

Rasharkin Primary School



Adverse Weather and Exceptional Closures Policy

Rasharkin Primary School Adverse Weather & Exceptional Closure Policy

Rasharkin Primary School will always endeavour, within the constraints of statutory guidance and health and safety legislation, to remain open during the school day to deliver the best possible education to its pupils.

An exceptional closure is unplanned, and is due to unforeseen circumstances such as adverse weather conditions, or power failure. During such circumstances, the safety of all pupils and staff is of paramount importance. The principal is authorised to make an emergency closure, in consultation with the Chair or Vice-chair of the Board of Governors, in exceptional circumstances, when it is absolutely necessary to do so in the best interests of the pupils and staff.

Examples of specific exceptional closures are:

- The death of a teacher or pupil at the school
- Flooding or burst pipes at the school
- Electricity failure
- Heating failure
- Damage to school
- Severe weather conditions e.g. heavy snowfall
- School being used as a polling station for parliamentary/local government elections

The decision to close the school will be taken by the principal following the completion of a risk assessment, for Rasharkin Primary School. In times of extreme weather, the principal will consider the risk as far in advance of such a closure as possible. The principal will endeavour to make a decision at the earliest possible time. Decisions the night before can only be taken when all the indications are that adverse conditions will continue overnight. If there is any doubt the principal will defer the decision until the next morning.

Factors to be considered in coming to any decision to close for exceptional reasons

- Can pupils and staff access the school building safely by pedestrian and vehicle routes? If not, can access be made safe?
- Is the school appropriately heated?
- Can buses, meal deliveries, etc., reach the school, particularly if the unforeseen circumstances affect a large proportion of pupils?
- If a limited number of staff can attend, are there enough adults to ensure adequate pupil teacher ratios?
- If there was an emergency could the school be safely evacuated and emergency services reach the school?

Decisions taken must be applicable to each individual school – not based on neighbouring schools whose conditions may differ.

Communication regarding exceptional closures due to adverse weather conditions

Closure notification before the start of the school day:

- As the principal lives a distance away from the school she may contact, the Chair of Governors, and Mr. Sam Calderwood, Buildings Supervisor, to enable her to make an informed decision on the closure of the school, as early as possible.
- Parents will be notified by text via the school's Textlocal service as soon after 7.30am as possible
- The closure will be posted on the School Website

The Department has developed an online application for schools to apply for an exceptional closure which should help to expedite the process. The application can be found at the following link: <http://apps.education-ni.gov.uk/appExclos/default.aspx>. The principal has registered Rasharkin Primary School for this service.

Closure notification during the school day

If the weather deteriorates during the day:

- The school may be closed early, but only in extreme cases
- Parents will be notified by text via the school's Textlocal service as soon as a decision to close has been made
- The closure will be posted on the school website www.rasharkinprimaryschool.com
- The school will be kept open, with as many staff as possible on hand, until the last pupil has left
- It is not possible for pupils to be given lifts by members of staff
- Staff travel must also be taken into consideration for health and safety reasons
- Where possible parents/carers will be notified later in the day regarding a closure for the next day to facilitate the making of childcare/family arrangements

*The school will make all practicable efforts to keep parents informed as to the situation with the school during adverse weather conditions, as we appreciate that such conditions and the uncertainty, places difficulties upon parents. **Parents are expected to check their text messages (first priority contacts only) and notify the school office for any change in contact details. We will send a 'test' text message each September to check that everyone is receiving our messages.***

EA buses transport many of our children to school. Each driver has the responsibility for deciding if their bus will complete all, some, or part of their normal route. We will try to communicate this information to parents as soon as we know, however it is not always possible that parents will receive this before the usual time for bus collection.

It is always very important that parents make informed decisions on the safety of their children travelling on dangerous roads regardless of whether the school is open or closed.

References

EN083 – Emergency School Closure Notifications

DE Circular 2020/09 School Optional Days and Exceptional Closure Days

Department of Education Checklist Exceptional Closure schools (Dec 2018)

Agreed (Chair, Board of Governors):



Date: 26/10/22

Appendix 1

Adverse Weather Risk Assessment

ACTIVITY	HAZARD	PERSONS WHO MAY BE AT RISK	CONTROLS IN PLACE	FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS
Travel - Getting to the school	Dangerous travel in extreme bad weather conditions	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisors and/or maintenance staff, pupils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal monitors weather conditions/warnings www.metoffice.gov.uk No travel should be considered if extreme bad weather warning and advice given for only essential journeys to be undertaken. 	Rural location of school and/or majority of school personnel. Regional warnings may not be accurate at local level, so local media broadcasts may also help. Refer to e.g. BBC weather and search by postcode
Travel via known areas of expected road closure or steep gradients	Dangerous travel in extreme bad weather conditions	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisors and/or maintenance staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prior planning by staff regarding alternative 'main road' routes to school location. 	Walking may be reasonably expected, when cars or other vehicles cannot make it all the way into the school. For example parents may decide to park on Duneaeny Road and escort children on footpath to school gate. Principal to consider what is reasonable based on locality and staff.

