

**CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**SEVERE WEATHER PROCEDURES**  
**DRAFT POLICY & GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS**

We are fortunate that spells of severe weather are relatively few and far between. On these few occasions however, there is often confusion and a general lack of direction and guidance. With this in mind, this policy and guidance note has been prepared by the LEA. Governing bodies are strongly advised to have a clear documented procedure in place for the occasions when some pupils may have to be sent home early or when a whole school may be forced to close because of severe weather in order to ensure the safety and well-being of all pupils and staff.

This document gives Caerphilly County Borough Council's recommended policy in relation to severe weather and exemplifies good practice. It is for governing bodies to determine their own procedures and to ensure that all employees are clear about their roles and responsibilities in the event of severe weather.

These procedural notes are principally intended in relation to severe weather but can also be applied in other circumstances e.g. due to heating failures etc.

The LEA and schools have a duty of care to their staff and pupils. By following the recommended arrangements below, this should minimise any problems.

1. The decision to close a school should not be taken lightly. Children have an entitlement to 190 days education annually and may also have an entitlement to a free mid day meal. When staff and pupils can get to school, then the school should remain open no matter how few pupils are in attendance. The great majority of our schools will have pupils within safe walking distance of their homes and therefore schools should remain open for them.
2. The responsibility for deciding to close a school because of severe weather lies with the Headteacher, preferably in conjunction with the Chair and/or Vice Chair of Governors. The Headteacher must make the judgement in the light of local circumstances. Before arriving at that decision, the Headteacher must take steps to ascertain the situation at the school itself. Very frequently the amount of snowfall varies very considerably from area to area. Members of the public cannot understand why schools have to be closed when they themselves have travelled without great difficulty past that same building on their way to work. etc. The decision cannot be made by LEA staff who will not necessarily be aware of the weather conditions prevailing in different parts of the County, or the particular circumstances which relate to individual schools. LEA staff can however be consulted and offer advice in the knowledge of these local circumstances, albeit that the final decision is that of the school.
3. Some schools (e.g. Special Schools, area Welsh medium schools, etc.) have lengthy taxi/bus routes. Whilst conditions at the school may be reasonable, the Headteacher should make attempts to ascertain the road conditions in the pupils' home area.
4. It may be the case that certain children living in certain areas should be permitted to leave school early, rather than the whole school be closed. Headteachers should consider alternatives to closure before sending all pupils home. It may be the case that only those pupils travelling by bus or those living in rural areas should be sent home early.

5. If the decision, after consultation, is to close the school, whether it be for a day or part of a day, the Headteacher should ensure that the pupils are not exposed to a greater degree of danger or discomfort than they would suffer were they to remain in school. The elements of danger which are involved, of course, can vary in accordance with the age of the child and can include the following:-
- (a) the distance from school to home, and whether transport is normally provided. If transport is provided by the Authority, then clearly the responsibility then devolves on the Headteacher to consult with the LEA in order to attempt to arrange alternative transport.
  - (b) Before deciding to send pupils home, Headteachers should ascertain from the child whether a parent will be there to receive them.
  - (c) There is also, of course, the element of danger involved in children leaving school at other than normal time from the point of view of general road safety, safety from attack etc., and this, again, is another factor which Headteachers are asked to bear in mind before arriving at a final decision to send pupils home or contacting parents to ask them to collect their children.

In very extreme conditions/circumstances, it may be necessary for all or the majority of pupils to be retained on the school site for a considerable time. This may necessitate instigating the Council's emergency planning arrangements.

There may well be other factors which should be borne in mind. Basically, the rule should be that emergency action involving the closure should only be instituted when all the various solutions to the problem have been examined, and the dangers and discomfort weighed one against the other.

6. **Headteachers must inform the LEA as soon as a decision to close the school has been reached. This should be done by contacting the following:-**

By E Mail (preferred) to: Steve Lawrence (lawres@caerphilly.gov.uk)

By Telephoning 01443 864968/864894/864870/864817.

7. If you are unable to make contact with any of the above telephone numbers (e.g. out of office hours) there is an emergency out of office hours telephone system at Tiryberth on **01443 875500**.
8. Once contact is made, staff in the School Transport Division, School Meals Providers and the Central Communications Unit will all be automatically contacted. The Media will also be informed, where relevant, e.g. school closures.
9. In the event that you need to contact school transport staff, please only do so after step 6 above. Relevant telephone contact numbers are **01443 864841/864823/864839/864863 or 07717 467461**.

10. Should you be unable for any reason to make contact (as in 9 above), the LEAs emergency planning officers may be contacted as follows:-

Steve Lawrence  
Bleddyn Hopkins  
David Hopkins  
Donna Thomas

11. Schools must not make contact direct with transport contractors to rearrange transport arrangements. All contractors have been advised only to respond to changes agreed with the LEA. This is of paramount importance to ensure services to other schools are not unnecessarily disrupted, e.g. shared transport, and to ensure the LEA can prioritise transport e.g. for pupils in special school/specialised units.
12. In the event of notification by the LEA that a transport contractor wishes to transport certain pupils early, Headteachers must comply with the request. It is the bus operators' responsibility to convey pupils home safely. This does not necessarily mean, however, that all pupils should be sent home early. Where a transport contractor is unable to provide transport in the morning because of severe weather conditions, no contract transport will be provided in the afternoon. Parents who are able to convey their children to school in the morning in lieu of the normal transport arrangements should be advised that they must assume responsibility for getting their children home in the afternoon as no contract transport will be available.
13. Schools should make every effort to communicate decisions to parents. By e mailing or telephoning the LEA (as in step 6 above), will automatically result in the media being advised.  
It should be stated quite clearly in any communication/newsletter to parents that the school is open unless a message to the contrary is broadcast via the media.
14. Schools should consider who else might especially need to be informed of the closure, e.g. governors or parents of children with special needs. In the case of small schools, it may be relatively easy to ensure that parents are contacted before sending pupils home; in the case of large schools this would not necessarily be the case. Schools should therefore consider, particularly in the case of young children, whether it is preferable for all children to be kept on the premises until they are collected.
15. In the event of a major snowfall occurring during the weekend affecting the whole County, the LEA may take a decision on the weekend that schools will not open on the Monday. Such a decision will be broadcast via the media.
16. A school may, in rare circumstances, be closed to pupils but remain open to staff. In the event of a school being closed, or staff being unable to reach their normal place of work, the school should have documented arrangements in relation to such matters such as staff being prevented from reporting for duty by severe weather conditions, working/remaining at home etc.
17. Schools should be aware that in the event of school closures, the LEA may incur transport and meal costs. As a consequence, earliest notification is therefore essential. In the event of the LEA not being informed of a school's closure in a timely manner, the school could be liable to charges made against the school's budget share.
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