

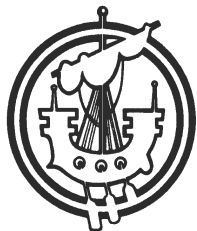


COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR
Roinn an Fhoghlaim
Department of Education

Ag Amas air Adhartas - Aiming for Advancement

**POLICY ON DISRUPTION TO
EDUCATION ON ACCOUNT
OF BAD WEATHER**

DECEMBER 2008



POLICY ON DISRUPTION TO EDUCATION ON ACCOUNT OF BAD WEATHER

RATIONALE

- 1.1 To formulate policy on weather related closure of schools in the context of wider corporate policy relating to emergency situations. In formulating this policy account has been taken of practice in other authorities.

AIM

- 2.1 To issue comprehensive guidance to schools in relation to the action to be taken in the event of a requirement to effect closure owing to emergency situations. This guidance is contained in the Schools Administration Handbook and is set out in Appendix 1.

THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

- 3.1 There is a statutory requirement to provide pupils with 190 days of education per session. Consequently, while Health and Safety must always be paramount, schools should only be closed as a last resort.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

- 4.1 As the length of this region equates approximately with the distance between Glasgow and Aberdeen it is obvious that potential for considerable variations in weather patterns exists, and experience bears this out from time to time. The logistics facing individual schools also vary. For example, The Nicolson Institute's catchment area is the whole of Lewis while there are some schools with catchments which can be as little as one or two villages. Consequently, the decision taken by a Headteacher will be heavily influenced by local circumstances and the logistics which arise from these.

CLOSURE DUE TO SEVERE WEATHER

- 5.1 While the decision to close a school will normally rest with the Headteacher, on the basis of severe weather forecasts and on-the-spot observations, it should be noted that devolved responsibility of this kind was originally given in the context of situations of impassable roads usually because of snow. In some areas in more recent times transport operators have been unable to cross bridges and causeways and decisions have been taken to close on this basis. However, this should not affect all pupils.
- 5.2 When radio stations broadcast police advice people to avoid non-essential travel, it is directed at travel that could quite easily be deferred or cancelled altogether. It does not mean that travel to school or work is unnecessary. Schools should therefore remain open wherever possible. It is often the case that conditions will not necessitate the closure of all schools and any decision taken by Headteachers should be based on individual situations. It is appropriate for schools to open for children who live locally even if school transport is not able to operate. Schools may also find it helpful to liaise with other schools where there are shared buses or where meals are delivered from another school's kitchen. There will therefore be a presumption against closure unless conditions are so severe that the wider corporate functions of the Comhairle are affected as does happen occasionally.

INFORMATION DISSEMINATION TO PARENTS AND PUPILS

- 6.1 Every effort must be made to give adequate notice to parents and individual schools should prepare contingency plans in the light of local logistical requirements. These should be in place well before the winter so that all staff, parents and pupils are familiar with them. Consideration needs to be given to a contingency plan to protect children who turn up at school despite closure.
- 6.2 Headteachers should advise staff, parents and pupils to listen for information on **local radio** during bad weather. Officers of the Comhairle will work with the local media to publicise arrangements when severe weather is forecast. Headteachers should include this information in the school prospectus.
- 6.3 School closure information can also be made available on
- a) **The school's website (if available)**
Individual schools can made arrangements for closure information to be posted on the school's website.
 - b) **Faire**
The Faire Community Careline Service, through its corporate out of hour responsibility for the Comhairle, is available 24 hours a day to receive not only calls directed to its out of hours number 01851 701702, but indeed all diverted calls from Comhairle switch-boards around the Western Isles.
 - c) **School answerphones**
If the school has an answerphone, arrangements can be made to have a message put on informing parents that the school is shut. If possible have a separate telephone line available to staff so that they can inform the school if they are not able to attend (see paragraph 10 below).
 - d) **Cascade telephone system**
A system of cascade telephone calls involving school staff and perhaps the PTA may be a useful way of informing parents,

