Ysgol Dyffryn Trannon

Severe Weather or Utilities Failure Procedure



**Guidance for schools – pupils (in relation to employees, reference should be made to the Authority’s ‘Inclement Weather Policy for Schools’)**

This procedure was adopted on:

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (Chair of Governors)

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (Headteacher)

***This procedure should be read in conjunction with Welsh Assembly Government Guidance 093/2010 – Opening Schools in Extreme Bad Weather***

Although spells of severe weather are relatively few and far between, Governing Bodies are strongly advised to have a clear documented procedure in place for the occasions when some pupils may have to be sent home early or when a whole school may be forced to close in order to ensure the safety and well-being of all pupils and staff.

This document gives guidance in relation to severe weather procedures and exemplifies good practice. It is for Governing Bodies to determine their own procedures and to ensure that all employees are clear about their roles and responsibilities in the event of severe weather.

These procedures are principally intended in relation to severe weather but can also be applied in other circumstances, for example, heating failure, etc.

The LA and schools have a duty of care to their staff and pupils. By following the recommended arrangements below, any problems should be kept to a minimum:

1. The decision to close a school should not be taken lightly. Children have an entitlement to 190 days education annually and may also have an entitlement to a free mid-day meal. Low numbers of pupils in attendance due to weather conditions is not a reason in itself for a school to close. If the school can provide suitable staffing ratios and health and safety issues have been addressed then the school should remain open. The great majority of our schools will have pupils within safe walking distance of their homes and therefore schools should remain open for them. The fact that a headteacher or other staff cannot reach the school is not in itself an adequate reason for not opening.

2. The decision as to whether a school should close because of severe weather rests with the headteacher, in consultation with the Chair of Governors, with the health and safety of pupils and staff being the major consideration. Where a school needs to close on successive occasions, the headteacher should keep in regular contact with the Chair of Governors. Powys County Council will not take a decision to close all schools but do reserve the right to suspend school transport through discussion with transport contractors. Again, this decision will be based on health and safety grounds.

1. The headteacher must make the judgement to close the school in light of local circumstances. The decision will depend on an assessment of the relevant factors including weather forecasts, the prevailing situation in the area where the school is located, whether the weather and road conditions are expected to improve later in the day, the availability of members of staff, in particular those who have to travel, and the health and safety of both pupils and staff.

4. Some schools (for example, special schools, Welsh-medium provision) may have lengthy taxi or bus routes. Whilst conditions at the school may be reasonable, the headteacher should make attempts to ascertain the road conditions in the pupils’ home area.

5. Headteachers should consider alternatives to closure before sending all pupils home. It may be the case that only those pupils travelling by school transport or those living in rural areas should be sent home early. Sending home early those pupils who walk may cause further problems and may impact on other services if parents or carers need to leave their place of work early in order to look after their children.

1. If the decision, after consultation, is to close the school, whether for a day or part of a day, the headteacher should ensure that the pupils are not exposed to a greater degree of danger or discomfort than they would suffer were they to remain in school. The elements of danger which are involved can vary in accordance with the age of the child and can include the following:
   1. the distance from school to home, and whether transport is normally provided. If transport is provided by the LA or the school itself, it is the headteacher’s responsibility to contact the transport contractors to make the necessary transport arrangements; before deciding to send pupils home, headteachers should ascertain whether a parent or carer will be there to receive them (see also paragraphs 12 and 13);
   2. there is an element of danger involved in children leaving school at other than the normal time from the point of view of general road safety, etc. and this is another factor which headteachers should bear in mind before arriving at a final decision to send pupils home or contacting parents and carers to ask them to collect their children.

In very extreme conditions or circumstances, it may be necessary for all or the majority of pupils to be retained on the school site for a considerable time. This may necessitate instigating the school’s emergency planning arrangements. Guidance for schools in producing their Emergency Management Plan can be found on page 3771 of the Staff Intranet.

There may be other factors which should be taken into account. Basically, the rule should be that emergency action involving the closure of a school should only be instigated when all the various solutions to the problem have been examined and the dangers and discomforts weighed one against the other.

