



Ballyclare Secondary School

# **EXCEPTIONAL CLOSURES POLICY**

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## Checklist for School Opening/Closure Arrangements

An exceptional closure is unplanned, and is due to unforeseen circumstances such as adverse weather conditions, power failure, or situations which affect the safety of pupils and staff. Exceptional closures require approval from the Department of Education to allow a school to reduce its operational days below the 200 required by legislation.

It is important that each school should put in place (and subsequently review) an action plan during the first term of each school year, before the onset of adverse weather. In doing so, it should consider the Health and Safety guidelines.

In times of extreme weather, such as a heavy snowfall, the Principal should consider the prepared checklist as far in advance of closure as possible - the night before closure if circumstances allow - and, if necessary, decide to close the school the next day. This will allow early communication with parents and staff and ensure that parents are informed quickly. While it may not be possible for the Principal to make such a decision the night before, going through the checklist will help to focus on the key issues to be considered and enable them to come to a decision as early as possible. Decisions the night before can only be taken when all the indications are that adverse conditions will continue overnight. If there are doubts, Principals should defer decisions until early morning.

Local conditions will determine the decision of the Principal (or an agreed deputy such as the Chairman of the Board of Governors or a senior teacher), who will consider a number of agreed criteria for closure. Decisions taken must be applicable to each individual school - not based on neighbouring schools whose conditions may differ.

### **The following will be considered in coming to any decision to close for exceptional reasons.**

- Health and safety questions, including:
  - 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?
- Transport - can buses reach the school, particularly if the unforeseen circumstances affect a large proportion of pupils?
- If a limited number of staff and pupils can attend, is the PTR acceptable?  
An acceptable PTR is one teacher for 30 pupils
- Have local weather forecasts and road conditions, including those for areas from which staff will be travelling, been considered?

## If a decision is made to close

### **Communication**

- Schools should have in place an agreed plan on communication, not only to advise parents and staff, and keep them informed, but also to advise the relevant Education and Library Board and the Department of Education. The DENI school reference number should be quoted in all correspondence.
- Suggested means of communication include use of a texting service, informing the media (television and/or radio), email, or telephone (either calls or a recorded message).
- Parents must be aware of the means of communication that will be used.
- If it is possible, parents/staff will be updated at a later time in the day with a view to the "next day" so that all have time to make suitable family arrangements.
- Staff are encouraged to keep the school updated on their position (two way communication is vital).

## Communicating School Closure

### Decision made by Principal - Mrs K Bell



**Following consultation with**  
**VP School Organisation:** Mrs W Shingleton  
**Building Supervisors:** Mr I Wright/Mr N Higgins



#### Staff Informed

##### KB

Mr Houston	Miss Copeland	Mrs McCreary
Mr Siberry	Mrs Graham	Mrs H McKay
Mrs Shingleton	Mrs V Beattie	

##### WS

Mr Blair  
Mrs L Beattie  
Mrs Boles  
Miss Nevin  
Miss J Miniss  
Mr S McIvor

##### MH

Mrs Oliver  
Mrs Agnew  
Mrs L McKay  
Mrs McCrea  
Miss Dundas  
Mrs Weatherup

##### AS

Dr Flint  
Mr White  
Mr Thompson  
Miss Morrow  
Mr Atcheson

- Text message sent to Heads of Department who inform members of department including technician staff.
- Information posted on school website (WS) - Email sent to all staff via C2K
- Information posted on BBC NI website (KB)

#### Parents Informed\*

- Text message sent to all parents mobile numbers via 'Call Parents' if there is access to office
- Information posted on school website (WS) – email to all staff
- Information posted on BBC NI website (KB)
- Email sent to all parents for whom school has email address (KB)

\* Letter sent to parents informing them of the means of communication that will be used at start of December.

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## **Ballyclare Secondary School**

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