



Policy for Emergency Closure of School

In order to decide on the need for closure in times of extreme weather, such as a heavy snowfall, the Principal (or a designated deputy) will consider the checklist provided by DENI (Sept 2011). Any decision of the Principal (or agreed deputy), will only be made after carefully considering the agreed criteria for closure (Appendix 2) and will be applicable to Loreto College specifically. The Principal will liaise with the Principals from other schools, but any decision will not be based on the response of neighbouring schools, whose specific conditions may differ.

At all times the safety and welfare of students and staff is paramount in making any decision to close the school.

The checklist will have been reviewed as far in advance of any proposed closure as possible. This will normally be the night before any closure, if circumstances allow - and, if necessary, the decision to close the school the next day will be made the night before. This will allow early communication with parents and staff and ensure that both are informed in time to make necessary arrangements.

A decision to close the school on the night before can only be taken when all the indications are that adverse conditions will continue overnight. If there are any doubts, the Principal will defer a decision until early next morning.

While it may not always be possible for the Principal to make a decision to close the night before, a continuous monitoring of the criteria from the checklist will enable a decision to be made as early as possible the following morning. Parents and staff will be kept informed at all times using the agreed communication procedure. A time for the next update will be indicated at the end of each communication.

In arriving at any decision to close for exceptional reasons the following will be considered:

- Health and safety questions, including:
 - can pupils and staff access the school building safely?
 - can pupils and staff be evacuated in an emergency?
 - in an emergency, could the Emergency Services access the school?
 - is the area designated for disembarkation from transport safe for pupils?
- Transport – 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 and pupils can attend, is the PTR acceptable?
- An indication of the acceptable PTR should be included in the school's emergency plans for such events.
- Have local weather forecasts and road conditions, including those for areas from which staff will be travelling, been considered?

The Principal will carry out a comprehensive risk assessment (Appendix 1), based on the criteria, and using the proforma set out in appendix 1. Based on the result of this risk assessment, the Principal will then make a decision to remain open or to close the school. The principal will then communicate any decision using the agreed communication plan.

An attempt will be made, by opening the school on pre-arranged INSET days or exceptional closure days, to compensate for any closure due to poor weather.

Communication

The school has an agreed plan for communication, not only to advise parents and staff, and keep them informed, but also to advise the North Eastern Education and Library Board and the Department of Education of any decision regarding closure.

When a decision is taken to close the school during a normal school day, whilst pupils are still at school, parents will be informed directly via the TxtSolution texting service, introduced into the school in November 2011. It is important, therefore that all mobile phone numbers of parents are kept up to date. The school will then use its website to keep parents updated on the situation, as well as using the CEEFAX service provided by the BBC. The website will be updated between 11.00pm – 11.59pm and before 7.00am the next morning, if a decision was not made the night before. This means that parents will know, by the latest, at 7am in the morning, whether or not the school will be closed.

The North Eastern Education and Library Board and the Department of Education will be informed immediately of any decision regarding an emergency closure.

Summary of Communication to be used	
Emergency closure during a school day.	Parents informed via Text Message (Landline calls will be made where necessary)
Updates regarding situation: Before 11.59pm at night Before 07.00am in morning	School Website & CEEFAX School Website School Website NB The school is unable to give precise timings for entries on CEEFAX.

Maintaining Pupils' Work

During any period of closure pupils will be kept up to date with work requirements via the school website.

Appendix 1: Risk Assessment

ACTIVITY	HAZARD	PERSONS WHO MAY BE AT RISK	CONTROLS IN PLACE	FURTHER CONSIDERATION FOR IMPLEMENTATION
Travel/transport to/from school				
Access within the school				
Supervision of activities				
Heating and Welfare Facilities				
Maintenance of school premises				

KEY WEBSITES AND CONTACTS:

NI Met Office www.metoffice.gov.uk

NI Roads Service www.roadsni.gov.uk

NI Water www.niwater.com

Police Service for Northern Ireland 0845 600 8000 www.psni.police.uk

NI Fire and Rescue Service **Insert your local contact** www.nifrs.org

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Appendix 2: Criteria to be considered for Risk Assessment

The following checklist will give guidance to the Principal in carrying out a comprehensive risk assessment, so that an informed decision can be taken on a local level:

ACTIVITY	HAZARD	PERSONS WHO MAY BE AT RISK	CONTROLS REQUIRED	FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS
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.
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, or rail, to school location. 	Walking may be reasonably expected, when cars or other vehicles cannot make it all the way into the school. Principal to consider what is reasonable based on locality and staff.
Main entrance into school grounds.	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. If not passable by foot, access other reasonable means into the school. 	Signage on main entrance, or other entrances if prohibited from entry due to ice or other obstruction.
Main entrance into school grounds.	Entrance an immediate slip hazard.	Principal, teachers, Building Supervisors and/or maintenance staff, pupils, parents/carers and visitors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearance of slip hazard, unless alternative route found. Other routes may be prioritised and cause closure of the main entrance. Salt/grit may be adequate but manual work may also be required to clear snow/ice if this is the main and only entrance. 	If entrance is used by both vehicles and pedestrians, salting/gritting may be a priority. Cars may be stopped from entry to give priority to pedestrians and avoid risk.
Getting appropriate	Inadequate supervision	Teachers and pupils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A means of communicating with 	The emphasis should be on how to

ACTIVITY	HAZARD	PERSONS WHO MAY BE AT RISK	CONTROLS REQUIRED	FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS
members of staff to open school.			<p>school staff in order to establish their attendance on the day of extreme bad weather.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A means to communicate with school bus service, local authority and local bus service operators 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. 	<p>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. Schools in rural areas or secondary schools have pupils from a wider area and may be more dependent on school buses or public transport, therefore numbers may be less – and supervision easier.</p>
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, slopes, 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. 	<p>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. Treatment of inner areas such as courtyards, yards, or some walkways between buildings may be less of a priority.</p>
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. • Maintenance of water systems, for example prompt repair of leaks and drips. • Regular maintenance staff 	<p>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.</p>

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			checks to ensure heating and water systems are working well. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any areas of snow/ice remaining should be avoided and managed. • Pupils should be informed of restrictions. 	
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 yards and other external areas, when snow/ice cannot be easily removed or reduced. • If there are external areas free or generally free of snow/ 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. • 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 yard space is restricted then staggered breaks could be undertaken. However could this system be appropriately supervised?
Keeping 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 Board. • 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 over night. • 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.