1. Once the decision to close or partially close the school has been made, the headteacher (or nominated member of staff) must report the closure via the LA’s on-line ‘School Closure Notification System’. On submission of the information, the school closure notice will immediately appear on the Powys website ([www.powys.gov.uk](http://www.powys.gov.uk)). *Instructions on using the system can be found at* [*http://intranet.powys.gov.uk/index.php?id=5368&L=0*](http://intranet.powys.gov.uk/index.php?id=5368&L=0)

8. If a headteacher (or nominated member of staff) cannot access the on-line ‘School Closure Notification System’, they must contact the Powys Careline (0845 0544847) who will arrange for the information to be recorded and details uploaded to the Powys website.

1. By reporting the school closure via the on-line ‘School Closure Notification System’, the information will automatically be communicated to the media, including the Powys and BBC websites. In addition, wherever possible, schools should publish the closure of the school on its own website. Parents and carers should be encouraged to access these websites for information rather than ringing the school or LA.

10. It should be made very clear to parents and carers that the school is open unless a message to the contrary is broadcast via the websites and media.

11. Once the decision to close a school has been taken, the headteacher must contact the Passenger Transport Unit, Catering Service, the cleaning provider and leisure facilities (as necessary). Schools should not contact the media direct - where relevant, for example, in the case of school closures due to severe weather or heating failure, the media will be informed via an automatic link to the on-line ‘School Closure Notification System’.

1. In respect of a closure during the normal school day, every effort should be made to contact parents and carers to inform them of the school’s closure and to ensure the safety of pupils after they leave the school. Schools should ensure that they have up-to-date contact details for parents and carers. Pupils under 14 years of age should not be allowed to leave the school premises until parents or carers have been notified or arrangements have been made for their care. Parents and carers should be informed in advance of the school’s procedures in the event of severe weather and advised to check the LA, BBC and school websites for announcements about closures. Requests to collect pupils should also be provided on school websites.

13. Schools should consider who else might need to be informed of the closure, for example, governors and parents or carers of children with special needs. In the case of small schools, it may be relatively easy to ensure that parents and carers are contacted before pupils are sent home; in the case of larger schools this would not necessarily be the case. Schools should therefore consider, particularly in the case of children under 14 years of age, whether it is preferable for all children, other than those who travel on home to school transport, to be kept on the premises until they are collected.

1. Once a decision has been made to close the school, for either the whole or part of a day, it is the responsibility of the headteacher to contact transport contractors to make the necessary transport arrangements. It is the responsibility of the headteacher to ascertain which transport routes are in progress at the time of deciding to close the school and they should liaise with the transport contractors on the revised arrangements. If a decision to close the school is made after the journey to school has started the transport should continue on its journey to school and pupils not returned home until parents and carers have been contacted. Contact should be made with the Passenger Transport Unit where a change in transport arrangements would impact on services to other schools, for example, shared transport, or transport for pupils in special schools and specialist centres.
2. In the event of notification that a transport contractor wishes to transport certain pupils early, headteachers must comply with the request, as long as contact has been made with parents and carers. This does not necessarily mean, however, that all pupils should be sent home early. Where a transport contractor is unable to provide transport in the morning because of severe weather conditions, no contract transport will be provided in the afternoon. Parents and carers who are able to convey their children to school in the morning in lieu of the normal transport arrangements should be advised that they must assume responsibility for getting their children home in the afternoon as no contract transport will be available.

16. If the headteacher of the high school makes the decision to close the school during the normal school day and there is shared transport with neighbouring primary schools, it is the responsibility of that headteacher to contact the schools involved to inform them of the decision to close and to ensure that transport does not run until all parents and carers have been contacted.

17. Some pupils travel to and from school on public service transport. In these circumstances it is the headteacher’s responsibility to contact parents and carers to notify them of any revised arrangements for transporting pupils home.

18. If a contractor or public service vehicle cannot deliver pupils to the normal drop off point they should return the pupils to the school and the school should make contact with parents and carers.

A school may, in certain circumstances, be closed to pupils but remain open to staff. The LA’s policy in relation to the arrangements for employees during severe or inclement weather is documented in the ‘Inclement Weather Policy for Schools’ at <http://intranet.powys.gov.uk/index.php?id=5782>

**Other considerations**

* **Transport**

If a school is closed for a whole day, transport contractors are still entitled to claim 50% of the daily transport cost for each day the school is closed. Early notification of next day closure is therefore essential to prevent unnecessary costs being incurred.

