

December 2018
Management Circular No. 30

To **Heads of all educational establishments**

Emergency Closure of Schools¹

Guidance to Heads² on Severe Weather Conditions and School Closure

Council Policy

Schools will, as far as possible, and with due regard to the health, safety and welfare of both staff and children/young people, continue to operate normally in order to minimise the impact of school closures on parents/carers, children/young people and the local economy.

It is recognised that it is not possible or practical to have only one set of arrangements that will be applicable to all employees within the council. Glasgow City Council has a wide and diverse range of services, operational requirements, different working arrangements, hours of work etc. Managers are, however, as far as is reasonably practicable expected to ensure that employees are treated in an equitable and consistent manner.

Employees should make all reasonable effort to get into work.

Employees should follow the normal reporting of absence arrangements and keep in contact with their line manager.

Taking the decision to close the school

Heads, in partnership with members of the Directorate, are authorised to make an emergency closure when the weather or any other exceptional circumstance make this absolutely necessary in the best interests of the children/young people.

These 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 shared view of the Head and the Directorate, to do so would put the health, safety or welfare of children/young people and/or staff at risk. In reaching this decision, Heads should take full account of local circumstances and, in particular, the following considerations:

- a) 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 (children/young people or staff) home when a blizzard is at its height.

¹ Throughout this document *school* refers to any educational establishment or service

² *Head* refers to all heads of establishments or services

- b) Advice from transport operators: Transport operators are key in such circumstances as they will be the ones who decide whether vehicles should/can continue to operate. In adverse weather, the Executive Director is kept informed of the transport situation through Land and Environmental Services. The Directorate will be able to advise Heads on the up to date position.
- c) Arrangements for children's/young persons' safety: The absolute priority is to ensure that provision is made for each and every child/young person. Where children cannot be collected or delivered home, they should be kept at school and supervised.

Advice on travel

Heads should also recognise that parents/carers have a key role to play in the event of severe weather. Parents/Carers should be made aware that there is a responsibility upon them to make sensible decisions on behalf of their children/young people when weather conditions are severe. If they have concerns about their children travelling between home and school, they should keep them at home, informing the school that they are doing so. The fact that several parents/carers take this view does not, however, mean that the school should be closed unless the considerations listed above indicate that this is the only sensible decision.

Children/Young people should not be sent home in adverse weather unless the school is confident that they will be safe on the journey home and/or at home. They should remain in school until suitable arrangements can be made. In the case of primary schools or nurseries, parents/carers should collect their children or make arrangements for them to be collected by a responsible adult who is known to the school/nursery. It may be that a parent/carer who collects his/her children offers to take other children home. The agreement of the parents/carers of these children should be sought before the school releases them in this way.

The safety and well-being of children/young people should be paramount. If in doubt, a child/young person should not be released from school. Safe and speedy dismissal of children/young people in the event of an emergency closure depends on the school and parents/carers working in partnership. Parents/Carers 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 in the school handbook and school website. Parents/Carers should provide the school with any specific instructions in respect of their child should the school require to close during the day. Parents/Carers are required to give schools an emergency contact and should have told their children what to do in the event of an emergency closure.

If it is customary for children/young people to walk home or travel independently at the end of the school day, it would be reasonable for the school to release these children/young people to walk home or travel independently in an emergency. The school should ensure that a parent/carer or an identified adult is expecting their arrival. Account should also be taken of the age of the child, the severity of the weather conditions and the distance to be traveled.

Parents/Carers should ensure that their children's medical information is updated regularly. This is particularly important where children/young people are reliant on specific medicines and in the event of an emergency have to remain in school.

Communication Arrangements

It is essential that, when there is potential for school closures due to severe weather conditions, we are in a position to communicate quickly and clearly with parents/carers. This is just as important in relation to schools which are to remain open as it is to those which are closed. The Council website (www.glasgow.gov.uk), Twitter, Education Services web-site (<https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=15894>) and local media are now seen by many parents/carers as the information channel in these situations. Note that all communications with the local/national media should be through the Council's press office. Every attempt will be made to make the decision as early as possible in the morning or the day before in order to minimise disruption. However, this may not always be possible.

Schools should inform parents/carers through their normal procedures, that is, using text messaging or phoning.

All of the service providers who will be affected by the closure should be informed as soon as possible. Children and Young People's Support Team will inform the transport providers. The Estates Management team will inform Cordia Services (LLP) or Amey.

Employment Arrangements For Staff (Severe Weather)

The overriding principle is that it is the responsibility of all staff to make every effort to attend for duty at their normal school. The following arrangements will be adopted where time away from normal place of work becomes necessary as a result of severe weather.

Where a school is closed to children and young people:

Staff should attend their normal place of work. If unable to attend, the following options should be agreed with the Head:

- report to another Glasgow school in the same sector and undertake reasonable duties as required;
- a suitable programme of work to be carried out at home;
- annual leave, where this is available as an option;
- flexible working*.

If the member of staff is unable to report to their normal place of work on subsequent days or to fulfil any of the above options, unpaid leave will apply.

Where a school remains open for children and young people: First day

of bad weather

Where a member of staff arrives late or leaves early, or is unable to attend work for his/her contracted hours, he/she should make every effort to report his/her absence as early as possible. Where the Head is satisfied with the member of staff's explanation, one of the following options should be agreed:

- report to another Glasgow school in the same sector and undertake reasonable duties as required;
- a suitable programme of work to be carried out at home;
- annual leave, where is this is available as an option;
- flexible working*.

If the member of staff is unable to report to their normal place of work on subsequent days or to fulfil any of the above options, unpaid leave will apply.

Subsequent days of bad weather

If the member of staff is still unable to report for work on subsequent days, the following options will be available:

- continue to report to another Glasgow school in the same sector and undertake reasonable duties as required;
- a suitable programme of work to be carried out at home for up to a maximum of three days in total, subject to review each day;
- annual leave, where is this is available as an option;
- flexible working*.

Where none of the above options are possible, the Head should continue to authorise unpaid leave.

* Where it has been agreed by both parties that work will be undertaken within a three month timescale to compensate for the absence. It must take the form of agreed work additional to that expected within their normal contracted week.

Deterioration of weather whilst at work

Should a staff member request to leave early due to weather becoming worse and their desire to head for home, before it possibly becomes too bad to travel, a line manager would be expected to use suitable discretion. In such circumstances, a suitable programme of work to be carried out at home should be agreed.

Where a school is completely closed to all, for example when the police or the authority deems this to be necessary, then salary payments will be unaffected.

Absence due to sickness

Where a member of staff is absent due to sickness on a day which is known to the Council to be an inclement weather day (school closure, severe weather warnings etc.) then normal Attendance Policy procedures must still be followed.

If a member of staff requires time off to care for dependants because of an unexpected disruption, or termination of their care arrangements they should discuss this with their Head who will determine what is reasonable and necessary in the circumstances. Flexible working may be applied or the teacher may be allowed up to one day's paid leave any further leave will be unpaid.

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