

GUIDANCE ON EXCEPTIONAL SCHOOL CLOSURES

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This circular details the procedures to be followed in emergency circumstances which may result in the closure of educational establishments. Examples of such circumstances include severely inclement weather, abnormal temperatures, burst pipes and disruption to fuel, power or water supplies. The length of closure may vary from an early closure with a return to normal on the following day to a closure for one or more full days.
- 1.2 The guiding principles in such circumstances should be the safety and welfare of pupils and the minimum disruption to the normal education service. Inconvenience, discomfort or travel delay does not necessarily constitute good reason for an early closure.

2. Advice to Parents

- 2.1 Parents should be periodically reminded, for example by letter and through the school prospectus, 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 advised their children of the care arrangements.

3. Early Closure

- 3.1 Early closures 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. Where feasible, consideration should be given to partial rather than full closure.
- 3.2 When considering an early closure, head teachers should give paramount priority to the health and welfare of pupils. All arrangements should ensure the standard of care for each pupil as would be expected of a prudent parent. Arrangements should take account of the age, ability and capacities (physical and mental) of the pupils concerned; the location of the establishment in relation to pupils' homes, road traffic and other hazards; the home circumstances of the pupils and any other emergency arrangements.

- 3.3 No primary aged pupils should be sent home without ensuring that an adult's presence is available. In the absence of parental acknowledgement or consent to the amended time of dismissal, or acceptance of responsibility for the reception of the pupil by an adult nominated by the parent as an emergency contact point, supervision and care must be provided until such arrangements are made or until normal dismissal time.
- 3.4 Pre-five children must not be sent home. Parents or emergency contacts must collect children.
- 3.5 Consideration should be given to the health and welfare of staff. However, the authority expects staff to remain at work wherever possible. In all cases it is essential 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 Children and Young Peoples Services.
- 3.6 If, after considering all of the above factors, the head teacher still feels that there is no alternative to early closure, the Local Authority must be informed

4. Full Day or Extended Closure

- 4.1 In more extreme circumstances than those resulting in an early closure it may be necessary to consider the closure of an establishment for one or more days. These may include emergencies such as fire, burst pipes and heating or power failure which occur out of normal school hours with the result that unless immediate remedial action is taken the school will be unable to open.

Consideration should also be given to how education can be provided to pupils in these circumstances e.g., setting homework using electronic communications e.g., Emails to parents / pupils, texts, via the school website or by telephone.

In such cases it is essential that immediately the emergency is discovered, contact is made with facilities management (Tel. 01709 822838) and/or your building manager. If facilities management are unable to take steps to allow the establishment to open, they will contact the head of service or relevant manager who will agree with the head teacher what action will be taken.

- 4.2 Closure for one or more days may also require consideration in situations such as abnormal severe weather conditions or disruption to fuel supplies. Such circumstances could affect large

numbers of establishments at the same time. Consideration should also be given to the impact on the local community and schools should consider a later opening time as opposed to closure in the first instance where appropriate e.g., to allow more time for snow clearance etc.

4.3 Access to Schools

Caretakers must keep stocks of salt and gritting material available. As soon as treacherous conditions develop, gritting and/or salt scattering should be carried out. Head teachers should take all possible action to ensure that access for fuel deliveries and for pupils and staff is not made impossible by snow or ice. Where the caretaker is unable to keep access open, Children and Young Peoples Service should be informed without delay.

4.4 Communication with Parents

Head teachers should consider how best to ensure good communication with parents. They 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 reopening of the establishment. These methods will normally include local radio, school text alerts to parents and the school's own website.

Head teachers should also inform parents of the establishment telephone number and where possible the hours during which parents may telephone the establishment for information.

The importance of good communication with parents and the general public cannot be over-emphasised and head teachers should use every means at their disposal to update information about emergency contacts and on-going communication as part of the school's communication policy.

4.5 Attendance of Staff

The arrangements for staff attendance will depend on the situation in each establishment. While the welfare of pupils and the requirement to maintain the maximum possible educational service remain paramount, responsible consideration must be given to the 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 support staff be treated equitably. Where it is impracticable for all members of staff to attend, a nucleus of staff should be present during normal working hours to deal with enquiries and maintain contact with Children and Young Peoples Services. At the very least every effort should be made

to ensure the presence of a senior management member and caretaking staff.

The following applies to all staff regarding absence due to inclement weather: -

When the weather is sufficiently inclement to cause difficulties, but staff manage to report for work personally at any time during that day it will be regarded as if they had worked a full day. Where staff do not appear for work, the school governing body will need to determine whether they are paid.

Report a school closure

If the decision to close is before the start of the school day parents should be notified as soon as possible via school communication means, the school website should be updated to reflect this, the Local Authority and local radio stations should be informed as soon as possible (contact details are in appendix 1).

Making updates

Schools should keep all relevant parties updated in relation to the closure and reopening arrangements (contact details are in appendix 1).

Reopening school after a closure

1. The school should inform all relevant parties after the decision has been made to reopen (contact details are in appendix 1)
2. Parents should be informed when pupils should return to school via school communication systems. (It may be necessary to stagger start dates or times for relevant year groups dependant on cause of closure.)

Appendix 1

Useful Telephone Numbers

Department	Contact	Tel. Number
RMBC Switch board		01709 382121
Radio Sheffield		0114 2675440
Radio Hallam		0114 2091010
Rother F.M		01302 341166
Access To Education (Head of Service)		
Access To Education (Risk Management)	Andrew Guest Andrew.guest@rotherham.gov.uk	01709 255220
Access To Education (School Organisation)	Christopher Stones Christopher.stones@rotherham.gov.uk	01709 254831
Access To Education (School Organisation)	Elaine Maltby Elaine.Maltby@rotherham.gov.uk	01709 254847
RMBC Emergency and Safety (Health and Safety / Emergency Planning Team)	HealthandSafety@rotherham.gov.uk EPSharedService@rotherham.gov.uk	01709 823720 823876 822190 822131 255358 823861
RMBC Communications	Corporate.Comms@rotherham.gov.uk	01709 822754
RMBC School Meals	RiversideCatering@rotherham.gov.uk	01709 254025 822301 254024
Corporate Transport	R&E- PassengerTransport@rotherham.gov.uk Education.Transport@rotherham.gov.uk	01709 334718 822649
Police (non- Emergency)		0114 220 2020
Fire Service (non- Emergency)		0114 2727202
Flood line	enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk	0845 9881188
Yorkshire Water		08451 242424
National Grid Gas/Electricity (Power Cuts)		0800 111999 105
*Building Manager		

*Please feel free to add any other useful contacts into the table.