



# Exceptional Closures Policy

*Policy Date:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Signature of Principal:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Signature of Chairperson of Board of Governors:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Review Date:* \_\_\_\_\_

### Definition of an exceptional closure

An exceptional closure is unplanned and is due to unforeseen circumstances such as adverse weather conditions, power failure, flooding or situations which might affect the safety of the pupils and staff. The following action plan details the measures which the school will undertake to ensure the safety of pupils and staff

- Keep parents informed about arrangements for closure and re-opening
- Arrange for pupils to be picked up during the school day should the need arise.

### When it snows during the school day

On rare occasions, the weather can be so severe that getting to and from school becomes hazardous. This is especially so if the weather worsens in the afternoon.

Really bad weather is disruptive and can cause anxiety and stress.

Understandably, many parents ring the school if snow starts falling heavily during the day. It can be frustrating trying to get through when our outside line is engaged by other parents calling for the same reason! A jammed line and answering queries can in turn delay staff who are trying to get through to parents to arrange for early collection of children. We will contact parents by text service. (it is important that parents update the school of any changes to mobile phone contacts).

Decisions about closing the school or sending pupils home early are always difficult to make. We need to gather reliable information and conduct a risk assessment before making a judgement. Guidelines and a Principal's Checklist can be viewed at [www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications /checklist-exceptional-closure-schools](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/checklist-exceptional-closure-schools) We check weather reports, get advice from the EA (Education Authority) and try to access what is happening elsewhere in the area. We will take into account local conditions The decision to close school during a working day is not taken lightly but the over-riding principle is the safety of pupils and staff. It is the responsibility of the Principal, in consultation with the building supervisor, staff and the Chair of the Board of Governors (if available), to determine if the school will close. **The decision is taken on an individual basis and not based on those of neighbouring school whose circumstances may differ.**

### If the school is to be closed due to adverse weather overnight

In extreme weather conditions such as heavy snowfall during the night the Principal will take into account local conditions and in consultation with the Building Supervisor (Mrs Heather McFarland) who will visit the school as early as possible(if able to) to conduct a risk assessment of the grounds and premises will make a decision on the need to close the

school as early as possible. In reaching this decision, it usually means that the approach roads/and/or the school grounds are inaccessible and opening the school would be deemed unsafe for staff and pupils to travel. This will allow for early communication with parents and staff.

As the majority of our children are bused in by the local EA transport we need to be mindful of their policy that individual drivers must use their own discretion as to whether it will be safe to take their bus out using their knowledge of their route. If drivers do not transport children to school for health and safety reasons they do not need to transport them home again unless conditions improve considerably. Equally if children are transported to school and conditions deteriorate considerably drivers do not have to transport children home. So the principal will need to take this in to consideration when making a decision. If the majority of the children will be unable to get transport then she may decide in consultation with the building supervisor and drivers not to open the school.

Decisions the night before can only be taken when all the indications are that adverse weather conditions will continue overnight, or that the amount of snow that has already fallen would make travel to the school extremely difficult.

### **Criteria to be Considered**

1. Can parents, pupils and staff access the school building safely?
2. Are pedestrian routes in to school safe and accessible- has grit been applied?
3. Can pupils and staff be evacuated in an emergency?
5. In an emergency, could the Emergency Services access the school?
5. Have local weather forecasts and road conditions, including those for areas from which staff will be travelling, been considered?
6. Are there any areas within the school locality particularly impassable or dangerous in times of extreme bad weather?
7. Will the school buses be able to transport the children in/out of the school.
8. Are there any N. Ireland Met Office warnings available?
9. Can the school premises be heated?
10. Is there provision of water for sanitary use or drinking?

The above questions will form part of our Risk Assessment

If it is decided that it would be impossible to open the school, the following action will be taken to inform parents:

1. The school closure will be broadcast on the BBC.
2. The school will endeavour to contact all parents by text to inform them of the school closure. Hard copies of contact details will be kept should the internet be down.

3. Three parents representing the three main catchment areas for our school who have been appointed as a contact for parents may be contacted by parents. The principal will keep them updated on decisions taken to keep school lines free. These parents are :

Mrs Heather Campbell (02881647095 – Mobile:07834641754)

Mrs Joan Monaghan ( 02881647889)

Mr/Mrs Thomas/Nicola Hempton ( 02881647869 –

Mobile:07824661790

Mobile:07792016959)

#### If the weather deteriorates during the day

1. The school will be closed early but only in extreme cases.
2. The decision to close the school will be made by the Principal in consultation with the building supervisor and other key staff.
3. Any decision to close the school early will be passed on to staff and pupils as soon as we have transport arrangements in hand and parent text message sent.
4. School will be kept open with as many staff as is possible on hand, until the last pupil has left.
- 5. It is not possible for pupils to be given lifts by staff.**
6. Parents collecting their children are asked to meet at the front of the school keeping entrance free.
7. Due to Health & Safety – it is very important that staff travel must be taken into consideration.

#### How parents can help

- Listen to BBC radio.
- Plan ahead with your child/school what to do in a bad weather emergency.
- Keep checking for texts from school.
- Contact the three parent contacts for updates –  
Mrs Heather Campbell (02881647095 – Mobile:07834641754)  
Mrs Joan Monaghan ( 02881647889)  
Mr &Mrs Nicola/Thomas Hempton ( 02881647869 –  
Mobile:07824661790  
Mobile: 07792016959)
- Only call the school if you have to - calls in prevent calls out.

### Further Strategies in place

- Heating, lighting and water services will be regularly maintained either through the EA Help Desk or directly through the School.
- During severe weather conditions or when they are predicted, the heating system will run for periods of time during the night and during periods of closure or holidays by setting the timer appropriately (Building Supervisor's responsibility).
- The Building Supervisor will be responsible for the laying down of salt at the beginning/ end of the school day, should conditions require this approach to be taken. Sufficient supplies of salt for application to footpaths and the car park area will be maintained.
- Safety Signs and Hazard Warning Tapes will be available in school for cordoning off hazardous areas.
- The Building Supervisor will make regular checks of the premises, both inside and out to ensure that the School is safe and fit for purpose at all times. Any perceived hazards (such as fallen down branches etc. in snowy or windy circumstances) will be removed by the Building Supervisor, where physically practicable and with EA Health and Safety requirements being adhered to at all times. Any such incidents and those of a more serious matter, will be reported by the Building Supervisor to the Principal, who may then, on some occasions, make a decision on any possible further course of action required e.g. reporting to Education Authority (North Eastern Region) Maintenance Department for response/ support/ guidance.
- Local contact details for other services will be kept on record e.g. NI Met Office [www.metoffice.gov.uk](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk)

### **Monitoring and Evaluating the Policy/Action Plan**

Our policy/action plan will be reviewed biannually and/or in the light of changes in legislation or practice following consultation with all staff members, parents and external agencies.