**SEVERE WINTER WEATHER**

GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS & SETTINGS



**INTRODUCTION**

Although it is not known when we might suffer a severe winter again, schools can take the necessary steps to ensure that they are prepared for winter weather.

Severe winter weather events can be described as ‘tidal’ in that they can be forecast in advance. As such, senior staff in schools should be able to plan the action to be taken.

Every effort should be made to keep a school open when severe weather occurs.

However, schools may close due to unavoidable circumstances, which are usually health and safety reasons such as limited supervision of pupils or unsafe facilities.

**WHAT YOU NEED TO DO**

* Regularly refer to the Met Office for severe weather warnings
* Ensure the heating system is well maintained and fully functioning
* Develop a ‘site plan’ for the school site for clearance, gritting
* Ensure you have enough grit to last between 7-10 working days
* Take all action possible to keep the school open in event of extreme weather
* Have in place a communication plan in the event of a school closure
* Ensure you have an ‘Severe Winter Weather Action Plan’ to respond to severe winter weather

**MAINTENANCE OF HEATING SYSTEM**

All schools are reminded of the need to ensure that their heating systems are maintained in a state of good repair and efficient working order.

There are no longer legal minimum temperatures contained in relevant regulations for schools but a temperature of 18°C is a reasonable expectation for areas with normal levels of physical activity, for example, classrooms\*.

\*School Premises (England) Regulations 2012

Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010

Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992

**WEATHER WARNINGS**

The Met Office is responsible for issuing weather warnings, which warn of impacts caused by severe weather. The warnings are designed to let people, businesses, emergency responders and governments know what weather is in store and what the impacts of that weather may be.

These warnings are given a colour (yellow, amber, or red) depending on a combination of both the impact the weather may have and the likelihood of those impacts occurring.

This means it is important to read each warning to know what level of impact you can expect for your chosen warning area and how likely those impacts are to occur.

Schools should regularly refer to the weather forecast and be aware of any weather warnings issued by the Met Office for their area.

Further information on weather warnings can be found at the following website: <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/guides/warnings>

**ICE, FROST AND SNOW**

Schools have a legal responsibility to ensure that all pedestrian routes and playground areas are safe.

Ice, frost, and snow fall may not cause a school to close but can create slippery conditions on pedestrian and vehicle routes. Schools must act reasonably to prevent accidents where snow or ice may be present through gritting, clearing snow or closing off certain routes or areas.

*Assessment of Pedestrian and Vehicle Traffic Routes*

Schools should complete an assessment of the risks associated with ice, frost and snow fall and put in place appropriate safety measures. This should include:

* Identification of the most important routes for entering and leaving the premises and site that require clearance or gritting
* Identification of higher-risk areas such as pathways with slopes or stairways or routes used by those with vulnerabilities
* Identification of fire exits and assembly points that may be required in an emergency
* Identification of vehicle routes/drop-off points for deliveries, pupil transport and/or car parking that may require clearance, gritting
* Identification of areas to be taken out of use, such as large playground areas that are impractical to clear or grit
* Equipment and resources required to undertaking any necessary clearance, gritting, or closing off routes (shovels, gloves salt spreaders etc.)
* Health and safety of those required to undertake clearance or gritting operations
* Consideration of staggered start and finish times to reduce vehicles and risk of children walking

A site plan should be developed and included in the overall ‘Severe Winter Weather Action Plan’ (see below) identifying routes that are to be used and those that are not to be used. It may be useful to colour code these in order of priority/risk to enable certain routes to be prioritised and monitored.

All equipment and other resources should be stored in an appropriate manner and be well-maintained. This will include an appropriate, secure grit store capable of storing 7-10 working days of grit (based upon the routes/areas required to be kept clear).

*Gritting of Pedestrian and Traffic Routes*

Gritting should be carried out when frost, ice or snow is forecast or when walkways are likely to be damp or wet and the ground temperatures are at, or below freezing.

The best time is early in the evening before the ice/frost/snow settles or if this is not possible early in the morning before the school community arrives. Grit does not work instantly and needs time to dissolve into the moisture on the ground.

When gritting it is generally good practice to clear a pathway 1 metre wide for pedestrians, particularly from the main school entrance to the main reception area/pupil drop-off.

Arrangements should be made for access routes to be inspected regularly following the gritting to monitor its effectiveness.

Where certain routes have been identified as not being a priority/not requiring clearance/gritting, it may be appropriate for affected areas to be taken out of use.

If there is a requirement to prevent access to paths, slopes, steps, or other areas then this must be marked clearly using signs/cones/tape to ensure everyone is made aware.

