



WANDSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL  
CHILDREN’S SERVICES DEPARTMENT

# Closure Policy for Schools

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## 1. School Closures

The primary purpose of this guidance is to set out the roles and responsibilities of those involved in the decision making process that needs to be taken prior to the closure of a school. In the unfortunate situation where an occasion arises that may deem it necessary for a school closure, there are some key points that need to be taken into consideration. It is important where possible to avoid the closure of a school and this policy seeks to provide advice on considerations that need to be taken by schools before, during and after the recovery stage of any circumstances which may arise. A couple of recent examples were the volcanic ash cloud which prevented staff and students being able to return to the UK and the heavy snowfall in London and in both situations, most schools managed to stay open.

In addition, safeguarding issues need to be weighed up before a decision to close the school is taken, including the impact that a closure would have on families. If partial closure seems inevitable, an emergency plan needs to be placed to aid in the effective management of such a situation, also to minimise the level of impact that a closure will have in the school's ability to maintain a good standard of education.

Schools are reminded that at all stages of the decision making process, advice is available. Section 9 of the policy provides contact information for both Children's Services and other departments within the Local Authority.

Please note that while this guidance is primarily for schools, the same principles of risk assessments are necessary before the closure of any Children's Services establishments.

## 2. Keeping Schools Open

Schools should operate normally wherever possible and only resort to closure, partial closure or early closure in exceptional circumstances when conditions are such that the health, safety and welfare of pupils and staff could be at risk.

The Local Authority has powers to close community and voluntary controlled schools across the borough. In practice, however, the decision should be taken by the Headteacher in consultation with the Chair of Governors (unless by prior agreement with the Governing Body, the decision is delegated solely to the Headteacher). Schools should consult with the Director of Children's Services or the Deputy or Assistant Director before making a decision to close.

Headteachers and Governing Bodies should determine in advance who will take the decision to close the school. When severe weather is forecast, the Department for Education encourages schools to review measures in place to try and reduce disruption to learning.

It is important to plan ahead to ensure that a reasoned approach to risks is taken on whether or not to close or keep the school fully or partially open.

## 3. Inclement Weather Defined

Inclement weather is defined as:

- a. Prolonged and/or excessive snow fall or icy conditions.
- b. Excessive and prolonged rainfall/flooding.
- c. Prolonged and/or excessively high temperatures.
- d. Prolonged and/or excessively low temperatures.
- e. Prolonged and/or excessively high winds that render travel dangerous.

## 4. Guiding Principles

The following principles seek to support Headteachers and Governing Bodies in responding appropriately during periods of inclement weather or emergency situations:

- a. Governing bodies should adopt an Inclement Weather Plan (see section 5) that provides for the health, safety and welfare of pupils and staff during periods of inclement weather.
- b. The Headteacher and Chair of Governors are responsible for making the decision to close the school and must undertake a risk assessment to determine the appropriate course of action.
- c. The school will consult and notify the Local Authority in the event of closure and remain in contact until such time as the school is fully reopened, this should include determining arrangements for catering and cleaning provision.

## 5. The Risk Assessment

The risk assessment should be undertaken to determine whether school closure is appropriate and to review the following key areas:

- Supervision and Safeguarding of pupils (e.g. staff shortage, safe travel)
- Access to and movement around the school (e.g. icy paths)
- Failure or loss of facilities on site (e.g. failure of heating system)
- Disruption to provision of school transport (e.g. hazardous road conditions).

Governing bodies should take these into account when writing and implementing their School Closure Policy.

**See Appendix A** for a general risk assessment template and guidance to assist Headteachers and Chairs of Governing Bodies in determining whether their school should remain open or not.

## **6. School Closure – Inclement Weather Plan**

### **6.1 Plan Ahead**

Assess immediately what hazards the severe weather e.g. snow could bring. There may be less supervision available, staff and pupils may arrive late and the number of minor slips and bumps may increase;

Identify the measures already in place to reduce risk to pupils and staff;

Identify any additional measures that would help to keep your school open.

