

Emergency School Closures

1. Introduction

It may be necessary to close schools for a variety of reasons including:

- Severe weather including snow, flooding or storms - See Section 2
- Disruption to transport, for example through petrol or diesel shortages - See Section 3.
- ☐ Unsuitable accommodation, for example due to loss of power supply, heating failures or fire damage - see Section 4.

Headteachers are asked to make contingency plans to try and ensure that schools remain open wherever possible.

2. Closure due to severe weather

School closure contingency plans should be prepared well in advance of the bad weather season so that staff, parents and pupils understand what these plans are.

The decision to close a school will normally rest with the Headteacher, on the basis of information received from the media about weather, supplemented by on the spot observation, either personally or from staff members better placed to make such observations. Advice given through local radio stations is directed at travel that could quite easily be deferred or cancelled altogether. It is not intended to reflect the view that travel to school, or indeed work, is unnecessary.

Your nearest 24 hour staffed police office may be able to help with a local situation report. These are in: -

Norwich,	01953 424242
Great Yarmouth,	01493 336200
King's Lynn,	01953 424242
North Walsham,	01692 402 222
Dereham	01362 693534
Thetford	01842 754314

Factors involved in reaching the decision to close the school are likely to be: -

- Access to the school, i.e road conditions (obstructions, snow, ice, flooding etc).
- Breakdown of school essential services (heating, electrical services, water, storm damage etc).

It is unlikely that conditions will necessitate the closure of all schools and any decision taken by Headteachers should be based on that school's individual situation. **Schools should remain open wherever possible.**

Headteachers should advise staff, parents and students to listen to local radio stations during inclement weather when broadcasts of school information are most likely to be made. However, Headteachers should be aware that incidents can occur with little or no warning and that not everyone involved will hear relevant broadcasts. Therefore a "back-up" system of cascade telephone calls involving school staff and possibly the PTA may be necessary to reach everyone. The attached emergency closure check list provides an outline for setting up such a system. It is important, in Data Protection terms, that parents are aware that their telephone number will be used in this way.

2.1 Closure guidance

On occasions it may be necessary for schools to close during the school day ie. If the weather is deteriorating and there is doubt as to whether children can be returned home later in the day. In such cases schools need to ensure that children are able to return home safely and that there will be someone to meet them when they get home.

Should a severe weather warning be received, the Schools' Closure Plan will be activated at County Hall and a team assembled to receive calls from Headteachers and to activate the broadcast system via the relevant radio stations. The Met Office web site home page (www.meto.gov.uk) gives details of any severe weather warnings in place.

Headteachers should telephone:

Norwich (01603) 222008

This number incorporates a bank of telephones simultaneously to handle the larger number of calls expected in these circumstances. When this number is operating the procedure described in Section 4 is redirected to this number. The procedure will operate from 0600 hours to 0900 hours only.

The closure message

The telephone lines used in this operation are likely to become busy. Messages should be kept short and to the point, as follows: -

This is (name)

Head of (school)

State location code (e.g. EB1234)
(very important – no code, no message - for security purposes)

The school will not be open today (date)

or tomorrow (date)

Ancillary data will not normally be broadcast, however, exceptional items will be transmitted if at all possible. Such items are: -

**The school will remain open for (e.g. examination students today)
..... (date) and/or tomorrow (date)**

Please give the message slowly as the operators will be completing a form with the details given.

2.3 Staff attendance

Although it is recognised that severe weather conditions make it difficult for staff to get to and from work, unless an individual has permission to be away from work for other reasons, then the expectation is that staff will present themselves for work. A transport difficulty, which may arise from the occurrence of snow or other factors, does not alter that obligation which applies equally to all staff. It is not limited by the location of an individual's home. Staff who live a considerable distance away from their workplace, or in isolated situations, are equally expected to attend work as usual.

When adverse weather conditions make travelling difficult or dangerous, staff should conduct their own risk assessment and inform their Headteacher. The Headteacher may then authorise staff not to attend school or, in case of prolonged closure, to attend a school closer to their home (see sections 3.2 Staff Absence for further information).