*Water Ingress and Footwear*

Winter conditions may also result in more water being trodden into buildings than is usual, make sure that floors are cleaned and dried or put some mats down at the main entrances to help control the risk of slipping.

Where practicable, all staff and pupils should be reminded of the need to wear appropriate non-slip footwear when coming into school in severe weather conditions, as it will seldom be impossible to clear all snow and ice from a site.

**EXTREME WEATHER AND SCHOOL CLOSURE**

The DfE [advises](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/emergencies-and-severe-weather-schools-and-early-years-settings) that any decision to close a school is for head teachers, since they know their schools and the surrounding area. DfE advice is that head teachers should use common sense in assessing the risks and keep their schools open whenever it is safe to do so. Schools can improve their readiness and planning for severe weather by signing up to the Met Office’s severe weather [warning system](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/uk/uk_forecast_warnings.html).

Schools should make every effort to keep the school open. However, there may be circumstances that prevent this from happening. Factors that may influence the need to close are:

* **Staff availability to supervise pupils (e.g. transport disruption)**
* **Condition of the school site (e.g. unable to keep clear pedestrian routes)**
* **Ability to keep school building safe (e.g. low temperatures)**
* **Ability of suppliers to deliver services (e.g. catering and pupil transport)**
* **Ability of parents/guardians to bring/collect children**

Severe winter weather events will need to be monitored and any decision to close the school should be made by the senior school management team using the information available.

Closure may impact not only on the school but also any additional services provided (such as breakfast clubs and after-school groups) and these should be considered in the decision-making process.

The ‘Severe Winter Weather Action Plan’ below can be used to assist in determining what action should be taken.

Where the decision is taken to close the school, good communication is essential with parents, contractors (e.g. catering and transport) the local authority and other relevant parties identified in the plan.

Communication will include the updating of the school website, social media, messages on the answer machine, use of ‘parent-call’, even notices on the school gate etc. A review of this may be appropriate to check parents are happy with this and how it is working.

It may be prudent to review the needs of vulnerable pupils in more detail during times of extreme weather.

**SEVERE WINTER WEATHER ACTION PLAN**

| **Name of school** | Blank cell |
| --- | --- |
| **Date plan issue/review** | Blank cell |
| **Responsible person** | Blank cell |

| **Introduction** | Implementation of this Severe Winter Weather Action Plan is to be initiated upon notification or recognition of icy and/or snowy conditions that may result in conditions that impact on the school’s ability to operate as business-as-usual.  This Severe Winter Weather Action Plan is specific to this site and owned by the responsible business manager/headteacher.  It is to be reviewed annually and/or following any change in procedures or premises that may affect its effectiveness. |
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| **Pre-Implementation** | The actions below are required before any implementation of this action plan to ensure the plan can be effectively implemented. |
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***Ice and Snow Site Plan***

A site plan of the premises/school should be attached as part of this plan. It should identify the following:

* Gates and entrances/doors that will be used during unsafe ice/snow conditions
* Gates and entrances/doors that will *not* be used during unsafe ice/snow conditions
* Access routes that will be open and maintained for pedestrians
* Traffic routes that will be open and maintained for drivers
* Access and traffic routes that will *not* be maintained or used
* Higher risk areas that will require on-going monitoring (slopes, stairways, emergency routes etc.)
* Transport drop-off areas that will be required to be cleared/gritted
* Playground areas/play equipment that will need to be assessed for safety
* Higher risk areas which require additional maintenance (e.g. steps, slopes, specific entrance areas)

***Grit/Salt Stores***

The grit bunkers/containers should be kept full and locked at all times. Fully stocked grit bunkers/containers will be expected to enable 7-10 days’ use, based upon the site requirements. Location of storage should be noted in this plan along with details of the supplier of the grit.

Grit levels and locking arrangements should be periodically checked for effectiveness.

***Clothing and Equipment***

A brief itinerary of the equipment required to grit or clear snow should be listed. This could include:

* Shovels
* Gloves, boots
* Physical barriers/signage
* Mechanical grit spreader
* Absorbent mats

***Information and Training***

The site manager and other staff involved in gritting and snow clearing tasks must have attended appropriate training (e.g. moving and handling of loads).

All staff and other occupants should be provided with details of the plan and requirements they are required to fulfil in the event of plan implementation (e.g. what to do if they cannot attend school, safe play etc.).

| **Plan Implementation** | The predicted weather conditions forecast should be reviewed to determine if this plan is to be implemented. Consider the following questions. |
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Have we allocated a responsible person to monitor weather reports?

Has the Met Office any warnings for ice and snow in our areas?

Are there any warnings from the local authority for ice and snow?

How long are the severe winter weather conditions expected to last?

