

Horsmonden Primary School

Emergency Closure Policy



Prepared by:

Approved on:

.....

.....

Signed (*Chair of Governors*)

Date of next Review:

.....

.....

EMERGENCY SCHOOL CLOSURE POLICY

This policy applies to school closures for any reason, for example severe weather or water supply switched off.

As a fundamental principle every effort must be made to keep schools open, even if only limited numbers of pupils can attend. There is a legal requirement to keep schools open for children to attend for 190 days per year (380 sessions). However schools may close due to 'unavoidable' circumstances, i.e. when it is no longer safe for staff or pupils to be onsite. The cancellation of public transport or the inability to run a normal timetable due to staff absences are not considered unavoidable circumstances.

The government has stressed the importance of schools remaining open, wherever possible, as closures have a knock on effect on parents/carers who are key workers in other areas of the public sector, e.g. Health Services, thus undermining crucial service delivery. The overriding principle is, therefore, for schools to remain open to the maximum degree possible, as is consistent with health and safety requirements, even if it is not possible to run a full timetable.

1. Preparation Ahead of Severe Weather

There are long and short term actions to take that will increase the school's ability to remain open during times of severe snow and ice.

Long term – in advance of winter weather:

- Ensure procedures are fully communicated to staff and parents/carers.
- Ensure stocks of salt/grit/sand are adequate for the time of year and foreseeable weather.
- Pre-identify the outdoor areas used by pedestrians most likely to be affected by ice, for example: - building entrances, pedestrian walkways, shortcuts, sloped areas and areas constantly in the shade or wet.
- Ensure water, boiler and heating systems are regularly maintained.
- Inspect windows and exterior doors for draughts.
- Check that pipes are appropriately lagged.

Short term – before forecasted severe snow and ice:

- Regularly check weather forecasts via news and websites. Take action whenever freezing temperatures are forecast.
- Make sure curtains and blinds are closed at night to retain heat.
- Close doors between areas of differing temperatures.
- To enable proper circulation of warm air keep radiators clear of obstruction.
- Put procedures in place to prevent any icy surface forming and/or to keep pedestrians off the slippery surface.
- Gritting should be carried out when frost, ice and 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 evening before the frost settles, if this is possible (or additional salt is required), use it early in the morning before people arrive.

2. Taking the Decision to Close the School

The Headteacher and/or Deputy Headteacher in consultation with other members of staff will take the decision 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 students and staff. A suitable and sufficient risk assessment should be undertaken prior to any decision being made.

In such circumstances, during each day the Headteacher should review the risk assessment. It is expected that a school will remain open until normal time for the end of the school day. However if the revised risk assessment indicates that circumstances have changed to such an extent that the Headteacher believes conditions are now unsafe, early closure may be necessary. In such circumstances the school should register their closure online at www.kentclosures.co.uk

This decision will 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 students and/or staff at risk. In reaching this decision, the Headteacher and/or Deputy Headteacher will take full account of local circumstances and, in particular, the following considerations:

(a) Both short and longer term weather information: Further information on this will be sought from the Kent Local Authority Schools website www.kent.gov.uk/winter and BBC local weather updates.

(b) Advice regarding local transport and the safety of local roads: whether buses and trains are running, and whether it is safe to drive on local roads. Attention should be paid to ascertaining what would be a safe and appropriate time to send students and staff home. The LA's Twitter update service @GrittingKent provides up to date information on ice alerts, the weather forecast and when they will be out gritting. The information is also uploaded to Facebook, Gritting Kent.

(c) Arrangements for student safety: The absolute priority is to ensure that provision is made for each and every child. Where children cannot be collected immediately or it is deemed that they cannot make their own way home safely, they will be kept at school and supervised until collection can take place.

(d) Whether the school is safe and accessible to all students and staff including those with disability, and has working heating/electrics/water.

(e) Whether there will be enough support staff available to provide for the safe movement around school of those students with visual impairment.

The closure or opening of other schools in the proximity will not be the key factor in such taking decisions, although this may be taken into account. It is the responsibility of all teachers to make every effort to attend for duty.

ADVICE TO STAFF

The expectation is that staff will make every effort to attend school during severe snow and ice except in the most extreme cases where they can demonstrate a high degree of risk or by virtue of distance or terrain and absence of transport that it's simply not possible for them to attend. The Headteacher should be aware of the location of their staff and be able to communicate with them to determine attendance. Staff should, where possible, have alternative arrangements to get to work: walk, bus, train, car sharing.

ADVICE TO PARENTS/CARERS

It is recognised that parents have a key role to play in the event of severe weather. If they have concerns about bringing their children to and from the school, they should "play safe" and keep them at home, informing the school that they are doing so. The fact that several parents take this view does not, however, mean that the school will be closed, unless the considerations listed above indicate that this is the only sensible decision.

3. Communication Arrangements with Parents/Carers and Staff

It is essential that, when there is potential for school closures due to severe weather conditions, we are in a position to communicate quickly and clearly with parents and staff. The Horsmonden Primary School website is an important

information channel in these situations. Any decision to close should be taken as early in the day as possible, or if feasible notification should be provided the evening before. The Emergency School Closure procedure should be used to communicate the decision. This will involve putting an announcement on the website and texting parents and staff. In addition, to determine whether the school is open or closed, staff/parents can visit www.kentschoolclosures.co.uk and search for the school in the search box. The Kent Closures website can also be used to find out if other services in Kent are open or closed, such as nurseries, children's centres and libraries. Parents/Carers and staff can also listen to KMFM, BBC Radio Kent, or Heart FM to hear if the school has closed.