

Arrangements for Exceptional/Emergency School Closures Guide

HS-G-27

For compliance with:

- Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974
- The Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999

This document applies to:

- Directors, Heads of Service and Senior Managers, who have responsibilities as set out in the Health & Safety Policy.
- Any staff who have a level of responsibility for the management of a school or education premises and its operation.
- All staff who support managers in the operation of a school or education premises

Review History

This standard will be reviewed every three years or following legislative changes

Date	Version	Summary of changes	Amended by:
Feb 2009	1	Creation of Document by Gill Sweetenham	GS
20.10.12	1	Review by Health & Safety Team	MY
20.12.13	1	Annual Review and transfer to new template	KB
4.8.15	1	Review as part of document review schedule	KB
24.1.17	1	Update to correct post titles and typos	GS
3.1.19	1	Review to update advice offered and requirements of notification	RB
16.9.19	1	Additional information about extreme heat/humidity added.	KB

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Introduction

These guidelines set out the procedures for dealing with exceptional and emergency closures. This document does not include guidance on planned school closure. Schools cannot prepare for every eventuality. However, circumstances in which closures MAY be necessary could include adverse weather conditions, building defects, critical incidents.

Closing a school is never an easy option. In taking a decision to close a school, the safety of pupils, staff and visitors is of paramount importance. However, schools should remain open wherever possible, with closure always considered as the last resort.

The school should have contingency plans in place according to the local requirements of the individual school to cater for such an eventuality. Plans should include roles and responsibilities, and the arrangements for communication and media management. Every effort must be made to give adequate notice of school closures to parents/ guardians. **It is good practice to have planned in advance to mitigate and prepare for the circumstances of closures.**

1. When Should a School Close

Risk Assessment

The decision to close a school will normally rest with the headteacher, on the basis of weather forecasts and on-the-spot observations.

Before making the decision to close, the headteacher should undertake a risk assessment (see Appendix A) and decide if there is significant risk of severe injury, ill health or inability to comply with relevant legislation. Any of these factors could lead to their decision to close part or all of the school. Wherever possible this risk assessment should include consultation with Brighton and Hove City Council's Head of School Organisation and Head of Education Capital , if appropriate (see Emergency Closure Contact List Section 7).

If prior consultation is not possible, then any decision to close should be reported to the Executive Director - Families Children & Learning via an email to educationandskills@brighton-hove.gov.uk as soon as possible. Once the Council is made aware of a school closure colleagues in other Council teams will be made aware.

2. Advice on closure due to severe weather

When deciding if a school should close due to severe weather, consideration should be given to adequate staff attendance (see below) and whether the severe weather presents a significant hazard to staff and pupils. Severe weather includes both extremes in high and low temperatures and snow/ice.

NB: When radio stations advise people to avoid non-essential travel, it is directed at travel that could quite easily be deferred or cancelled altogether. It does not mean that travel to school or work is unnecessary.

Keeping schools open during severe weather

Where through risk assessment it has been identified that a school can remain open during severe weather, consideration must be given to any additional control measures needed to ensure safety.

Extreme Cold, Ice and/or Snow

During icy or snowy conditions, this will include the need to ensure safe access/egress routes into the school. Key/main route(s) should be identified and cleared of snow/ice. Please note that it is not necessary to clear every route into the school and the risk assessment should determine which route or routes are appropriate and safe to clear. Where grit/salt is used, this must be cleared away once the ice/snow has melted as the grit itself can create a slip hazard.

Extreme Heat and/or Humidity

There is no legal upper limit to working in hot conditions. When potentially exceptionally hot weather is forecast, schools should consider the projects and activities that are planned and what needs to happen to control the risks associated with working in hot weather. The decision to close a school due to extreme heat/ humidity should be established through risk assessment.

- Plan and prepare for hot weather and ensure suitable controls are in place, especially for outdoor activities such as end of year trips, sports days, summer fete's etc. Risk assessments should cover activities taking place in hot weather.
- Ask your contractors to specifically refer to working in hot weather conditions in their risk assessments and method statements, particularly in relation to preventing heat exhaustion, heatstroke, dehydration, etc.

There is specific guidance available in the councils [BHCC Hot Weather Guidance](#) available on BEEM.

The HSE's website states taking the following into consideration:

- reschedule outdoor work to cooler times of the day
- provide more frequent rest breaks and introduce shading to rest areas
- provide free access to cool drinking water
- introduce shading in areas where individuals are working
- encourage the removal of personal protective equipment when resting to help encourage heat loss
- educate workers about recognising the early symptoms of heat stress

Here is a link to the HSE's page regarding [working outdoors in hot weather](#).

Liability during severe weather

Concerns have been raised that schools may be more liable if they choose to stay open during severe weather and an incident occurs. In the event of an incident occurring (such as a fall on ice resulting in an injury) the school would need to demonstrate that it had done what it reasonably could to prevent it e.g. clearing snow and gritting key routes for visitors and staff to access, and giving appropriate warnings to staff and pupils etc. With adequate controls such as these examples in place, it is likely that a defence to a claim for compensation for a slip on snow/ice would be successful because the judge would otherwise have to conclude that the entire school should have been closed to avoid the accident.

