



**ROCHDALE**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

## **SEVERE WEATHER**

### **MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE DOCUMENT**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This guidance document provides advice for Headteachers and Chairs of Governors and has been prepared following incidents of severe weather. The advice aims to provide clarification on a number of important matters relating to severe weather and includes information provided by government. **Advice from the DfE, where provided, should always be followed.**
- 1.2 Rochdale Council recognises the important role of Headteachers in deciding whether schools should remain open in periods of severe weather and this advice has been prepared in order to help them in making those decisions. Above all, it strongly encourages schools to make every effort to remain open during periods of severe weather and suggests strategies for doing so, including, for example, reduced hours of opening.
- 1.3 It is for individual schools to make any decision to close and the Local Authority will not make a decision on behalf of all schools in the Borough telling them what they should do. They know the local conditions and the contingency possibilities which may allow the school to stay open for some or all pupils. Such decisions should however be based on a common sense approach, having regard to the conditions at the school and the need to continue to provide an education to children whenever feasible. Governing Boards and Headteachers are reminded that the School Standards and framework Act 1998 and the associated Regulations (The Education (School Day and School Year (England) Regulations 1999 (No 3181) require that schools should meet for not less than 380 sessions (190 days) for pupils.
- 1.4 Schools provide essential services to the community and employees are therefore required to make all reasonable efforts to attend work during periods of severe weather. Whilst the school has a responsibility to ensure that essential services are delivered, it is also committed to protecting the health, safety and well-being of its employees.
- 1.5 Severe weather is classified as weather conditions which have an impact on service delivery. This weather may be heavy snow, black ice, fog, floods, **extreme heat** or strong winds.
- 1.6 These guidelines are not exhaustive, but are designed to cover the key actions which employees and Headteachers/Governing Boards should take in the event of severe weather, and to outline arrangements which will apply where attendance at work is disrupted because of weather conditions.

## 2. PLANNING AHEAD FOR SEVERE WEATHER

- 2.1 When it comes to severe weather conditions such as heavy snow/**extreme heat**, Headteachers are expected to keep schools open for as many pupils as possible whenever it is reasonable for them to do so. If schools close for whatever reason it can be disruptive to children's education and make life difficult for working parents. Therefore schools should be planning on the basis that they intend to remain open during severe weather.

2.2 At some time during the winter we might expect there to be a bout of severe weather, therefore schools need to have plans in place, even if it doesn't happen this year, it will be valuable planning for the future.

2.3 In **planning for incidents of severe weather**, the Headteacher should consider/be aware of:

- How to contact employees and parents, as well as the wider community, including the local authority and the press;
- Estimating who amongst your employees will be able to get in safely for the beginning of the day and how you will be able to manage the school in those circumstances;
- For snow - maintaining stocks of salt and grit and reviewing the level of stock held, in the light of supply problems in previous years and identifying which areas of the school site need to be kept clear of snow and ice and ensuring that school employees who will usually assist with salting/gritting or otherwise keeping the relevant parts of the site clear know what steps to take, including undertaking these tasks safely;
- Arranging for help to be available from the school community - to help clear paths, entrances and steps, this will involve:
  - Associated risk assessments to be undertaken by the school and issuing specific instructions to employees, or other people, based on them
- Preparing for a day (or more) that might involve a reduced curriculum offer, where you will need to supervise students more than be able to provide the usual rich curriculum;
- Setting up an incident management team that would be available to manage the situation when it arises;
- Ensure you have all the information you need in advance including:
  - Contacts (name, telephone numbers) for those who will collect children if parents are not available.
  - Bus and taxi drivers' telephone numbers for school transport, so that direct contact can be made with them.
- **Consider postponing events due to take place on days where severe weather is expected**
- **Have clearly established safeguarding arrangements for pupils where there is a closure throughout the school day and ensure these are enacted**
- **The arrangements for free school meals for eligible pupils**

**Headteachers should check that their school's business continuity plan is up to date; particularly if there have been significant changes since the last occasion of severe weather. They should also be reviewed in light of your school risk assessments.**

The following checklist may be of use:

- ✓ Is the school's business continuity plan up to date?
- ✓ Have service priorities been reviewed to ensure they will remain the same in a severe weather disruption?

