



Victoria Primary School

Emergency Closure Policy and Procedures

2021

This policy should be read with the;

- Health and Safety Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Emergency Evacuation Procedures

Vision Statement

*An inclusive, imaginative and inspiring Learning
Community where everyone can be safe, healthy, happy and
successful together.*

INTRODUCTION:

Victoria Primary School will remain open during the day to deliver education to its pupils with due consideration to statutory guidance and health and safety legislation. However, the Principal is authorised to make an exceptional closure when unforeseen circumstances make it absolutely necessary and in the best interests of the pupils eg adverse weather conditions, power failure or situations which affect the safety of pupils and staff.

This document sets out our policy and procedures in the event of an exceptional closure.

CLOSURE OF THE SCHOOL

The following will be considered in coming to any decision to close Victoria Primary School for exceptional reasons (Appendix 1). These include:

- **Health and safety requirements**

- Can pupils and staff access the school building safely?
- Can pupils and staff be evacuated in an emergency?
- In an emergency, could the Emergency Services access the school?
- Is the area designated for disembarkation from transport safe for pupils?

- **Pupil/ Teacher ratios**

- If a limited number of staff and pupils can attend, is the Pupil – Teacher Ratio acceptable? (1 teacher: 30 pupils) Staff should let the Principal know as soon as is practically possible, if they are unable to attend due to driving conditions.

- **Weather and road conditions**

- Have local weather forecasts and road conditions, including those for areas from which staff will be travelling, been considered? Red weather warnings advise against travel and should therefore result in staff not driving.

The Principal will carry out a risk assessment (Appendix 2) in consultation with the Chair of Governors or if they are unavailable, the Vice Chair. Staff are asked not to contact the Principal while these decisions are being taken unless to report that they cannot make the journey to school. The decision will be made **where possible** before 8.00am and 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 and through appropriate external agencies such as the Met Office and PSNI (Appendix 3).

The decision to open a school during periods of severe weather is dependent on the Principal carrying out a risk assessment. If school is closed the Principal will ensure that the following events happen:

- The decision is ratified with the Chair or Vice Chair of Governors.
- The Principal will contact staff members and the school secretary will contact parents.
- Staff and/or a notice will be posted at the school gates to help prevent pupils from being left by parents at the start of the school day **if possible**. In instances of severe weather, parents should monitor the nominated phone for text contact.
- School will be appropriately staffed by teachers/classroom assistants to deal with any pupils who arrive at school unescorted until parents or emergency contacts can collect the pupils, **if possible**.
- The Education Authority and the Department of Education will be informed as soon as possible of the closure [curriculum.supportteam@education-ni.gov.uk]

Decisions to close the school will be taken after consideration of local conditions and not based on neighbouring schools.

Parents and staff will be contacted later that day with a view to the next day's arrangements, if a decision is able to be made at that point.

Staff should keep the school updated on their position.

CLOSURE DURING THE SCHOOL DAY

On occasions it may be necessary for school to close during the school day i.e. if the weather is deteriorating and there is doubt as to whether children or staff can return home safely later in the day or due to health and safety considerations.

In such cases **the school secretary will contact parents** [or main contact], to ensure that children are collected from school. Parents should ensure that their main contact details are up-to-date.

EXTREME WEATHER

In times of extreme weather, the above checklist will be considered as far in advance of the closure as possible eg the night before closure ***if circumstances allow***, and if necessary, a timely decision will be made to close the school the next day. Such a decision will only be taken the night before if all indications are that adverse conditions will continue overnight.

SAFEGUARDING PRECAUTIONS ON CLOSURE

No pupil will be allowed to leave school unless the school is aware that an identified adult will be available to supervise him/her at their destination. It may be that a parent who collects his/her children offers to give shelter to other children. The agreement of the parents of these children must be given before pupils are released in this way. We will ensure that adequate supervision by members of teaching staff will be made of those pupils who cannot go home or to their emergency destination immediately and have therefore to remain at school.

TRAVEL TO AND FROM SCHOOL

Parents should be aware that it is their responsibility to make sensible decisions on behalf of their children when weather conditions are severe. Parents are responsible for the safety of their children to and from the school.

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

Parents must give the schools an emergency contact point. Data Collection forms are sent out annually in September to all parents. Parents are required to complete and return the forms promptly. If the forms are not returned the previous year's form will be annotated as such and kept on file. Information on emergency contacts and instructions in respect of each pupil will be held centrally in the emergency contacts folder held in the school office. **It is essential that parents to keep the school up to date with any change in their contact details.**

STAFF ATTENDANCE

Although it is recognised that severe weather conditions make it difficult for staff to get to and from work, unless advised to the contrary by the Principal, then the expectation is that staff will present themselves for work. EA Contract Staff (Catering and Cleaning Services) also need to be advised of any emergency requirements.

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 on arrival. The clearance of public roads is the responsibility of the Roads Service.

CHILDREN'S PLAYTIMES

If there is any question of children's safety being at risk during break time and lunchtime where the playground area is deemed unsafe, school has a responsibility in inclement weather to keep the children indoors.

SERVICES

All of the service providers who will be affected by the closure will be informed as soon as possible, once families and staff have contacted.

MONITORING AND REVIEW

The Principal will monitor implementation of this policy.

This document is freely available to the entire school community and will be reviewed regularly.



