

Fairview Primary School



Exceptional School Closure Policy

Date Ratified: March 2023
Review Date: January 2026
To be reviewed: January 2029

INTRODUCTION

Fairview Primary School will remain open during the day to deliver education to its pupils with due consideration to statutory guidance and health and safety legislation. However, the Principal is authorised to make an exceptional closure when unexpected or unplanned circumstances make it absolutely necessary and in the best interests of the pupils such as:

- Death of a teacher or pupil at the school
- Flooding or burst pipes at the school
- Electricity failure
- Damage to school
- Severe weather conditions

The only exception to an exceptional closure being unexpected is when the school is being used as a polling station for parliamentary/local government elections or the decision to close is made by the Minister of Education.

This document sets out our policy and procedures in the event of an exceptional closure.

CONSIDERATIONS TAKEN IN EVENT OF CLOSURE OF THE SCHOOL

The following will be considered (see Appendix 1) in coming to any decision to close Fairview Primary School for exceptional reasons. These include:

Health and safety requirements

- 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?
- If a limited number of staff and pupils can attend, is the pupil/teacher ratio (1 teacher: 30 pupils) acceptable?

Weather and road conditions

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 risk assessment (see Appendix 2) in consultation with the Chair of Governors or if he/she is unavailable, the Vice-Chair and members of staff. The decision will be made **where possible** before 7 a.m. and on the basis of information received from the Met Office about weather, supplemented by on-the-spot observation, either personally or from staff members better placed to make such observations.

CLOSURE DURING THE SCHOOL DAY

On occasions it may be necessary for school to close during the school day, i.e. if the weather is deteriorating and there is doubt as to whether children or staff can return home safely later in the day, or due to health and safety considerations.

In such cases **the school will email the main contact (gathered from SIMS)** and update the school website and Facebook page to ensure that children are collected from school. Parents should ensure that their main contact details are up to date.

IN THE EVENT OF SCHOOL HAVING TO CLOSE

The decision to open a school during periods of severe weather is dependent on the Principal carrying out a risk assessment. If school is closed, the Principal will ensure that the following events happen:

- The decision is ratified with the Chair or Vice-Chair of Governors.
- **The main contact for each pupil is notified by email.**
- The school website is updated.
- A message is communicated via the school Facebook page.
- School is appropriately staffed by teachers/classroom assistants to deal with any pupils who arrive at school unescorted until parents or emergency contacts can collect the pupils.
- The Education Authority and the Department of Education are informed as soon as possible of the closure [<http://apps.education-ni.gov.uk/appExclos/default.aspx>].
- All emergency closures throughout the year are recorded via the MySchool functionality:
 - My School
 - View all
 - System Utilities
 - Admin Utilities
 - Create Closure Notice

These tasks do not all have to be completed by the Principal, although the Principal has the overall responsibility for ensuring each has been carried out.

Decisions to close the school will be taken after consideration of local conditions and not based on neighbouring schools, although collaboration between local schools will take place and, when appropriate, a joint decision will be taken.

Parents and staff will be contacted later that day with a view to the next day's arrangements if a decision is able to be made at that point.

Staff should keep the school updated on their position.

EXTREME WEATHER

In times of extreme weather, the above checklist will be considered as far in advance of the closure as possible e.g., the night before closure if circumstances allow, and if necessary, a timely decision will be made to close the school the next day.

In situations when there is no clarity from the Department of Education around school closure and in the event of advanced notification from the Met Office of an Amber Weather Warning (threat to life), the Principal will take the decision to close the school for the period of time covered by the warning.

Without an Amber Weather Warning being in place, a decision will only be taken the night before if all indications are that adverse conditions will continue overnight and make access and travel to school dangerous for pupils and staff.

SAFEGUARDING PRECAUTIONS ON CLOSURE

No pupil will be allowed to leave school unless the school is aware that an identified adult will be available to supervise them at their destination. It may be that a parent who collects their children offers to give shelter to other children. The agreement of the parents of these children must be given before pupils are released in this way. We will ensure that adequate supervision by members of teaching staff will be made of those pupils who cannot go home or to their emergency destination immediately and have therefore to remain at school.

TRAVEL TO AND FROM SCHOOL

Parents should be aware that it is their responsibility to make sensible decisions on behalf of their children when weather conditions are severe. Parents are responsible for the safety of their children to and from the school.

REMOTE LEARNING

In the event of an exceptional closure, staff will endeavour to provide remote learning activities through Seesaw and Google Classroom.

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

Parents must keep the school up to date with contact details and valid email address. Data collection forms are updated annually during parent interviews in October. Information on emergency contacts and instructions in respect of each pupil will be held centrally in the emergency contacts folder in the school office and also on our SIMS computer system. **It is essential that parents keep the school up to date with any change in their contact details.**

STAFF ATTENDANCE

Although it is recognised that severe weather conditions make it difficult for staff to get to and from work, unless advised to the contrary by the Principal, then the expectation is that staff will present themselves for work. EA Contract Staff (Catering and Cleaning Services) also need to be advised of any emergency requirements.