- ✓ Are employees aware of how contact should be made with their Headteacher in the event of weather disruption?
- ✓ Are school leaders aware of the home locations of employees and any employees who may have difficulties travelling to work?

All employees must do their best to anticipate problems due to severe weather conditions and make arrangements as early as possible to deal with the situation. It is important that arrangements are in place, so that employees can communicate with the school, and vice versa, about any problems they may be having due to severe weather.

Preparations may be as follows:

**Contact telephone numbers** – Headteachers should ensure that contact details for employees are up to date, and employees should ensure that they have contact telephone numbers for school and members of the Leadership Team so that they can communicate as soon as possible any problems which will affect their ability to attend work or attend work on time.

**Travelling to and from work** – extra care should be taken when travelling to and from work in severe weather, and it is advisable to look at weather forecast information, transport and travel information and general tips for driving in severe conditions, before travelling. It may be appropriate to consider using public transport if this is operating and is accessible, rather than driving. In some circumstances, employees may be able to walk to work, if they live within a reasonable distance and are fit and able to do so; or it may be feasible to car share – for example, it may be possible to travel with colleagues who have vehicles which are easier to drive in bad weather. It may also be appropriate that employees leave their vehicle in an alternative location in case the area around their home becomes inaccessible. Employees should have an alternative plan for how to get to work if they couldn't use their car.

**Caring responsibilities** – in the event of severe weather, some schools, nurseries and other childcare providers may be closed or inaccessible, so employees may need to plan alternative childcare arrangements. Similarly, those who care for vulnerable people may be affected if, for example, day centres are closed, and so they will need to think how this care will be provided in the event that their normal arrangements are disrupted due to severe weather. Employees should have an alternative plan in place for any caring responsibilities they have.

**Understanding minimum staffing levels for opening the school safely** – schools should have an understanding of key roles and minimum staffing requirements on site/accessible. Consideration should be given to how severe weather may impact upon this and your business continuity arrangements.

### **3. TAKING THE DECISION TO CLOSE THE SCHOOL**

- 3.1 The local authority advice will be to remain open except in the most extreme or exceptional of circumstances. Headteachers are authorised to make an emergency closure when the state of the weather or any other exceptional circumstance make it absolutely necessary in the best interests of the pupils.
- 3.2 The overall decision on whether to close therefore lies with the Headteacher – it is not possible to have a centralised or uniform approach on this matter as each school is best placed to know the local conditions. **Headteachers should discuss and agree the closure with the Local Authority and Chair of Governors.**

- 3.3 Decisions must be supported by the latest and most accurate information available. The presumption should be in favour of keeping the school open unless, in the Headteacher's view, to do so would put the health, safety or welfare of pupils and/or employees at risk. In reaching this decision, Headteachers should take full account of local circumstances and, in particular, the following considerations:
- Both short and longer term weather information: e.g. it would be inadvisable to react to the first flurry of snow without seeking further information on the weather conditions ahead. Equally, it would be unwise to send people (pupils or employees) home when a blizzard is at its height.
  - Advice from transport operators: Transport operators are key players in such circumstances as they will be the ones who decide whether vehicles should/can continue to operate.
  - Arrangements for pupil safety: The absolute priority is to ensure that provision is made for each and every child. Where children cannot be collected or delivered home, they should be kept at school and supervised.
- 3.4 It is often specific access or other localised issues that require schools to close. Therefore in these circumstances the closure or opening of other schools in the proximity should **NOT** be the key factor in taking decisions. The overriding principle is that it is the responsibility of all employees to make every effort to attend for duty at their normal school.
- 3.5 It is for the Headteacher to decide whether a school should close, taking into account relevant information and advice, such as that available from or provided by the Local Authority, Health and Safety, the Met Office, local transport providers etc., as well as the situation at the school site itself, such as safe access, any weather damage, loss of power or water supply, **availability of key staff** etc.
- 3.6 In the event that the school is closed, the Headteacher will discuss with the Local Authority whether employees can work from an alternative base **to support another school remaining open**.