### **6.2 Special schools and transport arrangements**

If circumstances prevent all or some of the School buses from operating for example adverse weather, the Director, Deputy Director or Assistant Director of Children's Services and the Director of Environment and Community Services will be notified by the Transport Manager to confirm the decision on whether to cancel one or more of the bus rounds. Special School Headteachers will be informed as soon as possible (or they may contact the transport section directly) so that they can make the necessary arrangements to notify parents and staff and a decision will need to be taken if the school is to close.

### **6.3 Procedure for Headteacher closing School**

If the Headteacher determines that the weather or other factors are serious enough to raise concerns about the health, safety and welfare of pupils and staff travelling to or from school, the Headteacher should implement the school's Emergency Plan.

The plan should contain information on:

- a. What types of inclement weather may constitute a health, safety and welfare issue and require the school to be (and remain) closed.
- b. How parents & staff will be notified that the school will be closed.
- c. What actions individual staff should take if the school is to remain closed.
- d. Which organisations and/or individuals should be contacted if the school is to remain closed.
- e. Contact telephone numbers for all necessary organisations and individuals.

A decision to close the school prior to the school day should be made as early as possible whilst attempting to take into account the time that staff and children may be leaving home to travel to school.

The school should inform the Local Authority (see section 9) and also update the OpenCheck system which the public can access either via mobile phone application or at <https://opencheck.atomwide.com>

## 6.4 Early School Closure

If the school remains open for the day, every effort should be made to send pupils home at the normal time. However, if the local weather conditions become a concern during the day, to the extent that pupils travelling home at the normal dismissal time may represent a potential health, safety and welfare issue, the Headteacher should implement the school's emergency plan which should include considerations for early school closure.

**6.5 Partial School Closure** (i.e. closure of part of the site or closure of the school to a specific year or year groups)

In the event of inclement weather, which has health, safety and welfare implications, consideration should be given to whether a partial closure rather than a full closure could be achieved in order to minimise disruption to education.

Further contingency measures may be required if the closure is to be lengthy (e.g. offsite provision).

## 7. Recording Attendance of Pupils

Guidance on how to record pupil absence is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-attendance>

In summary, if the school closes completely, all pupils should be marked code "Y" – "forced and partial closure". Code "Y", does not count as absence in the statistics.

If the school remains open, the only exception to this will be for pupils who are not within walking distance of the school, and who get to school by transport provided by the school or Local Authority, and where that transport is not available because of adverse weather conditions. If the school is partially closed the above Code "Y" should be used for pupils.

All other children should be expected to attend and should be marked as present or absent as normal. Department for Education (DfE) advise that Headteachers should determine whether a child's absence should be recorded as authorised or unauthorised during very severe weather conditions. If the Headteacher is satisfied that the reason a child could not get to school was because of the adverse weather, then that absence should be authorised; if the Headteacher judges the child could have made it to school, then that absence should be unauthorised.

DfE advise that the key indicator is persistent absence and that short periods of adverse weather are not likely to impact upon this. OFSTED inspectors look at trends over time and take into account incidents of adverse weather.

## **8. Attendance of School Based Employees**

### **8.1 Action for school closures**

Where, having considered all of the above, the Headteacher and Governing Body take the decision to close the school to both staff and pupils, staff will be granted time off with pay. For those schools using the council's payroll services, no action is required.

Staff should be notified of a school closure at the earliest opportunity. Governing Bodies should ensure that systems are in place to enable all staff to be contacted in these circumstances.

The Headteacher should ensure that any other visitors expected at the school on that day e.g. health workers, authority staff, contractors are notified of the closure. Visitors may be subject to the decisions of their own employers regarding work during inclement weather and are expected to notify schools if they will not be attending a planned appointment. If a visitor you were expecting does not attend, you should make attempts to contact them or, where this is not possible, notify their employer in order that their safety can be ascertained.