Under Section 1 Compensation Act 2006, when a court is determining whether certain actions should have been undertaken to prevent an incident, consideration should be given as to whether these steps/action would prevent a 'desirable activity' (e.g. schooling) from taking place.

A court would therefore weigh up what actions the school had taken, with the impact that closing the school would have. Therefore, where a school does what is reasonable to ensure the health and safety of visitors and staff, it is unlikely that the school would be found negligent because they had chosen to keep the school open. The decision to close needs to be based on risk assessment and not based on the fear of compensation claims.

Closure during the school day

It may sometimes be necessary for schools to close during the day; for example, if the weather is deteriorating and children may not be able to get home later. If the council receives a severe weather warning this will be communicated to schools by e-mail. This does not mean that your school has to close. The decision to close must be assessed individually by each school. For example a school where children live within walking distance may decide not to close, whereas a school where most pupils travel by public transport would close. The Met Office website home page www.metoffice.gov.uk gives details of any current severe weather warnings. If you take the decision to close the school, inform the Council as soon as possible. Updates will need to be provided on a daily basis.

Where the decision is taken to close the school during the day, schools need to consider the risks to children and parents of closing. Roads may be hazardous and extra traffic may increase the danger. Pupils should not be sent home unless the headteacher is confident of their ability to make the journey safely, gain access to their homes and be safe there. **If parents have not previously been advised that the school is closing, pupils may be at risk. The school must ensure that all pupils will be safe if they are sent home early.**

Staff attendance

Although it is recognised that severe weather conditions make it difficult for staff to get to and from work, all staff are expected to come in unless they have permission to be away from work for other reasons. Transport problems, which may be caused by snow or other factors, do not alter that obligation. If it is anticipated that it will take longer to travel to school then school staff should take this into account and start their journey at a reasonable time. This obligation applies equally to all staff and is not affected by where they live.

When adverse weather conditions make travelling difficult or dangerous, staff should conduct their own dynamic risk assessment and inform the headteacher. A dynamic risk assessment is the continuous assessment of risk during rapidly changing circumstances, in order to ensure continued health and safety. Dynamic risk assessments do not need to be recorded. The headteacher may then authorise staff not to attend school or to travel later in the day as conditions improve. Staff are not required to attend their nearest school to offer their services.

Transport

The attendance of many pupils will depend on road conditions and the decision of transport providers on whether or not to operate. If your school has a high proportion of pupils who are transported to school by the Council, please liaise

with the contractors before making a decision, as this will help you judge how many pupils to expect if you keep the school open. If you close the school, the contractors and the Council must be notified as soon as possible.

If a decision is made after school buses and other vehicles have begun their journey to school, please remember that contractors arriving at school with the pupils on board are under no obligation to immediately take pupils home again. School staff must remain at school to supervise the pupils remaining on site until contractors can take them home. **If you need to cancel your school transport, please notify the Home to School Transport team:**

hometoschooltransport@brighton-hove.gov.uk and transport provider, if you have contact details.

Coding for school registers for pupil absence

Under the revised Pupil Registration Regulations 2006 and the school attendance guidance September 2018, schools should record absences related to exceptional closures using:

Registration Code: Y. Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances

The Department for Education provides a further description within [School](#)

[Attendance: Departmental advice for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and Local Authorities.](#)

This code can be used where a pupil is unable to attend because:

- The school site, or part of it, is closed due to an unavoidable cause; or

- The transport provided by the school or a local authority is not available and where the pupil's home is not within walking distance; or
- A local or national emergency has resulted in widespread disruption to travel which has prevented the pupil from attending school.

This code is collected in the School Census for statistical purposes.

Whole or partial school closures that are known or planned in advance such as: between terms; half terms; occasional days (for example, bank holidays); weekends (where it is required by the management information system); up to five non-educational days to be used for curriculum planning/training; and use of schools as polling stations should use: **Code #: Planned whole or partial school closure.**

3. Advice on closure for buildings' defects

There are a number of building issues that might result in consideration being given to closure of a school or part of it. This may include:

- Structural defects
- Mechanical services – heating issues, water supply, gas release
- Electrical services – interruption of supply
- Inadvertent exposure to asbestos
- Positive Legionella sample (where there is a risk of infection)
- Fire damage
- Delay in completion of planned work

In all cases it is essential that the council are informed immediately of any such problem. Assistance will be available to help resolve such issues and advice offered about whether or not a school needs to close. It may be possible to create temporary solutions or reduce the impact to limited areas of a building. The council would seek assurances that remedial work was completed as quickly as possible to keep disruption to a minimum.

Should there be any concerns regarding health and safety, schools must contact the Health and Safety Team. (see Contact List section 7)

4. Advice on closure due to critical incidents

What is a critical incident?