GUIDANCE ON EARLY CLOSURES

- 7.1 It may sometimes be necessary for schools to close during the day; for example, if the weather is deteriorating and children may not be able to get home later. If the Comhairle receive a severe weather warning this will be communicated to schools by e-mail. This does not mean that every school has to close. The decision to close must be assessed by individual Headteachers. In the event of a decision to close the school the Education Department and local radio station should be informed as soon as possible. Updates will need to be provided on a daily basis. Schools need to consider the risks to children and parents of closing during the school day.
- 7.2 Where the decision is taken to close the school during the day, pupils should not be sent home unless the Headteacher is confident of their ability to make the journey safely, gain access to their homes and be safe there. If parents have not previously been advised that the school is closing young pupils may be at risk. Consequently, in the case of primary pupils, contact, and appropriate arrangements, must be made before pupils are released.

STAFF ATTENDANCE

- 8.1 When a school is closed to pupils, staff are required to present themselves for work. Although it is recognised that severe weather conditions make it difficult for staff to get to and from work, all staff are expected to come in unless they have permission to be away from work for other reasons. Transport problems, which may be caused by snow or other factors, do not alter that obligation. This obligation applies equally to all staff and is not affected by where they live. Staff who live a considerable distance from their workplace or in isolated locations are also expected to attend work as usual. In this sense school staff are thus treated like all Local Authority employees.
- 8.2 When adverse weather conditions make travelling difficult or dangerous, individual staff should make their own risk assessment and inform the Headteacher who may then authorise non attendance. However, the general benchmark for non-attendance will be the rare occasion when all Comhairle employees are advised to stay at home or leave work early. In such situations the police usually advise people to stay indoors in any case.

TRANSPORT

- 9.1 The attendance of many pupils will depend on road conditions and the decision of transport providers whether or not to operate. There should be liaison between Headteachers and bus contractors before making a decision as this will help judge how many pupils to expect if the school is kept open. If the school is closed the contractors must be notified as soon as possible by the Headteacher.
- 9.2 If a decision is made in the morning after school buses have begun their journey to school it should be noted that bus operators arriving at school with the pupils on board are not under obligation to take pupils home again immediately. They may have other commitments in the context of the integrated transport system which they have to honour. School staff must remain at school to supervise the pupils remaining on site until operators can take them home.
- 9.3 For similar reasons, if a decision to close early is made during the day, bus operators may not be able to send buses to the school before the normal afternoon pick-up time. It is the Headteacher's responsibility to liaise with them for an earlier pick-up time. Pupils must be adequately supervised on site until bus operators can take them home. The school must ensure that all pupils will be safe if they are sent home early.

MML/DS
December 2008

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SCHOOLS ADMINISTRATION HANDBOOK: EXTRACT FROM SECTION N

N.2 EMERGENCY CLOSURE OF SCHOOLS

N.2.1 From time to time, circumstances arise which can lead to the emergency closure of schools or other educational establishments. Examples of such circumstances include exceptionally bad weather (including circumstances which may affect the pupils' transport home even though the school itself may not be directly affected), abnormal temperatures, burst pipes, disruption of fuel, power or water supplies. The length of closure may vary from an early closure for a brief period with a return to normal on the following day to a closure for one or more full days. Parents should be advised by letter and through advice in the school handbook which is issued annually to parents (see Section M) that there may be occasions when emergencies make it necessary for pupils to be sent home prematurely and that in these circumstances parents should have planned what arrangements are to be made for their children and advised the school of an emergency contact point or advised the school of an authorised adult who can care for the children in the event of an emergency.

General principles

N.2.2 Early or longer closure should be considered only when the circumstances are such that it is impossible to continue to make reasonable provision for pupils. Head teachers should make every effort to provide education for as long as possible and for as many pupils as possible. Consideration should be given, where feasible, to partial rather than full closure.