Signed – Chair of Governors:



Signed – Principal:

Date: 13th April 2021

**APPENDIX 1:
PREPARING A PLAN TO DEAL WITH A POSSIBLE EXCEPTIONAL CLOSURE
DUE TO SEVERE WEATHER KEY ACTIONS**

KEY ACTIONS	SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIONS
Does the school have contact details for all parents/guardians, pupils and staff. Does the school have contact details for the relevant ELB emergency on call officers?	Are the contact details updated regularly. Do they include Mobile Telephone numbers?
Where fuel oil is required. Ensure that fuel level is checked regularly and appropriate levels maintained.	Set a minimum fuel level for a re-order of supply. Check fuel level frequently during severe weather periods.
Ensure that heating, lighting and water services are regularly maintained	Regularly report maintenance issues to the Board Maintenance Help Desk. Have the Boards Help desk/ emergency on call officer telephone numbers available.
Maintain sufficient supplies of salt for application to footpaths and driveways. Where mechanical salt spreaders are utilized, are they functioning and available?	Order supplies before the onset of winter. Have the salt suppliers' telephone numbers available or follow board procedure to re order.
Maintain stocks of Safety Signs and Hazard Warning Tapes for cordoning off hazardous areas.	Order supplies of Hazard tape (yellow/black or red/white). Order signs which prohibit access to hazardous areas.

**APPENDIX 2:
POINTS TO CONSIDER WHEN DECIDING TO OPEN THE SCHOOL**

FIRST CONSIDERATION	OTHER CONSIDERATIONS
Can the principal gain enough teaching and/or supervisory staff to operate safely?	The emphasise would be on to operate safely. What would be the threshold of staff numbers in respect to expected pupils? For Primary schools, pupils would be likely to be local, with a greater expectancy of attendance.
Is the school appropriately heated?	Are fuel supplies adequate? Have there been previous failures of the heating system in autumn/winter months? Is the means for remedial action readily available?
Are water systems working appropriately?	Are there known faults in times of severe weather? Are there written records – ensuring methodical checks are made?
Can the level of heating be maintained throughout the school day/week?	At times of severe weather consider running the heating system during periods of closure or holiday. Is frost protection installed and utilised?
Can people movement be minimised between school buildings, if access and egress is made externally?	If pupil numbers are low, can classes be grouped together? Can these areas be cleared and maintained to limit the restriction?
Restriction of outside play would limit the snow/ice from becoming compacted, and therefore more dangerous.	If conditions are not dangerous outside play may be possible. However, supervision may have to be higher. Could play or breaks be staggered to ensure appropriate supervisory levels. If any snow or ice is present prohibit running.
Can the school grounds be maintained to effect opening the following day?	Pedestrian walkways should be a priority, over vehicle parking, but in the long term parking areas inside the school should be treated, or cleared of snow. Persons who have parked in the school grounds should be aware of the priority and told to take care in this area. Signs could be placed to remind these persons. Maintenance should be a priority where pedestrian walkways also coincide with vehicle areas. Alternatively, restrictions could be made on pedestrians or cars stopped from entering that area.
Monitor the weather situation locally and through the media (Met Office).	Government Agencies such as the Roads Service may be able to provide information regarding road clearance, providing assurance of home journeys, or return journeys the following day. Met Office provides flash weather warnings (see Met Office website).
Are maintenance materials and personnel available to ensure the school can eliminate, reduce or isolate risk throughout the school day?	Can similar provision be assured for the following day(s)? Salt/grit spread on walkways or other areas at the end of the day could limit icing. This could also prevent a further snowfall from taking a foothold and re-icing. Slush or water from thawed snow/ice should be cleared as much as possible to prevent re-icing. Iced slush could be more dangerous than the initial fall as surfaces may be uneven and more slippery.

**APPENDIX 3:
RISK ASSESSMENT – SEVERE WEATHER – SNOW/ICE**

ACTIVITY	HAZARD	PERSONS AT RISK	CONTROLS REQUIRED	FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS
Getting to the school	Dangerous travel in extreme bad weather conditions.	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisors and/or maintenance staff, pupils.	Principal monitors weather conditions/warnings www.metoffice.gov. uk Staff to inform Principal if they cannot make the journey to school. No travel should be considered if extreme bad weather warning (red) and advice given for only essential journeys to be undertaken.	Rural location of school and/or majority of school personnel. Regional warnings may not be accurate at local level, so local media broadcasts may also help.
Travel via known areas of expected road closure or steep gradients	Dangerous travel in extreme bad weather conditions.	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisors and/or maintenance staff.	Prior planning by staff regarding alternative 'main road' routes, or rail, to school location.	Walking may be reasonably expected, when cars or other vehicles cannot make it all the way into the school. Principal to consider what is reasonable based on locality and staff.
Main entrance into school grounds.	Entrance not possible	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisors and/or maintenance staff.	Park car outside school until clearance can be made. If not passable by foot, access other reasonable means into the school.	Signage on main entrance, or other entrances if prohibited from entry due to ice or other obstruction.
Main entrance into school grounds.	Entrance an immediate slip hazard.	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisors and/or maintenance staff, pupils, parents/carers and visitors	Clearance of slip hazard, unless alternative route found. Other routes may be prioritised and cause closure of the main entrance. Salt/grit may be adequate but manual work may also be required to clear snow/ice if this is the main and only entrance	If entrance is used by both vehicles and pedestrians, salting/gritting may be a priority. Cars may be stopped from entry to give priority to pedestrians and avoid risk.
Getting appropriate members of staff to open school.	Inadequate supervision	Teachers and pupils.	A means of communicating with school staff in order to establish their attendance on the day of extreme bad weather. A means to communicate with school bus service, local authority and local bus service operators to establish pupil means of getting to school. Principal to establish what would constitute appropriate supervision – through dynamic assessment on the day of extreme bad weather.	The emphasis should be on how to operate safely, not whether a full and normal curriculum could be followed. Primary school pupils are likely to be local, with a greater expectancy of attendance.