A critical incident may be defined as any event which threatens severely to disrupt, in whole or in part, the functioning of the school as a whole. Critical incidents would normally have the following features:

- There are substantial threats to the safety or wellbeing of individuals or to the fabric or reputation of the institution; and
- The incident is likely, or has the potential, to lead to the suspension of normal operations.

There are two types of Critical Incident likely to affect a school:

- An internally generated incident, about which there is some knowledge and action can be taken to improve or reduce the impact by the school's Critical Incident Management Team, and;
- An externally generated incident, where something beyond the limits of the school may impact upon it, resulting in the need to take immediate action.

In the case of the externally generated Critical Incident, which may or may not be a Major Incident, one of the emergency services will require the immediate evacuation of the school to a place of safety. In this case having a 'Grab-Bag' containing all current contacts required, a plan of the school showing key services including shut off points for gas, water and electricity, would be beneficial. Assistance will be provided at the place of safety by the council's Emergencies & Resilience Team.

Where there is an internally generated Critical Incident, the school's Critical Incident Management Team should have clearly defined roles in the preparation for a forced closure. The school's Action Plan should have been tested and exercised. Assistance with evacuation can be provided through the provision of buses through early contact with the council's Emergencies & Resilience Team.

5. Communicating information about emergency closures

How will staff, parents and students find out if their school is closed?

Headteachers should advise staff, parents and students to check the school's website or look for a communication from the school's text message service or similar communication tool for school closure information. Headteachers and, as necessary, the schools critical incident team will work with the Council and local media when it is necessary to close schools and/or provide updates on the situation. Schools will need to inform parents of how such information will be communicated in advance of any closures.

How will staff, parents and students find out when their school is re-opening?

School should have a variety of methods to get information to parents, staff and students about re-opening. These could include:

- Posting notices on the school gates
- School websites
- Staff telephone cascade
- Parent telephone cascade
- Text messaging
- Messages via the local media

6. Staff attendance

When a school is closed to pupils, staff are expected to present themselves for work unless told otherwise by the headteacher. **It is not a requirement that staff should attend their nearest school on the first day of their school's closure.** However in the case of longer closures headteachers may decide to make arrangements for staff to work on an alternative site when appropriate health & safety/ safeguarding arrangements have been put in place. Schools should have plans in place to contact contract staff (catering and cleaning services etc.) who also need to be advised of any emergency requirements.

Schools that are part of the school meals contract also need to notify the School Meals Team Manager on 07833 480061 and by email to:
schoolmeals@brighton-hove.gov.uk

7. Further Information

The [Health Safety & Wellbeing Legal Register](http://beem.org.uk/P3557) (also available at <http://beem.org.uk/P3557>) contains all relevant legislation such as the Health & Safety at Work etc. Act and all Regulations.

Relevant links

[Met Office Homepage](#) – Weather information and alerts

Emergency Closure Contact List

Service	Post	Daytime number	Out of hours number
Emergencies & Resilience Team (Critical and major Incident support, including plan preparation and testing)	Emergency Planning & Resilience Duty officer	01273 296699 or 01273 296643	07540 675169
Executive Director of Families Children & Learning	Executive Director	01273 293514	n/a
Brighton & Hove City Council Health & Safety Team	Health & Safety Duty Officer	01273 292062	n/a
Education & Skills	Head of School Organisation	01273 290732 Mobile: 07584 217328	n/a
Education Capital	Education Capital Team	01273 293477 (with voicemail)	n/a
Education & Skills	Head of Standards & Achievement	01273 293513	n/a
Home to School Transport	Admissions and Transport Team	01273 293501 Mobile: 07548148036/	n/a
Media Relations	Communications team	01273 293033 01273 291040 01273 291031	07833 483181 (emergency only)

Risk Assessment Form Version:

For further info on risk assessment see: BHCC Guidance

To calculate Risk Rating (R): assess the likelihood (L) of an accident occurring against the

Task / Activity Covered by the assessment				Likelihood (L)	X	Impact (I)	
				Almost Impossible	1	Insignificant (minor injury, no time off)	
Workplace			Unlikely	2	Minor (non-permanent injury, up to 7 days off)		
Date of Assessment		Date Assessment to be reviewed	Possible	3	Moderate ((injury causing more than 7 days off)		
Person Completing		Manager/ Head teacher	Likely	4	Major ((death or serious injury)		
Staff involved in assessment			Almost Certain	5	Catastrophic (multiple deaths)		
				Low =1-3	Moderate = 4-7	Significant = 8-14	High = 15-25

What are the significant, foreseeable, hazards? (the dangers that can cause harm)	Who is at Risk?	Current control measures (What is already in place/done)	Risk Rating			What additional controls will be put in place to reduce the risk further?	Revised Risk Rating			Sign as done
			L	I	R		L	I	R	
E.g. Slip, trip or fall on wet flooring	- Staff - Visitors etc.	- Barrier matting - Wet floor signs - No running rules (in schools)	3	2	6	- Introduce non-slip flooring to areas by external doorways - Provide cleaning/drying	2	1	2	

							<i>equipment for staff</i>				
1.			•								
2.			•								
3.			•								
4.			•								
5.			•								