#### **Closure during the school day**

- 3.7 The safety and well-being of pupils should be paramount. If in doubt a child should not be released. Safe and speedy dismissal of pupils in the event of an emergency closure depends on the school and parents working in partnership.
- 3.8 Parents should be fully aware of the procedures which will operate in any particular school should there be an emergency closure. Normally, this information would appear in the school prospectus and school website.
- 3.9 Parents should provide the school with any specific instructions in respect of their child should the school require to close during the day. Parents are required to give schools an emergency contact and should have told the children what to do in the event of an emergency closure.

## Precautions

- 3.10 Reasonable attempts should be made to ensure that children and young people will go home to a safe environment should school be closed. Clearly, the relevance of the following precautions will be dependent upon the age of the child or young person **or if a child/young person has any additional needs.**
- 3.11 It may be that a parent who collects his/her children offers to give shelter to other children. The agreement of the parents of these children should be sought before releasing pupils in this way. This can be done on the day and agreed by telephone/text.
- 3.12 If it is customary for pupils to walk home at the end of the school day, it would be reasonable for the school to release these pupils to walk home in an emergency but only if there were a parent or an identified adult expecting their arrival. Account should be taken also of the age of the pupil, the severity of weather conditions and the distance to be walked. It would not be seen to be reasonable to release pupils with the instruction to return to school if they find no one at home.

## Children Remaining in School

- 3.13 Provision of adequate supervision by members of teaching employees should be made for those pupils who cannot go home or to their emergency destination immediately and have therefore to remain at school.

## Types of closure

- 3.14 There are 3 main types of closure:
- Planned closure – where a school determines the closure in advance. A closure in this situation would be required to be made up to ensure that the statutory 190 pupil days take place.
  - Emergency closure – when a school determines the closure on the day due to unforeseen and unexpected circumstances. Whilst there is no requirement to make this day up, it is not expected that a school would evoke an emergency closure on a regular basis or without consideration of all the options. If a school initially closes due to unforeseen or unexpected circumstances, but then remains closed and it is no longer an emergency closure, there will be a requirement to make up subsequent days lost.
  - Partial closure – where a school determines that a portion of the school could remain open.

## 4. REMAINING OPEN

- 4.1 As an alternative to closure, Headteachers should consider:
- Opening the school later in the day and closing earlier;
  - How alternative lunch provision may be provided if the usual arrangements are effected (consultation with the schools provider should take place in relation to alternative provision);
  - Some classes should have no more than 30 pupils within them, but having more than 30 in one class due to temporary exceptional circumstances **is reasonable**

and therefore a need for a temporary increase in class numbers should not be a reason to close the school;

- How the school building might be used to ensure there is adequate supervision - for example use of the hall and other larger spaces where this is practicable;
  - Limit the extent to which students have to move between buildings;
  - Plan the curriculum offer and / or the strategies you will use to ensure students are managed effectively and safely with the employees available.
- 4.2 If a number of school staff are unable to attend work on time/throughout the day, schools have the flexibility to work creatively, perhaps bringing together groups and classes with teachers and support staff working together.
- 4.3 The infant class size limit does not apply to activities normally carried out in larger groups for example assemblies, sports and other structured or unstructured activities that the school may choose to provide as part of a rich curriculum offer.
- 4.4 In relation to snow - clearing of snow on school grounds is the responsibility of the school and the Caretaker/Site Manager are required only to clear doorways and the immediate lead in path to a width of at least 3 feet or 1 metre, to allow free access and egress to and from the premises. Any areas affected by ice should be covered with rock salt/grit as required. Pedestrian areas will be treated by the Local Authority in exceptional weather conditions, subject to the resources of the council. Further information on priority areas can be found as follows: <http://www.rochdale.gov.uk/parking-roads-and-transport/gritting-and-winter-service/Pages/gritting-updates.aspx>.