N.2.3 When considering early closure, head teachers should regard the health and welfare of pupils as paramount. All arrangements should ensure that standard of care for each pupil as would be expected of a prudent parent. Arrangements should take account of age, ability and capacities (physical and mental) of the pupils concerned; the location of the school in relation to pupils' homes and to road conditions and other hazards; the home circumstances of the pupils and any other emergency arrangements.

N.2.4 No primary aged pupils should be sent home without ensuring that an adult's presence is available. In the absence of parental/guardian acknowledgement or consent to the amended time of dismissal, or acceptance or responsibility for the reception of the pupil by an adult nominated by the parent as an emergency contact, supervision and care must be provided in school or another suitable location until normal dismissal time.

N.2.5 If early closure is being considered because of abnormal temperatures Head Teachers should consult appendix N.1.

Actions to be taken when closing the school early

N.2.6 If, after considering all of the above factors, Head Teachers feel that there is no alternative to early closure they should advise the relevant Head of Service immediately, other than in the most exceptional circumstances. Where the Head of Service, or their nominated deputy, agrees that the proposed early closure should take place the head teacher should take the following action:

- a. refer any necessary alterations to transport arrangements to Technical Services Transportation Section;
- b. where appropriate, make arrangements to provide school meals as on a normal day;
- c. advise, if possible and where known, any after school care scheme which involves children;

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- d. if possible, send a note home to parents informing them of the reason for closure and when pupils should return to school; and
- e. advise any subsequent users of the building (eg cleaners or groups who might have booked a community let) if the school will not be available that evening. Head teachers will bear in mind that it is possible that some or all pupils might have to be sent home (eg because bad weather and/or high tides might make their normal journey home problematic) whereas a local community group would still find it perfectly safe to use the school for a school let.

N.2.7 If contact with the media is required the appropriate action will be taken by the relevant Head of Service.

N.2.8 Consideration should be given to the health and welfare of staff, though the authority would expect staff to remain in school wherever possible. In all cases every effort should be made to retain during normal school hours a nucleus of staff including senior staff to look after children for whom alternative arrangements cannot be made, to deal with enquiries and to maintain contact with the education authority.

Full day or extended closure

N.2.9 In more extreme circumstances than those which might lead only to an early closure, it may be necessary to consider the closure of a school for one or more days. The possibility of a full day or extended closure could arise when emergencies such as fire, burst pipes or heating or power failure occurs outwith normal school hours with the result that unless immediate remedial action is taken the school will be unable to open.

N.2.10 In such cases it is essential that immediately the emergency is discovered, the Head Teacher or other senior member of staff should contact the Comhairle's Technical Service help line or the relevant Head of Service where the matter is not related to building issues. Head teachers should keep emergency contact telephone numbers readily available. If Technical Services Department are unable to take steps to allow the school to open they will contact the head teacher who should discuss with the relevant Head of Service what action will be taken in the particular case.

N.2.11 Closure for one or more days may also require to be considered in situations such as abnormally severe weather conditions or disruption to fuel supplies. It is possible that some emergency situations such as fuel shortages can be anticipated and that their effect can be minimised by careful forward planning. Head teachers are asked to undertake contingency planning to meet such emergencies and to review these plans each session.

N.2.12 Where large numbers of schools might be affected by an emergency situation, the Education Department will issue general advice to schools, coordinate efforts to keep schools open and ensure that all interested parties are kept informed. The role of the head teacher in ensuring that disruption to education is kept to a minimum will, however, be important and when considering the school's response to serious emergency situations which might lead to closure of the school head teachers should note the following:

Disruption to Fuel Supplies

- a. In the event of any disruption to fuel supplies, heating and fuel levels should be monitored to ensure that existing stocks are being used sensibly and that early and accurate information about fuel levels can be given to the Resources Service on request. Maximum use should be made of any part of the school heated by a fuel which is not in short supply but in some cases it may be possible to provide alternative forms of heating to accommodate staff of part of the school population.