Main entrance into school grounds, including Bamford Park	Entrance not possible	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisors and/or maintenance staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Park car outside school until clearance can be made, e.g. in Bamford Park • Or consider parking in village main street and walking into school. 	Signage on main entrance, or other entrances if prohibited from entry due to ice or other obstruction. Staff should avoid parking on Duneaney Road or Bamford Park, all day, to help alleviate congestion.
Getting appropriate members of staff to open school	Inadequate supervision	Teachers and pupils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A means of communicating with school staff in order to establish their attendance on the day of extreme bad weather. Staff will communicate with principal via her mobile (phone call / text message) when possible • A means to communicate with school bus service (drivers have principal's mobile number), local authority to establish pupil means of getting to school. • Principal to establish what would constitute appropriate supervision – through dynamic assessment on the day of extreme bad weather. 	The emphasis should be on how to operate safely, not whether a full and normal curriculum could be followed. Primary school pupils are likely to be local, with a greater expectancy of attendance, however as RPS is a rural school, with most children travelling from surrounding areas highly dependent on school buses therefore numbers may be less – and supervision easier.
Access to school buildings	Slips, trips or falls	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisors and/or maintenance staff, contractors, parents/carers and pupils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salting/gritting could be undertaken when snow or ice is foreseeable. • Salt/grit spreading on pedestrian walkways and snow clearance where reasonable. • Whenever possible steps, ramps etc. should not be used. However if appropriately treated, these pedestrian walkways should be no different from a treated path. • The Principal to determine which walkways should be used and treated first. 	Extreme bad weather is generally forecast, although snow/ice can be worse or less than expected, depending on local geography. If a school's salt/grit stock is low then only main walkways could be treated. Other routes could be signed to prevent use.

Heating and Welfare facilities	Cold – below permitted work level (16° C / 60.8° F). No sanitary or drinking water	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisors and/or maintenance staff, contractors and pupils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constant heating throughout periods of known cold snaps to prevent frozen pipes. Boiler has anti frost protection automatic system. • Maintenance of water systems, for example prompt repair of leaks and drips. • Regular maintenance staff checks to ensure heating and water systems are working well. 	If the school premises cannot be heated or provision of water for sanitary use or drinking cannot be made within school hours then the school may have to close.
Keeping the school open	Slips, trips or falls of pupils at break-time	Pupils and Supervisory Assistants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No use of playgrounds and other external areas, when snow/ice cannot be easily removed or reduced. • If there are external areas free or generally free of snow/ice, supervised play/break can be undertaken. • The supervision level should be higher and running prohibited. • Any areas of snow/ice remaining should be avoided and managed, e.g. cones used to mark area of ice. • Pupils should be informed of restrictions. 	Certain areas could be cordoned off and managed through salting/gritting prior to releasing for use. Melted snow/ice can refreeze so continued attention may be needed. If necessary, use only one playground therefore as restricted space then staggered breaks could be undertaken. However, could this system be appropriately supervised? Allow children to play on grass in icy / snowy weather to minimise risks.
Continuing to keep the school open	Further snow or ice, or icing of previous fall	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisors and/or maintenance staff, and pupils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principal to monitor the weather conditions through the Met Office and local media. • Information may also be gained from the EA. • Further salt/grit could be used on walkways and other areas to minimise for the next day. • Surface water could be brushed to drains to avoid icing up overnight. • Maintain walkways and key roadways. 	Further stock of salt/grit could be organised and/or maintenance undertaken on water or heating systems to ensure they continue to work effectively.

Appendix 2 – KEY WEBSITES AND CONTACTS

NI Met Office			www.metoffice.gov.uk
DfI Roads			www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/topics/roads
NI Water			www.niwater.com
NI Direct			https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/school-terms-and-school-closures
Police Service for Northern Ireland		0845 600 8000	www.psnl.police.uk
NI Fire and Rescue Service			www.nifrs.org
EA	North Eastern Region Nigel Freeburn	nigel.freeburn@eani.org.uk Tel: 028 9448 2233	
DfI Rivers	DfI Rivers HQ	rivers.registry@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk	https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/topics/rivers-and-flooding
Department of Education	Tackling Educational Disadvantage Team	attendance@education-ni.gov.uk Tel: 028 9127 9543	www.education-ni.gov.uk
Application to DE for exceptional closure		http://apps.education-ni.gov.uk/appExclos/default.aspx	