



Severe Weather Procedure

School Responsibility	Mr L Gilhooly
Headteacher	Mr L Gilhooly
Governor	Mrs Charlotte Monkman
Adopted	February 2023
Review	February 2026

ETHOS STATEMENT

The school was founded by and is part of the Catholic Church. The school is to be conducted as a Catholic School in accordance with the canon law and teachings of the Catholic Church and in accordance with the Trust Deed of the Diocese of Leeds in particular: 1. Religious education is to be in accordance with the teachings, doctrines, discipline and general and particular norms of the Catholic Church.

2. Religious worship is to be in accordance with the teachings, doctrines, discipline and liturgical norms of the Catholic Church.

And at all times the school is to serve as witness to the Catholic faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

MISSION STATEMENT

St Joseph is our patron saint and he inspires and guides us in our school mission:

- *Each one of us is part of God's family and we are all special*
- As God's children and family we love one another, pray together, play together and walk hand in hand with God
- God is our teacher and we are his gifts. He helps us learn together, work hard and do our best to make our world a better place
 - With fun, laughter and friendship we celebrate God's love
 - We respect and care for everyone and for God's wonderful world

Introduction

This guidance document aims to provide clarification on a number of important matters relating to severe weather and includes information provided by government.

It is for individual schools to make any decision to close. 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.

Planning Ahead for Severe Weather

When it comes to severe weather conditions such as heavy snow, Head Teachers 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.

In making plans for the winter, the Head Teacher should consider:

- How to contact staff and parents, as well as the wider community, including the local authority and the press
- Schools must ensure they have all the information they need in advance including contacts (name, telephone numbers) for those who will collect children if parents are not available.
- Maintaining stocks of salt and grit and reviewing the level of stock held
- Identifying which areas of the school site need to be kept clear of snow and ice and ensuring that school staff 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
- Associated risk assessments to be undertaken by the school and issuing specific instructions to staff, or other people, based on them
- Estimating who amongst your staff 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
- 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
 - Working together in cluster groups so that parents with more than one child in schools are able to make their decisions on the basis that schools in the area are making the same arrangements. It might also help with transport arrangements if all schools in an area decide, for example, to open late.

Making the decision to close the school

The local authority advice will be to remain open except in the most extreme or exceptional of circumstances. Head Teachers 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.

The overall decision on whether to close therefore lies with the Head Teacher – 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. Head Teachers should inform the Chair of Governors of the decision taken.

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 Head Teacher's view, to do so would put the health, safety or welfare of pupils and/or staff at risk. In reaching this decision, Head Teachers should take full account of local circumstances and, in particular, the following considerations: both short and longer term weather information: 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 staff) home when a blizzard is at its height.

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. The overriding principle is that it is the responsibility of all employees to make every effort to attend for duty at their normal school. Any decision to close should, where practicable, be made before 7.30am to allow information to be passed onto the media and relevant people as soon as possible.

Closure during the school day

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.

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 on school website. 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 2 emergency contacts and should have told the children what to do in the event of an emergency closure.

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. 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.

Remaining Open

As an alternative to closure, Head Teachers should consider:

- Opening the school later in the day and closing earlier
- 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
- Plan the curriculum offer and / or the strategies you will use to ensure students are managed effectively and safely with the staff available

Communication Arrangements

It is essential that, when there is potential for school closures due to severe weather conditions, Head Teachers 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. Schools should also follow the usual procedures (i.e. text messaging) to inform parents and carers. To make every attempt to publicise any closure, staff and/or a notice posted at the school gates could prevent pupils from being left by parents at the start of the school day

For further information, please see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/emergencies-and-severe-weather-schools-and-early-years-settings#severe-weather>

St Joseph's
Catholic Primary School Otley
a Voluntary Academy

As a family with God in our hearts, we love, laugh and learn.

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29 November 2023

Dear Parents/Carers,

ARRANGEMENTS REGARDING SNOW

When we have a downfall of snow overnight, we will endeavour to open school as normal. However, we need to consider how many staff can get to school safely and the safety of the children in their journeys to school. After assessing the situation, a message, via our texting service, will be sent by 7.30am if school is to have a delayed opening or to close. Also a notice will be posted on the school website.

In the event that school remains open, we will try to ensure clear pathways for children are available.

The snow is a joy for the children who naturally want to play out in it and have fun. To enable this to happen without them sitting in wet clothing for much of the day we will, if possible, have the children outside for a play together just before the end of the school day and then they can get in to dry warm clothes as soon as they get home. If your child goes to after school provision it would therefore be a good idea to send some spare clothes that they can change in to at the clubs so they don't miss out on the fun.

As ever, your support is much appreciated at times like these.

Yours sincerely,

Mr L Gilhooly
Headteacher



Checklist for Planning for Severe Weather

Before severe weather occurs

- Ensure the school has an incident management team for severe weather
- Consult with chair of governors
- Order grit/salt bins for the school
- Compile list of volunteers to clear snow, ice when required
- Acquire protective clothing, shovels etc for those clearing snow/ice
- Set up the arrangements for communicating directly with parents if closure seems a real possibility • Undertake risk assessments of site

When severe weather is forecast

- See local weather forecasts
- Remind staff of the schools plans and the expectation that the school will remain open
- Ensure that someone can get into school to answer the telephone and inform parents who are unaware of the closure.
- Ensure that parents are reminded of the process for receiving information about school opening hours and the arrangements for severe weather.

On the day/s of severe weather

- Make decision by 7 am to stay open, open for limited hours, or close, etc.
- Consult chair of governors etc.
- Notify local authority
- Notify parents, pupils, staff by text, phone etc.
- Undertake risk assessments as appropriate.

Afterwards

- Review plan and revise for next year
- Update arrangements for calling together the incident management team in the light of any staff changes, etc.