



Standard Circular 10b
October 2019

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL: EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Council Offices
211 Main Street
Barrhead
East Renfrewshire
G78 1SY

**SEVERE WEATHER CONDITIONS CONTINGENCY PLAN:
EMERGENCY CLOSURE OF SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION ESTABLISHMENTS**

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TO: HEADS AND MANAGERS OF ALL EDUCATION ESTABLISHMENTS

Dear Colleagues

EMERGENCY CLOSURE OF EDUCATION ESTABLISHMENTS IN THE EVENT OF SEVERE WEATHER CONDITIONS

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1. Introduction

On very rare occasions severe weather can lead to the emergency closure of schools or other educational establishments. The length of closure may vary from an early closure on an isolated occasion to full closure for one or more consecutive days.

It is the Department's aim to maintain as full an education service as possible in times of emergencies; however, the health and wellbeing of pupils and staff will be the first consideration. Head Teachers and their staff have in the past shown considerable initiative and made great efforts to keep their schools open in the face of adverse circumstances and I hope that the terms of this circular will allow our emergency procedures to operate responsively and effectively. The guidance provided in this document should be used to form each school's contingency plan and to contextualise procedures for dealing with severe weather. (Appendix 6)

Parents should be advised by letter and through standard advice in the school handbook 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 where they should go. Emergency contact information must be kept up-to-date to enable the safe dismissal of pupils. For those who live some distance away it would be beneficial, where possible, to have a contact close to the school for situations such as heavy snow fall.

2. Closure of Education Establishments Due to Severe Weather Conditions

During severe cold winter weather, schools and services can be affected for a variety of reasons, such as those noted below:

- the access road is not on a priority or severe weather route and is therefore untreated;
- insufficient staff are able to reach their place of work to maintain minimum ratios;
- pupils are unable to reach school safely;
- school buses stop operating and public transport is severely disrupted;
- problems with the heating supply;
- water supply is compromised resulting in disruption to sanitation services; and,
- access routes around the establishment are considered hazardous or are blocked by snow and ice.

The decision to close a school rests with the Director. This may also be due to 'red alert' weather warnings such as gale force winds. The role of the Head Teacher is crucial in ensuring that disruption to education is kept to a minimum. Preparations and effective communications are key to the effective management of such circumstances.

3. Preparations for Periods of Severe Winter Weather

Janitors and caretakers must keep adequate stocks of salt and gritting material available. As soon as treacherous conditions develop, gritting and/or salt scattering should be carried out to provide a direct pathway to the school. This may mean that the 'normal' route used by parents and pupils will not be available during a period of severe weather. It is important to ensure that all fire exits from buildings are clear and available for use in an emergency.

Where the janitor is unable to keep access and exits clear, this will form part of the Head Teacher's or Manager's situation assessment (Appendix 1) for consideration when premises may have to close.

4. Procedures for Closure and / or Re-opening Schools and Services

During periods of severe weather the Education Senior Manager (Developing People) will arrange to cascade met office weather forecasts and refer Head Teachers to the situation assessments attached in Appendix 1 and 1a. This will allow Head Teachers to consider all aspects of health & safety when informing decisions on whether or not school closure is deemed necessary.

When adverse weather, such as heavy snowfalls or gale force winds occur during the evening and / or overnight, Head Teachers should keep watch on local conditions. In such circumstances text messaging to Head Teachers will be used by the Education Senior Manager and Education Provision Manager to communicate instructions. The Council website will also be a source of information during out of hours.

Where large numbers of schools and services are affected by adverse weather the Department Resilience Management Team (RMT) will provide direction for Head Teachers. The team will co-ordinate efforts to re-open schools and to keep Head Teachers and parents informed.

The office and mobile telephone numbers of key members of the Education Department are listed in Appendix 3.

N.B. Mobile telephone numbers for officers should be used if it is not possible to communicate with staff at the Education Department Offices.

4.1 Action Required

Once a full assessment of the situation and factors affecting operations has been undertaken by the Head Teacher or Manager, the Education Senior Manager (Developing People) should be consulted immediately to discuss whether closure is necessary. The Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) is an alternative contact should the Education Senior Manager (Developing People) not be available.