### **8.2 Action where school remains fully or partially open**

If the school is open, then any staff who would normally be expected to work on that particular day should make all reasonable efforts to attend their school at the earliest opportunity and keep their managers advised of their expected arrival time.

If staff are unable to attend work for valid reasons i.e. safety or travel disruptions, then they are expected to contact the school at the earliest opportunity to report their absence in accordance with Local procedures. Their absence will be recorded as authorised leave.

Staff who are absent on authorised leave in the above circumstances will have the option to use annual leave, flexi leave, unpaid leave or hours owed as time off in lieu to make up the time missed. The school may, for example decide to open on an alternative day when conditions improve and staff may make up the time by working that day.

It is for the Governing Body to sanction arrangements for time to be made up with due consideration of service needs and the relevant statutory terms and conditions. Where unpaid leave is agreed, this should be notified to the appropriate payroll provider.

If a member of staff fails to attend work and does not report their absence, then attempts should be made to contact them as soon as possible to ascertain their safety and the reason for their absence. Where there is no reasonable explanation for absence, the school is entitled to investigate this matter further. Schools are recommended to contact their HR providers for advice in these circumstances.

### **8.3 Action where school closes early**

Where staff are at work and are concerned about remaining at work and request to leave, schools are advised to give due consideration to such requests. In particular, schools should consider staff with special needs and/or who may otherwise be considered

vulnerable or at risk. Schools may be able to make arrangements to allay concerns, for example by arranging transport or arranging for staff to travel together or leave in a group.

If the Headteacher and Governing Body make the decision to send staff home part way through the working day, i.e. to close the school early, then staff are entitled to their normal pay.

#### **8.4 Records**

The Headteacher should ensure that records are kept of absences due to inclement weather, how much time was missed and how the absence was accounted for. The Local Authority may ask for this information for reporting purposes.



## 9. Contact Details at the Local Authority

If you close the school you must inform the Children's Services Department

Below is a list of useful contacts at Wandsworth Council that can be used when reporting a school closure.

	Tel. No
<b>Ana Popovici</b> Director of Children's Services Email: <a href="mailto:ana.popovici@RichmondandWandsworth.gov.uk">ana.popovici@RichmondandWandsworth.gov.uk</a>	020 8871 7891
<b>Kate Bond</b> Assistant Director of Children's Services Email: <a href="mailto:kate.bond@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk">kate.bond@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk</a>	020 8871 8794
<b>Pete Gaskin</b> Schools Support and Traded Services Email: <a href="mailto:peter.gaskin@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk">peter.gaskin@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk</a>	020 8871 7974
<b>Brendan Ryan</b> Education Human Resources Manager Email: <a href="mailto:Brendan.ryan@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk">Brendan.ryan@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk</a>	020 8871 5471
<b>Peter Wall</b> Transport Manager Email: <a href="mailto:peter.wall@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk">peter.wall@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk</a>	020 8871 8015 / 8016 / 7977
<b>David Sharp</b> Head of Planning & Capital Development Email: <a href="mailto:David.Sharp@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk">David.Sharp@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk</a>	020 8487 5108
<b>Lewis Brunton</b> Schools Support Manager Email: <a href="mailto:lewis.brunton@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk">lewis.brunton@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk</a>	020 8871 7992
<b>Charlie Masson Smith</b> Press Officer Email: <a href="mailto:Charlie.Masson-Smith@RichmondandWandsworth.gov.uk">Charlie.Masson-Smith@RichmondandWandsworth.gov.uk</a>	020 8871 6173

**Debbie Western**

Emergency Planning Officer

020 8871 5747

Email:

[debbie.western@RichmondandWandsworth.gov.uk](mailto:debbie.western@RichmondandWandsworth.gov.uk)

24 hours Emergency Control Centre (WEC)

020 8871 7490

Emergency Planning Unit

020 8817 5747

Schools & Community Psychology Service

020 8871 8744

Education Welfare Service

020 8871 8306

School Inspectors

Primary Schools:

020 8871 7608

Secondary Schools:

020 8871 8790

Public Affairs (press office)

