



# Wheelchair mobility

**Visual Impairment Service**

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## Mobility and orientation for wheelchair users

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This booklet is intended to provide basic guidance and techniques for supporting a mobility programme for pupils who use manual or powered wheelchairs.

While the Service does not supply wheelchairs we can advise and support on their use by visually impaired pupils.

For information related to the supply and maintenance of wheelchairs you should contact the wheelchair's supplier direct.

This booklet is intended to supplement, not replace, the advice and training you receive from the Visual Impairment Service's Mobility Specialist.

<b>Contents</b>	
	<b>Page</b>
Why this is important .. .. .	2
Before you start .. .. .	3
On route in a manual wheelchair .. .. .	4
General guidelines .. .. .	5
Mobility routes .. .. .	6
An example of a scripted route .. .. .	7
Beach wheelchairs .. .. .	8

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## Why is this important?

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- be aware of where they are within their school
  - be able to move around within their environment safely and as independently as possible
  - have some involvement in and control over their journey
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- stay safe (Every Child Matters)
  - enjoy and achieve (Every Child Matters)
  - make a positive contribution (Every Child Matters)
  - reduce feelings of anxiety and isolation which visually impaired pupils in particular are known to experience as they move around their school

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## Before you start

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- check the wheelchair is working properly
- ensure all buckles/harnesses are correctly fastened

### Manual Wheelchairs

- introduce yourself to the pupil and agree where you are going
- tell the pupil when you are about to start moving and
- gently press his/her back between the shoulder blades to indicate this

### Powered Wheelchairs

- staff should charge up the powered wheelchair every evening ready for use the next day



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## On route in a manual wheelchair

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- make 90 degree turns
- touch either the pupil's right or left shoulder
- give a verbal prompt such as "turning right" or "turning left"
  
- say when you are going to stop
- gently press the front of the traveller's shoulder
  
- when going up or down a ramp give a verbal prompt
- place your hand on the pupil's shoulder and gently push either forward or backward to indicate which way the wheelchair will tilt
  
- verbally warn the pupil when you are about to move on to an uneven or bumpy surface
- tap your fingers on their shoulder as an extra physical warning
- make use of bumps and different floor surfaces as they can provide key information to the wheelchair user about where they are



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## General guidelines

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- allow sufficient time for familiarisation and completing journeys lots of opportunities to practise and learn new skills e.g. using the joystick
- avoid getting distracted and focus on the child
- speak only as much as is helpful giving short, clear and relevant information

### Manual Wheelchairs

- walk at a slow pace as movement feels greatly exaggerated when in a wheelchair especially if the user has limited or no vision
- give both a verbal and physical prompt when moving a manual wheelchair
- always use the same routes so the sequence of movement and landmarks can be remembered
- **never** leave a child in a wheelchair in the middle of a corridor
- **never** leave a child in a wheelchair facing direct sunlight

### Powered Wheelchairs

- at first practice in a large empty space e.g. hall or playground
- first practice moving the wheelchair forwards and backwards; then practice turning to the left and right
- the pupil must be able to stop the wheelchair immediately when asked for safety to self and others
- as the pupil develops control practice moving in narrower corridors and through doorways
- encourage the pupil to take on responsibility for their travel, control of their wheelchair and safety of self and others
- help pupils to build up routes by encouraging them to learn and to use landmarks and cues between places they visit around school

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## Mobility routes

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- different kinds of textures on the ground
- landmarks which are either fixed (e.g. radiator) or specifically placed such as a paintbrush on art room door
- cues which involve using all the senses:
  - wind chime when entering through classroom door
  - smell of food when entering dining area
- encouraging the pupil to trail or reach out to find and touch known landmarks
- ensuring the pupil uses a switch or other communication aid or signs to make mobility choices where appropriate
- a **scripted route** (see below) so that all staff working with the pupil are consistent

### What is a “scripted route”?

This is a written guide, which everyone working with the pupil should use to reinforce mobility skills consistently. It identifies the sequence of landmarks on a given route that the pupil can be actively involved with.

Planned scripted routes can be built in to every day activities e.g. going to lunch five or ten minutes early provides valuable time for pupils to explore their environment and learn and develop a range of skills such as:-

- exploring landmarks on route
- using a communication aid to say what the next landmark will be
- using photos to sequence landmarks on the journey

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## An example of a scripted route

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This is an actual example of a scripted route between Natalie's classroom and the music room. It clearly identifies the sequence of landmarks/cues and what the adult needs to do. The bold text identifies what Natalie needs to do e.g. feel, touch, look at, listen to or smell.

### Natalie – Scripted Route Between Classroom and Music

(Below is the sequence of landmarks and cues on route for Natalie to take an active role – shown in bold).

- Show photo of music teacher (**look**)
- Turn right out of classroom – say “turning right” (**feel touch on right shoulder and listen to your information**)
- Move onto door mat (**feel bump**)
- Locate red fire extinguisher (**look at and touch with or without help**)
- Open and close door to playground (**listen for noise from door and feel outside weather**)
- Locate red basketball post (**look at and touch with or without help**)
- Locate gate across playground (**look at gate**)
- Open, walk through and close gate (**hear noise and feel grid under wheelchair**)
- Locate lamppost (**look and touch with or without help**)
- Use ramp (**feel body leaning backwards**)
- Locate and go through door (**feel bump at entrance and hear echo**)
- At end of corridor by library turn right – say “turning right” (**feel touch on right shoulder and listen to your information**)
- Locate music room (**look at yellow door**)

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## Beach wheelchairs

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Beach wheelchairs can be hired at various places along the British coast. They are easier to push over sand and can even be taken into shallow water.



For a list of beach Wheelchair hire scheme across the UK contact:

Mobilise Organisation  
National Headquarters  
Ashwellthorpe  
NORWICH NR16 1EX

Telephone: 01508 489449

Fax: 01508 488173

E-Mail: [enquiries@mobilise.info](mailto:enquiries@mobilise.info)

Website: [www.mobilise.info/PagePDFs/A51007-69.pdf](http://www.mobilise.info/PagePDFs/A51007-69.pdf)