Ultimately the decision to close a school or education establishment will be taken by the Director of Education.

4.2 Transport

Head Teachers should maintain close contact with transport operators about the needs of the school (see Appendix 2).

4.3 Staff Attendance and Health & Safety

The arrangements for staff attendance will depend on the situation in each establishment. Head Teachers should recognise the need to maintain services safely during adverse weather conditions, whilst properly discharging their duty of care to their employees. Where conditions allow, staff should be asked to attend and work as normal a day as possible. It is important that teaching and local government staff be treated equitably. All employees

are expected to make every reasonable effort to attend for work, but without compromising their health and safety. Employees should not put themselves at unnecessary risk and in this regard should use their own judgement and give due consideration to severe weather warnings. If an employee decides that it is not feasible or possible to report to work at all, they must inform their manager as early as possible, and no later than 1 hour after the time they would be expected to start work. Employees should report to an alternative East Renfrewshire School closer to their home, if possible, where the weather conditions have prevented them travelling to their usual place of work.

Head Teachers will be responsible for **local decisions on individual staff requests to leave early** as a result of adverse weather, bearing in mind all available information including the travel options, home address and mode of transport of the employee concerned. This necessarily means that those employees, who will not encounter difficulties, and any other essential employees, should remain at work until normal finishing time in order to maintain services. Likewise, line managers should also contact any shift workers who are due to attend work later that day when travelling conditions are still expected to be difficult.

The Council website (www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk) will provide updates on the impact of adverse weather on Council services as will the Council's Facebook page and Twitter feed. If an employee is looking for specific information that affects them, then they should contact their manager directly. Head Teachers should ensure staff are aware of the lines of communication.

Where it is impracticable for all members of staff to attend, a nucleus of staff should be at the school during normal working hours to deal with enquiries and maintain contact with the Education Department. At the very least every effort should be made to ensure the presence of a senior member of the school management team and janitorial staff *unless directed otherwise*. It is, however, important that the safety of any individual is not compromised.

If it is not possible for the telephones to be staffed or for the school to receive or make telephone calls, telephone numbers at which the Head Teacher or his/her representative and a member of the janitorial staff can be contacted must be provided to the Education Department.

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

The Council website will provide day to day information for staff and parents. Where feasible, staff are expected to report to their nearest East Renfrewshire school if a journey to their normal place of work is totally impracticable or would compromise their personal health and safety.

4.4 Supervising Pupils Remaining Beyond the School Day

Severe weather conditions which can be difficult to forecast or predict with accuracy, may result in significant disruption to transport. Should such a situation arise Head Teachers are requested to keep the Education Senior Manager (Developing People) informed in the first instance of the need to detain pupils in the school beyond normal school dismissal time. Sufficient staffing levels would be necessary for the safe supervision of remaining pupils. This scenario would constitute a major emergency response and therefore guided by the Department RMT and close liaison with Health & Social Care Partnership officers.

Head Teachers will be advised by the Department RMT on the actions to be taken regarding keeping pupils and staff in a safe location which has adequate heating, toilet facilities and access to mains drinking water. In a prolonged period extending into the early evening, sustenance will be provided. Appendix 4 provides detail of the protocol to be followed.

In circumstances where there is significant authority-wide disruption the Council RMT will co-ordinate transport and health needs through regular liaison with the Departmental RMT.

In a situation such as described above, effective communication is paramount. Staff at the Education Department will be available throughout such instances for immediate response. E-mail inboxes must be checked hourly to ensure prompt responses are made and actions taken.

Head Teachers must ensure that the medical needs of individuals are known to key staff and those needs met if it becomes necessary to accommodate pupils and staff overnight. This should form part of each school's contingency plan for emergencies.

4.5 Communication with Parents and Other Service Users

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 school. This advice can be provided by e-mail or text and supported on the school's website. Schools should keep information on their own websites up to date on a daily basis during periods of adverse weather, informing parents of local procedures for closures / re-opening of premises.