CLEARANCE OF SNOW

Within the school site, the school is responsible for snow clearance, and the clearing of approach paths is the specific task of the caretaker. When severe weather is forecast, the caretaker should be tasked to lay salt and grit on arrival. The clearance of public roads is the responsibility of the Roads Service.

CHILDREN'S PLAYTIMES

If there is any question of children's safety being at risk during breaktime and lunchtime where the playground area is deemed unsafe, school has a responsibility in inclement weather to keep the children indoors.

SERVICES

All of the service providers who will be affected by the closure will be informed as soon as possible, once families and staff have been contacted.

MONITORING AND REVIEW

The Principal will monitor implementation of this policy.

The Fairview Primary School Exceptional School Closure Policy will be evaluated and reviewed every three years unless any new Department of Education guidelines and health and safety guidelines necessitate an early review.

This policy was ratified in March 2023 and reviewed in January 2026 with due consideration to the following:

- EA School management - Manual for Principals and Governors
- School Optional Days and Exceptional Closure Days Circular 2022/14
- *Checklist for Principals When Considering Opening or Closure of School* produced by the working group on school opening/closing arrangements
 - [Checklist for Principals when considering opening or closure of school](#)
- Remote Learning Guidance DENI Circular 2022/16

APPENDIX 1:

PREPARING A PLAN TO DEAL WITH A POSSIBLE EXCEPTIONAL CLOSURE DUE TO SEVERE WEATHER KEY ACTIONS

Does the school have contact details for all parents/guardians, pupils and staff? Does the school have contact details for the relevant EA emergency on-call officers?

Ensure that fuel level is checked regularly and appropriate levels maintained.

Ensure that heating, lighting and water services are regularly maintained.

Maintain sufficient supplies of salt for application to footpaths and driveways. Where mechanical salt spreaders are used are they functioning and available? Maintain stocks of safety signs and hazard warning tapes for cordoning off hazardous areas.

SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIONS

Are the contact details updated regularly?
Do they include mobile telephone numbers?

Set a minimum fuel level for a re-order of supply.

Check fuel level frequently during severe weather periods.

Regularly report maintenance issues to the Board Maintenance Help Desk.

Have the Board's Help Desk/ emergency on call officer telephone numbers available.

Order supplies before the onset of winter.

Have the salt suppliers' telephone numbers available or follow Board procedures to re-order.

Order supplies of hazard tape (yellow/black or red/white).

Order signs which prohibit access to hazardous areas.

APPENDIX 2:

FIRST CONSIDERATION WHEN DECIDING TO REOPEN THE SCHOOL

Can the Principal gain enough teaching and/or supervisory staff to operate safely?

Is the school appropriately heated?

Are water systems working appropriately?

Can the level of heating be maintained throughout the school day/week?

Can people movement be minimised between school buildings if access and egress is made externally?

Restriction of outside play would limit the snow/ice from becoming compacted and therefore more dangerous.

Can the school grounds be maintained to affect opening the following day?

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The emphasis would be on operating safely. What would be the threshold of staff numbers in respect to expected pupils? For primary schools, pupils would be likely to be local, with a greater expectancy of attendance.

Are fuel supplies adequate? Have there been previous failures of the heating system in autumn/winter months? Is the means for remedial action readily available?

Are there known faults in times of severe weather? Are there written records ensuring methodical checks are made?

At times of severe weather consider running the heating system during periods of closure or holiday. Is frost protection installed and used

If pupil numbers are low, can classes be grouped together?

If conditions are not dangerous, outside play may be possible. However, supervision may have to be higher. Could play or breaks be staggered to ensure appropriate supervisory levels? If any snow or ice is present, prohibit running.

Pedestrian walkways should be a priority, over vehicle parking, but in the long term parking areas inside the school should be treated or cleared of snow. Those who have parked in the school grounds should be aware of the priority and told to take care in this area. Signs could be placed to remind these persons. Maintenance should be a priority where pedestrian walkways also coincide with vehicle areas. Alternatively, restrictions could be made on pedestrians or cars stopped from entering that

area.

Monitor the weather situation locally and through the media (Met Office).

Are maintenance materials and personnel available to ensure the school can eliminate, reduce or isolate risk throughout the school day?

Government agencies such as the Roads Service may be able to provide information regarding road clearance, providing assurance of journeys to and from school.

Met Office provides flash weather warnings (see Met Office website).

Can similar provision be assured for the following day(s)?

Salt/grit spread on walkways or other areas at the end of the day could limit icing. This could also prevent a further snowfall from taking a foothold and re-icing.

Slush or water from thawed snow/ice should be cleared as much as possible to prevent re-icing. Iced slush could be more dangerous than the initial fall as surfaces may be uneven and more slippery.