

Closing Your School in an Emergency

A Guide for Headteachers and School Staff – 2015/16



This document outlines the agreed procedure which all schools must follow when it is necessary to consider closing in the event of an emergency (e.g. snow, flooding, no water or heating). A copy should be held by the Headteacher, Secretary, Chair of Governors and Caretaker; with each having a copy at the school and at home.

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Be Proactive!

Agree Your Procedure

It is important that all schools have an agreed procedure that will be followed in the event of a closure, and that this is communicated to all staff and parents. Many schools now offer a free text service which immediately informs all parents of the school's decision to close; however, we strongly recommend that all parents still be advised to listen to updates on BBC Radio Cornwall, Pirate FM or Heart FM during periods of inclement weather.

Maintain and Inspect Your Property

The main reason for schools to close is as a result of property damage caused by inclement weather e.g. roofs, boilers and pipes. It is important that you maintain your school to an acceptable level, and that you are fully aware of your school's maintenance issues - a copy of your school's Condition Survey may assist you with this. If temperatures fall below freezing, someone from the school (perhaps the caretaker) should undertake a daily inspection of the property's boilers, radiators and water heaters. For a copy of your Condition Survey, or for advice on how what to look for during your inspections, please contact your Building Surveyor and/or Mechanical Engineer.

Free De-Icing Salt

In September/October each year, Highways send an email to all schools offering free de-icing salt; the only condition being that the school holds a suitable receptacle/bin. We strongly recommend that all schools take up this free offer, as all further salt supplies will need to be sourced externally to the Council and at a cost to the school. This service is available to maintained schools only.

Who to Contact?

If the decision is made to close, schools must notify the Local Authority **by email**, as per the agreed procedure (overleaf). A copy of your notification is automatically forwarded to numerous internal officers and radio broadcasting colleagues; however, in some circumstances, you may wish to seek further advice. Whilst the contact details below are there to assist you, these may be busy or unavailable when a large number of schools are closing at the same time (usually as a result of snow).

| | <u>08:30 – 17:30</u> | <u>17:30 – 08:30</u> | <u>Useful Links</u> |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| General Advice | | | |
| Schools Access & Infrastructure | 01872 322457 | 07891 840439 | Cornwall Snow Advice www.cornwall.gov.uk/snow |
| Radio Broadcasters | | | Met Office www.metoffice.gov.uk |
| BBC Radio Cornwall | 01872 475263 | 01872 475263 | |
| Pirate FM | 01209 314314 | 01209 314314 | |
| Heart FM | 01392 354231 | 01392 354231 | |
| Transport | | | Environment Agency www.environment-agency.gov.uk |
| Passenger Transport Unit | 0300 1234 222 01872 323562 | 0300 1234 222 07824 848921 | Devon & Cornwall Police www.devon-cornwall.police.uk |
| School Closures Webpage | | | |
| Access & Infrastructure | 01872 322457 | 01872 322457 | |
| Maintenance | | | |
| Building Surveyor / Engineer | 0300 1234 100 | 07699 721092 | |
| Interserve (PF12 Schools Only) | 0800 6344 190 | 0800 6344 190 | <i>Procedure Overleaf</i> |

Procedure: Considering Closing Your School?

During School Time

Before School Starts

1

Undertake a Risk Assessment

Your priority must be to ensure that all children within your care are kept safe and warm. All subsequent actions must take this overriding view into account.

You must undertake a risk assessment, using common sense to determine whether it is feasible for children and staff to remain in the school; and if not, what subsequent risks could arise by sending them home.

During inclement weather, you should be aware of weather forecasts and take into account local road conditions. Similarly, if the school has no water/heating, you should base your assessment around the estimated resolution time.

Where is it safe to do so, you must do your utmost to keep the school open. To facilitate this, you may wish to consider varying the school's activities - bringing classes together, reducing the extent to which children have to move between buildings, and/or ending the school day early.

You must undertake a risk assessment to determine whether it is safe for children and staff to travel to school; and if so, what subsequent risks could arise once they are in school.

During inclement weather, you should be aware of weather forecasts and take into account local road conditions. Similarly, if the school has no water/heating, you should base your assessment around the estimated resolution time.

Where is it safe to do so, you must do your utmost to open your school. To facilitate this, you may wish to consider opening late or closing early. And/or varying the school's activities - bringing classes together, reducing the extent to which children have to move between buildings, and/or ending the school day early.

2

Make Decision & Seek Governor Approval

Having assessed the risks, it is the Headteacher's responsibility to make the final decision whether or not to close. Where possible, the Governing Body should authorise this decision. If your Chair of Governors is not contactable, you should contact your Vice Chair or other Governing Body members to ratify your decision.

3

Inform the Local Authority & Radio Broadcasters

To confirm your closure of your school, an e-mail (from any e-mail account) must be sent to: schemerg@cornwall.gov.uk

The 'Subject' of your e-mail **must** read:

School Name / 4-Digit DfE No. / Closed or Opening Late or Closing Early

Your e-mail should contain a brief explanation of your reason(s) for closing. You will be sent an automated reply confirming receipt. Please note however that emails which do not comply with the agreed format will not be accepted, will not be broadcast by any local radio stations, and will not be published by Cornwall Council on their website, *Facebook* or *Twitter* pages. This measure is in place to verify legitimacy and prevent hoaxes.

Providing your e-mail complies with the agreed format, a copy will automatically be forwarded to BBC Radio Cornwall, Pirate FM, Heart FM, as well as Transport and Catering.

Transport and catering providers will receive a copy of your e-mail; however, it is essential that each school informs its own provider(s) of their decision to close, open late and/or close early. Please note, the ability to meet alternative times rest solely with each transport and catering operator; schools must appreciate that providers may be unable to adjust timetables due to commitments elsewhere.

4

Inform Parents

Providing your e-mail complies with the agreed format, it will be broadcasted by BBC Radio Cornwall, Pirate FM and Heart FM. However, you may wish to inform parents directly.

Your priority must be to ensure that all children within your care are kept safe and warm. A member of staff **must** remain at the school until all children have been collected.

Providing your e-mail complies with the agreed format, it will be broadcasted by BBC Radio Cornwall, Pirate FM and Heart FM. However, you may wish to inform parents directly.

Providing it safe to do so, a member of staff should be at the school gate at the usual start time to inform parents who may not have heard/received the closure notification.