Head Teachers should also inform parents of the school telephone number and, where possible, the hours during which parents may telephone the school 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 ensure that the community is aware of the up-to-date situation at the school.

Any communications, either directly with the public or through the media, must be fully integrated with the Council's Internal Communications Arrangements. Head Teachers should not need to contact Communications within the corporate communications service directly. The Education Senior Manager (Developing People) will liaise directly with the department's link officer in the Communications Team who will make full use of the Council's communications options including:

- SMS
- Website
- Twitter / Facebook
- Press
- Local Radio

5. School Closure Recording System

After an emergency closure of whatever length, Head Teachers should complete the proforma 'School Closure Recording System' attached as Appendix 5 and send this to the Education Department's Health and Safety Adviser.

The report includes:

- the dates on which the school was affected and why
- whether the closure was full or partial
- dates and times when staff were dismissed before normal hours
- any alternative arrangements to accommodate staff or pupils
- any alterations to normal travel arrangements
- days on which meals were not supplied
- any special initiatives taken
- any specific problems experienced.

5.1 Recording of Attendance

Details of procedures for recording pupil attendance in emergency situations are outlined in Standard Circular 49.

5.2 School Lets

The ERC Culture and Leisure Trust office should be kept up-to-date by the Head Teacher on the situation at the school. It may be possible for the Community Facilities office to relocate lets in alternative accommodation in accordance with any guidelines which are issued at the time of the emergency.

Mhairi Shaw
Director of Education
October 2019

Name of School: _____ Date: _____

Completed by: _____ (Head Teacher/Manager) Time: _____

Situation Assessment for Schools and Education Establishments during Periods of Severe Weather

TO ASSESS THE NEED FOR EARLY CLOSURE AND REPORT TO EDUCATION SENIOR MANAGER (DEVELOPING PEOPLE)

1. Having assessed the information from the met office weather forecast for your area, what do you consider the impact to be to your establishment?
2. Consider the current local road traffic conditions and information and identify what issues arise for making necessary journeys?
3. Do you need to mobilise school transport <u>earlier</u> than normal or <u>delay</u> dismissal time?
4. Will you have to release staff early who have longer distances to travel?
5. Are you able to maintain sufficient staff to supervise pupils safely?
6. If necessary, what assistance do you require to initiate your contingency plan for delaying dismissal of pupils and remaining in your establishment? (Please also refer to Appendix 4)
7. In conclusion summarise your views and proposed action.

Name of School: _____ Date: _____

Completed by: _____ (Head Teacher/Manager) Time: _____

Situation Assessment for Schools and Education Establishments during Periods of Severe Weather

TO ASSESS CONDITIONS FOR RE-OPENING AND REPORT TO EDUCATION SENIOR MANAGER (DEVELOPING PEOPLE):

1. Is a designated pedestrian route to an entrance sufficiently clear of snow and gritted?
(state which entrance is in use)
2. Are <u>all</u> fire exits and routes from buildings fully cleared?
(snow must be sufficiently cleared and doors functioning and a cleared route to a safe muster point identified)
3. Is there adequate heating and water supply?
(state whether partial issues in specific areas of buildings)
4. Will support services be operating such as school meals?
(pupil numbers who regularly take school meals would be helpful)
5. Are transport providers operating?
(if sufficient staff, school may open partially to those not reliant upon buses)
6. Do you have sufficient staffing levels to open fully or partially?
(suggestion on how partial opening would be managed is helpful here)
7. In conclusion summarise your views and proposed action.

Appendix 3

The following arrangements, which have been agreed with Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, should be implemented whenever the Director of Education renders the early closure of a school as necessary in emergencies, such as exceptionally severe weather or disruption to fuel supplies.