## **5. COMMUNICATION ARRANGEMENTS**

- 5.1 It is essential that, when there is potential for school closures or partial closures, due to severe weather conditions, Headteachers are in a position to communicate quickly and clearly with parents. This is just as important in relation to schools which are to remain open as it is to those which are closed. It is the schools responsibility to notify parents of the school closure using their internal systems and texting services and they should ensure that their own website is updated in relation to closures and re-opening.
- 5.2 Schools should notify the Local Authority (LA) via the Council's Corporate Communication Team using the text message alert system. Text 'SNOW' (followed by a short message inc. school name) to 60300. This is the way that we, in the LA, alert everyone that needs to know of your school closure including Early Help and Schools (Assistant Director); Human Resources; Health & Safety and School Improvement teams. These texts are essential both in and out of school hours.
- 5.3 The Local Authority is required to constantly update the DfE, Council's Media Team of the impact of severe weather throughout its duration and updates in relation to the schools position should be provided as requested.



## **Services**

- 5.4 It is the schools responsibility to notify all of their service providers and any user of the site of its closure including, catering, cleaning, school crossing patrol, transport, employee agencies, out of school employees, sure start/children's centres etc. There may be additional/potential charges should services not be advised of school closures.
- 5.5 Arrangements for school transport and crossing patrols should be made (the contact numbers can be found in an appendix to this document).
- 5.6 Parents should give strict instructions to the children as to what they should do in the event of the School Bus Service not turning up to take them to school.

## **6. ARRANGEMENTS FOR EMPLOYEES**

- 6.1 The overriding principle is that it is the responsibility of all school employees to make every effort to attend for duty. Employees should effectively plan ahead and be prepared for travelling to work during severe weather.
- 6.2 Where traffic, police and other organisations recommend only "essential travel" the DfE have determined that this includes pupils being able to attend school and employees being able to attend work **in** schools. Employees are required to attend for work during days of inclement weather and should ensure that they are aware of the weather forecast which predict snow etc. and ensure that they have suitable arrangements in place to enable them to fulfil their contractual obligations. Employees are responsible for getting to work and each person must make their own arrangements to attend work within the context of the "essential travel" definition given above. This is highlighted to encourage employees to make good plans in the event of severe weather.
- 6.3 A decision in relation to a school closure relates to a closure for pupils and staff still have a duty to attend their school if they possible can, the closure should not prevent staff for reporting for work.
- 6.4 Where a member of staff may arrive later than their usual time, they should make every effort to report their late arrival as soon as possible and attend work at the earliest opportunity.
- 6.5 An employee's failure to attend work and fulfill their contractual requirements will result in the day being treated as a day's unpaid absence with the appropriate deduction from salary.

### **Absence due to sickness**

- 6.6 Where an employee is absent due to sickness on a day which is known to the School to be a severe weather day (school closure, severe weather warnings etc.) then the School's Health Related Absence Procedure must still be followed.

## **Unauthorised Absence**

- 6.7 An employee who is absent from work and fails to notify the Headteacher, will have their absence recorded as unauthorised and pay will be deducted. Disciplinary action may also be taken.

## **7. ATTENDANCE STATISTICS FOR PUPILS**

With regard to attendance statistics for pupils, the Department for Education advises that when a pupil cannot attend because of severe weather, the school can use absence code 'Y', which means that the absence will not affect absence statistics.

USEFUL CONTACTS	
<p>Council's corporate communication team for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emergency press statements</li> <li>• Media handling</li> </ul>	<p>01706 925739  <a href="mailto:Danny.Brierley@Rochdale.Gov.UK">Danny.Brierley@Rochdale.Gov.UK</a>            Out of hours:            01706 926002  <a href="mailto:newsdesk@rochdale.gov.uk">newsdesk@rochdale.gov.uk</a></p>
Property Services Helpdesk – Reactive Maintenance Team as identified in the Schools Emergency Plan for Building issues e.g. Boiler, pipes, roof, etc.	01706 924567 (in and out of hours)
Rochdale Emergency Contact Centre Assistance from trades people following fire, flooding, vandalism, etc. e.g. glazer, plumber, joiner	01706 924567 (this will default to the 0300 393 8875 out of hours number)
Electricity North West – (National Grid)	0800 195 4141
Gas – (National Grid)	0800 111 999
Water Customer Services Helpline – (United Utilities)	0845 746 2200
Police - non emergency	101
Fire Service - non emergency	0161 736 5866

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