When a school is closed to pupils the expectation is that staff will present themselves for work unless advised to the contrary by the Headteacher. Contract Staff (Catering and Cleaning Services) also need to be advised of any emergency requirements.

2.4 Transport

Particularly in rural areas the attendance of many of our pupils will depend on the road conditions and the ability of home to school transport contractors to judge if they can operate. Some form of liaison between your school and the contractors is obviously helpful in arriving at a decision and, in all cases should help you to judge how many pupils you can expect if you keep the school open. In the event of a school closure, the transport company(ies) must be notified as soon as possible.

2.5 Clearance of snow

Within the school site, the school is responsible for snow clearance and the clearing of approach paths is the specific task of the caretaker. When severe weather is forecast, the caretaker should be tasked to lay salt and grit in advance.

The clearance of public roads will depend on the availability of the Highways Department vehicles or contractors who will not normally be able to clear snow on school sites.

Headteachers should be aware that they have a responsibility in inclement weather to keep the children indoors if there is any question of children's safety being at risk, for instance if they are let out at breaktime and the playground area is unsafe.

3. Disruption for other reasons

In September 2000 blockades of fuel depots seriously disrupted the availability of fuel supplies, leading to Headteachers considering school closure. The following is based on guidance developed at that time.

Whilst a school's purpose is to provide education, the priority of national and local emergency plans is to save and maintain life. Therefore schools play an important role in enabling parents who work in the emergency, health or associated services to be free from additional childcare responsibilities in term time and available for work.

3.1. School closure

Wherever possible schools should remain open. However, where it proves impossible to provide adequate supervision it may be necessary to fully or partially close your school.

Should it be necessary to close your school, you should notify County Hall using the same procedure as detailed above in 2.1 Closure guidance.

3.2 Staff absence

It is permissible for Headteachers within the overall policy and arrangements agreed by your Governing Body to authorise staff not to attend your school – but, if possible, to attend a school closer to their home. It is important, before authorising any such arrangement that you find out if that school needs help from your member of staff. This also applies to staff who live in Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire, as we have a reciprocal agreement with those counties. Where it is agreed that a member of staff should attend a school other than their normal place of work, the Headteacher of that school should ensure that they are briefed on local arrangements for health and safety, i.e as a new or temporary staff member would be briefed on arrival at the school for the first time.

3.3 School meals

Difficulties in delivering the school meals service may arise from three causes:

- transport of meals from schools with kitchens to those with servery facilities only
- deliveries of food
- staff not being able to get to work

You should check with the School Meals Service/your cook daily on the likely availability of meals being provided on the following day and keep parents informed. If school meal arrangements at your school cease, then provided that parents have been notified of the need to provide packed lunches, your school can continue to operate.

4. School closures for other reasons

On occasions it may be necessary to close your school due, for example to a:

- breakdown of the heating system
- loss of essential services such as water or electricity
- fire damage

In these events the Headteacher should telephone Education Planning & Buildings Section at County Hall on **01603 224308** and give the closure message.

If the telephone is staffed, i.e during office hours, a staff member will take the message, and advise the relevant sections of the Education Department as appropriate. If necessary, arrangements will be made to advise local radio stations.

These are :-	BBC Radio Norfolk	01603 614346
	Hereward Radio	01733 460400
	KLFM	01553 771778
	Radio Broadland	01603 660927
	SGR FM	01473 461000

If the telephone is unstaffed, i.e outside office hours, the answerphone will remind Headteachers to ring the local radio station(s) appropriate to their catchment area.

Emergency closure check list

School

It is advisable that Headteachers and staff carry completed versions of this at all times

1. Severe weather - phone Emergency Planning Unit - 01603-222008 2. Other reasons - phone Education Premises Section - 01603-224308 (Location Code _____)									
If manned	If answerphone								
Give closure message	Leave closure message								
Activate cascade phone procedure to parents									
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