

Education Services
Procedures and Guidelines

EMERGENCY SCHOOL CLOSURE

GUIDANCE TO HEADTEACHERS

2019

COUNCIL POLICY STATEMENT

Education Services will, as far as possible, and with due regard to the health, safety and welfare of both staff and pupils, continue to operate schools normally in order to minimise the impact of school closures on others.

In allocating resources, keeping schools open/operating normally should be a formal priority for the Council in exceptional circumstances.

1. TAKING THE DECISION TO CLOSE THE SCHOOL

Headteachers are authorised to make an emergency closure when the severity of the weather or any other exceptional circumstances make it absolutely necessary in the best interests of all staff and pupils.

In cases of severe weather in an area as large and diverse as Dumfries and Galloway it is rarely possible to have a centralised or uniform approach on this matter. The decision as to whether the weather conditions necessitate the closure of the school therefore rests with individual Headteachers. However these decisions must be supported by the latest and most accurate information available. Headteachers should avail themselves of this information and take account of their Graduated Response Implementation Plan. They should also consider consulting with nearby schools prior to making this decision.

The presumption should be in favour of keeping the school open unless, in the Headteacher's view, to do so would put the health, safety or welfare of pupils and/or staff at risk. In reaching this decision, Headteachers should take full account of local circumstances and, in particular, the following considerations:

- (a) **Both short and longer term weather information:** It would be inadvisable to react to the first flurry of snow without seeking further information on the weather conditions ahead. Equally, it would be unwise to send people (pupils or staff) home when a blizzard is at its height.
- (b) **Advice from transport operators:** Transport operators are key partners in such circumstances as they will make decisions whether vehicles should/can continue to operate.
- (c) **Arrangements for pupil safety:** The absolute priority is to ensure that provision is made for each and every child. Where children cannot be collected or delivered home, arrangements should be made for them to remain in school and be supervised.
- (d) **Consider the impact on staff:** Teaching and support staff in school work under different terms and conditions. Closing your school will result in no detriment to staff who are contracted to the school on that day

Where Headteachers are in any doubt about sources of information about roads/weather/school transport please contact Directorate Support T: 01387 260466 (64466) / 01387 260083 (64083) / 60542 / 60556 email DirectorateSupport@dumgal.gov.uk. It is often specific access or other localised issues that require schools to close. Therefore in these circumstances the closure or opening of other schools in the proximity should not be the key factor in taking decisions. Headteachers may find the Council's website [DGVOST](#) useful.

The overriding principle is that it is the responsibility of all staff to make every effort to attend for duty at their normal school where it is safe and practicable to do so. Detailed guidance for this is appended (Employment Arrangements for Education Services' School Staff (in the event of inclement weather)).

ADVICE TO PARENTS

Headteachers should also recognise that parents have a key role to play in the event of severe weather. Parents should be made aware that there is a responsibility upon them to make sensible decisions on behalf of their children when weather conditions are severe. If they have concerns about their children travelling between home and school, they should "play safe" and keep them at

home, informing the school that they are doing so. The fact that several parents take this view does not, however, mean that the school should be closed unless the considerations listed above indicate that this is the most sensible decision.

2. COMMUNICATION ARRANGEMENTS

It is essential that, when there is potential for school closures due to severe weather conditions, we are in a position to communicate quickly and clearly with parents and staff. This is just as important in relation to schools which are to remain open as it is to those which are closed. The Council website, social media and local media are now seen by many parents as the information channel in these situations. To make best use of the communication channels they offer, any decision to close should be taken as early in the day as possible and the Emergency School Closure Application used to communicate the decision. The main aim of the application is to alert the media and the Council communications team who will ensure the information on the Council website is up to date for parents. It is still necessary for schools to follow the usual procedures (ie text messaging) to inform parents, carers and staff. To make every attempt to publicise any closure, staff and/or a notice posted at the school gates could prevent pupils from being left by parents at the start of the school day.

A step by step guide on the operation of the Emergency School Closure application is available within GLOW > D&G Site > DGEducationSupportServices > Advice&Support > School Closure folder. There is some set up required prior to use of this application. Support Services Team will run a test in October each year to ensure staff are correctly set up and familiar with this system. Headteachers can contact the Education Support Services Team for assistance/support if they have difficulty with this application. Tel. 01387 722166 or Internal 60505.

There is no requirement for Schools to contact Directorate Support if they intend to close. The Emergency School Closure Application will automatically email all senior officers within Education Services.

3. CLOSURE DURING THE SCHOOL DAY

3.1 Emergency Contacts

The safety and well-being of pupils should be paramount. If in doubt a pupil should not be released. Safe and speedy dismissal of pupils in the event of an emergency closure depends on the school and parents working in partnership. Parents should be fully aware of the procedures which will operate in any particular school should there be an emergency closure. Normally, this information would appear in the school handbook and on their website. Parents should provide the school with any specific instructions in respect of their child should the school require to close during the day. Parents are required to give schools an emergency contact and should have told the children what to do in the event of an emergency closure. Parents should make it clear to their older children whether or not they may escort younger brothers/sisters to their destination.

3.2 Precautions

3.2.1 Reasonable attempts should be made to ensure that pupils will go home to a safe environment should school be closed. Clearly, the relevance of the following precautions will be dependant upon the age of the pupil.

3.2.2 It may be that a parent who collects their child offers to give shelter to other children. The agreement of the parents of these other children **must** be sought before releasing pupils in this way.

3.2.3 If it is customary for pupils to walk home at the end of the school day, it would be reasonable for the school to release these pupils to walk home in an emergency **but only** if there were a parent or an identified adult expecting their arrival. Account should be taken also of the age of the pupil, the severity of weather conditions and the distance to be walked.

3.3 Pupils Remaining in School

Provision of adequate supervision by members of staff should be made for those pupils who cannot go home or to their emergency destination immediately and have therefore to remain at school. Should this extend beyond the normal working day for that member of staff then for teaching staff this should be negotiated as part of their 35-Hour Week Agreement, for non-teaching staff this should be classed as additional hours.

4. SERVICES

4.1 All of the service providers who will be affected by the closure should be informed as soon as possible. As soon as the school post the closure notification on the Emergency School Closure Application, an automated email will be sent to all service providers. (e.g. Transport, Meals, etc)

4.2 Arrangements for school transport and crossing patrols should be made.

4.3 Schools which share transport should make absolutely certain that each is aware of what the other is doing.

John Thin
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