be obstructed in any way.
- Electric wheelchairs transported unoccupied must be restrained using the appropriate wheelchair tie down.

11. Transport of Wheelchair Users by Taxi's & Private Hire Vehicles

When arranging transportation of a pupil by taxi/private hire vehicle, it is essential that you use vehicle which has been approved by local licensing regulations set by the district council, as a disabled passenger carrying vehicle. These vehicles have suitable methods to safely transport wheelchairs, as they will have a method to secure the wheelchair within the vehicle and a method of securing the wheelchair user via seatbelt or harness.

12. Public Transport

When assisting a wheelchair user to use public transport, it is important the all parties are aware of the safe locations for wheelchair users and any guidance provided on entrance to the vehicle. Where risks are identified then a risk assessment must be completed and control measures identified.

13. Communication

Good lines of communication must be established and maintained between drivers/escorts, users, carer's, manufacturers, and service providers.

14. Adverse Incidents

Adverse incidents must be reported immediately (Refer to Accident and Incident Health and Safety Policy). The health and safety team may need to request further information, investigate the incident as they are required to report adverse incidents to

the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the Medicines and Health Care Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) if the accident has any bearing on passenger safety.

Incidents must be reported in the following circumstances: -

- Wheelchair user or the carers have been injured or killed during transportation;
- No injury has occurred, but could have occurred i.e. near misses;
- Safety related equipment is faulty or has inadequate user information or labelling.
- Failure of the tail lift

15. Monitoring

Managers should regularly review the arrangements and procedures in place.

16. Record Keeping

All risk assessments and records of inspections should be retained in line with The Shaw Education Trust Retention Schedule.