* **Catering**

Whether a school is closed for part or a whole day, early notification of closure is essential to prevent unnecessary costs and/or wastage being incurred.

* **School Meals**

Where possible, arrangements should be made to ensure school meals are available at least to those who are entitled to free meals.

* **Cleaning**

Where the cleaning service is provided by an external contractor it is the responsibility of the headteacher to notify the contractor that the school is closed or closing early.

* **Leisure Services**

Where a school has planned off-site activities, for example, swimming, it is the responsibility of the headteacher to liaise with centre staff as to whether pupils will be accessing the facilities.

* **Recording Attendance and Absence**

If a school is open only pupils who normally travel by transport provided by the LA or the school itself and are unable to attend because of severe weather conditions should be recorded using code Y (Forced and Partial Closure). All other children should be expected to attend and should be recorded as present or absent as normal.

* **External Examinations**

***Schools are also advised to refer to WG guidance which can be accessed via the following link***

<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/100108schoolclosureexamsen.doc>

All reasonable efforts should be made to ensure that students are able to take their examinations as, for reasons of security and fairness, regulations do not allow candidates to take a paper at a later date than other candidates. This may mean that a school is open only to students taking examinations.

There are a range of options for examination centres unable to proceed with scheduled examinations in severe weather, including the setting up of an alternative examination centre at a central location; students being re-entered to take their examinations in the Summer or a later examination series; or special consideration being shown to students by examining boards where it is the last examination slot for a candidate taking a re-sit i.e. awarding a grade where an examination cannot be taken or the pupil has been disadvantaged, provided there is sufficient evidence to make a reasonable judgement.

* **Responsibility for Salting and Gritting**

It is the school’s responsibility to ensure that there is a safe pedestrian route into and out of the school building from the school entrance. There is no requirement to grit all of the premises but a main pedestrian route into the premises should be gritted plus any steps and the area surrounding fire exits.

In larger schools, it may be necessary to restrict routes to different parts of the school, with pupils and staff travelling via internal routes rather than going outside the school buildings. Depending on access around the school site, it may be necessary to look at a partial opening.

Schools are responsible for purchasing salt and grit for use on the school site. Supplies should be ordered by e-mailing requirements (number of bins to be filled) plus the school Cost Code to [tls.helpdesk@powys.gov.uk](mailto:tls.helpdesk@powys.gov.uk).

**FLOWCHART OF PROCEDURE TO FOLLOW**

Headteacher / Senior Teacher to assess local circumstances and consider alternatives

i.e. open, partial closure or full closure of school

Headteacher (or nominated member of staff) to report the closure via the LA’s on-line ‘School Closure Notification System’

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Headteacher to contact Powys Careline (0845 0544847) if they are not able to access the on-line system

Decision to close the school during the school day taken by the headteacher, in consultation with the Chair of Governors

Decision to partially close the school taken by the headteacher, in consultation with the Chair of Governors

Decision to close the school taken by the headteacher, in consultation with the Chair of Governors

**Full closure**

**Closure during the normal school day**

**Partial closure**

Headteacher to contact school transport contractors, Passenger Transport Unit and Catering Service, as appropriate, plus Cleaning provider and Leisure facilities (if necessary)

School to contact parents and carers to advise them of the decision and arrangements for dealing with pupils (as per paragraphs 13-16 of the guidance document)

Headteacher to contact school transport contractors, Passenger Transport Unit and Catering Service plus Cleaning provider and Leisure facilities (if necessary)

Place notification of closure on school website

School to publish the closure of the school on the school website

School to contact pupils due, for example, to take external examinations advising them of arrangements

School to publish details on the school website

Headteacher to contact school transport contractors to make the necessary transport arrangements **OR** headteacher to comply with transport contractors’ request to convey pupils home early

Headteacher to contact the Passenger Transport Unit and Catering Service, as appropriate, plus Cleaning provider and Leisure facilities (if necessary)

School to publish details on the school website