020 8871 8902

Transport Manager

020 8871 8015

Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL)

020 7930 6441

GMB

020 8202 8272

NAHT

01628 524 087

NASUWT

020 7490 6130

NUT

020 8846 0600

Association of School and College Leaders

0116 299 1122

UNISON

0845 355 0845

## Appendix A

### Keeping schools open and school attendance in inclement weather

#### 10. Risk Assessment Guidance

The following information gives suggested risk categories e.g. control measures, to assist headteachers and Chairs of Governing Bodies when completing their own risk assessment to decide whether their school should remain open in bad weather, or whether a decision to close the school should be made.

Hazard Description	Control Measures
Insufficient staff in attendance to ensure safe levels of supervision of the pupils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Network of teacher / staff contacts – early warning of non-attendance.</li> <li>• Consider bringing classes together in the school hall to ensure adequate supervision levels.</li> <li>• Ensure compliance with schools' supervision policy – if compliance cannot be made, decision to close the school.</li> </ul>
Absence of members of staff with key roles for health and safety, e.g. fire marshals, first aiders	School should have contingency arrangements in place, ensuring an adequate number of staff have been trained in these roles to cover any absences.
Snow / ice on playground / entrance and other pathways, resulting in slips/trips and personal injury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearance of primary routes i.e. those access routes which are used the most, to ensure staff and pupils have safe access to the school building(s). As time permits, clearance of secondary routes.</li> <li>• Reduce the extent to which children and staff have to move between school buildings for different lessons.</li> <li>• If necessary, consider taking the playground out of use until weather improves.</li> </ul>
Loss of facilities on site, e.g. failure of heating, lighting, toilets, water, causing welfare concerns for pupils and staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supplementary heaters (subject to completion of risk assessment), temporary lighting, independent water supplies.</li> <li>• Consider partial closure or the availability of alternative accommodation.</li> </ul>
School provided transport – risk of personal injury to pupils during transportation to / from school	Discuss with, and take advice from the transport provider. If the provider advises that transport is not running, then those children would be excused from school.
If weather deteriorates, risk of personal injury to staff during journeys home	Consider possible arrangements for those living further away or in more remote areas to leave first.

In the event of school closing earlier than normal due to deterioration of weather conditions, safeguarding of the children and young people	Arrangements for ensuring the security of children who may be sent home early e.g. parent / carer at home so that the child is not going home to an empty house. Network of parent / carer contact details.
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## 11. Guidance on maximum / minimum temperatures in classrooms

The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations state that “During working hours, the temperature in all workplaces inside buildings shall be reasonable”. High temperatures, heat stress and dehydration can be serious problems at temperatures above 35 degrees centigrade so that should be regarded as the maximum reasonable temperature for prolonged periods of time in classrooms.

This temperature is above comfort temperatures, but healthy children should be able to cope with this if they are given generous supplies of cool water to drink. More sensitive children may experience problems at much lower temperatures and staff need to watch for signs of heat stress at temperatures above 28 degrees centigrade. Schools need to make arrangements to ensure they have adequate supplies of drinking water. It should be remembered that the amount of water that can be delivered through drinking fountains is small.

Minimum temperatures are specified in the school premises regulations. 18 degrees centigrade is normal for classrooms, 15 degrees centigrade in areas where there is a higher level than normal of physical activity (e.g. PE), and 21 degrees centigrade in areas where there is a lower than normal level of physical activity because of sickness or physical disability (e.g. sick rooms, isolation rooms).

## Appendix B

### West Hill Primary School Procedures Covid-19

In the event of a positive COVID 19 case we will follow the protocols of Public Health England and guidance issued by the government, having put into place all measures stipulated in our [Risk Assessment](#).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>

At all times the health and safety of all our pupils and staff are of paramount importance and decisions will be made on this basis.

PHE will guide us through the actions that we need to take in the event of thresholds being met for advice to be sought.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-local-restrictions-in-education-and-childcare-settings>

A whole school closure will take place only on the advice of Public Health England.