1. Once the decision has been taken to close a school it is the responsibility of the Head Teacher, in direct consultation with the operator, to arrange the provision of transport at an earlier hour than that specified in the contract. The public transport officer for the area may be able to be of assistance in difficult cases but generally it will be more expedient for the Head Teacher to liaise with the operator.
2. The provision of transport at other than the normal times represents a variation of the terms of contract and in these circumstances the operator may demand an additional payment. Head Teachers should endeavour to avoid this wherever possible in negotiation with the operator.
3. If there is no way of avoiding additional payment, the Head Teacher should
 - ascertain the sum involved
 - arrange for the account to be sent to the school
 - verify the account
 - pass it without delay to the Business Support Manager (Central Administration), who will initiate the procedures for payment.

Strathclyde Partnership for Transport
131 St. Vincent Street
Glasgow
G2 5JF

Contacts:

Head of Bus Strategy & Delivery

Gordon Dickson (0141) 333 3407

Schools Agency Services & Compliance Manager

Karen O'Donnell (0141) 333 3201

Team Leader

Lynette Hampson (0141) 333 3293.

Emergency Closure Contacts

Emergency Closures due to Severe Weather Conditions

Where severe weather conditions result in the emergency closure of schools, the Education Senior Manager (Developing People) will arrange to advise Head Teachers of forecasts of extreme weather conditions.

During prolonged periods of extreme weather, daily e-mail bulletins will provide information for Head Teachers regarding procedures for situation assessments and any impact these may have on closure of education establishments. Staff and parents should be advised to keep contact with Head Teachers and check the Council website daily for up-to-date information.

24 hour contact numbers for schools during adverse weather are:

Tracy Morton	Ext.: 3763 / Mobile No.: 07900 833 501
Ruth Adams	Ext: 3574 / Mobile No: 07889 592 957
Janice Collins	Ext.: 3204 / Mobile No.: 07932 437 950
Lorraine Lawrie	Ext.: 3329 / Mobile No.: 07768 731 557

(The above staff are key members of the Department's RMT)

Protocol for:

Supervising Pupils Remaining Beyond the School Day

- Head Teacher makes contact with the Education Senior Manager (Developing People); if not available then the alternative is the Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) to inform that pupils are remaining in school beyond the school day due to severe weather
- confirm the number of pupils and that their records are up-to-date and accessible
- identify key issues: medical needs
transport needs
dietary needs
- establish how long pupils may have to remain into the evening
- establish the range of staff remaining to supervise and any shortfall
- identify any other issues in relation to school's context, e.g. heating and water supplies.

The Education Senior Manager (Developing People) will confirm Departmental RMT response immediately.

Please submit to the Education Health & Safety Adviser

School Closure Report (To be completed by Head Teacher or Establishment's Manager)

School Name: _____

The school was closed on the following dates: _____

The reason for the closure: _____

The school was closed to: All pupils

All staff

The school was open to: Staff

The following year groups of pupils

Dates and times when staff were released before normal hours: _____

Travel/transport alterations: _____

Dates on which meals were not supplied: _____

Please give an outline of any special arrangements made which are not listed above:

List the issues that need to be addressed in light of the school's experience on this occasion:

Adverse Weather Contingency Plan

School: _____

Session: 2019/2020

Emergency contact details of staff

Senior Management Team			
Name	Position	Home Telephone Number	Mobile Number

Janitors	
Name	Telephone Number

Emergency details of pupils

It is essential that up-to-date emergency contact details of pupils are readily accessible.

These are located:

Date last checked / updated:

Communication – planning ahead

Parents have been informed about where to find up-to-date information regarding the impact on the school during periods of adverse weather.

Parents have been informed of the school’s procedures.

Staff know how to maintain communication with the Head Teacher during adverse weather.

Factors to be included in School Contingency Plans

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Senior managers and staff know the mechanisms for internal communications should transport be disrupted

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Senior managers and staff have a plan for dealing with pupils remaining in school beyond the usual dismissal time and maintaining contact with the Education Department.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In the event of a lengthy closure, outline how pupils can access curriculum work such as through GLOW, SCHOLAR or Wikibuzz. (SQA has detailed contingency plans to deal with disruption to normal procedures should exam diet be affected.)

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In the event of a school being partially open the school has a plan for prioritising classes / year groups.

Please return this appendix to Pauleen Smith by Friday 1 November 2019.