Are these warnings likely to create unsafe conditions or warrant consideration of school closure?

| **Ice and Light Snow Conditions** | The following procedures should be followed where ice and/or light snow is forecast that could create unsafe conditions, but widespread disruption is *not* expected (e.g. yellow/amber warning) |
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Inform appropriate staff that the Ice and Snow Site Plan is to be implemented

Undertake gritting/snow clearance in accordance with the Ice and Snow Site Plan, prioritising high-risk routes.

Close and lock gates where access/egress is considered unsafe and not permitted and placed appropriate barriers/signage where routes/gates are closed.

Install water absorbing mats at entrances to premises where necessary to prevent slips.

Inform stakeholders and install signage indicating safe routes to be used by pupils, parents, staff, visitors etc.

Inform parents, staff and children of safety precautions, behaviours expected clothing and accessibility.

Warn pupils that grit is not to be handled or eaten as it is caustic, pay particular attention to those children that are very young or have high level of need.

Assess the use of the playground/s and play equipment for safety and cordon off/restrict access as appropriate (e.g. compacted snow causing slip hazards).

Undertake increased inspections of safe routes/higher risk areas to ensure continued safety (e.g. early morning, after school) and to determine if further gritting is required.

Monitor levels of grit to ensure adequate supplies are available to continue to provide safe routes.

Keep parents, suppliers, and local authority informed and updated of current school status via letter, text, e-mail, website, social media etc.

| **Extreme Weather/Heavy Snowfall Conditions** | The school should call a meeting of key personnel as soon as they become aware of the potential for extreme weather conditions.  A ‘dynamic risk assessment’ should be undertaken where extreme weather conditions/heavy snowfall is forecast/has occurred with the potential for major disruption and school closure (e.g. amber/red warning).  The following should be considered as part of the assessment to determine what action is required to be taken, including potential for school closure. |
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***Staff Availability***

What would be the threshold of staff numbers in respect to expected pupils (estimate how many staff members need to get in for the school to operate safely by identifying how many pupils could attend)?

Can we gain enough teaching and/or supervisory staff to supervise pupils so we can operate safely (not whether a full and normal curriculum could be followed)?

How many staff have informed the Head teacher if they cannot attend school?

Can we gain enough site staff to grit/clear routes and other areas so we can operate safely?

Have we communicated with caretakers, maintenance staff, teachers, and other supervisory staff to establish their means of accessing the school at the time of extreme bad weather?

***Pathways and Traffic Routes***

Are pedestrian routes on the school grounds passable?

Is there means to improve pedestrian access prior to attendance of staff, parents, and pupils, visitors etc.?

If required, can movement to various parts of the school be limited without disruption – ensuring maintenance is concerted to general access routes?

Can people movement be minimised between school buildings if access and egress is made externally?

Can priority be made in respect to slopes, steps, or ramps, or can these areas be restricted from use?

Are vehicle routes into the school grounds and parking areas passable?

Is there means to improve vehicle access prior to attendance of school buses, teacher vehicles, etc.?

Is it possible to arrange drop-off outside the school for school buses that is safe?

If open, can vehicle parking areas have a passable pedestrian route to access the school?

Do we have sufficient materials to enable the priority routes to be cleared for as long as the weather is likely to remain severe?

Can slush or water from thawed snow/ice should be cleared as much as possible to prevent re-icing?

***Buildings***

Is the school building/s accessible?

Is the school appropriately heated and can this be maintained?

If required, could the low overnight temperature be raised without impeding the effectiveness of the system?

Are water systems working appropriately?

***Playgrounds and Equipment***

Are playground and play equipment safe to use?

Will a restriction of outside play limit the snow/ice from becoming compacted, and therefore more dangerous?

Could breaks be staggered to enable appropriate supervision?

***Suppliers***

Can suppliers (catering and pupil transport) operate effectively to provide the necessary services?

| **School Closure** | The following procedures should be followed if it is necessary to close the school |
| --- | --- |

Communicate with all relevant stakeholders informing them of the school closure. This will include parents, suppliers, contractors, staff, local authority.

Methods to inform stakeholders will include ‘parent call’, text messages, school website, local authority website, answer machine, WhatsApp, notices on school gates etc.

Have school staff members available to address enquiries from parents, suppliers, local authority etc.

Put in place arrangements to care for pupils who may have made their way to school and arrange for their collection with parents/guardians

Cancel any school trips, breakfast clubs, after school events as necessary.

Continue to monitor the weather forecast to determine how long the prevailing weather conditions are expected to last.

Continue to monitor the factors that resulted in the school having to close and look for opportunities to resolve the situation and enable the school to open.

Keep stakeholders informed of the on-going situation and when the school is to re-open.