Access to Schools

- b. Schools should ensure that they have appropriate stocks of salt and gritting material are available. Head Teachers should discuss any issues in this regard with their Business Support Officer.

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Communication with parents

- c. Head teachers should consider how best to ensure good communication with parents. Head teachers should make every effort to advise parents in writing of the reasons for closure and indicate the methods by which they will be informed of the date for the re-opening of the school. (These methods will normally include local radio and possibly the press although schools should note that in the event of large scale difficulties, the Education Department will make arrangements through the Comhairle's Press Officer for any necessary Press Release to be issued.) Schools should also arrange to notify the Comhairle's 24 hour Faire Service of any problems and to keep Faire updated so that they can inform parents and others who may contact the service. Head Teachers should consult the Policy on Employee Contact with the Media (Revised) which is included under Policies and Procedures on the Education Department's Intranet site.

The importance of good communication with parents and the general public cannot be over-emphasised. Head teachers should use all practical means at their disposal to ensure that the community is kept up to date with the situation at their school. It is essential, in this regard, that head teachers regularly update information about pupil emergency contacts.

Attendance of Staff

- d. The arrangements for staff attendance will depend on the situation in each establishment. While the welfare of pupils and the requirements to maintain the maximum possible educational service remain paramount, responsible consideration must be given to the health and welfare of staff. Where conditions allow, staff should be asked to attend and work as normal a day as possible. It is important that teaching and non-teaching staff be treated equitably. Where it is impracticable for all members of staff to attend, a nucleus of staff should, where possible and subject to health and safety considerations, be at the school during normal working hours to deal with enquiries and maintain contact with the Education Department. If it is not possible for the school to receive or make phone calls, phone numbers at which the head teacher or his/her representative can be contacted should be provided to the relevant Head of Service.

As part of the school's contingency plan head teachers should consider how staff who are not expected to attend or who for some reason are prevented from attending can best be kept in touch with the day to day position at the school.

Transport

- e. Schools should liaise directly with transport operators to arrange the provision of transport at an earlier hour than normal. The Transport Section of the Comhairle's Technical Services Department should be contacted as a matter of urgency if, for any reason, the regular operator is unable to vary the service.

Contact with the Education Department

- f. **It is essential that Education Department be kept up-to-date with the situation in each school.** In the event of an emergency situation in the school, Head teachers or their representatives should telephone daily, before 10.00 if possible, to report the position. The information provided will form the basis of any report which will then be passed to the media.

Alternative Accommodation

- g. If the emergency situation appears likely to last for more than a day or two, head teachers should consult with the relevant Head of Service on the use of alternative accommodation for staff and for pupils such as neighbouring schools, community halls or other suitable buildings. Any additional costs in connection with alternative accommodation (and additional transport where necessary) must be approved in advance by the Head of Educational Resources but, where so approved, will be met from central budgets.

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School Lets

- h Groups or individuals with planned school lets should be kept up to date by school of the situation with regard to their let so that they may consider cancelling or relocating the activity in the event of an extended closure.

Reporting on the closure

- N.2.13 After an emergency closure of whatever length head teachers should send a brief report to the relevant Head of Service on the action which was taken. The report should include:
- a. the dates on which the school was affected and why
 - b. whether the closure was full or partial
 - c. dates and times where staff were dismissed before normal hours
 - d. any alternative arrangements to accommodate staff or pupils
 - e. any alterations to normal travel arrangements
 - f. days on which meals were not supplied
 - g. any special initiatives taken
 - h. specific problems experienced

Recording of attendance

- N.2.14 School closures should not be counted as openings for the purposes of attendance and absence recording.

Log Book

- N.2.15 The decision to close in emergency situations and the action taken should be noted in the school log book or other official record.

